

When Identity Becomes Political

The Russophone Population of Moldova in Social Media

Riikkamari Johanna Muhonen

Master's Degree Thesis

Development and International Cooperation

Political science

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Abstract

This study analyzes the political identity of Moldova's Russophone population using discussions on Russian social media site vKontakte as a source. The research is divided thematically, covering themes of history, language, Transnistria, other questions of current politics, and views on the future. Together these themes form a fairly wide image of the political attitudes of this group of people.

The theoretical basis of the work consists of concepts of political identity, nationalism, and geopolitics. These concepts are applied to discussions on social media using textual analysis. Comparisons to rhetoric of Russian foreign policy aimed at "compatriots" residing in the "near abroad", in other words the Russophone populations of post-Soviet states, is applied. In addition, comparisons to the situation in other post-Soviet states with Russian diaspora are made.

The research shows that rhetoric stemming from the Moldovanist ideology of the Soviet period is still actively used in discussion of many themes related to the political opinions and identity of the Russophone population of Moldova. Also the impact of Russian media is visible in discussion concerning certain political events. It seems that language identity is in many ways connected to social identity and political opinions, and the language question is present in discussion concerning all themes. Previous research has gained similar results from other post-Soviet states, even though it seems that situation might be changing as the Russophone population in these areas is becoming increasingly bilingual.

On the other hand this study demonstrates the multivocal nature of the Russophone population of Moldova: also opinions supporting the relatively recent political turn towards the EU are visible in the material and all three major ideologies (pro-Romanian, pro-Russian, Moldovan patriot) that control the field of politics in Moldova are also visible in my sources. Thus, according to my analysis, it seems that historical factors, constantly changing political orientations, Moldova's cultural and geopolitical position between the East and the West, as well as economic problems have resulted in split identities and political views of this group of people.

Keywords: Moldova, Social media, Russian diaspora, Russian foreign policy, Russian world, Russkiy Mir, Political identity, Compatriot, Near abroad, Geopolitics, Russian language

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research questions

Moldova is a borderland between the East and the West. It used to be a part of the Soviet Union and is nowadays an independent country situated between Ukraine and Romania. During the disordered years of the early 1990s the country held a referendum whether it should remain independent or become part of Romania, as it historically was. Moldova is in this sense an interesting example of the crisscrossing questions of politics and identity. People identifying themselves as Moldovans form 76% of the population (compared to Ukrainians 8,5%, Russians 6%, Gagauz 4%), but a rather interesting fact is that most people belonging to ethnic minorities name Russian as their first language. In addition, Russian is widely used as a lingua franca, which makes it the most widely spoken language in the country. This means that the concept of “Russophone population of Moldova” does not refer only to ethnic Russians, but includes individuals of other nationalities as well. The core of this definition is that people who can fluently debate rather complicated political issues in Russian can be considered Russophone despite that fact that they might be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. It is clear that especially the part of population living in the area of Transnistria identifies themselves strongly with Russia and in fact they have been demanding independence since the civil war of 1991. From the political point of view, Moldova is an interesting area for both the EU and Russia. Both of these major political players have political and economical interests in the area.

This research aims to discuss the questions of the Russophone minority's identity in relation to politics based on the web discussions on the Russian social media site vKontakte in its five biggest Moldova-themed groups. In practice this is done by first introducing key theories and concepts that are essential for the study of this topic and then moving on to the empirical study of implications of identity and political views of the Russophone population of Moldova as evident in the social media site vKontakte. In other words my aim is to discuss questions that are connected to both identity and politics, as these two are in constant interaction in the case of Moldova. The national and language identity of an individual largely defines also his political views, especially in the case of Russophone diaspora in the post-Soviet republics. In this study the language in which the individuals are expressing their opinions is Russian, but it is clear that even within this group of Russian-speakers the actual political identities vary. The more specific questions this study aims to answer can be placed under two major themes.

Firstly, the questions related to history and language remain essential for the Russophone population of Moldova. Through the comments on the internet my aim is to find out, whether this group sees their motherland as bilingual or multilingual. What is, in their opinion, the role of Russian language in the Moldovan society? What kinds of reactions or even problems does it cause to speak Russian in public? Officially, Romanian, or the Moldovan dialect of it, sometimes referred as Moldovan, is the only official language of the country. How does the Russophone part of the population see this? Should Russian gain the position of the second official language of Moldova? And should the Russophone minority learn Moldovan or keep using Russian? Question of language is also connected to history in a sense that historical roots of Moldovan/Romanian language are often discussed in social media. This originates in the question concerning the history of the country: when did Moldova actually become independent and what was the meaning of this event? The history and roots of the nation are clearly one of the most discussed political themes on social media, which shows the importance of the past to the current identity-building process of the people. These themes are very actual for many writers despite the fact that the events discussed sometimes took place decades or even centuries ago.

Secondly, my thesis discusses current political events and views for the future. The recent political “boiling points” within the country include the question of Transnistria, which is discussed in a separate chapter as a special case of strong Russian minority within Moldova. The majority of population living in Transnistria carries a Russian passport. How do the writers see the position of Transnistria in comparison to the rest of Moldova? Should it become part of Russia, join the rest of Moldova or become independent? As almost 10% of the whole population has emigrated from Moldova since 1991, the whole question of national identity is a very interesting one, especially as Romania treats Moldovans immigrating to Romania as its own citizens and offers them dual citizenship. How are the discussants commenting the reasons and results of emigration? Another major theme discussed under this theme is Moldova’s own “orange revolution”, which took place in April 2009, when around 50 000 protesters gathered in Chişinău and other major cities of the country to protest the results of parliamentary elections. The riots were largely organized through social media and many public buildings were damaged. The reaction of the Russophone population to these events was mainly negative, as they saw that the protests were supported by Romania. The last chapter of this thesis discusses views for the future: how does it look like for this small republic? Should

it remain independent or seek protection from Russia or Romania? Should it join the EU? Why?

All these themes are closely connected to a larger question of Moldovan identity and in this case especially the identity of the Russophone minority of Moldova. How do the persons representing the Russophone population of Moldova identify themselves? Are they Russians or Moldovans? Are all Moldovan people actually Russians or Romanians, or is there such a thing as a Moldovan person? Can he be Russophone or do Russian-speakers separate themselves from ethnic Moldovans? What kind of a bond do they have to the republic of Moldova? Where does the Moldovan nation come from (or does it even exist?) and which way should it take now? And as it is clear that Russia sees Moldova as part of its so-called “near abroad” territory, the Russian foreign policy and especially soft power techniques applied in this post-Soviet state have a wide impact on all levels of the society and are discussed in most of the chapters of this study.

The topics discussed in this thesis form a fairly wide overview to the subject. Language seems to be the basis and main source of arguments for most of the writers, which is why questions connected to language are widely discussed. On the other hand identities connected to language often show connections to either Romania or Russia, but in addition to these groups there is also a fairly visible group of Moldovan patriots, who strongly support the independence of Moldova. I aim to present the points of view of all these three groups in my thesis. In my analysis I have used the GOST 2002(B) system to transliterate Russian names and terms into the Latin alphabet. In my analysis I have used the commonly used terms and names which are mostly based on Romanian, such as Moldovan (to refer to the language or ethnicity) and Chişinău (the name of Moldova’s capital city), while in my sources these terms often appear in their Russian forms Moldavian (moldavskiy) and Kishinev. In the citations these words are in their original form in order to be constant with the writers’ expressions.

As there is very little research available discussing precisely the Russophone population of Moldova, my research literature consists from a wide array of works. First of all, from the theoretical point of view the political ethnography and hermeneutics presented in this thesis are mainly based on works by Hans-Georg Gadamer and an article collection discussing different points of view to political ethnography, *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* edited by Edward Schatz. This approach is combined to the method of textual analysis as presented by Quentin Skinner in *Visions of Politics vol. 1: Regarding Method*. Also the theory on social construction of reality as

presented in *The Social Construction of Reality; A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann has had a major effect on how I approach my subject. This theory is discussed in connection to the concept of open political space and the realm of political action as presented by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. The concept of political/narrative identity applied in this work is largely based on *Identity, Narrative and Politics* by Maureen Whitebrook. As for the different applications of nationalism, the classic work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by Benedict Anderson offers a starting point, which is further applied into everyday situations and conditions in *Banal Nationalism* by Michael Billig. Also a collection of Finnish articles *Nationalismit*, edited by Jussi Pakkasvirta and Pasi Saukkonen was a useful introduction to different forms of nationalism. As for geopolitics, John Agnew's *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* offered a compact introduction to this wide field. For Russian point of view to the subject, Aleksandr Dugin's *Osnovy Geopolitiki* was of essential importance.

For empirical works, Dmitri Trenin's and Andrei P. Tsygankov's works offered useful background information on Russian foreign policy. As for discussion of this policy in relation to Russian compatriots and the "near abroad", as well as the processes taking place in the post-Soviet space, *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition* by Graham Smith offered a detailed presentation on the subject. The article collection "*The Humanitarian Dimension*" of *Russia's Foreign Policy towards Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic States* edited by Gatis Pelnens offered valuable information on the influence of Russia's foreign policy in Moldova as well as points of comparison to other post-Soviet states. There was also a good range of articles available discussing different political, social and linguistic features of post-Soviet Moldova, including articles by Matthew H. Ciscel, Susanna Hast, Ryan Kennedy, Luke March, and John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, & Rebecca Chamberlain-Creănga among others. In addition I have used articles from both Western and Russian newspapers, reports and other types of material from governmental actors (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation) and different types of organizations (such as Amnesty International). Thus, my research offers new information on the Russian diaspora in post-Soviet states, and Moldova particularly. There is also very little research available on Russian-language social media, so my study is somewhat unique in analyzing political views of Russophone population of Moldova expressed on this platform.

1.2. Sources

Social media can be described through a metaphor of a village: its inhabitants gather deliberately, regularly or somewhat haphazardly. Their motives and gratifications vary: some are there to work or play, some to promote or sell. Some loudly announce their presence, while others remain silent. Some are circumspect with their public communications, while others aggressively assert political, religious, social or economic positions. The life in this type of village is highly public and private at the same time, though the privacy is often only fictitious as even things that are posted for a selective network are always available for viewing at least for the hosts of the site. In other words it can be said that “personal” is a more fitting adjective than “private” to describe the sphere of social media, but on the other hand this “personality” is always affected by the public nature of social media, highlighting certain features of an individual while hiding others. Social media is often compared to electronic mass media or interpersonal communication, but in reality the truth is somewhere in between, as most discussion in social media is taking place between individuals but in relation to images of the world presented in other types of media. In other words, interaction in social media is production and consumption at the same time in a deprofessionalized space. (Lomborg 2013, 1-9, 27-29; Richardson 2013, 5-7;)

For this study my sources are formed of discussions in the five most popular Moldova-themed groups in the Russian social media site vKontakte (vk.com), which can be described as a Russian equivalent for Facebook. VKontakte was established in 2006 and has currently more than 226,5 million accounts, mostly in the Russophone world. This makes it far more popular than Facebook, which has only 7,9 million users in Russia. VKontakte is in many ways similar with Facebook: the main activity is communication with friends by writing on their ”walls” and exchanging private messages. All users have their own profiles, which include a wall, photos and information the user wants to share with others, such as interests, political and religious views, and favorite music, films and TV-shows. The features that make vKontakte different from Facebook are the possibilities to listen to music or watch movies online. In addition it is possible to join different types of groups and take part in various discussions within these groups, similar to Facebook. Each group page contains a description of the group’s contents, music, pictures, a wall, and discussions, where themes are discussed more thoroughly. (VK.com, Internet World Stats)

The material for this study is gathered from the walls and discussions of five

Moldova-themed groups on vKontakte. I have not marked which discussions took place on the walls and which ones in the separate discussion spaces, as this separation was not relevant for the study. Instead, I have marked the group from which each citation is taken with the abbreviations listed in the next chapter. In my material the discussants remain anonymous and I refer to all discussants with the pronoun “he”, as gender did not have an influence on opinions presented. If needed, the discussants can still be tracked with the names of the groups and dates when the comments were published, as the groups are open and all their discussions are available for viewing even for people who are not registered users of the site. Thus, the texts analyzed in this study are public comments discussing different spheres of Moldovan everyday life and politics, written in Russian and published on a Russian social media site. I also went through most of the Moldova-related groups on Facebook, but decided to leave them outside the analysis, as the discussion on them did not include comments from the Russophone population of Moldova.

The groups which are the sources of my analysis in this thesis are all “open” groups, which means that the user does not have to join these groups in order to see the contents or take part in the discussion. I chose five of the biggest open Moldova-related groups as sources for this thesis. Republica Moldova (3654 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club38550>, RM), The Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic (2604 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club25140890>, RYL), Moldova Mare – Great Moldova (2080 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/moldovamare>, MM), Moldova (1567 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club3406004>, TIM), ICS Moldova Mare (1347 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club3636430>, ICS). Altogether my material is formed from approximately 15 000 or more messages posted on the walls and discussions of these five groups by June 2015. Approximately 10% of all this material was connected to the themes of this thesis, and out of this material 70 texts are analyzed more in detail in this study. Out of these messages 31 were published in the group Moldova Mare – Great Moldova, 21 in Republica Moldova, 10 in ICS Moldova Mare, 5 in Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic, and 3 in Moldova. The amount of messages chosen for analysis from each group directly demonstrates the activity of discussion within these groups with Moldova Mare – Great Moldova being by far the most active, while the Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic was relatively inactive despite its size. The texts chosen for analysis form a representative sample of the material, as they represent different points of view and different groups. Most of the messages mentioned as relevant for the research topic were usually one or two sentences long, mostly simple comments, exclamations or

even insults. Due to the large amount of these types of comments, the texts analyzed in this study do not in most cases form logical discussions, but are instead gathered from different groups and then analyzed as individual comments on large-scale political phenomena. The ones analyzed in the study are usually more than one or two sentences long and use certain rhetorical means to promote their goals instead of the very short and aggressive notes typical for social media.

The first one of the groups, Republica Moldova, has a description in Moldovan and links itself with the official governmental pages of the Moldovan republic. Thus, it can be described as a moderate Moldovan-nationalist group. Most of the discussions within this group are connected to everyday subjects, such as looking for a job or sharing music or humorous videos with the other users. The news posted on the page is in both Moldovan and Russian languages, but the discussion takes place mostly in Russian. The group does not have a clearly stated political agenda, but the large amount of members makes the discussions fairly active. In this group the sympathies towards Romania are expressed more freely than in the other groups and Romanian language is used more actively than in the other groups, even though large majority of messages are in Russian.

The second group, The Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic, can be described, as the name suggests, a fairly strong Russian nationalist group. The discussions concentrate on current news, which are mostly commented from a very Russian point of view. All these news are posted by the administrators of the group, so the analysis of messages on this group is based on the comments on the news and discussions outside the wall. Pictures and quotes from Vladimir Putin appear frequently alongside the news. Other popular themes include history, where the Soviet period is especially stressed.

The third group, Moldova Mare – Great Moldova, is an extreme Moldovan nationalist group. Its members strongly support Moldovan identity against both Russian and Romanian impacts. Also the language question is very much visible in the discussions within this group, as one of the main goals of the members of this group seems to be to gain recognition to the idea that Moldovan language is completely separate from Romanian language and should be treated as such.

The fourth group, Moldova, is even more neutral than Republica Moldova. It contains hardly any nationalistic contents and basically all discussions within the group are connected to everyday subjects without political connections. Finally, the fifth group, ICS Moldova Mare, is again fairly strong Moldovan nationalist group, even though the discussions within this group are not as active as within Moldova Mare – Great Moldova.

In fact the last two groups mentioned here are much less active than the three biggest groups so they offer fairly small amount of source material for this thesis.

Due to the platform and my research interests, all the discussions I am analyzing were originally written in Russian. This can also be seen as a political choice, as some of the writers point out:

1.) Look at the situation in group. There are so many pseudo-patriots and the only thing they do is shout about “the Moldovan language and nation” here and there, but still 90% of the discussions and fights are in Russian language. Why don’t you take advantage of the opportunity to use your “mother” tongue? Why are you arguing about language and at the same time refusing to use it in basic communication? Look at the amount of themes we’re discussing in the official language... (RM, 9.4.2009)

2.) Yes, here the Russians gather to show Romanians and true Moldovans how they should live their lives... If the site would be Romanian, the atmosphere would be different. (RM, 28.2.2010)

As these two quotes point out, using vKontakte as the only source of material provides both positive and negative effects for the research. As for the positive side, this is clearly the most active Russian-language forum in the internet discussing issues connected to Moldova. On the other hand the opinions of non-Russophone Moldovans are not very visible and the few individuals taking part in the discussion that are not completely fluent in Russian are using a foreign language, which sometimes clearly restricts their expression. It is also clear that some individuals taking part in the discussion are not currently living in Moldova. Even though a vast majority of discussants are living or have previously lived in Moldova, there are also some activists who have lived abroad their whole life but show interest towards Moldova due to their roots, political or historical interests etc. Thus it is impossible to guarantee that all the sources for this thesis are produced by actual members of the Russophone population currently living in Moldova. On the other hand when the strong Russian influence on the Russophone community of Moldova is taken into account, I think that the fact that activists from outside Moldova are also taking part in the discussion is not a problem as it reflects the overall situation in the country where everyone has contacts to Romania and Russia, and the opinions from abroad have a strong influence

on the political processes taking place inside the country.

In the current age of global communication social media is a mighty platform for people living in different countries but connected by a common ideology. As some researchers of Russian foreign policy point out, Cold War has not ended in the sense that Russia and the West are still struggling to spread their spheres of influence. Development of global communication systems has given an option of “precision targeting” to the new “advanced weaponry of the war for hearts and minds” making them less costly and highly effective. Even though the soft power of Russia and the EU is not eminently present in my sources, it is clear that for example the Russian-language media has had a major influence on the views presented by the discussants, so the role of soft power as part of Russia’s foreign policy towards the “near abroad” cannot be ignored in the analysis. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 12.)

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Textual analysis

The background of this study lies in the ethnographical way of studying political thinking. By this I mean that every individual can be seen as a political actor, which makes it worthwhile to do research on ordinary citizens instead of just politicians or political theorists. By ethnographical way of thinking I also aim to go close to the working subject by observing and analyzing their writings in social media. These texts can be described as situated somewhere between comments on current political issues and discussion taking place in a textual form, which is the reason why I have decided to combine methods of textual analysis and ethnographic theory in this thesis. I will firstly shortly introduce how Hannah Arendt described the realm of political action, then moving on to the textual analysis as presented of Quentin Skinner and to the concept of political/narrative identity as presented by Maureen Whitebrook.

Hannah Arendt separated three human activities: labor, work and action, and four possible realms for these activities: the political, the social, the public and the private. Community was an essential feature of political action, as this type of action required communication between individuals and working together to reach common goals. On the other hand, political action is clearly separated from other types of social connections, such as actions taking place in the family sphere. For political realm action (praxis) and speech (lexis) were essential. From these two especially the role of speech is emphasized. The realm of the political is also described as public and free of control. In the realm of politics all actors are equal. Arendt described public space as a realm of political action, which consists of free individuals. “Public” in this sense means visible and something that people share, as in a public space everything is visible. People strengthen their position as unique individuals by performing in the public space. Public space is used for political performances, so the people taking part in politics perform in the space. Public space gathers people together and connects them at the same time letting them to differentiate themselves from the others. Reality is formed in discussions and actions taking place in a public space. (Arendt 2002, 15-16, 30-34, 210-211, 220-221; Hautamäki 2005, 34-36.)

Speaking is described as political action and speeches of political actors are stories, which reveal the identity of an individual. Through speeches the individuals reveal who they are, show their active personal identity. Speeches and actions also reveal the

interests that may bond individuals, even though they do not have a concrete material form. These stories are created within communities in interaction between individuals. This theory fits well to the post-modern society, in which narrativity has become a major factor in the process of building reality. Also civil society can be described as a public space for actions of individuals. This action is egalitarian communication between individuals in a civil society. In my view, social media is essentially an open political space that gives groups that have usually remained silent an opportunity to express their views. In social media these “speeches” also raise immediate reactions from the others taking part in the discussion. (Arendt 2002, 182-186; Hautamäki 2005, 41-42.)

Textual analysis as presented by Quentin Skinner sees texts as actions, which should be placed in the contexts and frames of reference of their own period of time and (political) culture. In other words, Skinner points out that texts should be analyzed from a performative and intertextual point of view. This vision includes the principle commonly accepted in human sciences that it is impossible to achieve an objective understanding of the actor’s own reasons for political action. Instead it is possible to analyze texts and speeches he has produced from the point of view of action, usage and goals. These motives for producing texts are, according to Skinner, public and available as sources for analysis. The analysis of the motives of a writer is essential for understanding the meaning of a text. Whether the text has meant to be an attack, a defense or criticism, opens the writer’s motives and values. In other words, if thorough attention is paid to the text itself and the context in which it has been published, it is possible to analyze the meaning the author himself has given to the text. (Skinner 2002, vii, 1-3, 93, 97-100, 110-117.)

According to Skinner, language can be divided into two dimensions: the dimension of meaning concentrates on what the words and sentences physically include, whereas the dimension of action aims to describe the goals that the actors want to reach with their speeches and texts. The same goes for Skinner’s views on concepts: instead of just concentrating on their meanings, attention should be paid to their connections with each other and networks to which they belong. For example the things we take for reasonable action or argumentation depends greatly on our thinking and beliefs. Belief systems are again one part of wider systems of thought, so according to Skinner it is essential to look at texts and speech in a wide context in order to understand their deeper meanings. On the other hand postmodern criticism on culture has made us more aware of the connections between language and power. In this sense language is a way of expressing authority, raising emotions, creating communities, leaving individuals outside these

communities, and using many other ways of social control. In his writings Skinner concentrates especially on the rhetorical means that aim to influence on the construction project of our social world. (Skinner 2002, 3-5, 126-127.)

The tools Skinner provides for textual analysis are very useful for my material as despite the fact that there no information available about the background of the writers or their motivations, the texts they have produced are clearly very performative, offering strong rhetoric to defend or oppose opinions presented in the discussion. Most of them can be placed under categories of defense, attack, or criticism, which are described above. The motives and values used for producing the texts can thus be analyzed from them, as most of the writers are not just expressing their opinions but also promoting certain political goals through their writings. Also the concepts used are of essential importance, as concepts such as “compatriot” or “near abroad” are very much promoted by the Russian political elites and form an essential part of Russian foreign policy towards the post-Soviet states. The meaning and contents of these concepts will be discussed later in this study.

According to the theory on social construction of reality the people around an individual, his significant others, have a major role in the strengthening process of an identity. In order to strengthen one’s identity, direct and emotionally charged feedback from the significant others is required. The other people around that are less significant also take part in the process by forming “a choir” that also supports the individual’s understanding of himself. The significant and less significant others are also in interaction with the subjective reality of the individual. They may also have an impact on one another. The individual is expected to have a strong contact to his primary group to strengthen one reality on the expense of others. In addition he may have connections to other, secondary groups. (Berger & Luckmann 2009, 170-172.)

In addition to this classic theory on social construction of reality, identity can further be defined as a way of talking about self and the community so that it has political implications. Maureen Whitebrook claims that identity is, primarily, a matter of the stories persons tell others about themselves, plus the stories others tell about those persons. In this sense, identity can be build through stories. The construction or narration of identity entails placing the self in the public sphere, and thus a capacity for taking on a political role. The political aspect of identity rests on an understanding of the self as social, “situated” and narratives of identity as embedded in other stories, including the wider stories of social and cultural settings. Identity and self should be distinguished from each other: identity is

public (intersubjective, social and political) by nature. Identity can thus be seen as a public manifestation of the self. Identity can be defined either as a product of ourselves or as a product of our social context, or our beings as social selves. The available meanings of political identity range from citizenship, used almost as neutral, merely descriptive term, to the characteristics of members groups, or, in wider meaning beyond the political identity of persons, to the identity of political entities – groups significant in the political realm or politically defined entities such as nations or states. This way, national identity is a way of conceiving “our” group in a particular way and in so doing takes ideas of nationhood for granted. On the other hand some individuals or groups of individuals, instead of regarding themselves as citizens of sovereign nation-states, many people have come to see themselves primarily as members of a racial, ethnic, linguistic or gender group. (Billig 2010, 60-61; Isin&Wood 1999, 3-4, 7; Whitebrook 2001, 4, 6-7.)

Political identity may be theorized in two rather different ways: either as a matter of awareness about the relationship of the person to the political order or as a function of inclusion in political units and as referring to certain characteristics whereby persons can be grouped for political purposes by a wide range of identificatory characteristics: nationality, geographical place or regional location, race, ethnicity, family or kinship, language, class, sex/gender, political affiliation or religion. The first represents personal identity in a political context, the second is that the political subject is taken as a unit for political analysis, citizen, member of a group or nation. There are certain drawbacks to separating out political identity in terms of the political status of the individual or the person as a member of a political collectivity. To concentrate on a separate person allows an over-emphasis on the separate self, whereas in the political context, these persons are often grouped. This risks de-personifying and stereotyping: specific political contexts and characteristics shared with others are often taken as relevant features for political analysis, disregarding the individual characteristics of political actors. In my study I aim to avoid this type of stereotyping by presenting the different voices within the Russophone community of Moldova. (Whitebrook 2001, 9, 137.)

Attention to identity in political theory has taken two distinct forms: an interest in personal identity and in political identity. Identities whether racial or other, are not permanently fixed. Rather, they are socially constructed and inscribed with particular meanings within the context of existing power relations. Identity is regarded as either a matter of self-awareness and/or the relationship of the person to the political order or a characteristic attributed to (members of) groups regarded as significant in the political

process. Political identity can be characterized by distinction from others, self-understanding, or values, goals and commitments. Group identity can also be considered in narrative terms: in the building of identity by nationalist groups identity narratives are weapons in the struggle for power and can also be instruments for constructing an “imagined community”. (Whitebrook 2001, 127-129, 148; see also Anderson 1999, Berger & Luckmann 2009.)

Since the 1980s the concepts of “imagined community” and “construction of nationhood” appeared in the theories of nationalism. Identities were no longer seen as fixed and static structures, but rather dynamic, malleable and contested. All nations exist in multiple versions, which differ a great deal from each other in content and appeal to different constituencies within the group as a whole. National identities are open to ongoing manipulation and rearrangement, and shaped by specific historical-political contexts, having their primary meaning and effects within them. This inherent variability of national identification does not diminish their significance. (Bassin & Kelly 2012, 6; see also Anderson 1999.)

Since the fall of the Soviet Union each of the fifteen newly independent nation states has been engaging in its own process of nation-building. Alongside the macro-management of official state ideologies, identity discourses are highly fragmented, and can be driven not from the top but from below, by social sub-groupings within a given national context who are seeking to establish and defend their position in the novel social and political circumstances. In Moldova these processes have been slow and in many ways they are still in progress due to political factors, which will be analyzed more in detail in the further chapters. Questions of identity also play a major role in the analyses of the Russian diaspora, Russian national politics and foreign policy. (Bassin & Kelly 2012, 7.)

The concept of narrative identity as defined by Whitebrook is of essential importance for this study, as most of my sources are actually intertextual stories about the Russophone community of Moldova and the writers’ own position within this community. Many of the accounts that are analyzed are not even trying to be neutral, but instead offer openly romanticized and sentimental accounts about the past, present, and the future of the community in relation with the other ethnic groups (namely members of the titular nation). From my sources it is also clear that most of the discussants are very loyal to their own group, as most of the writers stick to their own opinions very strongly and hardly ever give credit to discussants expressing opposing views.

Identity is an ongoing process of differentiation and subject to redefinition,

resistance and change. It therefore draws attention to the context of identity: and so for narrative political identity, attention to the political context with which the bearer of identity interrelates and within which they operate. The identity of a person is somewhat political matter: they operate in a political world, their identity is affirmed, recognized in part by their political status or activity, their behavior as a political actor. Both persons and political bodies construct narratives to order and explain themselves, and order for both person and political group, state, regime or other political entity may depend on mutually understandable narratives. Conceptualizations of agency have previously been strongly connected to rationality and responsibility and ignored certain groups that lack qualities for agency, such as women or the poor. The concept of agency is also liable to exclude facets of identity that are apparently beyond consideration in respect of agency such as ethnicity, gender or religion. Narrative identity does not exclude these factors and allows agency by those defined as marginal, deviant or anomalous. Narrative identity suggests a strong link between situated identity and agency by directing attention to the socially-constructed and socially-focused, culturally embedded person. The narrative identity of social movements or nations may thus appear relatively unstable or fragmented and in this sense unpredictable and possibly threatening to political order. (Whitebrook 2001, 138-147, see also Berger&Luckmann 2009.)

When applying Whitebrook's theory to my sources, there are clearly two aspects of narrative identity: first of all, as discussed above, it is a way of demonstrating group membership, and secondly, a way of identifying oneself in relation to the political environment. In my sources this often refers to the fact that most of the writers are in one way or another describing their relation to the surrounding political environment by expressing opinions about the current state of affairs and views about the past and future. Some of these descriptions are very small in scale, related to a certain village or suburb, while others discuss the situation in whole Moldova, the post-Soviet states in general or even on a wider scale. In addition, due to the current situation in Moldova and pressure from the outside, they are also making comparisons with other political environments, in most cases Russia, the other post-Soviet states, and Romania. Especially the stories told by Russian political elites through Russian media have clearly had a major effect on the narrative identity of certain discussants. This is also a form of interaction with the political environment, as the writers are often discussing subjects such as legislation and election results that have an effect on their everyday life and this way in their identity. This makes the discussants active agents in relation to politics regardless of their background.

In this chapter textual analysis as presented by Skinner, and the concept of political/narrative identity as presented by Whitebrook have been discussed. In the empirical analysis of the data it is important to see each of the discussants as an individual expressing his personal opinions on the subject, at the same time treating him as a member of a certain group of people – the Russophone population of Moldova. As not all discussants are ethnic Russians and also their political opinions, as well as values and motivations vary, the problems of grouping people in search of a single political identity become clear. On the other hand it must be taken into account that the foreign policy of the Russian Federation sees the Russophone population of post-Soviet states as a single pro-Russian-minded group. Thus, individual public, narrative and political identities are in constant dialogue with the group identities defined both from outside and inside the group itself.

2.2. Hermeneutics and ethnography

Also the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer has had a strong influence in my way of thinking. The core of this theory is that we interpret all texts and objects from our own point of view. We always have some kind of presupposition or hypothesis based on which we make our own interpretations, whether we want it or not. So, it is impossible to do an unbiased analysis, even though it is possible to make interpretations. The researcher should be aware of his presuppositions and aim to assess critically, whether the structures that the researcher sees in the text really exist in it. From shattered notes of a certain phenomenon it is not possible to build a whole worldview or ideology of an individual. Skinner points out that it is useless to describe the contents of a text, but instead the goal should be to understand what the author meant with this text in certain contexts of time, space and culture. The concepts used should be evaluated in several contexts in order to understand their different meanings. As Skinner points out that no ideology has a uniform history, but instead the concepts connected to this ideology have been used differently in different contexts and all together these different usages form an overall image of an ideology and meanings connected to it. (Gadamer 1975, 235-239, 258-267; Gadamer 2005, 29-35; Skinner 2002, 15-16, 58-60, 79,84-85.)

The idea of hermeneutical understanding and different levels of hermeneutics are also central to the ethnographic method. When using literary sources it is never possible to reach the so-called first level of hermeneutics, which refers to the internal motivations of the writer. Instead we can produce our own interpretation about it, which

can also be called the second level of hermeneutics. There is also a third level of hermeneutics, which refers to the impression the reader of our research gets about the topic. In other words, even though Skinner in his own research concentrates strongly on history and philosophy of political thought in the previous centuries, his thinking can be applied to the research on current political debates. The focus is still on what the authors wanted to say with their texts and how they wanted the readers to react on them. This means that the focus should be on the period of time when these texts were produced, and the audience, to which they were aimed. When these two factors were combined to the social context, it is possible to analyze the motivations of the writer. (Gadamer 1975, 235-239, 258-267; Gadamer 2005, 29-35; Skinner 2002, 86-89; Yanow 2009, 279.)

People's membership in different types of communities and their identities are not black-and-white unities, even though especially in web discussions individuals aim to present themselves for example as solely Russian-minded or solely Moldovan patriots. In reality it must be taken into account that the membership in certain groups demands a certain type of behavior inside the group and in the discussions that are taking place. In the background of my research lies the ethnographic view on individuals and the idea that individuals aim to give out a positive image of themselves within the groups, even though in reality their identity is a far more varied entity than it shows on web discussions. In this sense also the stableness of their identity can be questioned. The core of the ethnographic view is thus the declaration of the diversity of reality. Ethnography aims to understand a common human being and his relationship to power. (Schatz 2009, 7, 11-12.)

The strength of the ethnographic point of view lies thus in the recognition of the complexity, multivocality and multilayeredness of reality. On the other hand ethnography sees reality as a set of performances, which in my opinion is an extremely good viewpoint to virtual reality and discussions in the social media, in which people strongly aim to form a certain type of image of themselves. Also according to the theory on the social construction of reality by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the worldviews of individuals are formed as a result of social interaction. Also Hannah Arendt points out that public speech and action form an identity: the individual creates a public image of himself based on them. The environment, in my research the virtual environment, supports the development of the group members' identities towards the set goal, which in the case of my research is mostly either Russian or Moldovan nationalism. This constructivist viewpoint is in many ways typical for ethnography. (Kubik 2009, 38; Schatz 2009, 12; Wedeen 2009, 88, see also Arendt 2002; Berger&Luckmann 2009.)

Ethnographic point of view also shows that all political activities are not connected to the competition on raw materials, but above all politics is about collective identity and symbols, which are used to show this identity. Usually politics is practiced as if identity was a stable entity, when in reality the factors of time and space have a great impact on changes taking place in the identity. So, the creation of collective identity is always political action and the goal of political action can be described as balancing the collective identity around a certain symbolic middle point. If it is assumed that politics is a locally produced action, the ethnographic viewpoints concentrating on the micro-level are significant. So, the aim of ethnographical method is to concentrate on actions of real people in real environments. (Kubik 2009,25-27, 45.)

My goal is to analyze the representations of (political) identities in virtual groups as results of identity-building processes. According to my sources it is clear that changes on macro-political and economic levels cause strong reactions also on the micro-level. The same kind of approach has been used in studies concerning the building process of a nation, in which the actions taking place on the national level are proportioned to processes on the local level. In other words research themes in these cases are the identity-building processes on national and local levels, especially concerning national identity and building of collective memory. On the other hand, when doing research on these processes it must be taken into account that the classic view on communities with shared values, identity and culture has been mostly replaced with an idea of a multi-placed and segmented identity. In other words the identity of an individual is built in a stream of cultural influences, in the middle of political commitments and under the influence of economic relations. This way the modern view on identity sees it as multi-placed, recognizes the importance of local collective memory and overall treats identity more as a voice than as a structure. (Kubik 2009, 33-34, 39-41, 47.)

My research takes influences from three forms of ethnography. Firstly, it concentrates on partly hidden and unofficial forms of political action and the cultural construction of power relations. Secondly, it concentrates on the social construction of identities and events on micro-level. Thirdly, my study discusses my research theme in the global context, through transnational relations and multi-placed ethnography, as the study is taking place in a virtual environment with strong connections to the global internet-community. According to hermeneutics, knowledge depends on power relations and social reality is built as a result of social interaction. Ideas, beliefs and values are created as results of social processes and the surrounding environment, such as language, structures

of the society and human relations, have a strong influence on them. According to the interpretive way of thinking culture and the contexts it creates have a great influence on building reality and knowledge. In this sense the concepts and performative elements used must be interpreted in their own context. (Kubik 2009, 49-50; Wedeen 2009, 80-82, 87-88; see also Gadamer 1975, 2005; Skinner 2002.)

By applying to this theoretical background it can be said that doing research on social movements is literally doing research on a phenomenon which is moving and changing, as these movements are all the time absorbing new models of action and values to themselves. The sources available rarely fit to ready-made theories about human activities, but instead it is productive to look at them at a certain type of theoretical background at the same time acknowledging the significance of one's own personality as a researcher to the results gained from the research. The movements and "the culture" they represent are often actually a combination of stories, images and concepts, which means that the analysis of this kind of material is always analysis of certain points of view, from which it is impossible to draw large-scale theories. In my research I am aiming to concentrate on the writings of certain individuals and to look for connections to previous and upcoming events in order to form a more thorough image. (Zirakzadeh 2009, 113-116.)

Even though I have discussed the ethnographical point of view, it does not mean that I should use traditional ethnographical methods, such as interviewing or observing. When using problem-centered phrasing of questions, it is possible to creatively combine different types of methods and theories in order to shed light to the various aspects of the research problem. In other words, in this chapter I have tried to point out that my research is strongly based on the ethnographic view on individuals, politics and power even though I am using textual analysis as my method. Hermeneutics and theories on social construction of reality offer a background and starting point for the research.

In this chapter I have discussed ethnographical points of view on studies of politics, which offer a background for this study and the framework for my own thinking in connection to the textual analysis as presented by Skinner and the concept of political identity as presented by Whitebrook discussed in the previous chapter. In the next chapter I will discuss two central concepts that demonstrate the wider context of my research question, as nationalism and geopolitics are large-scale frameworks within which the discussants operate either consciously or unconsciously. Through these concepts that form a background for the phenomenon I move on to their practical implications, when the actual discussions are analyzed in the further chapters.

3. CENTRAL CONCEPTS

3.1. Nationalism

Benedict Anderson described nations as imagined communities, because the members of a nation never get to know all the other members of the same nation and still they share a feeling of community. A nation has also limits and a sense of sovereignty. This way nationalism is not an ideology, as it is a part of all political ideologies and is inherited from one generation to another. Instead, nationalism is related to phenomena like religion or kinship, even though different community-forming features may be stressed during different periods of time. Nationalism is community in anonymity. Also language is an important factor in creating communities. Since printed press language has brought people together and the same can be said about internet and social media. Communities have an awareness of being embedded in secular time with all its implications of continuity engenders the need for a narrative of identity. When discussing the identity of human communities, the most important features of the group are those that secure the continuity of the group's existence even when its members change. These are the features that separate the group from others and the things that the members of the group have in common. The ways of building a group identity include usage of national symbols and processes of inclusion and exclusion: pointing out friends and enemies from the other existing groups. (Anderson 1999, 5-10, 46; Billig 70-73; Pakkasvirta 2005, 76-78, 89; Saukkonen 2005, 92, 103.)

There are different ways to see nationalism and its origins. Social primordialism sees ethnical ties as a larger-scale form of family ties and in this way a natural form of human organization. Cultural primordialism, on the other hand, stresses the importance of culture for communities: culture gives meaning to things. The relation between individual and culture can be described as deterministic: each individual or generation has only a very limited impact on the culture of the community. Culture can be said to be based on very long-term, stable and consistent features that cannot be easily changed. Communities that share the same culture have a connection to a certain country and share a myth of a common origin, common memories, one or more shared cultural features and mutual solidarity. These are the basis of group identity, which can also be used by political elites in the nation-building process at the same time stressing the homogenous nature of a nation and silencing voices of the minorities. Culture is also constantly reconstructed in social interaction between individuals. According to the theory of social

construction people create, maintain and change social reality by forming their own ideas about it, by demonstrating these ideas to others and by receiving and interpreting the ideas of others. (Billig 2010, 25-28, 70-73; Pakkasvirta & Saukkonen 2005, 23-25; Remy 2005, 55-56, see also Berger & Luckmann 2009.)

Also modernization and especially cultural modernization have had an impact on nationalism. The theory of cultural modernization sees language as a major factor for nationalism, which leads to the fact that modern communication systems make it possible for people to exchange views in their native language and build nationalism even across geographical borders. The shared language also strengthens the idea of belonging to a certain nation and culture. This development does not happen outside the political system, as political will and publicity in media often have a major impact on spreading these ideas to the masses. Nationalism can also be described as a certain type of discourse and a way of building social reality through national rhetoric and concepts. Even if it is difficult to define “nationalism” or “nation”, many scholars point out that the principle of cohesion is essential when discussing nationalism. This means that people themselves are able define to which nation do they belong, which can be expressed through solidarity towards a certain nation. This subjectivity is the core of nationalism, even though there are also scientific and juridical ways of defining a nation. (Pakkasvirta & Saukkonen 2005, 33-35, 40-41, see also Billig 2010.)

Ethnic groups in diaspora form their own type of nationalism, which is also the case with the Russophone minority of Moldova. In an industrialized society the pressure of unifying different ethnic groups focuses on diasporic groups, which may lead to discrimination or persecution. Strengthening their own nationalism may be the only way of preventing assimilation to the majority. Nationalism is strengthening especially cultural and economical conflicts within the society. From the point of view of Russian diaspora groups this question is problematic, as even though in many diaspora groups the Russian identity is of major importance, in others Russians are trying to assimilate to the majority due to the bad image Russia has in the international sphere. This is also in connection to the reasons of emigration, as many Russians living in diaspora have escaped the country due to repression and do not possess a positive image of their country of origin. (Remy 2005, 52-53; Tishkov 2007.)

The connection of an ethnical group to a certain geographical area may be based only on thoughts, which explains diaspora movements. The feeling of mutual solidarity makes even diasporic groups unite and able to defend themselves against threats

from outside the group. Language or religion alone is not enough to create an ethnic identity. The crucial factor is whether the people themselves see these features so significant that they separate them from other people. A nation is a separate concept from ethnic identity. The features of national identity include a historical homeland, common myths and historical memories, common culture shared by wide range of people, common economy and equal rights and duties. This means that the criteria for a nation are stricter than for an ethnic community, as an ethnic community may e.g. comprise of only the highest classes of the society. (Remy 2005, 56-58, on the concept of the “homeland”, see Billig 2010, 74-78.)

Nationalism, on the other hand, can be described as an ideological movement that aims to reach and maintain the autonomy, unity and identity of a group of people that see themselves as a nation or a potential nation. In this case autonomy means the formation of some kind of a national government, but not necessarily a national state. Unity means that the members of the nation belong to the same state, share a common culture and a feeling of a national connection. The question of identity concentrates on preserving the original identity of the group by diminishing the effect of foreign cultures. In Moldova, especially in the rhetoric of Moldovan nationalists, national identity is strongly based on the importance of origin, language and national culture as well as separation from both Russian and Romanian influences. (Remy 2005, 60, 65.)

There were three simultaneous transition processes going on in the former Soviet republics in the early 1990s, which will be briefly discussed in the following. The most important one for my thesis is the transition in national identity, but also the formation of civil society and the economic transition are briefly introduced, as they had a major impact on the lives of people living in all post-Soviet republics. The decolonization processes that took place included attempts to form national identities out of polities that consist of multiethnic communities. Post-colonial regimes tend to give low priority to the establishment of political communities based on inclusion, political equality, universal citizenship and securing democratic governance. Rather, the state-building process following independence invariably involves one section of the community imposing some form of political and cultural hegemony on the rest. This is often followed by ethnic tension. For the borderlands of the USSR the process is interpreted as transition from colonial rule. The nationalist struggles of the 1980s were interpreted as having secured the liberation of national homelands from the USSR and up until 1991 these lands existed as colonial appendages of a Russian-dominated Soviet empire. Since 1991 competing visions

of what form these political homelands should take have become a universal feature of politics in the post-Soviet borderlands. (Smith 1999, 6-8.)

Usually members of the titular nation wish to complete their polity by elevating their nation (language, culture and people) to a key place within the state's political institutions and social life of the country. Ethnic minorities often uncomfortable with their place in the new polities wish to see their own people and cultures provided with autonomous or even sovereign political homelands. In addition there are those not wishing to fit into neat ethnic or religious divides that wish to see their homeland based on politics of identity able to transcend such differences. It is a vision of homeland that plays down ethnic and religious differences and holds that all residents who live and work within the sovereign state should have equal right to membership of the citizen-polity. All these groups are very clearly visible also in the Moldovan political field and in my sources. (Smith 1999, 8; on the concept of the "homeland", see Billig 2010, 74-78.)

For Russia the situation is different as Russians more than other nations were identifying themselves with the large homeland either in the form of a Tsarist Empire or the Soviet Union. Also the territory that constituted the Soviet Union had long been considered integral and largely undifferentiated part of Russia. The expansion created an overland empire favored blurring the boundaries between metropolis and colonies. Also the formation of the modern Russian nation coincided with colonial expansion. The image that the most Russians had of their homeland (*rodina*) was based on the conception of Russia as a multiethnic (*rossiyskiy*) rather than a specifically Russian (*russkiy*) empire. This means that the Russians' view of their homeland was more inclusive and their relationship with the colonies more ambiguous than in most other colonial empires. This development continued during the Soviet period when Russians were encouraged to identify with the Soviet Union as their homeland more strongly than the other nationalities of the Soviet Union. One sign of this was that the state provided Russians with schools and mass media in their own language irrespective of where they lived in the Soviet Union. Also, because Russian was the state *lingua franca*, the Russians faced fewer obstacles to social mobility regardless of their place of residence. In addition, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic lacked certain things available to other republics, such as promotion of their own native folk culture. This way, Russian identity became almost a synonym for the Soviet homeland, which was further encouraged by the mass migration of Russians to borderland republics. (Prina 2015, 59-60; Smith 1999, 8-9, 47-48.)

For many Russians the decolonization process was focusing on the creation

of a sovereign and democratic Russia, for others the idea of re-establishing an empire abroad and re-colonizing the former Soviet borderlands is inextricably bound up with Russian national identity. Also, due to the numerous domestic ethnic groups with a distinct set of identities and federated homeland administrations, Russia's state-builders were facing the task of forming a political community out of differing and competing political identities. Four distinct ideologies behind the post-Soviet Russian nationalism can be identified: liberal, neo-nationalist, neo-Soviet and democratic statist. Out of the four, neo-nationalists seek "return to empire", to the pre-communist golden age. The ideology includes far right thinking and acclamation that Russia should find its own path without cooperating with the West. Russia should also re-gain its status as a global superpower in Eurasia. According to this ideology the new Eurasian empire in its narrowest form should include vast territories of Eurasia, the Caucasian republics and the Slavic republics of Ukraine and Belarus. Also Moldova is included in this empire. For neo-Soviets, on the other hand, the idea and values of Russia embodied within the Soviet homeland. For them, Soviet years are a positive period in Russian history, which provided Russians with job security, an extensive welfare system, strong leadership, international respect, and pride in their country's superpower status. Both neo-nationalists and neo-Soviets are in general willing to incorporate the lands settled by ethnic Russians into Russia and their attitudes towards the West and post-Soviet states not willing to incorporate into Russia are openly hostile. Liberals and democrats were not stressing territorial questions in their ideology. Russian nationalist ideologies and especially the concept of empire are further discussed in the next chapter concerning geopolitics. (Godzimirski 2007, 34-36; Smith 1999, 8-9, 54; on the concepts of "Eurasia" and "empire", see also Dugin 1997.)

When coming back to the other transition processes in the post-Soviet space, the second one of them that took place in the former Soviet republics was a transition from totalitarianism to democracy. A widely recognized democratic building block is a civil society, meaning the network of social groups, modes of thinking and cultural traditions which operate autonomously from the state and its political institutions. The civil society in the Soviet Union was absorbed into the state-apparatus, but in the reformations of the 1980s autonomous social movements had a major role. Since 1991 the situation of the civil society varied in different former Soviet republics. Questions related to civil society in Moldova are discussed throughout this study. The third transition was from command to market economy, which included privatizing state property, ending state-regulated price-control and further opening up the region to international trade and investment. This has

taken place with varied success in different republics. The economic liberalization has also had an impact on the prospects of both democratization and geopolitical stability, even though rapid economic reform has also led to social hardships, which harms political stability and democracy. Also the regional project of the post-Soviet states, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), had been shaped by a legacy of economic interdependency and limited trade with the rest of the world economy. (Smith 1999, 10-12.)

Throughout the post-Soviet borderland states, there has been a tendency amongst the titular political and cultural elites to place heavy emphasis on nation-building in reshaping the political and cultural life of their newly emergent polities. Based upon the claim that the titular nation is the only legitimate homeland nation within the political space that it shares with other ethnic groups, such nations aspire to becoming the state of and for a particular ethnocultural core nation, whose language, culture, demographic position, economic welfare and political hegemony must be protected and promoted by the state. Even though there are differences between nationalizing regimes and language policies, a relationship between the titular nation and the political homeland exists to varying degrees, with consequences for those minorities who are not considered members of the homeland nation and do not share its cultural attributes. In Moldova the national identity-building process is still going on, as the status of the official language is under constant discussion and its population is in many ways under the influence of the strong neighboring states. (Smith 1999, 74.)

In this chapter I have briefly discussed the principles of forming groups as the basis of national identity and the relation these groups have to culture and language. In my study the importance of language and role of diasporic groups are stressed, which is why diasporic groups are discussed more in detail in this introduction to nationalism. I have also demonstrated the implications of Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" to the modern world and especially social media. The brief introduction to the general development and especially nation-building processes that have taken place in Russia and the post-Soviet states offers a starting point for my research and provides background for comparison between different states.

3.2. Geopolitics

All societies tend to form boundaries between themselves and others as this is a basic precondition for them to distinguish themselves from other societies. Their distinctiveness rises from the idea that the society is a coherent social-geographical entity, which gets its

existence by distinguishing what it is and what it is not. The conventional understanding of the geography of power is formed from three geographical assumptions: first, that the states have an exclusive power within their territories as represented by the concept of sovereignty; second, that “domestic” and “foreign” affairs are essentially separate realms in which different rules obtain; and finally, that the boundaries of the state define the boundaries of society such that the latter is totally contained by the former. These assumptions reinforce one another to produce state-centered view of power in which the space occupied by states is seen as fixed, as if for all time. On the other hand these assumptions are not valid in many cases concerning the modern global world, where global institutions and enterprises have a significant role in world politics. In the case of Russia it must be also pointed out that in many ways foreign policy practiced by the Russian Federation treats subjects residing outside its boundaries in many cases the same way as its own citizens, and is this way breaking these three basic principles. (Agnew 2003, 23, 51-56.)

The structure of the international system has three features that count: it is anarchic, without higher authority; states all perform the same functions and are equivalent units; and there is an uneven distribution of resources and capacities among states. This means that the system’s shape as a whole is determined by the number and relations between the Great Powers, the states with most resources and capacities. The balance of power between the Great Powers is the key mechanism in world politics. The hierarchy of Great Powers can be seen as emerging out of a competition for primacy on the basis of two axioms concerning states and their attributes. One is that relative power differences between states cause states to compete with one another for relative shifts in power and status. The second is that competition between states takes place under conditions of international anarchy; that is, conditions in which there is little or no return to cooperation, and winning is everything. (Agnew 2003, 54, 69-70, 72-75.)

On the other hand Great Powers do not only possess privileges, but they also have responsibilities to protect smaller nations. This positive aspect of influence policy often leads to using the protection argument as a justification for violating sovereignty of a smaller state. In case of Russia this means that taking over the role of an actor responsible for the stability of the post-Soviet states may lead to an unequal concept of sovereignty where Russia has superiority over the sovereignties of these countries. The so-called Great Powers of every era have been able to inscribe their particular geopolitical imaginations on to the world as a whole. State power has involved the capacity for undertaking action by

states in the conditions of a particular era. This presupposes conventions of meaning about state behavior that are shared by all parties and arise out of the actions of states and other actors. In this construction, hegemony refers to the norms and rules governing world politics accepted by dominant social groups and classes. The meanings are those diffused by the most powerful states. (Agnew 2003, 54, 69-70, 72-75, Hast 2007, 179.)

Alongside the development of transport and communication also the old ideas stemming from previous centuries remained. These included the idea of “natural” rights of Great Powers over smaller ones and an overall colonial ideology. For example the Cold War period echoed older geopolitical models about opposed states demonizing each other and the domino effect, which gave the Great Powers natural rights to protect their sphere of influence. In the Soviet rhetoric the situation was described as a great global struggle between an embattled socialist experiment and aggressive but decadent world capitalism. After the Second World War the world was divided in three: the first (the West) and the second (the East) battling over the resources of the Third (developing) world. The category of the Third world derived from the structural opposition of the other two worlds. The binary position was also visible in the militarized nature of the conflict. Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s the Three Worlds concept has lost much of its appeal. (Agnew 2003, 28-31.)

The “culture wars” scenario has become increasingly popular among theorists looking to reconstitute the ideological geopolitics of the Cold War on a multipolar basis. An increasing number of writers are placing stress on the importance of cultural values and institutions in the geopolitical confusion left after the Cold War: according to them, future wars will most likely occur between the nations and groups of different civilizations, such as Western and Slavic-Orthodox. As civilizations have different views on relations between the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy, thus culture and cultural identities are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world. On the other hand it is difficult to define such broad-scale cultures: the example of the EU has proven that it is difficult to form a common identity even for its member states. Also globalization with free flows of information, people, goods and capital tie cultures together and increase tensions within culture areas. (Agnew 2003, 119-120; Huntington 1993.)

In Russian rhetoric the heartland theory is still of major importance. The heartland theory sees Russia and Eastern Europe as the center of “heartland”, the center of the world island, the ruler of which rules the world. In Russian geopolitical thinking

Russia's special position in the world as a separate civilization characterized by its central position between the East and the West are still valid. In his theory Russia is not part of Europe or Asia, but a spiritual and historical unit of its own. These ideas were also adapted as parts of Soviet ideology. The idea of Russia's unique character leads to the fact that this uniqueness has to be protected in every possible way. This does not mean complete isolation, but still restricts communication with both Asia and Europe and leads to strong requirements for all neighboring areas to either cooperate with Russia or remain neutral from other influences. The center of Russia's uniqueness is described as its people, who are unified in ethnical, cultural, psychological and religious terms, this way forming a civilization of its own. In most radical theories Russian people are a "messianic" people with a universal mission of spreading its empire not only within its own territory but globally. Also the Orthodox Christian religion is of major importance for the ideology. Religion combined to historical and linguistic factors has also led to creation of a "Slavonic brotherhood", which is used as justification for certain Eastern European countries to naturally belong to Russia's sphere of influence. According to this theory, the geopolitical goal of the US and Western Europe is to spread their influence to Eastern Europe, which also led to current "russophobia" in the West and to the ideological battle against the Soviet Union after the Second World War. (Dergachev 2004, 260-266, 268-271, 295-307; Dugin 1997, 47-49, 83-90, 165-169, 188-192, 254-259.)

However, too many discussions on geopolitics are concentrating on the level of individual states, when in reality global economy with its cores and peripheries linked together with flows of goods, people and investment forms a world society, where national boundaries have lost much of their importance. Wealth flows through networks of trade and communication producing regional concentrations of relative wealth and poverty. On a higher level, the nodes of the integrated world society are social groupings and cultural community, political identity and economic integration are all structured at a global scale. The integrated world society model privileges global-scale communication based on networks among multiple actors that are relatively nonhierarchical and more or less depending upon the volition of the actors themselves. This new type of geopolitical thinking also changes the ideas of time and space when compared to the traditional idea about geopolitics based on nation states. (Agnew 2003, 130-131.)

The collapse of the USSR left behind ties of national solidarity and collective identity that can be called "the ruins of empire" and form a substructure that defines the future of Russian national identity both inside the Russian Federation and outside it. The

concept of an empire, as it is presented in the Russian political context, includes many features that are visible in the Russian foreign policy especially towards the post-Soviet republics: empire is a polity that includes many communities (peoples, ethnic groups, nations etc.), hierarchical coexistence of centers and peripheries, the autocratic way of integrating territory and society “from above” (lack of civil rights of the subjects), presence of an universal idea (a global utopian project for the sake of which an empire integrates in its body and in the sphere of its influence different peoples and territories) and capability of international influence. There is a strong imperial nationalist movement in Russia, which aims to support the revival of the Russian empire or even create a new Eurasian empire that would cover a larger territory than the USSR did, even though originally this idea was created among white Russian emigrants as an alternative for the Soviet communism. It also valorizes Russian identity and wishes to support the well-being of ethnic Russians both in the Russian Federation and outside it. This movement also has a strong anti-Western orientation: the West is seen as “the dangerous other” not only from geopolitical point of view, but also in a sense that Russia should have a right to follow its own way and keep its status as a great power. (Dergachev 2004, 40-41, Malinova 2010, 60-66, see also Dugin 1997.)

The Russian Federation is breaking the traditional rules of geopolitics in many ways by keeping (or trying to regain, depending on the point of view) the position of the USSR in global politics. On the other hand it is also building cultural boundaries in Europe by making contradictions between the Western and Eastern cultures and trying to keep its position as the regional center for whole Eastern Europe. To support this goal, the geopolitical concept of Russian World (Russkiy Mir) is of major importance. Starting from the early 2000s it developed rather independently from official Russian policy regarding compatriots residing in foreign countries. Russian language is one of the cornerstones of the concept, as it is seen that language is the only proper carrier of culture. Thus, a person who speaks Russian and thinks in a Russian way is Russian. Russian World can then be defined as a phenomenon of ethnic culture having a network culture consisting of large and small communities within the Russian language and culture environment, and taking Russia as the mental centre. Russian World is also name of the organization promoting Russian soft power among compatriots in the Russian near abroad. In addition, there are several other foundations, NGOs, and even state organs promoting the rights of Russian people abroad. This is in stark contrast with the fact that Russia itself is very cautious and even xenophobic about its own immigrants, even Russians returning to their country of

origin, in the same way as countries of the “near abroad” are cautious about Russians. (Kostenko 2007; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 44-47.)

Back in the mid-1990s, when the legislation concerning Russian minorities abroad was based on citizenship: only people whose nationality was not a “titular nation” in any of the newly-independent states could be considered a compatriot. In practice this meant that a Chechen could be a compatriot but a Kazakh could not. From here the definition has moved towards self-identification, but still only the Russian ethnicity is stressed instead of the numerous national minorities of Russian Federation. In this sense only ethnic Russians can be compatriots, while members of national minorities, such as Buryat or Bashkirs, cannot. This is also due to the important role of Orthodox Christian religion in the rhetoric concerning the compatriots. On the other hand many local governments of Russian Federation are active with their “own diasporas”, as is the case with Tatars, for example. In addition the widest possible definition of compatriots includes the citizens of Russian Federation, ethnic Russians living abroad, people of any national minority of Russia living abroad, and even people living in the “near abroad” and having some kind of connection to Russia. (Laruelle 2006; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 44-47.)

There are approximately 300 million Russian speakers in the world, who are considered participants of the Russian World by the Russian political elite. Out of these about 25 million people speak Russian as their first language and live in Russia’s “near abroad”. The internet is regarded as one of the most important means of communication between Russia and the diasporic groups. The development of Russian world as a specific civilization is suitable for the Russian elite as a counterbalance to the influence of Western countries, and in Russian rhetoric rights of the “people/nation” instead of rights of individuals or states are often stressed. A person can be included in the Russian World according to his/her affiliation to the particular language, religion, and cultural community. The physical boundaries of the Russian World are not clearly defined as even people living in the “sphere of influence” of this community can be defined as its members, due to which Kremlin has a wide range of possibilities to use the concept to achieve specific political objectives. Since 1999 the definition based on language, religion, culture, and tradition is also the foundation of Russian law concerning the rights of compatriots. The law also lists territory, namely the Tsarist Russian Empire, the USSR and Russian Federation, as an eligibility criterion for compatriots. A person who was born, lives, or used to live in these areas can be considered as a compatriot. Also the concept of Russian World aims to bring together people who have connections to any of these three states. In fact, self-

identification is the most important factors for defining the status of a compatriot. (Dergachev 2004, 307-312, 392-395; Laruelle 2006; Nezavizimaya Gazeta 2007; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 44-47; Shevel 2007, 4-6, see also Dugin 1997.)

In this chapter I have briefly presented some general structures and functions of geopolitics, such as the Great Powers and Three Worlds, as well as the Russian views on the topic. Then I have aimed to point out the way how Russophone populations of the “near abroad” are an important factor in the geopolitical interests of Russia, and what kind of rhetoric justifies this way of thinking. This analysis has shown that the power balance and spheres of influence of Great Powers are still valid concepts when discussing the field of global politics. On the other hand globalization and, as my study discusses, the transnational flow of information in different types of networks is having an effect on both the fields of domestic and international politics.

4. QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

4.1. History

The geographical location of Moldova is at the border of Asia and Europe. During the Middle Ages the inhabitants of the area traded with Kiev, the Byzantine Empire and Rome, which had a major influence in the culture of the area. On the other hand the conquerors from the east (Huns, Hungarians, Goths and Tatars) formed a threat for the stability of the area. This threat led to the formation of the Moldovan Principality in 1359, which was situated between the Carpathian mountains, the river Dniester, the Danube and the Black Sea. Moldova was in a close connection with another Romanian principality, Valachia. Valachia also conquered southern areas of Moldova in the 14th century, but the areas were returned to Moldova in the 15th century. Both Valachia and Moldova ended up under Turkish rule in the 16th century, but remained in a relatively autonomic state. During this period the easternmost parts and the borderlands of Moldova, also known as Bessarabia, were constantly attacked by the Russians. As the Byzantine Empire weakened, Bessarabia became part of the Russian Empire according to the peace treaty of Bucharest in 1812. The rest of Moldova together with Valachia started a political movement to form a kingdom of Romania. This finally happened when Moldova and Valachia merged into one in 1859. This strengthened the wishes of the Bessarabian inhabitants to join the newly emerged kingdom. (Miklóssy 2011, 166-168)

These early stages of Moldovan history remain important for many Moldovans. For them this narrative of events that took place hundreds of years ago is an important factor in building a national identity for contemporary Moldova. They often point out the fact that an area called Moldova existed long before an area called Romania was mentioned in any official documents. This is used as to prove that Moldovan culture is first of all independent and secondly much older than Romanian culture by Moldovan nationalists, as the following text demonstrates:

3.) All nations were 'invented' in one way or another. And the Moldovan nation (as a state-forming community) and ethnos (as a historical and cultural community) were invented just like Valachia (Oltens and Muntens), much earlier than the Romanian nation. And when it comes to existence/non-existence: there are political (concerning the nation) and ethnological (concerning the ethnos) facts. Political facts: the Moldovan Republic exists and

is formed by a Moldovan nation; ethnological facts – Bessarabian historical and cultural region exists, and its people define themselves as Moldovan and speak the Moldovan language (which is supplemented with western romanticisms just like Romanian and is influenced by Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian languages in the vocabulary and phonetics at least) and the region has been influenced by the Russian and Ukrainian traditional and urban cultures. So, from political-legal and ethnological points of view the Moldovan nation exists, as there is Moldovan statehood, identity, culture, and language. How irredentists, pan-Romanians, as well as Moldovan nationalists react to this is already a political question. (MM 25.9.2009)

Using the textual analysis as introduced by Skinner it is clear that by listing examples from the fields of history, linguistics, and cultural studies this writer (3) aims to point out that contemporary Moldova is an independent state with a long history. The writer also aims to make a clear separation between today's Moldova and Romania by pointing out that Moldovan culture is more ancient and has remained the same throughout the centuries despite the fact that the Moldovan territory has been occupied by several different groups during this period of time and the state borders have been constantly moving. From the point of view of intertextuality this writer aims to offer a contradictory view on history compared to the pro-Romanian view by stating his disagreement with this view on history.

There are also opposing views to the topic, pointing out that both Romania and Moldova share so many common cultural features that making separation between them is fairly difficult:

4.) *Yes, we are part of the Great Romania, which is like Yugoslavia of the Eastern Romanic peoples. We have many nationalities but only one nation. Do not mix up Rus people living in the north and the real Moldovans. The Moldovans originate from Franks, while Rus people originate from ancient Slavonic tribes. We live in our own territory, while you are in Moldova as guests with their feet lift up on the table. (MM 16.9.2014)*

5.) *The concepts of 'Moldova', 'Moldovans' and 'Moldovan' have existed since the dawn of time, but the Bolsheviks were the first ones to use these as opposites to all things 'Romanian'. They tried to turn a geographical concept into a*

separate nation and they rewrote our common history the way that they liked. Same religion, same language, same history, same traditions, same mentality.... everyone can draw their own conclusions (of course according to their own ethical and moral qualities).

PS. Please note that the strongest 'Moldovanists' are always the simple Russophone guys, who do not know the language (although they are very fond to argue about it), nor they are familiar with the national traditions, and their understanding of the culture is absolutely superficial. At the same time they are trying to prove here that (of course only in words, as they are internet warriors) they are the true 'Moldovan nation'. (RM 17.11.2009)

In the first text (4) the linguistic and cultural similarities are used to demonstrate that Moldovan culture is in fact the same as Romanian culture and this claim is proved with historical evidence. The second writer (5) is pointing out the political goals behind the concepts used. In this case, he sees that making "Moldovan" an opposite concept to "Romanian" is promoting Russian-minded goals of keeping these countries as separate political units. This indeed was the case during the Soviet period, when the Communist Party of Moldavia (CPM) was the author of a quasi-nationalist tradition that sought to create a Moldovan people. This goal was supported in many spheres of life, including culture, as Moldovan folk songs were widely performed and films of Emil Loteanu (such as *Queen of the Gypsies/Tabor ukhodit v nebo*) gained popularity and support both in USSR and abroad. At the same time other Soviet republican communist parties were punished when pursuing "nationalist deviations". (March 2007a, 602.) The writer (5) also points out that it is possible to have an effect in the identity of a group from outside the group by stating that the people opposing the idea of a common Romanian culture in Romania and Moldova are actually Russophone Moldovans with little understanding of Romanian culture. This way he is practicing politics of exclusion by stating that only member of the titular nation are competent to discuss the similarities and differences between Moldovan and Romanian cultures. These two texts demonstrate the importance of using right concepts to promote certain political goals. They also show in practice that both cultural, ideological, and political boundaries have a major role in defining the identity of a nation.

Also the figure of an early prince of the principality of Moldova Stephen the Great (Ștefan cel Mare) is an important symbol for both Romanians and Moldovans.

During his rule (1457-1504AD) he strengthened the Moldovan independence against its neighboring countries and held a long resistance against the Ottoman Empire. He ruled his kingdom from Suceava, which is located in nowadays Romania. His figure is currently used by Russian nationalists to strengthen an ideology, which can be referred to as “Moldovanism” (Moldovenismul). Moldovanism existed already during the Soviet era and it stresses that Moldovan and Romanian people and language were completely distinct entities, and that the Moldovan identity was itself partly Slavic and could find realization only within the Russian/Soviet sphere of influence. It also sees that Moldova achieved statehood in 1359, 500 years before the emergence of a unified Romanian state. In Moldovanism the image of Stephen the Great is used to make up for the imagery gap created by the fall of the USSR: Stephen the Great is often replacing Soviet icons, such as the image of V.I. Lenin as symbol of the state. Stephen the Great is often described as the “founder of Moldovan statehood” and a link between the medieval and modern epochs of the Moldovan state. This link is articulated through a propagandist context from the Soviet era, which stresses the “lifelong friendship between the Russian and Moldovan people” in contradiction to “Romanian and fascist occupation”. Thus, the image of Stephen the Great is also very visible in the Victory Day celebrations alongside the veterans of the Great Patriotic War and the war memorials. This way, historical events and characters are used as tools for political manipulation. This is not unique to the Moldovan case, as for example in the early phases of the Yugoslavian breakup wars medieval history and historical figures were constantly used by the Serbs to prove the originality of their culture and the long history of their independent state compared to the other Yugoslavian republics. (March 2007a, 602-605; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 233-234, Vihervuori 1999, 56-68.)

As many Moldovan nationalists see the independent republic of Moldova as the only real heir of Stephen the Great and his Moldovan principality, they occasionally present fairly harsh and concrete demands to gain acknowledgement for this idea:

6.) *The movement of Moldovan Patriots, I suggest you to think about the following idea: We should approach our government with the demand of moving the place of burial of the much-respected Stephen the Great. In other words, to move the grave from previously Moldovan territory (Romania) to the territory of current Moldovan Republic (for example to the fortress of Soroki). After all, the warrior was not Romanian but Moldovan nobleman and even if he was buried in his own lands (on the territory of Great Moldova) back then, I have to sadly remind*

you that the territory belongs nowadays to our neighboring country Romania. In other words, they were not given just the lands, but also Stephan himself. And we have all the rights to return him to the homeland! (MM 9.9.2009)

This text (6) is a plea for other members of the group sharing a similar understanding of the history of Moldova, calling for symbolic deeds to strengthen the national identity of Moldovans. It should be noted that the writer is referring to himself as well as the other members of the group as “patriots” instead of “nationalists”. The division between these two concepts is usually made based on the idea that a “patriot” only loves and appreciates his country while a “nationalist” is also aggressive towards other nations. In reality this kind of division is very artificial, as also this text demonstrates, as both concepts are closely related to nationalism. Also in this study I do not make a separation between patriots and nationalists. (Billig 2010, 55-59.)

The text is also an exceptional example that for forming a political group identity not only traditional symbols, such as flags, are regarded as important; in this comment historical character is embodied as a symbol in a very concrete way, as bones from the Middle Ages are seen as of essential importance for the national identity of a contemporary state. This type of plea does not stem from practical questions of everyday life, such as emigration or language questions, but instead sees the foundation of contemporary Moldova in the kingdoms and battles of the Middle Ages. This text is an illustrative example of the importance of common historical symbols for the national identity-building process and also shows the strong opposition to Romania, which is an essential part of both pro-Moldovan and pro-Russian rhetoric. The writer sees the contemporary republic of Moldova as a direct heir of the “Great Moldova” of the Middle Ages, despite the fact that the Moldovan character and statehood of this earlier state can be discussed, as it covered wide areas of today’s Romania and shared a common culture with these areas.

Nowadays Moldovans regard themselves as ethnic Romanians whose ancestors became part of the Russian Empire as a result of the Russian expansion into the Balkans. They lived in Bessarabia under Russian rule and came into close contact with their Ukrainian neighbors. The language and culture of the Moldovans have been strongly influenced by the Ukrainians. Still, the Romanian influence has been vital for the Moldovan culture for centuries, which is why it has been sometimes problematic to define Moldovan national identity and its characteristics. Romania is both geographically and

mentally very close to Moldova. The Moldovans are Eastern Orthodox in religion. Whereas the Romanians changed the script of their literary language from the Cyrillic to the Latin in the mid-19th century, the Moldovans continued to use the Cyrillic script under Tsarist pressure. The state of Bessarabia gained independence in 1917 and soon merged into the kingdom of Romania partly due to the unclear situation in Soviet Russia and partly due to the strong pressure from Romania. The USSR never recognized Bessarabia as part of Romania. (Miklóssy 2011, 166; Wixman 1984, 136-137)

In the inter-War period Moldova, also known as Bessarabia, was a part of the independent Romanian state. During that time the Moldavian population of the USSR was comprised of the Moldavians living in the Ukrainian SSR, near the border with Bessarabia. In 1924 the Soviets created the Moldavian ASSR on the east bank of the Dniester river in today's Transnistria. In Soviet historiography this reflected the general will of the people, while from Western point of view it was seen as a Soviet intrigue aimed at contesting Romanian sovereignty, as the area was formed arbitrarily on Ukrainian territory that had never previously been part of either Moldova or Romania. In 1926 the Moldavian population of the USSR was approximately 279 000. Bessarabia was occupied by the Soviet troops in 1940 in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, but soon the area was occupied by German forces and merged back to Romania, remaining under Romanian rule until 1944. The area was reincorporated in the USSR after World War II and the Moldavian ASSR was abolished. (Ciscel 2008, 106; Hill 2007, 56-60; Lory 1996, 154; March 2007a, 602-605; Miklóssy 2011, 168-169; Munchaev & Ustinov 2008, 564; Wixman 1984, 136-137.)

During the inter-war period, the Romanian government had changed the Moldavian writing system to conform to modern Romanian. With the reincorporation of Moldova after the war, the Soviets insisted that the Moldovans go back to writing the Moldovan language in the Cyrillic script. The national identity and ethnic character were manipulated harshly as the Soviet historians rewrote the history of Moldova and separated its development from Romania. Also ethnic purges took place in the Moldavian SSR during Stalinism: the Soviet rule caused a famine that killed at least 115 000 Moldovan peasants and more than 100 000 Moldovan people were displaced in Central Asia and behind the Urals, and replaced with Russians and Ukrainians mostly in the eastern parts of the country, in present-day Transnistria. On the other hand the industrial production of Moldova improved significantly during the Soviet rule when the investments from the central government led to the building of several electric power plants, improvement of

wine-production and founding of industries producing building materials and canned food especially on the eastern banks of the Dniester. These institutions are still of major importance especially to the Transnistrian economy. The relations between the ethnic Moldovans and the other peoples of the republic were resentful throughout the Soviet period. The population of the Moldavian SSR was approximately 2,2 million in 1959 and 4,3 million in 1989. In 1989 64% of the inhabitants were Moldovans, 13% Ukrainians and 4% Russians, which shows the influence of displacements to the demography of the republic. (Ciscel 2008, 106; Hill 2007, 56-60; Lory 1996, 154; March 2007a, 602-605; Miklóssy 2011, 168-169; Munchaev & Ustinov 2008, 564; Wixman 1984, 136-137.)

The period of Soviet rule in Moldovan history raises mixed feelings. In general it can be stated that the Soviet period supported the process of Russification in all non-Russian Soviet republics. Russia was considered the core of Soviet Union and in many cases especially Russian immigrants who fled to non-Russian republics treated these republics as Russia. After the disintegration of the USSR many immigrants suddenly found themselves “living abroad” and were uncomfortable with the new borders that now divided them. Due to this factor the collapse of the USSR is considered a geopolitical catastrophe among influential political forces in Russia, which is clearly visible in the foreign policy conducted by the Russian Federation since the 1990s. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 9.)

Especially among the Russophone population of the country there is a tendency to neglect the harsh experiences of many ethnic Moldovans and instead stress the positive sides that the Soviet rule brought to the country. This is an essentially Moldovanist or pro-Russian view on history. These types of attitudes are occasionally in contradiction with the official statements and policies of the Moldovan government, as the following opinions demonstrate:

7.) A year ago M. Ghimpu declared the 28th of June 1940 the ‘Day of Soviet Occupation’. He also decided to hold commemorative event all over the country on the 28th with flags at half-mast. On the central square of Kishinev Ghimpu decided to erect a monument for the victims of the Soviet rule and now a memorial stone has been placed there. The Moldovan people are outraged by this cynical and blasphemous act of interim president, aimed at re-writing the history of Moldova. Our membership in the Soviet Union was a heyday of construction and development in Moldova. Institutes, hospitals, libraries and conservatories were built. If one does not understand the importance of the

Soviet period for the development of Moldova, one has absolutely no understanding of history. (RYL 28.6.2011)

8.) *It is not clear to me how the Moldovans were restricted from developing their own culture during the Soviet period? They had their own republic, their own language, education in Moldovan, books were published in this language, from children's storybooks to serious scientific works, magazines and newspapers were printed, television and radio broadcasts also existed in Moldovan. The economy is a different matter of course, there were subsidies from the union's budget and much of today's infrastructure was built. Please explain to me how the Moldovans were oppressed? (MM 22.7.2010)*

As against conceptualizations of political identity which take persons for political purposes to be free of all attachments, narrative identity is constructed with reference to the past, drawing on memory, and related to present context. This is done partly by situating ourselves within a narrative of the self and partly by borrowing stories that are already part of our culture. This embedment may be compared to intertextuality, the understanding that there is a narrative tradition in which any one narrative is situated and to which it responds. In case of describing the events that took place during the Soviet occupation of Moldova also the term perlocution, first introduced by Quentin Skinner, can be applied. Perlocution is a speech act which aims to create a certain type of impression about an issue. An example about the usage of perlocution is how themes that are not socially accepted are being discussed, because a description of an action always includes evaluation of it. In practice this takes place by describing things that are usually described in a negative light with positive or neutral terms or by striving to turn negative terms into more neutral ones. (Skinner 2002, 147-156; Whitebrook 2001, 2-3.)

When these two texts are compared to Whitebrook's and Skinner's theories, it is clear that the writers (7, 8) are using perlocutive methods to describe only the positive sides of the Soviet era, while in most post-Soviet societies this period of time is seen in a fairly negative light. Of course there is also a major difference on how the whole Soviet period is seen between different ethnicities, and it is clear that the Russian point of view on the Soviet period is positive. Thus it cannot be said that the writers are deliberately using perlocutive rhetoric, even though they are offering contradictory views on official historical narratives, by drawing examples from the collective memory of Russians living

in Moldavian SSR. This is also a way of demonstrating the constancy of ethnic and language identity originating in the Soviet period. These views are intertextual reactions to the official view on the Soviet era history. Again, symbols play a major role as the memorial stone mentioned in the first text clearly puts under question the view on the Soviet era that is presented in both of the writings. The writers are expressing their opinions in Russian-language social media, where they are certain to receive at least some support from other members of the same group. Also according to Whitebrook's theory on political identity, this is a successful way of building a group identity against the official values of the state. All narratives tend to offer only a certain interpretation of facts and all narratives are responses to other stories. These two texts can be described as narratives opposing the official narrative represented by the state in the form of a memorial stone. In addition it should be noted that president Mihai Ghimpu, who is mentioned in the text, is one of the most pro-Romanian politicians in the country.

Social movements are usually seen as groups promoting particular forms of organized collective action, but also a more social form of social movement can be distinguished. This identity-oriented approach sees social movements from the point of view of political identities and collectivities they wish to defend. From this point of view, the movement's self-identification, what the social movement is and on behalf of whom it speaks, is of paramount importance, as are the movement's adversary, a principal enemy identified explicitly by the movement, and the movement's goals, the kind of social order it wishes to attain. The texts above are descriptive examples of rhetoric of a grass-root level social movement that aims to oppose the government by offering alternative interpretations about historical periods of time, even though the ideas presented on the grass-root level are also very much present in the highest levels of domestic and international politics in the case of Moldova. (Smith 1999, 102-104.)

Also the borderlines of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic moved many times in the course of history, following the demands of the Soviet political elite. This still raises questions especially among Moldovan patriots:

9.) *As citizens of Moldova we have nothing personal against Ukraine and Romania. --- We were not the ones who took Ukraine and Romania their ancestral lands that belonged to us more than 600 years, as Stalin the Great Leader gave you our lands in Bucovina and southern Bessarabia. We were not the ones giving up our Moldova to the Romanians. The area is still today called*

Moldova and which was supposed to be unified again with today's Moldova after the First World War, but instead Stalin gave even more land of ours to Ukraine. We have not crawled in front of Ukraine or Romania and we are not asking for foreign lands. Instead we ask, or demand the justice to happen. It is our Moldavian land and we love and cherish it. But I repeat one more time; we are not against Ukraine or Romania. We respect and value them as neighbors, as our countries and peoples share hundreds of years of history, BUT there are national interests that are the most important thing for us. (RM 3.12.2008)

10.) So, if Ukraine did not conquer these lands, you mean that Moldova gave them away voluntarily? How can you talk about the will of Moldova, when it did not exist as a state back then? (MM 16.9.2014)

These texts are repeating the same themes as the other texts discussed above. The first writer (9) sees the course of Moldovan history as a continuation starting from the Middle Ages and does not recognize the fact that for long periods of time Moldova as such did not exist, but was either a part of Romania or the Tsarist Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. In his writing the historical facts and ideology are in dialogue: on one hand Moldovan lands were given away, but on the other hand they were not given by the Moldovans but someone else who was making decisions for them. One might question whether the view on continuous history of a nation is valid, if someone else is making such crucial decisions on behalf of the nation. The second writer (10) offers an opposing view by questioning the borders of this historical territory referred to as Moldova. He points out that if an independent state called Moldova does not exist, it cannot lose or give away any territory either. In these texts the land is a symbol for an independent state and this way for a nation and it seems that the writers are strongly supporting a view that a nation can exist even without an independent state. (On the concept of “homeland”, see Billig 2010, 74-78.)

The question of Moldova's borders leads to the analysis of current relations of Moldova and Russia. The following text is a rare example of pro-Romanian opinions expressed in Russian-language social media:

11.) Valachia, Moldova and Transylvania should be unified together, but Russia is using all its force to break this alliance. I would understand if Moldovans would be Slavic and speak in a Slavonic language, but the situation is completely

opposite, both inside and outside... Maybe in the Middle Ages Moldovans had friendly relations with the Russians, but not now as the relations today have quite demanding character from the Slavonic side. (MM 16.9.2014)

This writer (11) sees the position of Moldova as separate from Russia due to linguistic and cultural factors, which in many theories are central to the building processes of national identity, as they are distinctive features that separate groups of people from each other. On the other hand it can be questioned whether the writer sees Moldovans as a nation or an ethnic group as he states that “Valachia, Moldova and Transylvania should be unified together”. It is interesting to note that the writer sees language as such an essential feature of a nation that if Moldovans would speak a Slavonic language the current relations with Russia could be considered normal. Thus the writer agrees that there are certain spheres of influence based on language, but that Moldova is treated unjustly as due to the Romance language spoken in the country it belongs to the Western sphere of influence. The writer also questions the close relations of Moldova with Russia, which have been the cornerstone of Moldova’s foreign policy for the past decades. According to this writer, Russia is using force to break Moldova’s natural alliances based on language and culture, and describes Russia’s attitude towards Moldova as “demanding”. Thus the writer sees Russia and its impact in an exclusively negative light, which is opposite to the general opinions expressed in my material.

4.2 Language

The Moldovan language is an eastern, Ukrainian-influenced form of Romanian. The Moldovan (Romanian) language belongs to the eastern division of the Romance language branch of the Indo-European language family. The Moldovan speech is fairly uniform, having only minor speech differences from region to region. It is also claimed that Romanian and Moldovan languages are actually the same language and the names Moldovan or the obsolescent form Moldavian are only used due to political reasons. This stems from the Soviet times, when the linguists were supporting the national project of separating Moldova from Romania by claiming that Romanian and Moldovan are two different languages, and it remains an important part of the “Moldavianist” ideology discussed in the previous chapter. The process of separation of these two languages was strengthened by adding features of local dialects into the Moldovan literary language, and adding Russian loanwords and even grammatical patterns into the language. This led to the

situation that according to some opinions by 1990s a certain part of the population could not speak neither their native language (Romanian) nor Russian correctly or fluently. By referring to a “Moldovan language” the state effectively declared that the phenomenon of language skill loss was a legitimate form of linguistic behavior. On the other hand, peasants under both Romanians and Soviets referred to themselves and their language as “Moldovans” well into the 1930s, which infuriated pan-Romanian nationalists in Greater Romania. It should also be noted that the name of the language matters for the *raison d'être* for the Moldovan state, as language is considered one of the prime determinants of national identity. Nowadays Moldovan language is written in the Latin script. The change from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet and the claim that Moldovan alone should be the official language of the republic were important ways of strengthening the national identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the other hand the standard language is still not well established due to lack of contention about its Moldovan/Romanian identity. The problem is that also Romanian spoken in Romania draws on cultural and literary traditions from across present-day Romania and Moldova, and the languages or dialects spoken in the eastern part of Romania and in the republic of Moldova are identical. (Billig 2010, 29-36; Ciscel 2008, 103-104, 106; Dogaru 2004; Dumitrescu 2011, 164; Dyer 1999; Lory 1996, 154; Miklóssy 2011, 169; Pavlenko 2008, 12; Wixman 1984, 136, see also King 1999.)

The debate about these minor linguistic differences and the name of the language spoken are widely discussed in my material:

12.) *Moldovan language, according to linguists, is a dialect of Romanian language alongside many other dialects, such as Muntesian, Oltesian and Ardelensian. The official language of Moldova is Romanian. 'Moldovan language' is one of the official languages of the Republic of Transnistria, where, unlike in other parts of Moldova, the Cyrillic script remains in use. (MM 31.10.2007)*

13.) *Our language is the language we got from our mothers and fathers. And I want to say that we are Moldovans, but our language is Romanian. Why should I argue over this theme? There are the American people, and what is their language? English of course, the official language. Even though its accent is a little bit different from the English spoken in England. Should the language always bare the same name as the country? Is there a language called*

Transnistrian then? (RM 9.4.2009)

14.) Moldova is a very unique country. In the constitution it is written that the official language in MOLDOVAN. I wonder if anyone has heard of this so that this language would also be taught at schools? As an example we can take Serbia and Croatia, where the language is practically the same, but try to tell a Serb that he is actually speaking Croatian or the other way around, I'm sure you will not get away from the situation without breaking your jaw! This is called national morale, when people are protecting their language, history and traditions... (ICS 20.11.2008)

The writers (12, 13, 14) here are discussing one of the most basic questions on linguistics: how to define whether the language used is a separate language or a dialect of an already existing language. There are two principles of separating these: first of all, if the users of language can understand each other, it is often considered that they are speaking in two dialects of the same language. On the other hand, as in the case of Serbian and Croatian (14), this can also be a question of identity: if the users of language feel that they are speaking different languages, then these two are considered separate languages. Also state boundaries are used as a classification criterion, which is why Finnish and Karelian are considered separate languages and not dialects of the same language. On the other hand also dialects of the same language can be fairly distant from each other. As these three texts demonstrate, the definitions given to language can be used to reach opposite political goals, as these types of classifications are most of all based on the self-determination of the people using the language. The names of school subjects mentioned by the last writer (14) will be discussed more in detail in the chapter on current political questions. (Billig 2010, 29-36; Häkkinen 2007, 37-38.)

Words used to describe identity are concepts whose contents vary depending on the time and place. In other words concepts are not stable but flexible to changes by nature. Skinner points out that it is possible to understand the way of thinking of people from very different cultural backgrounds and different periods of time, if we orientate ourselves to their usage of language and the concepts used. On the other hand it must be taken into consideration that all our beliefs are socially constructed, so they should be viewed with equal criticism. With literature the interpretations of the researcher can be placed into appropriate contexts in order to understand their way of thinking. Also, the

concepts are linked to one another and to the surrounding society, and this way forming wider systems of concepts, which contributes to the building process of the context, where the studied phenomena take place. (Skinner 2002, 28-35, 40-53, 141-142.)

The changes in the meanings of concepts are also signs of changes in the social reality of a society. The changes occurring in different periods of time are signs of political and social development of the society. According to Skinner in order to understand the worldview of the research subject it is not essential to analyze which words are used, but instead which concepts belong to the social reality of the research subject. The adoption of a new concept is most clearly visible in the vocabulary, which is developed to describe this concept. On the other hand also social conditions may restrict the usage of certain concepts. For example between different political groups there may be differences in their willingness to use a certain concept, even though they would agree about its contents. In these kinds of contradictory situations new meanings to the concept might emerge and normal language users might accept them without criticism. It is also possible to show with usage of language that one does not agree with the majority about the contents of a certain concept and aims to change the overall attitudes towards this concept. Concepts are in constant change and must be understood as instruments of ideological battles instead of stable building blocks of a society. (Skinner 2002, 158-161, 165-174, 177-180, 183.)

Some of the most central concepts used in the Russian foreign policy towards post-Soviet states are “compatriot” (sootechestvennik) and “near abroad” (blizhnee zarubezhe), which were created to the language after the fall of Soviet Union. According to the Federal Law on National Policy of Russian Federation towards Compatriots Abroad, “compatriots” are individuals, who are citizens of the Russian Federation permanently living abroad, persons who were citizens of the USSR and now live in the former republics of the USSR (both those who have obtained the citizenship in the residence country and those without any citizenship), emigrants from Russia and its historical forms of state who were its citizens (and are citizens of another country, have obtained the allowances of permanent residence, or are without any citizenship), and posterity of persons mentioned before, except representatives of foreign countries (the titular nations). This definition shows that the understanding of a compatriot is, from the Russian point of view, very wide and can thus be used for a wide spectrum of political purposes. The ones listed in Russian legislation include protection of the compatriots’ civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, and state support to the compatriots’ organizations in cooperation with

organizations based in the Russian Federation. Also many other post-Communist states, such as Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Romania, have created such diaspora laws to protect their expatriates. (dic.academic.ru; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 20; Shevel 2007, 1-5.)

The same has happened with the concept of “near abroad “ (or occasionally “new abroad”, *novoe zarubezhe*), which refers to the post-Soviet states and aims to separate them from the “far abroad” or “old abroad”, which refers to the independent countries that did not belong to the USSR. Making this distinction values the post-Soviet states separately from the rest of independent states and stresses their special and close relationship with Russia, which can be used for various political purposes even though several Russian dictionaries explain this distinction only by stressing the right to free migration between the post-Soviet states and Russia as the main reason for this conceptual differentiation. On the other hand some dictionaries also state that the concept of “near abroad” is connected to human rights (including language rights), dual citizenship, a common economic area, state and customs borders etc. Human rights of the Russian compatriots are an issue of growing interest in Russia’s international relations. The protection of these rights is listed as a top priority in almost all official Russian foreign policy documents. There is an especially urgent need to protect the human rights of compatriots living in the near abroad. Kremlin is constantly questioning the abilities of the post-Soviet state governments to protect the rights of Russian ethnic minorities, this way questioning their legitimacy as a whole. By using the concept of human rights, Russia aims to internationalize the issue. Russia is also paying special attention to the human rights of Russians living in the European post-Soviet states despite the fact that ethnic Russians living in Central Asia, e.g. Turkmenistan, are facing much harsher forms of discrimination. (dic.academic.ru; Godzimirski 2007, 18-19, 24-26; Hill 2007, 63-64; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 23.)

Russia today stresses the importance of spreading its influence on the basis of the Russian language and assistance to Russian compatriots abroad. Therefore one can assume Russia is making use of the consequences of Soviet-era immigration policies. These are the results of processes that, during the Soviet period, were aimed at the growth of the percentage of Russians and, accordingly, the diminishing of the percentage of inhabitants belonging to “titular nations” in every non-Russian republic in order to ensure the following: first, the use of immigrants as a labor force for the needs of growing industrialization; second, the formation of the so-called new “Soviet nationality” (“Soviet

people”); and, third, preservation of the USSR as a union of 15 republics, to avoid any of the republics leaving the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these results were upheld in ex-USSR states in the form of a large amount of Russophone people and the widespread distribution of the Russian language. (Pelnens (ed.), 2009, 10.)

One of the distinct features of Russian diaspora is that it has been formed on a political basis, rather than an economic one. Russians have spread across the territory of the former Russian Empire or Soviet Union mostly because they were encouraged or forced to do so by the state and its authoritarian rulers. Many Russians fled their homeland due to political or religious repressions and formed diasporas in the Baltic states, Western Europe, or America. The Russian diaspora is bound by the sense of displacement; its members feel separated from their historical homeland. Usually such people hope to return to their roots at some point in life, but the biggest problem for the Russian diaspora is that their “homeland” (the Soviet Union or the Tsarist Russian Empire) does not exist anymore. Moreover, their desire to return to modern Russia is very weak due to historical, political, and economic reasons as well as the negative image Russia has in the international sphere. They also demonstrate little sense of transnational solidarity linking their diasporic communities either symbolically or through established social networks, even in platforms such as social media. In my material, there are relatively few comparisons of the situation in Moldova and other post-Soviet states. Therefore, the relationship between modern Russia and the Russians living abroad is not a simple one, despite the fact that Kremlin is eager to develop the concept of compatriots abroad for its foreign policy needs. The goal of Russian policies concerning the compatriots is to make them “state-forming nations” (*gosudarstvobrazuyushaya natsiya*) alongside the titular nations with equal rights. (Laruelle 2006; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 21; Smith 1999, 78-79.)

The Russian political elites also strongly support the use of concept of “diaspora” instead of a “national minority” when talking about the groups of Russian people living outside Russia. This due to the negative connotations of “national minority”, which stem from the Soviet era: Russians living abroad would then be put on the same level as Russia’s own small national minorities or even “tribes”, who did not enjoy a wide array of rights during the Soviet period or even today and whose culture is not considered as high or worth protection. On the other hand also the concept of diaspora includes an idea of discrimination, which is why it has been considered harmful for ethnic Russians who wish to integrate into the societies they live in. This is also visible in the fact that the Russian Federation has never offered Russian citizenship for all people living in the post-

Soviet states despite the fact that according to international law Russian Federation is the successor state of the USSR and inherited its position in the UN and other international organizations. The concept of diaspora is also problematic in a sense that it is usually used to describe a group of people who have voluntarily emigrated from their country of origin. Due to this the Russian diasporas of post-Soviet republics can be called “accidental diasporas” as they have not moved from their place of origin, but instead the borders around them have been moving. (Laruelle 2006.)

Kremlin actively encourages the compatriots to form loyalty to modern-day Russia, including its interpretation of history and its political system, while at the same time remaining in the country of residence. Kremlin also aims to create and consolidate compatriots’ organizations into an effective social networking system that can be used to attain specific foreign policy goals. Therefore, Russian compatriots’ policy in the post-Soviet sphere is not just a humanitarian tool, but rather a tool of geopolitical influence. An example of this kind of social networking among compatriots was the demonstration caused by the dispute concerning the Soviet war memorial “the Bronze Soldier” in Tallinn 2007. Russia’s requirement that post-Soviet countries grant status to minorities depends on the proportion of Russian-speakers in the home country: the bigger the diaspora, the higher the requirements. Both Russia’s governmental institutions and NGOs participate in the intensification of compatriot issues and the consolidation of compatriot organizations in order to achieve strategic goals. The concrete activities include support to local NGOs, promoting access to Russian media, organizing different types of cultural events etc. (Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2008, 2013, 2014; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 21-22.)

Some of the Russians of “near abroad” also respond to these policies by displaying a weak sense of communal willingness to engage in politics of collective action. At most, the identities of these borderland Russians are highly localized on the external homeland of Russia. Many ethnic Russians in the borderland states still subscribe to what can broadly be interpreted as a neo-imperial vision of Russia, celebrating the spiritual greatness and achievement of the Russian past, and even aspiring to be a part of Russia’s geopolitical renewal. This ideology is very strong e.g. in Transnistria, where there is some support for a return to the Soviet homeland or to a geographically expanded Russia. Even for Russians whose bonds with their former homeland are confined primarily to the cultural sphere, what happens in Russia is still of special interest. This is especially the case when ethnic Russians feel that they are being treated unfairly by the polity in which

they reside. (Smith 1999,78-79.)

One of the main questions discussed in the sources is whether the Russophone population of Moldova should learn Moldovan language or whether it is acceptable to only know Russian. The practical issues discussed in social media, such as the ability of older generations to learn new languages, and the quality of language-teaching in Moldova, are turned into questions of human rights:

15.) *What about the generation of our parents, who lived in the Soviet period and who are not Moldovan. Maybe they are not citizens at all? If the society requires knowledge of Moldovan language from me and my friends, why is there only one Moldovan school in the Taraklyisky suburb? Why do the authorities call Moldovan language Romanian? Surely the Russians do not require an all-Russian society? They want to live decently, if it can be put that way... So we can ignore the rights of Russian-speakers, but the EU tells us to protect the rights of gays. Who decides these values? What will be the priorities in the future? (MM, 7.4.2012)*

16.) *People, I believe that it is of course necessary for people living in Moldova to know both the official language and Russian. I think that normal young people have understood this long ago. There is only one small detail: why should we bother old Russians by saying that they have to know the official language? These people who are stumping old Russian people into dirt by ignoring their questions and requests by saying that they have to learn the official language: do they get an orgasm from this? I think they are just bullies! Our old people should be respected as they even won the war for us! And now we cannot even answer them normally in Russian if they do not know the official language. And imagine how difficult it is for them in different state institutions where all forms and everything are only available in the official language. I think we should just let our old people live without requiring them to know the language. I think that already very soon everyone will speak two languages in Moldova. Let's be more tolerant towards each other. I, for example, try to answer to people in the same language as they address me. Even though I do not know the official language perfectly. (RM 8.5.2011)*

Narrative accounts lack objectivity: stories promote a certain point of view and there is a tendency to romanticize or sentimentalize in the process of storytelling. In a narrative characters and events, together with commentary on them, have been put together to present a certain interpretation of a set of facts. A narrative may also include rhetorical devices that aim to make the point stronger. (Whitebrook 2001, 2-3.) Both texts (15, 16) are typical narratives of everyday life as Whitebrook described them: they are very emotional and making polarized observations of the surrounding society by drawing sharp contradictions between the different ethnic groups within the society. The first text (15) above is a typical example of the discussion: it combines several different topics and shows that questions of language, values and politics are inseparable. Firstly, the right to use Russian in public is tightly connected to civil rights. If the right to use Russian is restricted it is seen as a restriction of basic civil rights. On the other hand “an all-Russian society” is not required, but as all the writers state that the older generations or Russian-speakers are not able to communicate in the official language, in practice this means that a large proportion of ethnic Moldovans should be fluent in Russian in order to provide services to the older Russophone population.

The writers (15, 16) are pointing out the tolerance of the Russophone population as all of them at least try their best to speak the official language. The first writer (15) is also pointing out that the EU is promoting wrong type of toleration by giving gay rights precedence over the language rights of the local population, while second writer (16) brings out the symbolic image of the war and the hardships older generations have endured. It must be noted that according to Moldovan legislation the administrative bodies of the country work in both Moldovan and Russian, but when the writer (16) is describing “different institutions where all forms and everything” are only available in Moldovan, he is clearly stating that reality and legislation are not congruent. This way, both of these comments are building a narrative about discrimination against the older Russophone population despite their efforts for the well-being of the state.

The Moldovan social context is also criticized by pointing out the lack of suitable schools for learning the official language. On the other hand some writers point out that personal motivation is a key factor in learning the official language, as the following examples demonstrate. It must be also taken into account that the field of education in general lacks funds in Moldova: in rural areas teachers earn less than 1USD per day, the buildings lack heating, and textbooks are scarce in some areas. (Ciscel 2008, 105.) In this conversation especially people that identify themselves as ethnic Moldovans

are stating their opinions:

- 17.) *I wonder what kind of facilities to learn a language are needed for the generation who was born during the Soviet period? As far as I know, back then just as right now Moldovan was taught, so the question remains what stopped them from learning the Moldovan language? And what stops them today? (MM 8.4.2012)*
- 18.) *I have studied my language independently until today without any help from anyone. Just buy a dictionary, then practice with your Moldovan friends if you are in Russia, if you are in Moldova half a year is enough to learn the language if you really want to and if you don't, then no help will be able to make you learn anyway... (MM 8.4.2012)*
- 19.) *You can learn a language even outside school if you really want to learn it. In your case, if you lived in Moldova for many years and haven't found a way to learn the language – that's already a joke. I cannot find books or dictionaries to learn my language, but I ask from people and they help me and I travel to my fatherland in order to learn to speak a little bit. (MM 8.4.2012)*
- 20.) *This is my situation: my grandparents were sent here from Russia after the war to rebuild the republic, which means that there's not a drop of Romanian or Moldovan blood in my veins. And back then when the fields needed plowing, no one called us invaders. And when I was born it was possible to speak freely in Russian, which is my mother tongue. But suddenly in the '90s me, my parents and grandparents were told that we were invaders and given two options: to become Romanians or 'suitcase-railway station-Russia', which we did not like. Okay, maybe they will create conditions to learn Romanian. But no, instead Russians were fired from their jobs because they did not speak Romanian. And with this approach you hope non-Romanians will love and respect Romanian language? This brings only negative reactions. Now I study Moldovan not because I am forced to do so, but because I like this language, my friends speak in this language and I want to understand them. And my friends help me in the learning process, they do not shout that I could have learned the language long*

ago or even better, move to Russia. Overall it's good that the majority of people are right-minded and their nationality does not matter. (RM 7.10.2009)

Especially the last text (20) is very narrative by nature, describing events from a very individual point of view and stressing personal experiences. Ethnicity seems to be an important factor for identity-building for the second (18) and the third writer (19): it seems that they are ethnic Moldovans living permanently in Russia and studying their native language. They are making a comparison to the Russians living in Moldova by stating that learning the language is not difficult even with just a dictionary. The first writer (17) makes a similar comment by stating that the conditions to learn Moldovan have not changed since the Soviet period, thus the writer is questioning how the older Russians did not learn the language during their youth. The longer text (20) states the situation from a Russian point of view: as it was not necessary to learn the language of the titular nation during Soviet era there were often tensions between the different ethnic groups, as has been described earlier. The writer is also making an interesting separation between pro-Romanians and Moldovans: while he does not “love and respect Romanian language”, she is studying “Moldovan”. The disintegration of the Russian population is the core of Russia’s foreign policies towards the “near abroad”. This sense of disintegration is apparently strengthened by discrimination and lack of efficient language teaching. It seems that the negative reactions gained from the surrounding society have only strengthened the writer’s Russian identity.

Some of the writers are pointing out that language can also be a source of discrimination and providing good conditions for learning the official language are of essential importance to the assimilation process:

21.) All the citizens should have a possibility to self-consciousness and self-identification as a people. This derives from language and how we identify ourselves. Yes, the minority does not have the right to dictate the conditions, but its interests should also be taken into account. And in order to prevent the minority from seeing itself as second-class citizens in their own country integration to the society is needed. Not only the ‘do as you please’-type of attitude. Actually the question of language is a very burning issue, as the young Moldovan-speaking generation does not appreciate the people who do not know Moldovan. I have seen this with my own eyes. From here the conflict derives. I

speak Moldovan myself and when I come to Kishinev I am delighted to practice it. But others did not even have the chance to learn it. In many ways language is splitting the society. Look at Russia. How many nationalities are living there! Of course there are many conflicts, BUT! They are connected by the fact that they all have the chance to learn the official language. (MM 15.12.2011)

Some of the writers are also blaming Moldovan nationalists for the situation. They see the situation of the Russophone minority in Moldova as bad as the situation is in the Baltic States, which in the rhetoric of Russian foreign policy are often described as the worst places to live for a Russophone individual. This writer is comparing the situation in Moldova to other post-Soviet states:

22.) I have traveled widely around Russia and the CIS and nowhere have I seen worse nationalists than in Moldova, Western Ukraine and the Baltic States! In Caucasus where I live there are so many nationalities: Adyghe, Tabasaran and Ingush people live side by side but would never use their own languages in communication: they would use Russian because they respect each other and want to understand each other! They do not see it as occupation, and believe me they suffered more than the Moldovans during communism (forced labor, deportations, shootings etc.) and in here the situation is that some write in Moldovan some in Russian all in their own group without understanding what is going on. What are they teaching us? Let's use the commonly known language and respect each other! (RM 24.6.2008)

These two (21, 22) accounts are offering different views on the subject: the first writer (21) is stating that the interests of the minority should be taken into account, but does not state clearly how this should be done in practice, except by adding resources to language-teaching. The writer is stating the tolerance of himself as a Russian-speaker, who is “delighted” to practice Moldovan while he is in the country and at the same time criticizing the younger Moldovan-speakers about their attitudes towards Russian-speakers. On the other hand the first writer (21) does not make a clear statement about whether the country should be bilingual, if there would be enough resources to teach the official language to the speakers of minority languages. The second writer (22) has a clearer point of view: by describing the communication of ethnic minorities living within the Russian Federation he states that

Russian should have the status of a lingua franca in post-Soviet states due to historical factors. He does not explain why this common language of all nationalities could not be the official language of the state.

These attitudes echo the Soviet period, when Russian speakers could afford to be monolingual, while the speakers of titular languages aspiring to social advancement had to be bilingual or multilingual. Also institutional arrangements were mostly aimed at guaranteeing that the needs of Russian-speakers were met, creating feelings of resentment among the titular nationality. Russian was the language used by the government and in higher education. The language shift that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union was problematic in many ways: there were large populations of monolingual Russian speakers, a proportion of the members of titular nations had been russified, and multiethnic populations were still relying on Russian as a lingua franca. All these problems are still visible in the discussion and create challenges to the nation-building processes of post-Soviet states. Also the problems discussed in the previous comments are not typical only to Moldova, but to many other post-Soviet European states: in many cases Russian individuals are too old or unwilling to learn the titular language, but on the other hand in many cases the Russophone population felt that they gained negative reaction to their attempts to communicate in the titular language from the members of the titular nation. Currently the situation is changing due to changing language teaching policies and language environments with Moldovan-speaking people being less bilingual and Russian-speakers being more bilingual than before. (Ciscel 2008, 110; Hill 2007, 56-60; Pavlenko 2008, 8-9, 16, Prina 2015, 53-54.)

Also the Moldovan nationalists are very visible group in my sources. According to them Moldova should remain independent from both Russian and Romanian influences and language is an essential feature of this independence. Their attitudes especially towards the idea of making Russian a second official language in Moldova are very negative:

23.) *Russian, Ukrainian nor Romanian are needed as official languages. Just Moldovan language and period. And those who are not happy with this can go where they want to, to Romania, Russia or Ukraine where these languages are spoken. I think it's enough that there's a law that allows people communicate in which ever language they want to, but not more than that. In the constitution the official language in MOLDOVAN and that's the highest degree of law in*

Moldova. The one who does not respect that does not respect the Moldovan nation, Moldova itself, Moldovan culture and Moldovan language. And the one who does not respect these should not be a Moldovan citizen, but should be sent to Romania, Russia or just on a march to somewhere. Let them build their future there as Moldova does not mean anything to them. (MM 20.4.2009)

24.) I am sure you agree that in each state, as in each small or big cultural group, besides common interests (such as national idea, territory, name etc.) there are also conditions, symbols without which it is not possible to exist, and one of these symbols is the official language. Everything concerning this issue is clear: if you do not speak the official language, you are a tourist in the best case and an enemy of the nation in the worst case. --- Problems connected to the study of language especially among the Russophone population exist, of course. These are most of all connected to the absence of language environment due to the fact that even we live in one country, we rarely are in contact with the ethnic majority. (ICS 28.7.2008)

25.) I am sure everyone in here knows English. And I am sure the majority of you know one more foreign language besides English. Then why is it a problem to study the language of your own country? You know yourselves how many problems could be solved if only you would learn the language? ALL the problems connected to the language are easy to solve. I think it is a beautiful language, not at all difficult to learn, and everyone around you is speaking in this language – the environment is perfect for learning it. Only the stupid ones will think it's not necessary to learn it. Because you must be stupid if you do not realize how much easier your life in the country where this language is the official one will become. But you will scream and fight and think that it's easier to build the country according to your wishes and change the constitution than to change something in yourselves. (ICS 5.7.2008)

These nationalistic points of view (23, 24, 25) are simplifying the question from a different starting point than the ethnic Russians. For them, citizenship should define national identity, which is strongly linked to the language. All citizens of Moldova should thus speak Moldovan, as it is not possible to have national identity of a Moldovan citizen and

speak Russian. Their rhetoric is very similar to the pro-Moldovan phrase “suitcase-railway station-Russia” (chemodan-vokzal-Rossiya) from the 1990s, which is still often mentioned in a negative light by the ethnic Russian commentators. (Such as in citation number 20.) It refers to the same idea that Russian-speakers should be send back to their “country of origin”. This way the writers are promoting idea that no nation-state can be bilingual.

They are also pointing out that the different ethnic groups do not communicate much in their everyday life, which is partly due to the fact that different languages are used in different spheres of the society and fields such as business and entertainment are mostly administered in Russian, as the following writer demonstrates. He is also stating the role of Russian as a lingua franca in the society and stating that unwillingness to communicate in Russian is a sign of hostility towards Russia:

26.) *Kishinev speaks Russian! In cinemas films are shown in Russian. Everything is in Russian! Just the people are not Russian. They speak in Russian but by nationality they are not Russian. And that is the only reason why they do not want Russian to be the second official language. Due to the hostility towards Russia, that's why. But I cannot understand why political interests should be limited to one nationality, when the Moldavian population is multinational!*
(ICS 18.11.2008)

The text above (26) is yet another example of the complexity of national identity. The writer is stating that even Moldovans that speak Russian do not want to make it an official language due to their national identity as Moldovans and hatred towards Russia. This is an example that knowledge of a certain language does not necessarily have an effect on one's identity and political views. The question of official languages is highly political in both domestic and international spheres. When the Moldovan government was planning to grant Russian the status of a second official language of the state, large-scale demonstrations were held. Making Russian the second official language of the state would also be a strong sign that Moldova belongs to Russia's geopolitical sphere of influence. This is opposing the views of the majority of Moldovans, as the Alliance for European Integration has hold the majority of seats in the parliament since 2010. Statistics also demonstrate, as mentioned earlier, that the titular nation in Moldova is becoming more monolingual than before, so the common idea among Russian-speakers that “everyone speaks Russian in Moldova” does not match with reality.

When discussing identity and language, the concept of linguistic justice can also be applied. It refers to the “parity of esteem” between different languages used in a certain society. Issues of linguistic (in)justice tend to arise in cases of linguistic asymmetry, as it is hardly possible to create conditions for perfect equality for all linguistic groups within a state. If only a single language is used, the situation is exclusionary and unjust, as the minorities are at a disadvantage and must either shift to the dominant language or accept political marginalization. On the other hand policies to accommodate multiple language groups can only achieve partial results. While states can be officially bilingual or multilingual, arrangements are often made on the basis of territoriality, effectively creating individual localities that are virtually monolingual. Another option is state-level bilingualism, which necessitates a major investment in translation resources and in the policies for this type of instrumental efficiency, and the result is often asymmetric bilingualism. (Prina 2015, 54-56.)

Of all the national minorities living in Moldova, Russians appear to be more active than others. First, this is due to the Russian language as one used for “interethnic circulation” and the influence it has over the entire population. Both in official and unofficial settings, the Russian language is used at a level similar with that of the official state language, whereas in some sectors it is practically the dominant language of communication. According to Moldovan legislation, all official documents are issued in both languages, and all civil servants are obliged to respond to requests submitted by citizens in the language used in the respective request. There are also civil servants in the government and parliament, who only speak Russian. Therefore, during many high-level meetings discussions are held in Russian language, whereas plenary sessions are simultaneously translated for those members of the parliament who do not speak the state language. In addition to Russian media, which is very popular in Moldova, there is a wide range of local newspapers, radio and TV channels that write in the Russian language. The entire local mass media has at least several programs for the Russian population. The business community, in particular service providers, is mainly composed of Russians. Also, the basic language spoken in cinemas, clubs, and entertainment venues in Chişinău is not the state language. Thus, it can be stated that in fact Moldovan is a “minorized majority language” (a majority language that necessitates the protection normally reserved to endangered languages), while Russian has the position of a “majorized minority language” (the language of a numerical linguistic minority but de facto with the prestige of a majority language). There is also a strong correlation between linguistic and social identity and

these identities are highly exclusionary due to the Soviet period, when different ethnicities had little interaction with each other and “nationality” was a feature mentioned in the passport of each citizen and used as a political tool. Thus tensions between the titular nationality and other ethnic groups are hard to avoid despite the development taking place. (Hill 2007, 54-55; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 219; Prina 2015, 53.)

The situation of other minorities in Moldova is used as an example of the importance of Russian language for the whole society:

27.) *Russian (or any other language) should be an official regional language in areas where Russians (or any other nation) make up at least 50% of the population. The minority should follow the interests of the majority, not the other way around. For your information, there are two such regions in Moldova: Gagauz-Eri (80% Gaugazians) and Taraklinsky region (66% Bulgarians). In these areas the Moldovan government has given the local majority nations a possibility to realize their national and language rights. BUT! Instead of their own languages the Gaugazians and Bulgarians have decided to use... Russian! In Gaugazia there is NOT A SINGLE school, where the teaching would be in Gaugazian! Not because Kishinev does not allow it, but because they themselves do not respect their language. (RYL 6.8.2012)*

28.) *There are Moldovans who speak Russian as their mother tongue. In order to maintain peace Russian should be included in the constitution as a regional language, not necessarily in the whole republic but in areas where the amount of Russophone population is more than 25%. Then there would be no problems. In Gaugazia this would mean Russian, Romanian, Gaugazian. In Transnistria Russian, ‘Moldovan’, Ukrainian. And in Moldova Moldovan, de facto Romanian. This is the problem: those in power cling to the symbols to retain the support of the people, whether it means prohibition of communist symbols, creating the Day of Occupation of Moldova, reduction of Russophone staff, closing of Russophone groups in universities and so on. It would be fair to call this social discrimination, but since we have few people properly trained in the sphere of law, the Russophone is forced to learn the official language or repatriate to Russia. (RYL 5.8.2012)*

29.) *There are no laws that require you to know Moldovan language. No one has the right to compel and force you to know Moldovan language. And the usual logic of things: why do we need Moldovan when everyone knows and speaks Russian? The obligatory Moldovan language leads to conflict and war between the different nationalities of Moldova, to war and enmity between Moldovans, Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzians, Bulgarians, as in the example from our neighbor Ukraine. Russian is a language that unites hundreds of nations to live in peace and harmony. It is a language that brings and creates peace. For example in Dagestan there are dozens of nations, each with their own language. And only due to Russian language, as all the nations learned it and this way found a common language with each other, all these nations were able to live peacefully side by side in their republic, as before there were constant bloody wars. A similar example is India, which has hundreds of ethnic groups, hundreds of languages and dialects, and only English language was able to unite all Indians into one community, and besides that English is the second official language and everyone knows it. Before the British came, there were constant wars between the peoples. English is a unifying language of peace and harmony, just like Russian. (RM 26.5.2014)*

These writers (27, 28, 29) are stressing the fact that Russian is widely used even among ethnic Moldovans and other ethnic minorities and in some cases even preferred over the official language or other minority languages. In this rhetoric the depreciation of Russian language equals depreciation and even misinterpretation of history and contemporary reality. Russian-speakers are on the other hand described as discriminated people without possibilities to learn about their civil rights (27), and on the other hand carriers of a language of friendship and unity (29). The last writer (29) is also making romanticized and simplified comparisons to Dagestan, which is an area belonging to the Russian Federation, and India, a colony of British Empire and an extremely complex case in its own, without clear points of comparison to the situation in Moldova. All in all these three texts (27, 28, 29) contribute to a bigger narrative of the role of Russian as a de facto lingua franca of the post-Soviet space, which is artificially replaced with a state language that is not spoken by the whole society. This narrative is echoing the problems for the role of the official state language discussed earlier: the large monolingual Russian population, Russian as a lingua franca, and a certain percentage of russified citizens of the titular nation or other national

minorities.

Out of the 1490 schools working in Moldova, 280 schools teach in Russian language and 28 are mixed Russian-Gagauzian, Russian-Moldovan, or Russian-Ukrainian schools. A total of 110 000 students study in the Russian language. The amount of Russian schools constitutes 20% of all schools, while Russians constitute 6% of Moldova's total population. Thus, all disciplines have textbooks published in Russian and a separate subject of "History, Culture, and Traditions of the Russian People" is studied in Russian-language schools. There are also university disciplines in Russian, two Russian-language universities, and branches of Russian universities operating in Moldova. Some of the views on Moldovan history presented in these institutions are opposing the dominant ones, which has supported the polarization of Moldovan society with people identifying themselves either with Russia or with Romania instead of strengthening the national identity. This way, at least when questions related to education are discussed, it seems the Russian minority has fairly good opportunities to use their native language in this sphere. (Ciscel 2008, 109; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 234-235; Putină 2011, 171-172.)

Some writers are opposing the idea of making Russian the second official language for the fear that it might reduce the importance of Romanian language in the society. Again examples are drawn from other ex-Soviet states:

30.) *People, of course I love Russian language, but I don't want it to become the second official language. I look at Belarus where Russian is the second official language and people forget their native language Belarusian. My friend is from Gomel and they have one Belarusian school in the whole city, do you want that to happen in Moldova? (ICS 24.11.2008)*

31.) *Normal MOLDOVANS if you speak to them in Russian they will answer in the same language! If in Romanian, they will answer in that language! They are civilized people! And by the way, gentlemen, it is no secret that Russians think that Moldovans are 'stupid' and Estonians are 'falling behind'. Why? It is very simple! The languages of these two republics are not in any way similar to Russian! They belong to a different language group! It was harder and took more time for these nations to get used to Russian language! And that's why they were called in such names! Is that normal? So you think Moldovans should give up their right to speak in the language of their ancestors? Because they*

have to be fluent in mighty Russian language? (ICS 25.11.2008)

These two texts (30, 31) discuss the threats connected to the Russian language. In Belarus (30), Russian is the most widely spoken language and the role of Belarusian has been diminishing since the Soviet era: in the 1920s more than 80% of schools in Belarus using Belarusian as the language of instruction, while in the early 1990s this number had fallen into 20%. After Russian was made into second official language of the country the role of Belarusian has continued to diminish. It remains the mother tongue for 73,7% of people living in Belarus, but a large majority of these people uses Russian as the language of everyday communication. There is also a wide gap in the situation between cities and rural environments, as Belarusian is mostly spoken in the countryside. The situation is somewhat similar to Moldova, as Chişinău and other major cities are also areas with most Russian-speakers. The Belarusian example is a rather threatening view on the chain reaction that has followed the declaration of Russian language as the second official language, despite the fact that there were also other factors involved. In Russian rhetoric Belarus has also been actively separated from its pre-Soviet Polish-Lithuanian past very much in the same way as Moldova is separated from its common past with Romania. Also the question of religion is present, as Poland and Romania represent Western, Catholic cultures, while Russia is Eastern and Orthodox. The comparison of Moldova to Estonia presented in the second text (31) is again pointing out the dismissive attitude stereotypically connected to Russian speakers due to historical factors, and the threats for speakers of small non-Slavonic languages with a large Russian minority in their country. (McMillin 2006; Pavlenko 2008, 11, 16; Smolicz & Radzik 2004; Stern 2014.)

As a conclusion of this chapter discussing the language question, the following dialogue demonstrates well the paradoxical relationship between the Russian language, which is often the lingua franca in ex-Soviet states, and the language of the titular nation:

32.) *To live one's whole life in Moldova without knowing the language shows lack of respect towards the Moldovan nation and it is too much constantly demand that Moldovans would communicate with you in Russian. In Moldova, if you do not want to answer to a Russian in Russian you are a Russophobe. You Russians come up with all kinds of bad excuses for laziness of not learning Moldovan. All the time you are complaining how difficult it is in Moldova and*

how the Moldovans are oppressing you. Aren't you ashamed to say out loud such things? All Moldovans know Russian, but Russians do not know Moldovan. This is not right and it should be changed. (MM 14.6.2010)

33.) *I live in Transnistria and am able to choose which language to use. If I am in Germany and ask something from a German in English, he will not start talking to me in German! Russian is one of world's most widely-spoken languages, as it is spoken by many nations, while Moldovan is only spoken by the Moldovan people.... (MM 14.6.2010)*

34.) *Russian is widely spoken only in CIS and outside CIS no one will understand your Russian. In Germany tourists speak English and local people speak German. There are no people living in Germany and not willing to learn German because it is not useful for them. All the Russians who have immigrated to Germany have learned the language fast and put their children in German schools and no one is saying that the Germans are oppressing them. (MM 14.6.2010)*

35.) *The CIS countries cover 1/6 of the planet – is that a small territory? In Germany there's a huge amount of nationalities living in their own suburbs, a Russian suburb, Turkish, Polish, Czech etc... In these suburbs children are taught two languages at school: German and their mother tongue. And English as a foreign language. And they are not saying that the Germans are oppressing them. So why not make Russian an official language if 90% of the population speaks it? Russian has been spoken in Moldova for centuries. When Pushkin was in exile in Kishinev I'm sure he did not speak Moldovan with the local people. (MM 14.6.2010)*

As this dialogue (32-35) clearly demonstrates, the historical factors and present-day politics, and on the other hand rights of minorities compared to the identity-building process of a national state that has gained independence relatively recently are in constant dialogue. Both parties of the discussion are providing over-simplifying rhetoric and numbers that are not matching with the reality. Also Moldova's historical cultural connections to Russia are pointed out, and in fact the Russian writer Pushkin (35) who

spent some years in political exile in Chişinău is an important figure in Moldovanist historiography as an evidence of the close cultural ties between Russia and Moldova. (March 2007a, 609-610.) The second writer (33, 35) is also not able to demonstrate, how his argument about immigrant children in Germany learning two or more languages is connected to his demand to make Russian an official language in Moldova. These texts are also one of the rare examples where the role of the CIS as a common marker for all post-Soviet states is discussed, even though in these texts it seems that the role of Russian language is the only factor keeping the commonwealth together. As this chapter has demonstrated, the language question is of essential importance for questions of identity and this way to views on concrete political questions. Language provides a starting point for polarized distinctions between different and in many ways overlapping identity groups based on ethnicity and language.

5. POLITICS

5.1. Transnistria

Already in 1990 the Russophone population of eastern Moldova had declared independence to the area that is commonly known as Transnistria. While this name refers to the fact that from Western point of view Transnistria is “beyond the Dniester”, in Russian the area is known as Pridnestrovyie, which could be translated as “on the Dniester”. In this case also the different names used can be seen as signs of geopolitics, as the Western name suggest that Transnistria is a somewhat faraway place, while Pridnestrovyie does not have this connotation. Also the Transnistrians themselves strongly promote using Pridnestrovyie as a short name for the area, the official name being Pridnestrovskaya Moldovskaya Republica, Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic, or PMR for short. However, in this study I continue to use the more common Transnistria. (pridnestrovie.info)

The area of Transnistria had a significant amount of armory, left there by the Soviet troops. In 1992 Russia joined the conflict by sending troops to Transnistria. The situation has remained static ever since as the international community has not managed to find a solution to the crisis. Russia recognized the area as an autonomous part of Moldova and started to pull out its troops in 1994, but the process is still going on. 97% of Transnistrian population would like to join Russia according to a referendum from 1996 and the most widely spoken language in the area is Russian. The merging process into Russia is problematic, because Ukraine is situated between Transnistria and Russia. While the Republic of Moldova is a struggling democratic state, the PMR is a hybrid authoritarian-democratic regime where power is concentrated in the hands of the presidency, and where parliamentarians are elected from single member districts to a Supreme Soviet. These divisions have had more than 20 years to harden, and a whole new generation has become socialized into thinking that division is the norm. (Miklóssy 2011, 166, 170-173; Munchaev & Ustinov 2008, 684, 713-715; O’Loughlin et al. 2013, 229-232.)

During perestroika in the late 1980s Mikhail Gorbachev failed to understand the importance of national feelings and aspirations in many of the Soviet republics, including Moldova. When in March 1990 he raised the question of a new union treaty as a way of avoiding political disintegration, it was already too late: six republics (the Baltic States, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova) announced their intent of nonparticipation in the

new union treaty, but in a referendum that was conducted in all Soviet republics except these six in March 1991, 76,4% of the voters approved the preservation of the Union. On the other hand already soon after the beginning of perestroika, nationalists were openly referring to the Soviet Union as the last empire in the age of decolonization. The Transnistrian conflict of spring 1992 was the first military conflict in the former Soviet republics and a challenge for Russia's foreign policy. The intention of Moldova's leadership to unite with Romania had provoked violent secessionism in Transnistria, which gravitated Russia economically and culturally. On the other hand the population of Transnistria was in fact multi-national, with Russians, Ukrainians and Moldovans. (Dawisha&Parrott 1994, 146, 240-242; Trenin 2002, 260; Tsygankov 2006, 45-47, 78-83.)

Russia intervened to stop the wide-spread fighting by putting the 14th former Soviet division under its control, negotiated a ceasefire and took on the task of maintaining peace in the region. At first Russia condemned the army involvement and rejected the opportunity to establish ties with the separatist leaders of Transnistria, but later an intervention and deployment of Russia's military forces were favored. This proved critical for preventing a further spread of violence and civil war in Moldova. On the other hand the command of the Russian peacekeeping project condemned several members of the region's civilian government for alleged corruption and rejected the notion that the army should refrain from intervening in domestic politics. Later the security threats in the "near abroad" were addressed through intense diplomatic involvement particularly in the areas of military confrontations or civil wars, such as Moldova, and through the initiation of economic and security projects aimed to tighten the ties among the former Soviet republics under the leadership of Russia. (Dawisha&Parrott 1994, 146, 240-242; Trenin 2002, 260; Tsygankov 2006, 24, 78-83, 149.)

Since 1992 the Russian peacekeeping forces in Transnistria have openly joined the local Russian minority in the attempt to establish a separate Russian enclave, and the command of the forces challenged Russia's official policy towards the conflict. Within the political class, the position of defending Russians in the entire former Soviet region was strongly reinforced in both parliament and the executive branch, which caused that Russia has kept its military presence in certain former Soviet areas, such as Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. In the early 1990s also the larger population of Russians could not accept Russia's new national identity and continued to favor the preservation of strong cultural ties across the former Soviet region. Polls indicated that most Russians supported voluntary reunification of the ex-Soviet republics with Russia. In political rhetoric this

meant that the former Soviet zone was often described as a “zone of special responsibility and special interest”. (Dawisha&Parrott 1994, 146, 240-242; Trenin 2002, 260; Tsygankov 2006, 78-83)

All in all it can be said that due to the situation in Transnistria, the territorial unity of Moldova depends to a large extent on Moscow’s position. Russia’s interests in Moldova are geopolitical (keeping Moldova within its orbit, through its participation in CIS and bilateral economic and political agreements, and preventing its merging with Romania), geostrategic (maintaining a military presence in the area and preventing Moldovan membership in the NATO); and humanitarian (ensuring fair treatment of the local Russians, but in fact preserving the special identity of Transnistria). Erasing the former frontline along the Dniester will be a difficult long-term task. Any solution that would give certain rights to the Transnistrians would have Russia among the prime guarantors. Even after the peacekeeping operation the border between Transnistria and the rest of Moldova will require Moscow’s attention. Ideally, the Russian government would welcome a Moldova that is sovereign (no integration to a Greater Romania), federated (with Transnistria having a special status, and a special relationship with Russia), neutral (but with a Russian military base in its territory), and gravitating towards the Russian Federation. (Trenin 2002, 160-162, 313-314.)

The case of Transnistria was taken to the European Court of Human Rights in 2004: according to the Moldovan side, the Russian 14th Army had intervened actively in the conflict both directly and indirectly against the armed forces of Moldova. The Russians also armed the Transnistrian separatists. On the contrary, the Russian side argued that the 14th Army had not taken part in fighting, but illegal armed operations had been taken against the soldiers of the 14th Army. All the Moldovan witnesses questioned categorically confirmed the active involvement of the 14th Army in the transfer of weapons to the Transnistrian separatists. They also confirmed the participation of Russian troops in the conflict, particularly the involvement of tanks bearing the flag of the Russian Federation, shots fired towards the Moldovan position and the transfer of a large number of troops so that they could fight alongside the Transnistrians or train them. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 213.)

The Court also noted that even after the ceasefire agreement of 21 July 1992 the Russian Federation continued to provide military, political and economic support to the separatist regime. The Russian army is still stationed in Moldovan territory in breach of the undertakings to withdraw it completely. The separatist regime also enjoys a financial support by virtue of the agreements it has concluded with the Russian Federation. The

Russian Government stated that the Moldovan Government was the only legitimate government of Moldova. As Transnistria was an integral part of the Republic of Moldova, only the latter could be held responsible for acts committed in that territory. The Court's final judgment was that Russian Federation was engaged in the unlawful acts committed by the Transnistrian separatists, regard being had to the military and political support it gave them to help them set up the separatist regime and the participation of its military personnel in the fighting. This way, the authorities of the Russian Federation constructed both militarily and politically to the creation of a separatist regime in Transnistria, which is part of the territory of the Republic of Moldova. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 216-217.)

In 2009, according to Transnistrian data, 750 000 people lived in the area, out of which 33% are Moldovan, 29% Russian, and 29% Ukrainian. Even though officially there are three official languages in Transnistria, Russian is de facto the language of communication in the area. The majority of Tiraspol's political elite is originally from Russia and only speaks Russian, so the meetings of the Supreme Soviet in Tiraspol are also held in Russian. Out of 182 schools in the area, only 33 teach in Moldovan and 2 in Ukrainian, while 82% of the pupils study in Russian. In addition, all schools follow the Russian education system. In universities education is available only in Russian, with small exceptions in faculties of Ukrainian and Moldovan philology. The Russian Federation also continues to support the Tiraspol government strongly in the form of humanitarian aid, the most significant example of this being the extra 15USD that the Russian Federation offers for all pensioners residing in the territory of Transnistria. The amount is significant when taken into consideration that the average pension in the area is 40-50USD and no such extra money is given to pensioners residing in Moldova. This kind of support encourages pro-Russian opinions in the area. (Ciscel 2008, 117; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 223-224, 227.)

Some writers in social media are also questioning the idea of Transnistria being a multilingual and multi-cultural territory due to the heavy Russian political and cultural influence. Again the language question seems to be a very central one when discussing themes related to politics and identity:

36.) *By the way, don't you think that this is a type of provocation from the Transnistrian side: officially there are three official languages in Transnistria, but in fact nobody studies Romanian due to which the administration or the police do not speak a word of it – because at schools no effort is given to teach the language. And then you take offence and become aggressive, when in the*

rest of Moldovan people do not want to speak Russian with you or employ you because you do not speak the official language... When in fact the situation is the same, just our side is seen as 'bad', 'evil' and 'intolerant'. What is the point of having three official languages when in reality everyone speaks Russian?! (MM 26.5.2010)

This (36) is a very critical view to the language situation in Transnistria and in many ways opposite to the official rhetoric on the topic. The fact that Russian is the most widely spoken language in Transnistria is not surprising, if the recent political events described above are taken into account. Also, as mentioned in the chapter on history, nowadays Transnistria has a somewhat longer and deeper connection with Russia than the rest of Moldova, as Transnistria has never been a part of Romania, but instead remained a part of the Soviet Union even during the inter-war period. This way it is understandable that both language and national identity of the Transnistrians are different from the rest of Moldova despite the fact that there are many opposing views on the current political situation. Due to the historical and political factors, many Transnistrian writers in social media are strongly opposing the idea of Transnistria joining the rest of Moldova:

37.) *Why are you talking about unifying Transnistria with your Moldova? We want to be by ourselves: do not try to touch our territory, nothing good will come out of it. And you should not say that Transnistria is a part of Moldova as we are independent from you. So no need for that kind of misinformation. Just for your information: the Transnistrians are against the unification with you... and against unification with anyone to be honest.* (ICS 28.6.2008)

38.) *Do you think Transnistria wants unification? For them there's no worse enemy than Moldova. If only you had heard Smirnov's speech on the anniversary of the beginning of the conflict or even the speech of the 'president' of Transnistria to the people at New Year. To him and many of the Transnistrian citizens Moldova is worse than Hitler's Germany was for the USSR. Transnistria has several times more foreign debt than Moldova does. Maybe the standard of living is a bit higher in there due to the industrial zone. But believe me, without the money coming from Russia Transnistria is not worth anything. And if we take into account who is currently in power in Moldova, Transnistria*

will never accept the idea of unification. (RYL 23.6.2011)

In terms of textual analysis both of these comments (37, 38) are representing a defensive position against the more dominant rhetoric supporting unification, but the argumentative means they are using are rather different. The first writer (37) is stating that Transnistria should remain independent and bases this statement just on the general opinion of the people. He does not provide concrete examples on why “nothing good will come out” of the possible unification with the rest of Moldova. The whole text is fairly aggressive type of defense against the ideas of a unified Moldova and Transnistria. The second writer (38), who is seemingly non-Transnistrian himself, offers more analysis on the current politics and propaganda connected to it. This is done by making comparisons to the situation during the Second World War, which are part of the collective memory of the people. The Transnistrian government has been strongly against unification since the 1990s and there seemed to be no change in their rhetoric concerning the situation. The situation changed in December 2011 when Igor Smirnov lost the presidential elections in the PMR to Yevgeny Shevchuk, who campaigned with promises of “free movement of people and goods”. So far very few concrete changes have appeared, and Transnistria can still only survive with financial aid from Russia and with the large industrial zone that was built in the area already during the Soviet era. While in 2011 the GNI per capita in Moldova was 1980USD, in the PMR it was USD857. Still, the living standards and purchasing power of the population in the PMR are higher than in the Republic of Moldova chiefly due to Russian subsidies. (O’Loughlin et al. 2013, 236.) The writer (38) is thus questioning the independence of Transnistria by talking about the “president” of Transnistria with quotation marks and stating that without Russia, Transnistria is not “worth anything”. The comment on current politics in Moldova refers to the situation that since 2010 the pro-European parties have gained more and more seats in the parliament, which does not please the Transnistrian authorities.

This pro-independence view on the current situation of Transnistria is not necessarily the prevailing one. When discussing the possibility of unification with the Republic of Moldova, according to surveys the majorities of both young people and over 60-year-olds who lived most of their lives in the unified Moldavian SSR are positive about the idea of unification. The middle age cohort of 36-60-year-olds who lived through and possibly even fought in the war of 1992 are most negative about unification, but almost half of even this group sees unification possible in the future. On the other hand the most

preferred options for the future of the area are still independence and unification with Russia, which supports the idea of the PMR within a broader Russian geopolitical and cultural sphere as part of the Russian World. (O'Loughlin et al. 2013, 250-254.)

The majority of Transnistrian writers in my material express their agreement with many Russophone writers of Moldova. Unification of Transnistria with Moldova might be possible, if Moldova would accept Russian as a second official language and become politically more orientated towards Russia than the West. On the other hand a small minority of the writers based in Transnistria consider themselves as Moldovan patriots, who support the idea of unification without demands:

39.) *I do not have anything against Transnistria and the Russians; I am also one of them. When it comes to splitting up and joining Romania, I agree with them. I am also against this. But we should not live in the past, as both Transnistria and Moldova have paid a high price for their past deeds. Now the majority of Moldovans and Transnistrians do not want to be with Romania, but want to have RUSSIAN as an official language. (ICS 24.6.2008)*

40.) *I think there should be peace! But we should not create two separate states as Russia suggests. If we do that then tomorrow the Gagauzians will ask for independence. And what then? After the break-up it will be worse; three countries that are poorer than today's Moldova will be created. We need one unified Moldova, which will rise up. And we must think about the people who live on different sides of the Dniester. Many of them have relatives on different sides of the river and giving Transnistria independence would only make things worse. We need to find a common language and revive the republic! (RYL 19.4.2011)*

41.) *I think we cannot escape each other. We have the same mentality, and everyone has relatives in both countries. That is why I think borders should be opened! (MM 22.5.2011)*

42.) *Due to historical events I live in Transnistria but am a patriot of Moldova! That's how my parents raised me and I am proud of it! Transnistria has to remain together with Moldova! 'Daddy's Republic', where all the high-ranking*

officials are relatives with each other and everything is planned and decided beforehand, is a burden to the people! There's no freedom: no education, to possibility to travel abroad with your passport... everything is restricted. This cannot go on very long! This problem needs to be solved! And desirably in favor of unification! (MM 31.7.2009)

As the first writer (39) suggests, language and political orientation seem to be of major importance for Transnistrians. Even though Moldova is in many ways orientated towards Russia, the Transnistrian population requires even deeper cooperation with Russia and Russian as the second official language in the republic. On the other hand it seems that for this writer the status of Russian language in Moldova is the biggest obstacle for unification: if Russian would be the second official language in Moldova, unification would be possible, as “both Transnistria and Moldova have paid a high price for their past deeds”. A positive answer to these claims does not seem possible in the near future as since the elections in 2010 the majority of members in the Moldovan parliament belong to the pro-European alliance. The importance of language question is understandable when the fact that during the 1950s the majority of people that settled in the area where ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. On the other hand especially the second text (40) is pointing out the political realities, as currently both Moldova and Transnistria are suffering from the situation and at least from economic point of view unification might be a beneficial option. The third writer (41) mentions the common mentality and families that are separated by the border. The last writer (42) takes this statement even further by pointing out the everyday problems caused by corruption, travel restrictions, and (inoperative) planned economy. It seems that unification is no longer an unthinkable option for many Transnistrians despite the aggressive rhetoric against unification with Moldova, which is constantly repeated by the Transnistrian authorities. Some of the writers also point out the absurdity of the idea of Transnistria joining Russia despite the strong pro-Russian attitudes in the area:

43.) Only naïve pro-Russians can have such views [that Transnistria should unite with Russia], but all the sensible people realize that if you want to live your life like in Russia, you should move to Russia and build your life in there instead of staying here and dreaming of nonsense. After the aid convoy from Noginsk got lost in the vastness of Ukraine it was clear for everyone that without good relations with the neighboring countries the region is doomed and no

unification with a far away state will help. As the saying goes, a close neighbor is always much better than a far away relative. (RM 10.10.2009)

In terms of textual analysis, this writer (43) is presenting harsh critique on the current situation of Transnistria. The writer points out again the economic problems already mentioned, as the industrial plants from the Soviet era are slowing their production and material aid from Russia does not always reach Transnistria. This is another example of Transnistria's economic and material dependence on Russia. Despite the pro-Russian efforts, the everyday problems and bad relations to neighboring countries are clearly upsetting the people living in Transnistria. Still, it seems that the writer identifies herself as Russian by stating that Russia is a "relative" of Transnistria, while Moldova and Ukraine will have to settle with the role of a "neighbor".

When analyzing all these texts concerning today's Transnistria, it seems that the clash between ideology and everyday realities is present. Even though it is not evident in my sources, previous research suggests that also a generation gap exists among the Transnistrian population when political opinions are discussed. According to surveys, both in the PMR and the Republic of Moldova the older and poorer groups of population are nostalgic about the Soviet system and see its collapse as a mistake, mainly due to the social security the system offered. This nostalgia tends to be much stronger in the PMR than in the Republic of Moldova, probably due to the closer ties and economic support coming from Russia. The young generation both in the PMR and the Republic of Moldova are more positive about Western-type of democracy and see it as a suitable goal for the future. (O'Loughlin et al. 2013, 245-250.)

The clash of ideology and reality is visible in the manner some of the writers describe everyday problems in a very detailed way, while others leave them unmentioned and concentrate on ideological points of view. All genres of texts mentioned by Skinner, such as defense, attack, and criticism, are present in these accounts, and especially critique against the official rhetoric concerning equality of different ethnic groups, the standards of living etc. is very visible. This possibly due to the platform on which discussion takes place: social media is a non-authoritarian and relatively free space for discussion, where all kinds of opinions that might be marginal in the official sphere are tolerated. For the point of view of textual analysis, these texts are strongly affected by the motives and values of the writers, as some of them are very pro-Russian and against unification, while others describe themselves as Moldovan patriots and are strongly supporting the idea of

unification. However, the picture is not black-and-white, as even some pro-Russian writers are supporting the idea of unification with Moldova if some of their demands are taken into account. The analysis shows that “people of Transnistria” is not a unified group, but instead there is constant discussion and negotiation going on about the prerequisites for unification with Moldova or Russia.

5.2. Other questions of current politics

Nowadays the population of Moldova is approximately 3,5 million (without Transnistria), of which approximately 60% are ethnic Moldovans. After the declaration of independence in 1991 Moldova experienced a rapid decline in its economic position due to unusually harsh terms of trade shocks. By 1993, Moldova's economy was about one-third of its pre-transition levels, and, without access to significant mineral or fuel resources with which to offset current account deficits, Moldova's economy was also slower to recover than other post-Soviet states. Moldova's economic downturn is widely considered the most extreme of the post-Soviet states, and Moldova now is considered the poorest country in Europe. Some of the biggest problems of the state during the period of independence have been connected to the strengthening of national identity. The question which parts of the country's history should be taken into account in the formation process of the nation's identity and what should be left out to promote the national unity, remains problematic, as we have seen from my material so far. (Dawisha&Parrott 1994, 145-146; Kennedy 2010, 63-64; Miklóssy 2011, 166, 170-173; Munchaev & Ustinov 2008, 684, 713-715.)

In the early years of independence there was a strong movement to support the idea of Moldova merging into Romania, which was high on the agenda of the leading Moldovan political party of the time, Moldovan Popular Front, (MPF). This led to an escalation of tensions and violence between the Moldovan government and Transnistria. Over time also the general opinion turned against the idea of unification, which helped the new consensus government into power. This government pledged to act on a multinational basis and observe the civil and political rights of all persons regardless of ethnicity. Since 1994 the most important political goals for Moldova have been to ensure domestic stability, ethnic harmony and to consolidate Moldova's fragile statehood, as well balanced foreign policy. In addition to these “unionist” and “Moldovan” tendencies, there is the Eurasian political tendency, which stresses Moldova's historical and cultural bonds with the Slavic world and is highly suspicious of political ties with the West. This ideology has gained great visibility due to the vocal Eurasianist minorities, the dominant role of Russian

language, as well as economic and military factors. (Dawisha&Parrott 1994, 145-146; Kennedy 2010, 63-64; March 2007b, 198-200; Miklóssy 2011, 166, 170-173; Munchaev & Ustinov 2008, 684, 713-715.)

The Russian-Moldovan relations have been highly reliant on the political elites of Moldova and their connections to Russia. In 2001 the Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM) came to power and Vladimir Voronin was chosen as the president of Moldova by the parliament. At first his political views were strongly pro-Russian and included joining the union of Russia and Belarus and making Russian the second official state language, which caused large-scale demonstrations. He also started negotiations with the Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov, which soon came to an unsuccessful end. Voronin called for help from Russia, but in 2003 he refused to sign the document known as the Kozak Memorandum at the last minute. Critics claim that the document would have made the Moldovan state dysfunctional and highly reliant on Russia. After these events, Voronin changed his views and declared European integration as the new national goal for Moldova. In 2006 Moldova and Ukraine introduced a new border regime, which did not allow export of goods by Transnistrian companies if they were not registered in Chişinău. Russia answered by doubling the price of natural gas sold to Moldova and ceasing the import of Moldovan agricultural produce and wines, which is one of the most important branches of Moldovan economy. The relations were again improving since 2008, even though Moscow continued to support the Tiraspol government both politically and economically. (Ciscel 2008, 114; Hast 2007, 186-187; March 2007a 612-618, 2007b 202-205; Nezavizimaya Gazeta 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 241-243; Prina 2015, 56-58.)

After the demonstrations of 2009 Voronin gave up his position and was followed by three acting presidents (Mihai Ghimpu, Vlad Filat, and Marian Lupu), as no candidate was able to gain the votes required to be chosen as the president due to the political deadlock between the Alliance for European Integration and PCRM, until Nicolae Timofti of the former was chosen to the position in 2012. Since 2010 the Alliance of European Integration formed by Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova, Democratic Party of Moldova and Liberal Party has hold the majority of seats in the parliament, which has led to signing the Association Agreement between the EU and Moldova in 2014. At the same time Moldova remains heavily reliant on Russia for trade and natural gases, so it cannot risk destabilizing its relations with its powerful neighbor through the adoption of anti-Russian policies. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 241-243; Prina 2015, 56-58.)

There are three notable nationalizing projects that nation-builders in the post-Soviet borderlands have embarked upon. First, there is de-Sovietization, which refers to the process by which nationalizing political elites have removed the homeland symbols, political institutions and representatives of Soviet power from the social and political landscape, and replaced them with new national symbols and political institutions in order to safeguard what is deemed to be the national interest. The process is also linked to mistrust of the “former colonizers”, the Russians, and unease about their perceived relationship with what is still seen as a neo-imperialist Russia. In Moldova this was not the case, as the Communist Party, which was supported by Russia, stayed in power until 2010. After that the Communist Party has remained strong, but the three parties forming the Alliance for European Integration have held the majority of seats in the parliament. (Smith 1999, 76.)

Second, nationalizing political and cultural elites are also engaged in reinventing and re-codifying the social boundaries that distinguish the homeland nation from other minorities. This representation of difference takes the form of offering one fully constituted, separate and distinct identity of “us” which is different from “them”, e.g. titular nation versus Russians. There is also a tendency to historicize identities and refer to pre-colonial “golden age”, which can inspire or forge unity amongst those who identify with that vision of nationhood. Finally, there is a tendency to totalize difference between the titular nation and ethnic Russians, to turn relative differences into absolute ones. In Moldova this process has also been much slighter than in other post-Soviet states, as Russian has remained the most widely-spoken language in the country and is especially vital to the cultural life of Moldova. (Smith 1999, 76-77.)

The third nationalizing tendency is associated with a desire to standardize culturally the social, economical and political life of the polity, based upon a premise that a more homogenous polity dominated by one national culture is essential to the post-colonial state’s political and economic modernization. Thus, political elites contend that linguistic, cultural and educational homogenization is necessary to run a more efficient national economy and state bureaucracy, as well as to produce a more loyal and harmonious citizenry. Of special importance is the goal of promoting a common national language. This goal is also bound up with a desire to reverse the former “colonial other’s” policy of asymmetric bilingualism in which the titular nations learnt Russian while Russian migrants who moved into the borderland republics during Soviet rule were given no incentive to learn the native language. In Moldova there is officially only one official state language,

Moldovan, but the discussion about making Russian the second official language is much more active than in many other post-Soviet states. (Smith 1999, 77.)

Minority demands in the post-Soviet multicultural societies take various forms: some minorities reject membership of the political space to which they currently belong and engage in secessionist struggles, either to create their own political space or to be reunited with co-nationals in another common political homeland (Transnistrian Russians), some minorities aspire to their own autonomous political spaces (Moldovan Gagauz), some seek alternative institutional means of securing political representation and support for the preservation of their languages, cultures and way of life (Moldovan Roma and other small minorities). In some cases the minorities are also cooperating with the majority to support their own interests against the interests of other minorities, as is the case of the ethnic Russians of Moldova who are in many cases cooperating with the Moldovan nationalist by stressing the Moldovanist point of view to form a strong opposition to the Romanian-minded groups who are supporting the idea of unification with Romania. (see e.g. Smith 1999, 128.)

The conflict between different ethnicities and views on history that started after the fall of the Soviet Union still goes on, as currently there has been much discussion about the fact that in schools history of Romania is currently taught in addition to history of Moldova. The situation of history teaching has been under constant changes since the fall of the Soviet Union. Currently a course on “Romanian and General history” is taught throughout the country. In 2006 the Communist government introduced a course on integrated history, which included segments on national, regional and world history, including history of Moldova’s different ethnic groups, but at the same time having a Moldovanist bias. The course was changed to the current one when the Alliance for European Integration took over the government in 2010. Internal political interests are also visible in the type of history that is being taught at schools. The Moldovan government has also received financial support from Romania to print textbooks on Romanian and world history. Many discussants are also stating that as they are living in Moldova, the language taught in schools should be called Moldovan, while currently the subject is called Romanian language and literature (*Limba și literatura română*). The names of subjects that are taught in schools remain one of the most discussed questions related to national identity and everyday life, as they combine many conflicting views on questions concerning history, linguistic factors and the political position of Moldova. (Ciscel 2008, 116; March 2007a, 607-609; National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova 2014, 56;

Romanovski, 2013.)

Below are some examples of the discussion concerning what should be studied in schools:

44.) *I think there's nothing wrong that we study the history of Romania at school, as we also study history of Russia, Ukraine and the rest of Europe. Just that our history, the history of Moldova, should be the priority. But to ban history of Romania as a whole is stupid and illogical, as Moldova is connected to Romania historically and Romania itself includes one third of the Moldovan land. Equally stupid would be to ban the history of Russia and the USSR, as we are, if I'm not mistaken, connected to Russia since the very birth of Moldova.* (MM 2.10.2009)

45.) *I think it is absolutely necessary to teach the history of Moldova and Romania together on one course. It is a strong bond connecting these two and teaching these two separately would make it difficult to explain many things that go on today. For example, why is it so difficult for Moldova to unify with Romania into one state. The answer to this question can only be found from the common history of these two countries.* (ICS 15.11.2008)

46.) *Why should our future children be called Romanians? Because our children will study Romanian language and history in the future, despite the fact that we live in the independent state of Moldova. We have our own history and language and we are Moldovans. We should not stay silent anymore, but tell the whole world, including Romanians, that we are not ashamed of our history and people. And if someone is ashamed of this, then it's time to change attitudes and be proud that we are Moldovans, that we are citizens of Moldova and the nationality does not matter, whether it is Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Roma, Romanian, we are all citizens of Moldova and our common country is called MOLDOVA. Foreign countries should no longer tell us how we should live, it's time to decide by ourselves what to teach to our children. Our ancestors were Moldovan and the noblemen were called noblemen of Moldovan lands, not Romanian or Valachian. Time to wake up, people!* (TIM 9.10.2008)

The first two texts (44, 45) are somewhat moderate opinions that accept the different periods of Moldovan history and point out the fact that as the Moldovan territory has been under the rule of different states, it is necessary to teach also the history of these ruling states at school. The first writer's (44) view on Moldovan history is rather interesting, as he sees that land areas currently belonging to Romania are "Moldovan lands". On the other hand it looks like he would date the "birth" of Moldova to the period of Russian rule, even though Moldova as a geographical term existed already centuries earlier. Also the second writer (45) makes an interesting statement why history of Romania should be taught in schools: to make children understand why unification with Romania is not possible, while usually school subjects such as "Romanian language" or "Romanian history" are seen as parts of pro-unification policies. The third opinion (46) sees that Moldovan history should be separated from the countries that have colonized the Moldovan territory during different periods of time. In this writer's opinion, the concept that is used to describe the subject taught in schools is of major importance: if the subjects studied are called history and language of Romania, it undermines the idea of Moldova as an independent state, which has an effect on national identity. He also sees the continuation of Moldovan history starting from the Middle Ages, but stresses that the current population of Moldova is multinational, but connected by their place of residence.

Moldova has experienced difficulties in establishing an identity as an independent state. These difficulties were punctuated by separatist threats in the early 1990s, after fears that Moldova's nationalist government would reunify Moldova with Romania sparked separatist movements in primarily Russophone area of Transnistria and the Turkic area of Gagauzia. In Gagauzia, an accommodation was reached which gave it significant autonomy and averted bloodshed, while the conflict of Transnistria has had a major impact in the politics of Moldova. The majority of Moldovans wanted to remain independent instead of merging into Romania according to a referendum from 1994, which led to cracking of the relations between Romania and Moldova. Romania was still hoping that Moldova would merge into it and encouraged Moldavians to move to Romania, which caused tens of thousands of Moldovans to emigrate in the 1990s. At the same time Russia increased its trade with Moldova. The Russian economic crisis of 1998 led to a major indebtedness and mass emigration also in Moldova. Between 1989 and 2004 Moldova lost 9% of its population (approximately 400 000 citizens), most of whom were highly educated. The high unemployment rate led to low standards of living and in 1999 approximately 71% of the population was living on the margins of poverty. (Kennedy

2010, 63-64; Miklóssy 2011, 173-177.)

The Moldovan legislation allows its citizens to hold a dual citizenship, the most widespread being the Romanian citizenship, which is held by approximately 300 000 Moldovan citizens, while another 600 000 wait for it. The Romanian citizenship is guaranteed for anyone who can prove that his second-grade relatives (e.g. grandparents) lived in the territory of Romania or Moldova during the period of 1918-1940, when Moldovan territory was part of Romania. Also the Bulgarian citizenship is fairly popular, especially in southern Moldova, and only during 2005-2007 11 000 Moldovans received it. Russian or Ukrainian citizenship is mostly held by those individuals living in Transnistria, where approximately 200 000 citizens hold a Russian passport. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 225; Țicu 2014, 48-49.)

Unionism is still red cloth for many of the writers, as the majority of the Russian population has always stressed the importance of good relations both towards East and West, stressing the role of Russia in Moldova's foreign relations:

47.) *I am against unification with Romania. I think the country should grow independently, with the help of other states but without unification with them. What does unification with Romania give you (I do not mean political questions but the interests of normal people)? Free movement inside the EU? Possibility to work there without extra problems with documents? If so, get yourself a SECOND Romanian citizenship. For Moldovans it is not difficult to get one and then you can travel as much as you like. But, if we unify with Moldova it will be more difficult to travel to Ukraine, Transnistria and Russia and working in these countries will be more difficult as well. As a result you will lose all contacts with Russia as it has nothing in common with Romania, is this really necessary? Another negative side in the unification with Romania is the sharp fall of export. Your products (fruit, wine, cognac and so on...) will not sell in Europe and it will be very expensive for both countries to export them to Russia. And finally, after the unification with Romania no tourists will come here anymore. Europeans will travel to Spain, but for Russians it's not possible as they need visas. (TIM 25.1.2010)*

In this text the writer (47) encourages those interested in the possibilities offered by Romania's EU membership to get a second Romanian citizenship. The writer assumes that

the possibilities of free travel around the EU are not as important as the possibilities to work, travel, and export goods with Russia. This is also an interesting view on the national identity of Moldova: if the citizens are encouraged to get a second citizenship so that the state can keep its good relations with Russia, what is the role of Moldovan national sovereignty in the process? The writer is stressing Moldova's position between Romania and Russia, and joining Romania would take Moldova further away from Russia, which is not seen as beneficial due to historical and cultural ties. Russia is also the most important market for Moldova's export products, but the writer does not mention the fact that these exports are highly dependent on Russian-Moldovan relations, as the relatively recent ban on wine export shows. This text is a narrative about Moldova's dependency on Russia, as its export products are not good enough for the European market and despite the relatively low salaries Ukraine and especially Russia remain desirable places to work. This view on Moldova's position in the field of international politics is fairly negative.

The problems in economics and the crisis of Transnistria have an impact on the slow pace of the democratization process in Moldova. Due to the privatization process of the early 1990s, the majority of enterprises are owned by the oligarchy. Corruption is widely spread and income differences are significant. The political situation in the country remains instable, which has reduced the interest of multi-national corporations to invest in Moldova. Only the EU-membership of Romania in 2007 has increased the interest of Romanian enterprises to invest in Moldova due to cultural and linguistic factors. Moldova is interesting to the EU due to its geographical location and its connections to Russia. With Romania's EU membership the emigration from Moldova has speeded up its pace. The attitude of the Russophone population towards this phenomenon is negative, even though also the migration of Russophone Moldovans to Russia and Ukraine is also a wide-scale phenomenon. Unofficial estimates state that between 200 000 and 500 000 Moldovan citizens work in different parts of Russia, especially in construction. (Miklóssy 2011, 166, 173-177; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 228.)

The following writers are commenting on the phenomenon of mass emigration and Romania's EU membership with a fairly nationalistic tone of voice:

48.) *We have reached the point when our people are leaving their own country! Everyone collects their things and moves away, thinking that somewhere else it's going to be better. But think that while leaving, we are leaving behind the most loved and cherished homelands where we spent the most memorable*

moments of our lives. We leave our fatherland behind and it is hardly a good thing to do: to throw parts of our lives away! Because by staying we can change much! A great country is made by people! Look around: we have a wonderful climate, the most beautiful people, a healthy generation, a lot of strength for a good life! Why should we leave behind all this? (RM 23.3.2014)

49.) *Why unionism slept since the early '90s for more than ten years? Because Romania did not join the EU in 1995, but only in 2007. And Bucharest started buying you with passports and sweet fairytales about how wonderful it would be 'to join the EU hand in hand'. And you, like a stupid herd of cows, headed to the Romanian embassy to get the beautiful passports. You are selling yourselves for a piece of paper. Aren't you ashamed in front of the motherland? I understand, it is very tempting to sell your country and head for the EU. But didn't it ever cross your unionist minds that the motherland might enter the EU with ITS OWN STRENGTH. Don't you think that losing your own citizenship is a price that is too high for the notorious blue flag with yellow stars? (MM 27.3.2009)*

These two writings (48, 49) are very nationalistic, using very romanticized and sentimentalized narratives to present the set of facts concerning the emigration processes that have taken place in Moldova since the early 1990s. Very value-laden concepts such as “the most loved and cherished homelands” and “motherland” are used in these types of narratives. The first text (48) is very appealing by nature, describing the beauties of Moldova and that leaving the country means throwing “parts of our lives away”. This type of rhetoric is very typical for nationalist descriptions of the “homeland”, which is often described as a very particular place using even terms of religious nature, such as holy. (Billig 2010, 74-78.) The second one (49) is more incriminating and clearly anti-Western, blaming the people who are leaving Moldova behind using metaphors like “a stupid herd of cows” lured by the “sweet fairytales” told by Romania. Thus, despite the fact that both texts are aiming for the same goal of controlling the emigration flows and develop Moldova instead, the textual means they are using are very different.

With elections in March 2005 the international community expected Moldova to go through similar color revolution as Georgia and Ukraine. This did not happen but instead the ruling Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), which is

strongly supported by the Russophone population, remained in power with its leader Vladimir Voronin. The party secured 46% of the popular vote and received 56 of the 101 seats in parliament. Voronin was chosen as the new president with additional support from non-communists. Other surveys demonstrate his relatively high popularity also among multi-ethnic groups, while in general different ethno-national groups in Moldova are visibly attracted to different leaders and their divergent visions of the country. On the other hand also the PCRM's political profile had changed from pro-Russian into pro-European due to the changes in Moldovan-Russian relations, which have been described earlier. All Moldova's elections since independence had been judged free and fair by international observers. Similarly, while private media outlets had clearly biases towards particular candidates, the state-owned media provided generally unbiased coverage. This changed in 2001, when the parliament fired the top executives at the state radio and television stations for not being politically balanced. In each of the following elections, observers noted a strong bias among state media outlets towards the PCRM. In electing the PCRM, Moldova gained the unique distinction of being the first country in the former Communist bloc to democratically elect an unreformed Communist party to power. Between elections in 2001 and 2005, the EU, the OSCE and Moldovan civil society groups noted serious deterioration in many areas of democratic performance. (Hast 2007, 182-183; Kennedy 2010, 62-65; March 2007a, 2007b 206-210; O'Loughlin et al. 2013, 240-245.)

The fact that a "color revolution" did not take place in Moldova before the mass demonstrations of 2009 was mainly due to three factors, which separated Moldova from the other post-Soviet societies, even though the PCMR's policies gave rise to regime characteristics and forms of opposition similar to those countries that experienced color revolutions. These types of "semi-authoritarian" and "semi-democratic" regimes allow some level of political competition, but limit this competition through restricting the operation of the opposition. These regimes cannot be said to be fully democratic, but they do have some democratic characteristics. A color revolution requires two background conditions: a perception that elections are not fairly conducted and an opposition willing to utilize popular protests. (Kennedy 2010, 63-66.)

First factor that had an influence on Moldova was that the Moldovan opposition failed to unify around a leader or platform. The candidates of the opposition parties remained fairly unknown for the greater public. The opposition was not unified and did not find an agreement on several essential questions on Moldovan politics, which made their campaign against the PCRM weak. The opposition also lacked effective grass-roots

organizations. Secondly, the relatively strong economic stability under the PCRM since 2001 resulted in the party's popularity. Thirdly, Voronin's decision to westernize his foreign policy by stressing European integration also had an influence on the situation. The westernization was a result of the worsening relations with Russia in 2001-2005, which was due to the rejection of the model Russia approved to solve the Transnistrian crisis as mentioned before. According to this model, both Transnistria and Gaguzia would have maintained their independent government organs, as well as their own constitutions, legislation, state property, independent budget and tax system. This model would have basically stopped any further movement towards the EU, which was not in the interests of Moldova. The rejection of this model was a political embarrassment to Russia. Worsening relations with Russia corresponded with strengthened relations with the EU. In 2003 Moldova was included in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy. (Kennedy 2010, 63-65, 71-75; March 2007b, 206-210.)

Still, series of demonstrations broke out in Chişinău after the parliamentary elections in April 2009. It is difficult to estimate, whether these events can be called a "color revolution", as they did not directly lead to a change of government, but instead to new elections in July 2009. In any case, the demonstrations were a major factor in changing the direction of Moldovan foreign policy, as the Alliance for European Integration has remained in power since 2010, thus speeding up the process of Moldova's rapprochement towards the EU. In April 2009 those unhappy with the election results were called together with the help of social media. Later the internet connections of Chişinău were cut off in order to control the spread of information about the demonstrations. Around 50 000 mostly young people participated and the demonstrations soon turned violent, as the demonstrators started attacking government buildings. It was widely estimated that the violence was provoked and directed from within the Communist Party. Officially 295 people were arrested though the unofficial number reaches more than 800. The police was accused of beating the demonstrators and 4 people got killed. The reaction of the Russian population towards these demonstrations was fairly negative, as they were seen as orchestrated by Romanian nationalists who were aiming for unification of Moldova with Romania. This opinion was widely promoted in the Russian media. Bucharest strongly denied involvement in the protests, while president Voronin claimed that the demonstrators were "fascists intoxicated with hatred" and was backed by Russia (Amnesty International 2009a, 2009b; Le Figaro 2009a, 2009b; Spiegel 2009; Sputnik International 2009; The Economist 2009; The New York Times 2009.):

- 50.) *This was a completely expected scenario, based on the policies that have been taken in the past years. 25 thousand people went to the streets because they were fed up with the empty promises and demanded real changes. And the people that have recently left the country are also looking for changes in order to return home. (RM 7.4.2009)*
- 51.) *I am from Russia, watching the television and cursing. Didn't the experiences of Ukraine, Georgia and so on teach your 'patriotic' youth anything? They are not the future of your country, but idiots who are going to ruin everything unless you stop them. You can call me an occupant or a person interfering in the internal affairs of your country, but I just express my subjective point of view, the decision is of course yours... (RM 7.4.2009)*
- 52.) *She is holding a Romanian flag with a swastika in her hand. It means this is not just a protest or an orange revolution, but some kind of seizure of the country. They are raising a Romanian, not a Moldovan flag. A flag of a different state! But on the other hand I cannot blame them. The parliament was taken over by a certain kind of youth. Youth wants to live in Europe, not in a CIS country. (RM 8.4.2009)*
- 53.) *The opposition paid them so well that they do not care anymore which flag they are rising and what kinds of slogans they are shouting. Normal people do not do these kinds of things. (RM 8.4.2009)*
- 54.) *Neither the state nor anyone else has the right to raise flags of foreign states on top of administrative buildings... And fuck, Romanians and Moldovans are different NATIONS, developing along different political and economic routes and even though the languages are ALMOST the same, we could then also say that Belarusians are also Russians and unite them with Russia because their languages are also very similar. (MM 5.9.2009)*

These texts (50, 51, 52, 53, 54) demonstrate that the writers tend to echo very strongly the official pro-Russian statements promoted in Russian media, which is the dominant source

of information to the majority of Moldovan citizens, due to which a certain proportion of the population sees Russia as Moldova's most important strategic partner and supports policies conducted by Russian political elites. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 237.) The effects of this ideology are clearly visible in the discussion, the demonstrations being the clearest example of the power of Russian media in my sources. National symbols are of major importance and apparently justify use of violence against the demonstrators, as the victims or violence against the demonstrators are not commented.

Only the first writer (50) expresses understanding towards the demonstrators and their demands, while others concentrate on blaming the demonstrators for disgracing national symbols and getting paid by the opposition. On the other hand the third writer (52) also expresses his sympathy towards the demonstrators by contrasting life in Europe and in a CIS country. He also notes the age of demonstrators and expresses understanding to the young people's demands of moving towards Europe. Points of comparison are drawn from other post-Soviet states, in this case Ukraine and Georgia by the second writer (51), but the demonstrations of these countries are reflected in a negative light. The writer is describing the demonstrators as "patriots" with quotation marks. These "patriots" are connected to the traditional enemy of the Russophone population, the "fascist Romania" by stating that one of the demonstrators had been holding a flag with swastika, a symbol of Nazi Germany and probably the strongest anti-Russian symbol, stemming from the Soviet wartime rhetoric. It should be noted that no official newspapers in the EU, Moldova or Russia published pictures of a flag with swastika, so it is unclear whether such a symbol was actually present in the demonstration. (On the importance of flags as nationalist symbols, see Billig 2010, 39-43.)

The confrontation of the EU and Russia is very visible, as the Moldovan demonstrators are blamed for their sympathies towards Romania and disgracing Moldovan national symbols, while in Ukraine the Orange Revolution was based on Ukrainian nationalism, but received equally negative response from Russian-minded commentators. Thus, both Ukraine and Moldova are placed in Russia's geopolitical sphere of influence, and the demonstrations are described as attempts by the EU to enter this sphere. For some of the writers (52, 53, 54), the most important message of the demonstrations was not the criticism towards the election results, but instead the unification and other pro-Romanian views. This is especially clear in the comments of the last writer (54), who repeats the arguments discussed previously about the separate nature of Moldova and Romania.

Some of the writers are pointing out that despite the events of April 2009

there is no need to build wall between the different ethnic groups:

55.) *I would like to address this to all those who keep writing here those banal phrases, such as 'who identifies himself as Romanian can move to Romania!', so gentlemen, who do you identify yourselves? In a similar fashion would you send the Russian minority to Russia? The Bulgarian community apparently to Bulgaria? The Gaguzians I assume you would like to deport to Turkey? Maybe it would be better to think before writing such things. This is our common country, a country of Romanians, Russians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Gaguzians and Gypsies, so there's no need for provocation with those kinds of statements. This is not an international conflict (nobody touched the Russian embassy), this is a political question.* (RM 8.4.2009)

While this writer (55) stresses the multinational character of the Moldovan people and calls for peace and mutual understanding, it is also clear that the political opinions among the people vary, as the demonstrations of April 2009 were of major importance to Moldova's political life and a starting point for the development that led into the victory of Alliance for European Integration in the parliamentary elections of 2010 and further political movement towards the EU. Despite the fact that some of the writers are claiming the protests as clashes of different ethnicities, it seems clear that in fact they were more of an ideological and political clash between opposing opinions about Moldova's current position and future. As the last writer claims (55), the demonstrations were a political question, but a geopolitical dimension was also included, as both Russia and the EU were eager to comment on them. This way the events of April 2009 can be compared to color revolutions that took place in other post-Soviet states.

5.3. Views on the future

Russian foreign policy since the early 1990s has been influenced by the country's role and interests in the geopolitical arena. The shift in thinking in Russian foreign policy circles, in relation to the countries of the "near abroad", reflected a growing unease over events in some of the borderland states and the consequent perception that Russia should play a more active role in the affairs of the borderlands. Thus, Russian troops were deployed in the "near abroad" for the purposes of peacekeeping. The language and metaphors of geopolitics was borrowed from neo-nationalists: "a geopolitical vacuum" and fears of

“geopolitical isolation” within the “post-Soviet space” as well as the need to reassert Russia’s “natural” and “regional sphere of influence” over the “near abroad” were discussed. The “near abroad” is thus linked both to Russia’s regional security concerns and to its prosperity, in that closer relations between Russia and the borderlands would offer great economic opportunities. Russia is especially concerned about the growing influence of some “far abroad” countries in the “near abroad”, including NATO expansion and the growing influence of the Islamic world. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 20; Smith 1999, 64-68, see also Godzimirski 2007.)

Russian foreign policy of the recent decade has been defined in the “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020”, which was approved by a presidential decree in 2009. There are also several other doctrines and laws concerning Russian foreign policy and military affairs. This doctrine states that it is in Russia’s long-term interest to transform the Russian Federation into a global superpower and a key actor in an emerging multi-polar system of international relations. Russia’s objectives in its “near abroad” view the entire post-Soviet area as a zone of exclusive Russian interest, thus marking the second direction of Russia’s foreign policy objectives. In addition to this, a new “humanitarian trend” of the Russian foreign policy has been established. It concentrates on issues such as human rights, the protection of interests of the compatriots living abroad, consular matters, and partnerships in the cultural and scientific sectors. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 18-19.)

In the opinion of a number of experts specializing in the issues of national minorities, Moldovan legislation is one of the best in the entire region, and the situation of the Russian community in Moldova cannot be compared to the situation of the Baltic States, for example. The law defines national minorities as persons who reside in Moldova, are its citizens and have ethnical, cultural, linguistic and religious particularities, which distinguish them from the ethnic Moldovans. This article allows them to create communities of their own and get financial allocations from the state for the organization of cultural events. Even though minorities in Moldova face some problems, these are mainly caused by the economic situation they live in rather than their ethnic belonging. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 218; Putină 2011, 167-169.)

From mid-1990s onwards important changes in attitudes towards the West began to emerge in Russian foreign policy. This was largely a reaction to the “construction of a new wall in Europe along the wall between the CIS and those states applying for EU and NATO membership”. Moldova joined CIS in 1991, but it is also a member of the so-

called GUAM group formed from CIS-states Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan as a counterweight to Russia-dominated CIS. Also already in 2005 77% of Moldovans supported the idea of European integration. During the Soviet period a notable percentage of Moldova's trade was inter-republic, which meant that the economic welfare of the borderland republic was bound up with the survival of some form of economic union. The diverse bilateral and multilateral treaties of CIS create a dense economic, geopolitical and cultural network of regional agreements. These include treaties on military cooperation, mutual recognition of borders, labor mobility, free trade, the coordination of new technologies and fighting the regionalization of organized crime. Despite growing trade and markets outside CIS, the borderland republics are still highly dependent on Russia, especially in relation to energy and other raw materials. This dependence on Russia and on the other hand the pursuit to gain access in the wider European market is a major factor in Moldova's present and future foreign policies. (March 2007a, 616-618; Smith 1999, 68, 157, 159, 161-166, 170, 172.)

Some of the writers take examples from other post-Soviet states to comment on Moldova's position between the CIS and the EU:

56.) *By the way, Georgia is doing much better economically than during the rule of Shevardnadze. They lost the war, but internal politics... the people are grateful for that. Maybe we can take other examples as well? What about Slovenia? It separated from Yugoslavia in the 1980s-1990s and now they are members of the EU. (RM 7.4.2009)*

57.) *More than half of our people want to get back to the USSR. But if there would be right kind of politics supporting interests of Moldova and its people without trying to please Europe all the time, it would be possible to turn the republic into a blooming area with high per capita income levels and balanced economy. All those in power could be so much richer by making full use of human resources and the people would not suffer but fight for this country without reminiscing the USSR. This is elementary. Create right conditions and people will come to you. Not long ago I talked with guys from Belarus. Such patriotism and respect towards the ones in power I have not witnessed in a long time. Everyone works, the industry has been maintained and reorganized since the Soviet period, agriculture develops. The cost of utilities for a 3-room apartment*

are 30 dollars per month, including heating, the average pension is up to 300 dollars. Maybe they lied a bit, but I hear such numbers from many people that do not know each other but live there. And by the way, Belarus is also a multi-national state and the control is quite strict, but due to this strictness the country is stable and people are confident about the future. Negative sides can of course be found everywhere as our world is not perfect, but what prevents us from taking into account this good example and striving towards it? (MM 2.9.2010)

As these two texts (56, 57) show, there is no mutual understanding between different groups of people about the future of Moldova. The examples drawn from other post-Soviet states represent the opposite extremities: as mentioned before, Belarus (57) has the strongest ties to Russia and the governance system is highly authoritarian. Georgia (56), on the other hand, has moved actively towards the EU and NATO since Mikheil Shaakashvili's political reforms which started in 2004, but eventually failed. Also Slovenia (56) is a very progressive example, quickly moving from Yugoslavia towards the EU and NATO. In these comments the progressiveness of moving towards the West is contrasting the social security offered by the Soviet-style authoritarian government.

Also other comparisons from the other post-Soviet states are used to demonstrate the path Moldova should take with its relationship with Russia and the EU membership:

58.) Enemies or not, it is still funny to notice that the more the Ukrainians are reaching towards the EU, the more aggression they are getting from Russia. This is the reason of the aggressions and provocations. Starting with the demand to get the Black Sea navy troops out of Crimea and the locating of NATO's rocket-launching bases. When talking about the friendship between Russia and Moldova it must be taken into account that these "warm relations" have existed for a very short time. Starting from when the economic blockades were demolished and the negotiations to control the conflict first took place. But it is difficult to call this 'friendship'. Or to use this phrase at all in the sphere of politics. (MM 29.6.2008)

This text (58) discusses the role Russia has in most post-Soviet states. The concept of

“friendship” was of essential importance in the Soviet rhetoric, where it referred to friendship between the different nations of the Soviet Union and the whole world. Friendship of nations was also an essential part of the Soviet foreign policy and soft power. In this sense Russia has inherited the concept and is using it in its foreign policy especially towards the “near abroad”, as it is part of the collective memory of all the peoples of the ex-Soviet states. But as this writer points out, this type of friendship is more or less forced, as the opposite of friendship is aggression, as the example of Ukraine demonstrates. This is a somewhat similar situation as during the Cold War, when the concept of “friendship” was used as a geopolitical tool by the USSR to spread its sphere of influence.

Moldova’s potential EU membership raises mixed feelings among the writers. Some of the writers believe that even though Moldova does not reach the criteria for EU membership yet, it is worthwhile to continue aiming for the membership:

59.) Today EU is for Moldova like successful people in glossy magazines are for a 16-year-old boy. This is the goal towards which we should strive, which encourages you to take an active position in your life and put your strength into changing it into something better. Now, from the economic point of view, it's not the best time for Europe as a whole. However, this is exactly the goal of EU: to work and create even better conditions for its citizens and enterprises. You cannot claim that the situation in Russia, Ukraine or other European countries would be better than in the EU?! (RM 5.3.2010)

This writer (59) sees the EU as a motivator to change Moldova “into something better”. The EU is described in a romanticized way as an organ that creates “better conditions for its citizens and enterprises”. The writer is also making a rather unbalanced comparison that the countries within the EU are doing much better than Russia or Ukraine, despite the fact that the post-Soviet countries have in general gone through major changes in the past 20 years and relatively few of them have been able to build politically and economically stable and democratic societies in such a short time. On the other hand the writer’s view on Moldova is also fairly negative: the country is compared to a “16-year-old boy” in need of idols to strive towards higher goals in life.

The majority of writers do not see membership in EU or NATO as a probable scenario for Moldova’s near future. Some of them are stating that Moldova should look for closer cooperation with Russia instead, while others state that strengthening national

independence is even more profitable for the country:

60.) *Moldova to the EU??? You people are not serious. Who would want us there with our current economic situation? Even Romania is on the last place among the EU countries, they were only taken there because of the gypsies. Moldova does not have any useful natural resources, no gas or even coal. Our country is agrarian, or at least once was. The main source of income for our country is the unofficial money transmissions from builders abroad. Just kidding! But people, do not worry as long as you have an uncle or a sister working somewhere in Moscow or Greece, you will not starve.* (MM 29.6.2008)

61.) *I have to say that we are not welcome to Europe... yet. (Maybe there will be a time when we reach the level that Europe will show some interest towards us.) And why would Russia need us? Definitely not to make us a blooming area! Superpowers always have their views on small nations like us and they are never willing to do charity.* (ICS 10.7.2008)

62.) *Europe does not need poor Moldova. In order to get into the EU, the country needs to fulfill many requirements and prerequisites given by Europe to the candidates of EU membership. Moldova is never going to fulfill these requirements. They are too demanding. Wouldn't it be easier to make friends with Russia? After all, there are more people working in Russia than in Europe and many families have connections to Russia.* (TIM 30.6.2008)

In these texts (60, 61, 62) the EU is again described as something ideal, unreachable for poor Moldova. The first writer (60) sees it as an encouraging ideal, while the other writers are stressing the poor position of Moldova. The position of Russia in these writings is changing: while the first writer sees it as one of the suitable destinations for migrant workers alongside EU countries, the second writer (61) describes it as a somewhat threatening superpower interested only in geopolitics, while the last writer (62) is promoting the traditional point of view that “friendship” with Russia is beneficial for a small nation such as Moldova. All the writers seem to agree that Moldova is not ready for EU membership in several years, but the options seen for the current situation are divided: while some of the writers encourage Moldova to reach towards the EU (61), others are

sticking into a more traditional rhetoric of “friendship” and cooperation with Russia (62).

Although Russia remains a strong regional power with a firm position on international level, it has lost much of its position as a “Great Power” after the Cold War. It has been especially difficult for the Russian political elites to recognize the loss of control over its “near abroad”. Current political trends as well as official doctrines and other documents concerning the Russian foreign policy state ambitions to regain its previous status both regionally and internationally. Russia recognizes that it has an advantage to become a major power among the post-Soviet countries – Russia is a regional power in several regions at once and it still has considerable “hard power” resources. Influence in its neighborhood is also a precondition to claim a status of “Great Power” and important part of balancing the West. On the other hand, influence of the EU and the US in Europe and China in Central Asia is growing in the post-Soviet space and despite efforts to regain its influence on “near abroad”, most of these countries are moving even further away from Russia. At the same time Russia still aspires to global role through initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation organization established in 2001 by Russia, China and four Central Asian CIS-states, and the Eurasian Economic Union established in 2014 by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. (Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 12, 212, 231, see also Hill 2007 and Godzimirski 2007.)

Moldova has tried to form positive relations with Russia by keeping its foreign policy flexible regarding the EU and NATO. This way it differs from Ukraine and the Baltic states, and the volume of Russian criticism has been much lower in bilateral and multilateral relations. The fact that Moldova remained under the Russian sphere of influence has been visible in many small-scale everyday events, such as May 9th, which is celebrated as the Day of Europe in the West and Victory Day in Russia. In Moldova, until 2010 it was celebrated as Victory Day with active participation of the local political elites, while the situation is now slowly changing and becoming more multivocal. According to theories on nationalism, different types of celebrations are an important way of expressing national identity. (Billig 2010, 43-46; Pelnens (ed.) 2009, 12, 212, 231, see also Hill 2007 and Godzimirski 2007.)

Despite the fact that Moldova is aiming more clearly towards the EU since the Alliance for European Integration gained the majority of seats in the parliamentary election 2010, all Moldovan people do not support the country’s rapprochement to the EU. Some of the comments in social media are critical towards the EU itself:

63.) *The EU is a big illusion, which was created for clearing and development for new markets for the major European monopolies. For example, before Hungary entered the EU it had a thriving domestic meat and dairy product industry. The EU with its eurostandards that were created to serve the major monopolies the whole medium- and small-sized industries on this field have disappeared from Hungary. Now they are buying sausage from Italy and those, who were previously working in this industry, are either jobless or working in another field. In fact even other countries than Greece and Cyprus have problems in there. The most successful states are the traditionally strong economies, which really form the backbone of the EU: Germany, France, and Great Britain (with some reservations). Other countries, including the Eastern European nations, are far from well-being. They have been assigned to another role. The Scandinavian countries should be discussed separately. That is a somewhat different group of countries. And when it comes to the NATO membership – it is absolutely not necessary for Moldova. That's a fact. (MM 2.5.2013)*

64.) *I am against entering the EU, as I think it is an absolutely useless union, where bureaucratic, interventionist leadership decides, how many pimples there should be on cucumbers and what should be the length of condoms. What is needed for Moldova is freedom of business, not subsidies to promote animal rights. (RM 22.3.2010)*

These texts (63, 64) include the most stereotypical ideas opponents of the EU usually have in their argumentation. Stereotyping is also a very typical method for demonstrating “otherness”, “foreignness”, or in this case the unsuitability of an EU membership for Moldova. (Billig 2010, 78-83.) The Union is seen as a structure supporting the major European industries at the expense of the small nations. While the first writer (63) is using concrete examples on how economies of Eastern European states developed after their EU membership and what is the role of these countries in the union, the second writer (64) concentrates on the urban legends about ridiculous EU standards. In these examples the union is a bureaucratic and unpractical political organ without connections to everyday life. It must be noted that the writer lists animal rights as a useless topic that EU promotes alongside standards for cucumbers and condoms, through which he demonstrates the ideas promoted by the EU that do not fit into Moldovan mentality or way of thinking.

In addition to the discussion connected to the EU, the identity of Moldovan people between Romania (or the West) and Russia remains a continuous theme in all the discussions:

65.) *We will not become Romanians, we will always remain Moldovans. If it's good or bad in here, I do not care, this is my fatherland and it is my duty to love and respect it. If you do not like it here, let me remind you that nobody is holding your tail, raise the flag and move to Romania or Russia or even Africa for that matter, but do not pull the republic behind you, as it is loved by at least 4 million people. Moldova will remain independent forever, unless we ask for someone for the opposite. We are Moldovans. We are patriots. We love our country.* (MM 18.7.2009)

66.) *If you think there is no Moldovan nation, then there is also no Russian or German nation, nor American or French nation. How many pure-blood and original Russians are there in Russia? Believe me, if there is 10%, then praise the Lord. And in Germany? In France? Do you really think negroes are French or what? You are being ridiculous. And about the US I better not say a thing. And after all, these are NATIONS. Yes, I agree that our nation is still not fully formed, not as UNITED, STRONG and POWERFUL nation, but believe me, this will happen in the next 50 years. The Moldovan nation is separated at the moment, but that is only for the time being. There will be time when every Russophone Moldovan citizen and every Moldovan of Gaugazian origin will proudly say I AM PART OF THE MOLDOVAN NATION.* (MM 17.7.2009)

67.) *I would like to remind you of one factor, which from my point of view is an essential one. We are not proud of our own country, we don't have the idea that we are MOLDOVANS. N.N. [another discussant] said correctly that we often say that we are either Russian or Romanian. But we rarely say that we are Moldovan. Where does this come from? From the current situation. The country has almost collapsed. Some want to become part of Romania, others want to preserve Russian language (or even make it an official language). Why to argue about this issue? Why to continue this useless 'war', which in the end will make the conditions only worse. Wouldn't it be better to forget words like 'Romanian'*

and 'Russian' and instead remember the word 'Moldovan'. After all, we are an independent state and we should be called Moldovans. We should cooperate with everyone, be independent players in the international arena and not to plan unification. (MM 19.6.2009)

68.) I am not going to intervene in the debate, I just want to say that I support an independent, rich and happy Moldova. Why should Moldova JOIN Russia? Do you mean that Moldova is a part of Russia? And when it comes to Transnistria, why do they identify themselves as Russians? Not Ukrainians or Romanians, but Russians? Are these their native lands? I think Russia is using all means to destroy the statehood of its weaker neighboring countries, such as Georgia (Abhasia, Ossetia), Moldova (Transnistria), Ukraine (Krim, Sevastopol). (RM 13.5.2008)

It can be questioned whether these views (65, 66, 67, 68) of an independent Moldova without strong cooperation with either Russia or the EU are realistic ones. As several other writers have pointed out, Moldova is a small nation with strong historical and cultural ties both to Romania and Russia. These have also had a major influence both on the domestic and foreign policies conducted by the country since it gained its independence, so it is highly unlikely that total independence from both Russia and the EU are realistic options for the small nation. On the other hand the last writer (68) is questioning, why Moldova should join Russia by commenting on the role of Russia's "near abroad" for the country's geopolitical position. This is done by naming certain recent conflicts between Russia and its neighboring states. The second (66) and the third writer (67) are describing the current situation by stating that "our nation is not yet fully formed" and that "the country has almost collapsed". Both of these statements suggest that Moldova has reached some kind of a turning point: either it will collapse or it will continue to develop to become "an independent player in the international arena". In any case Moldova is experiencing a transition and stopping at this phase of development is not seen as an option. All the writers are calling for unification of the different ethnicities across language barriers to develop the country as there seems to be certain agreement among the writers that the current situation in Moldova is not beneficial.

As the following examples demonstrate, some people are even questioning the viability of Moldova as an independent state:

69.) *It is clear that Moldova cannot live without Russia. Sooner or later it will become a part of Russia or Romania. At the moment only agricultural production keeps Moldova on its feet. --- In my personal opinion, I would like to have things like they were before. Bessarabia. In a sense that Moldova and Romania would be one unified country. Then we could get by in a normal way. Without unification we are facing a ceiling. By 2020 only a memory will be left of Moldova. Let me repeat: without Romanians or Russians we will face a ceiling.* (RM 17.3.2008)

As described earlier, Moldova has gone through many different conflicts and crisis since it gained its independence. The Transnistrian conflict, changing ruling parties and their alliances with Russia and the EU have had major influence on the politics conducted in Moldova. It has been stated in many writings that strong and unified national identity does not exist in Moldova, but instead different groups of people are identifying themselves differently and there is a certain amount of separation even within groups. At the same time the country is suffering from problems such as the rising price levels, corruption, and mass emigration. Due to economic reasons Moldova has to continue cooperating with foreign states, but when it comes to identity, the black-and-white separation between Romanians and Russians does not correspond with reality, as many writers in my sources are identifying themselves as Moldovans. This is the only example (69) in my material where the model of Bessarabia as a part of Romania during the interwar period is discussed as a probable model for the future.

Besides these three clear identities, there are also other forms of identities among the population of Moldova. Research on the subject demonstrates that Russians who stayed in the “near abroad” after these countries gained independence either identify themselves as citizens of their home countries or form a double identity of a “Russian Moldovan”, for example. Some also form even more regional identities, such as “Crimean Russian” or “Ural Kazakh”. Most Russians in post-Soviet republics have lost their contact with Russia and actually only a quarter of them even consider Russia as their historical motherland, regardless of the state they currently live in. Also the view of the USSR as motherland has been diminishing and will probably disappear in the future. Thus, it is probable that these types of “mixed identities” will be more typical in the future, which suggests that combining Russian mother tongue, Moldova as a place of residence, and

ethnicity of a Gagauz into one identity is possible. The latter is already reality, as the Gagauz minority is highly russified and Russian remains the language of education and administration in the Gagauz Yeri (Gagauz Territorial Autonomous Unit), which is why the Gagauz feel threatened about “Romanizing” or “derussifying” language policies. These types of individual mixed identities are common, and different sides of the identity are often stressed in different types of social situations. (Billig 2010, 69; Laruelle 2006; Putină 2011, 163-165.)

This writer offers a much more positive yet idealistic view on the future of Moldova, at the same time stating the current problems of the state:

70.) *I dream of universal prosperity, of love and peace among nations, of open borders, of real freedom of economic activity, of a strong state with wise politicians who will truly think about their people and protect the country from insanity and evil. I dream of well-coordinated work of all state structures which are not set up to rob citizens but to support them. I dream of a clear and precise legal system with laws that are not re-written every month just for the sake of collecting more bribes and new fines. After all, corruption is not just a bad thing, but something that changes the human psychology so that we get used to the fact that everything can be sold and bought. I dream of free medical care, free education, creativity and a situation, where a person is obliged to seek for employment if he doesn't have a job. I dream that all those who have run away the nightmare in which we are currently living would return to a state of which it is easy to be proud of. That is all. (MM 2.9.2010)*

As Whitebrook notes, there are interconnections between different periods of time and other factors in the creation process of a narrative identity: the place of imagination in the construction of a narrative identity may have a particularly political significance. Together with the retrospective characteristic of narrating, attention to remembrance and memory, narrative identity might also need, for effective political agency, to imagine the future, on the basis of an understanding of present and past. From this point of view, the last writer (70) is truly practicing politics with his writing: this image of the future is based on stating the problems of the past and present, and finding ideal solutions to them with models taken from abroad. The writer does not give any concrete ideas on how to develop these ideas, but already the rhetoric used reveals his goals and values. This text is a highly

sentimentalized performance aiming to encourage fellow Moldovans to work towards the stated goals. (Whitebrook 2001, 144.)

Moldova continues its unstable path towards the future, as demonstrations took place in Chişinău again in 2015, this time opposing the corruption practiced by the pro-EU government and its supporters. Russia has described the events as “colored coup” organized and guided by the US. It seems that the national identity of Moldova remains unstable and placed somewhere between the East and the West, and the problems typical to many post-Soviet states continue to harm the politics conducted in the country on an everyday basis. On the other hand, in 2014 the country signed Association Agreement with the EU aiming to deepen the economic and political relations with the union. So, at the moment it seems that Moldova is heading towards the EU, but the situation is open to fluctuations as this small country’s path during its independence has demonstrated. (European Commission 2014; Helsingin Sanomat 2015; RIA Novosti 2015; The Guardian 2015.)

6. CONCLUSION: When identity becomes political

The goal of this study was to discuss the political identity of Moldova's Russophone population through a series of research questions concerning their views on the history of Moldova, the everyday language usage, Transnistria, current political affairs, and views for the future. In this study the group of Russophone Moldovans does not refer to the group of ethnic Russians, but to a group of people that can comfortably debate about rather complicated political issues in Russian. This definition is identical to the one pronounced in Russian Federation's foreign policy documents, in which all Russophone people in the "near abroad" are considered compatriots.

The analysis was based on writings posted on the Russian-language social media site vKontakte. Out of the approximately 15 000 messages posted in the five Moldova-themed groups by June 2015 around 10% concerned topics relevant for this thesis. Out of these relevant messages, altogether 70 are analyzed in detail in this thesis. They were chosen according to their contents and length, as most of the messages mentioned as relevant for the research topic were usually one or two sentences long, mostly short comments or insults aimed at the other discussants. Due to the large amount of these types of comments, the texts analyzed in this study did not form logical discussions, but were instead analyzed as individual comments on large-scale political phenomena. The comments analyzed in the study represent different points of view, are usually more than one or two sentences long, and use certain rhetorical means to promote their goals. Out of these messages 31 were published in the group Moldova Mare – Great Moldova, 21 in Republica Moldova, 10 in ICS Moldova Mare, 5 in Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic, and 3 in Moldova. The amount of messages chosen for analysis from each group directly demonstrates the activity of discussion within these groups with the Moldovan nationalist group Moldova Mare – Great Moldova being by far the most active, while the Russian nationalist group Russian Youth League of Moldova Republic was relatively inactive despite its size.

As it is clear from the analysis, the different goals promoted by each group did not have an effect on the contents of the discussion that took place: pro-Russian opinions were visible in Moldovan nationalist groups, as well as pro-Moldovan opinions in Russian nationalist groups. Views supporting pro-Romanian opinions form a minority in my sources, but this is largely due to the platform of discussion. There was also surprisingly little attempt to form a common view for the group as an entity, but this was

probably due to the fact that groups on social media are rarely as permanent and stable as groups of other spheres of life as people within social media groups rarely know each other in “real life”. These groups are also spaces of debate, thus there is little need for consensus. In addition, opinions expressed in social media are often stronger than the ones expressed on face-to-face communication due to the public image aspect of social media: on this arena people choose what kind of an image of themselves they want to present. Some of the discussants presenting opposite views compared to the majority of group members seemed to even take advantage of the possibility for political provocation within the group. Thus, choosing comments that presented different points of view with reasonable argumentation was an important part of the research process.

The theoretical background of this study was based on textual analysis as introduced by Quentin Skinner and the concept of political/narrative identity as introduced by Maureen Whitebrook. Using tools of textual analysis I aimed to point out the most important symbols and concepts mentioned in my material for more detailed analysis in order to find out the motives and values of the writers. On the other hand both Skinner and Whitebrook stress that these types of materials should be treated as performances of public political identity, which also fits well with the overall nature of social media. One of the core meanings of these types of performances is to strengthen and manifest the individual’s membership in a certain group. Thus it is not possible to make strong hypotheses about the individual identity of the writers based on just a few messages on social media, but instead on their public views on political issues. On the other hand the group of Russophone Moldovans is multivocal by nature, without a clear consensus about the themes discussed in this study. The ethnographic view on study of politics was also briefly introduced. It stresses the role of individuals as political actors as well as the multivocal and multilayered nature of reality. This view fits ideas of the complicity of human nature and political action, as well as the uncertainty of conclusions when discussing social movements that are constantly moving and reacting to current politics.

As Whitebrook and Skinner have stressed the performative nature of public political acts and their role as social processes, connections to the classic theories on the nature of political action, as well as the role social construction of reality has for the identity of an individual were made. Firstly, the realm of the political as defined by Hannah Arendt was discussed, as social media can be described as an open political space combining the performative elements stressed in the theory of Skinner as well as the role of this type of space for identity-building as introduced by Whitebrook. In addition the

elements of social construction of reality as introduced by Berger and Luckmann were discussed, as their ideas about strengthening one's identity through public performance was in accordance with Arendt's theory on the role of open political space.

The theoretical background was followed by an introduction of two central concepts for this study. First of all, nationalism is a central concept when discussing themes like national or ethnic identity. Theories of imagined communities in general and diasporic groups in particular are essential for studying a topic related to identity of Russophone Moldovans. On the other hand the Russian diaspora of the "near abroad" is a very specific type of diaspora, which is why its special features and role in Russia's foreign policy were also discussed in this chapter. When talking about nationalism among the Russian diasporic groups of the "near abroad", Russia's geopolitical interests have a major effect on how these groups are used as tools to reach geopolitical goals. Thus the concept of geopolitics and geopolitical practices since the Cold War period as well as Russia's current geopolitical tools were briefly introduced from both Western and Russian points of view.

In the actual analysis chapters firstly themes of history and language were discussed. From my sources it is clear that most Moldovan patriots see the history of present-day Moldova as a direct continuation of history starting from Stephen the Great and the Principality of Moldavia. This way history is used as a tool to separate Moldovan identity from Romania, which is also the core of the Moldovanist ideology stemming from the Soviet period and still very visible in my sources. National symbols such as the figure of Stephen the Great are of major importance. On the other hand the losses of territory during the Second World War put this view on history under question: is it possible to have a nation without a state, or see history of a conquered nation as continuation for history of an area that later split? For the strongest pro-Russian group the most important topic related to history was the period of Moldavian SSR, which they aimed to present in a very positive light. Again, symbols such as a memorial stone for Moldovan victims of Soviet depressions were used to question this view on history and stress the positive sides of the Soviet era. This type of rhetoric was strongly opposing the view on history promoted by the state, and especially certain political actors such as Mihai Ghimpu who is known as a strong supporter of pro-Romanian policies.

When it comes to language, the status of the official language is under constant discussion and a major factor for the unstable position of Moldovan national identity. In addition to the official language, the role of Russian language in the Moldovan

society was widely discussed. The central themes were the lack of opportunities and conditions to learn the official language, the discrimination of Russian-speakers, and the possibility of making Russian the second official language in Moldova. When comparing research literature concerning the subject it is clear that similar themes are discussed all over the post-Soviet states as the language environment is changing and Russian is in most cases losing its position as a lingua franca. This type of development is slow and dependent on political decisions, as the example of Belarus demonstrates. From my material it was clear that language remained the single most discussed theme among all the topics, and it was clear that in most cases language identity is directly connected to social identity, as research from other post-Soviet states also suggests. The role of language was discussed also in connection to history, current politics, the future, and Moldova's overall position between the East and the West.

Transnistria is the clearest example of the effect geopolitics and Russian foreign policy have in the politics of Moldova, as the conflict has influenced all spheres of life. The major theme concerning Transnistria was whether or not it should unify with Moldova. Surprisingly, both people living in Transnistria and outside the area were expressing their support both for and against unification. In the arguments against unification ideological factors as well as the role of Russian language were stressed. On the other hand at least some of the commentators were seeing unification as a possible scenario if Russian would gain the position of a second official language in Moldova. Thus language question had a major effect on views concerning this specific political question. The commentators supporting the idea of unification were describing vividly the difficulties connected to Transnistria's current position, such as corruption and economic reliance on Russia. Criticism towards the current state of affairs in Transnistria was described in a detailed way.

As for other questions of current politics three topics were most widely discussed: how the subjects taught in schools should be called, mass emigration, and April 2009 demonstrations. Even though the names of school subjects may sound like an insignificant topic of political discussion, in reality it is combining many burning themes of Moldovan identity. The question, whether Romanian or Moldovan language and history should be taught in schools is combining many central themes connected to identity and Moldova's position as an independent state in relation to Romania. Mass emigration from Moldova is another topic with strong connections to everyday life, as both Russia and Romania have attracted hundreds of thousands of Moldovans to emigrate. Romanian

policy of offering a dual citizenship to Moldovans with fairly simple conditions is an essential cause for emigration. Different rhetorical means are used to discuss the topic, but a connecting feature of the discussion seems to be that true patriots, i.e. people identifying themselves as Moldovans will or should remain in the country, while those without a strong national identity will leave the country. Despite the fact that these writings are mostly very nationalistic, they are at the same time recognizing the current poor state of Moldova. This type of understanding is also visible in discussion concerning the demonstrations of April 2009 despite the fact that influence of Russian media is very visible, as commentators are expressing very little sympathy towards the demonstrators while stressing the view that they were paid by Romania and the opposition.

Views on the future concentrate on discussing the possibility of Moldova's EU membership. Again the views on current position of Moldova are very negative: in the most positive comments the EU is seen as some kind of an ideal that remains unreachable but at the same time worth striving for. In the more negative comments the typical rhetoric of EU-opponents is used by referring to the beneficial state of the richest member states at the expense of the poorer states, as well as the bureaucracy and quality standards of products described in a rather ridiculous light. This type of stereotyping is a very common rhetorical method to prove "otherness" or foreignness". Also Russia's position in relation to Moldova is discussed and the attitudes towards it are twofold: for some of the commentators Russia is a friend and ally due to historical reasons, while others point out the demanding nature of "friendship" with Russia. This rhetoric of "friendship" stemming from the Soviet period is repeated in connection to many topics.

As typical for discussion in social media the rhetoric used is extremely strong, due to which it is easy to agree with Skinner and Whitebrook and look at these texts more as performances to gain approval from other members of the group than honest descriptions of identity. On the other hand many texts are detailed narrations of the writer himself and his family or relatives, so in this sense the material is an interesting combination of performances supporting political motives and sentimentalized narratives. In the texts Moldova is clearly situated in the sphere of post-Soviet space: comparisons with other post-Soviet states are often used to illustrate different points of view, while there are very few comparisons to the EU countries to gain solutions for Moldovan problems. Only Slovenia is mentioned as an example of an ex-Yugoslavian state that has recently gained EU membership. Also examples from Russia are usually visible only in the most pro-Russian comments. These types of comments demonstrate strong neo-Soviet

sympathies, as especially in language questions, situation of multicultural Moldova is often compared to the situation of different minorities living within the borders of Russian Federation. This shows that in these comments Moldova is treated as part of Russia, not as an independent state. This view stems from the Soviet times and was fairly typical among the Russian minority in all non-Russian Soviet republics.

There are certain themes that do not come up in my sources, such as religion. Despite the fact that the Orthodox Church remains one of the main actors of cooperation between Moldova and Russia, its influence is not mentioned in my sources. This might be due to the fact that the church mostly influences older citizens, whose views are practically invisible in social media. It must also be taken into account that some of the people discussing in my sources are political activists, which has most probably influenced which themes raise the most discussion and aggressive reactions. The most active members of the social media community were even discussing in several groups simultaneously. On the other hand in my material the strongest patriots are also called “internet warriors”, so it is not clear how active the discussants are to take part in demonstrations or other political activities. The wide masses of Russian-speakers in Moldova do not necessarily share the understandings strongly promoted in many texts of my material. It is likely that outside the extreme national identities visible in my sources the quiet majority is building themselves a double-identity of being “Russian Moldovans” or even more locally “Chişinău Russians” etc.

As the chapters discussing language and history demonstrated, these themes are of essential importance for the public identities present in my sources. Views on history are often either built on legends and symbols of the distant past or in very recent memories of the Soviet reality in comparison with the current situation. These views are often linked to language, which seems to be the single most important feature characterizing the performed narrative identity of an individual, as questions related to language come up in discussion concerning most other topics as well. Especially the role of Moldovan language spoken by all nationalities residing in Moldova is stressed in the rhetoric of Moldovan patriots. The views on history and language are also in most cases reflected to questions of contemporary politics. It is likely that both pro-Moldovan and pro-Russian views are over-represented in my sources when the current political development of Moldova’s rapprochement to EU is taken into account.

Patriots of Moldova and Russia are also cooperating in a rather interesting way by building a common front against Western, in most cases Romanian, influence using

Moldovanist rhetoric. For example in questions concerning history, symbols of Moldova's ancient past are connected to celebrations commemorating the Second World War, while the era of Moldavian SSR is not openly criticized. Seemingly monolingual Russian-speakers are also keen to argue about the status of the official language, insisting to call it Moldovan instead of Romanian. The same goes with names of school subjects: instead of history of Romania or integrated history, the subject should be called history of Moldova. When discussing April 2009 demonstrations a "Romanian flag with a swastika" is mentioned as a strong symbol of evil. All these features are stressing the values and ideas that were an integral part of the Soviet ideology. Also the impact of Russian media's popularity in Moldova is visible especially in the discussion on April 2009 demonstrations. On the other hand these two parties have opposite points of view on the question of language: while many pro-Russian commentators are complaining about the discrimination of Russian-speakers and demanding the status of a second official language for Russian, Moldovan patriots are strongly supporting the idea of one official language, Moldovan/Romanian, spoken by all national minorities residing in Moldova. On the other hand some studies also suggest that the importance of language for social identity is diminishing as more and more Russians are becoming multi- or bilingual and learning the language of the titular ethnos.

As has been discussed throughout this study, it is very difficult to separate the question of identity of the Russophone population of Moldova from the overall influence of geopolitics and especially Russian foreign policy towards its "near abroad". This impact has been visible in some subjects, such as treating the right to use Russian language as a basic human right, while in connection to other themes even very strong anti-Russian opinions are expressed. A proportion of the Russophone population is clearly questioning the old rhetoric of "friendship" promoted by Russia and instead strives towards the EU. Despite the fact that true identities are impossible to reconstruct from writings on social media, the public political identities that the texts present offer interesting views to the values and motives of the writers. As this study has demonstrated, the Russophone population of Moldova is in no way a homogenous group of individuals. Judging by their discussion it seems that Moldova is still in the crossroads between the East and the West, as my material includes strong claims for and against rapprochement with the EU, "friendship" with Russia, and strengthening the nationhood of Moldova.

As the events in Ukraine have shown, research on post-Soviet space and especially the position of Russophone population within these newly-independent states, as

well as their integration and political orientations are very burning research topics. My study has aimed to provide new information on the topic by analyzing data gathered from Russian social media, which remains a very little utilized resource in Western research on social sciences. Social media is an important arena for activists all over the world to discuss their views and have political debates, at the same time being a truly open political space for people of all social classes. This study has been discussing political views and performances of identity as presented in this type of virtual reality. For future studies interviews of the discussants could be used for formation of a more thorough understanding of political views of the Russophone population of Moldova. Also comparisons to Russian diasporas in other post-Soviet states would be beneficial. On the other hand for a more complete image of public opinion on political issues within the country, analysis of the Moldovan-/Romanian-speaking majority should be discussed. Due to the large amounts of material available, also quantitative methods could be applied to material available on social media, as in scope of this research it was possible to analyze only a relatively small part of the discussion going on in vKontakte, not to mention other social media sites.

This study has concentrated on Russian-speakers of Moldova, who are treated as members of the “Russian world” in the rhetoric of Russian foreign policy. As this study has proven, the community is multivocal despite the strong visibility of Russian impact in the media and among the former political elites. Moldova should be treated as a member of the European post-Soviet space due to its historical geopolitical position clearly between Western and Eastern spheres of cultural influence. Questions such as the role of Russian language and other minority languages, weak administrative structures causing corruption, problems in the sphere of economy, and fluctuating foreign policy towards Russia and the West are not necessarily unique for a post-Soviet state that has gained its independence relatively recently. But as these questions are more burning in Moldova than many other European post-Soviet states, such as Estonia, they are clearly slowing down the process of building a common national identity for all Moldovans, including the Russophone population. This has resulted in very split identities and political views of this group of people, as this study has demonstrated.

7. SOURCES AND LITERATURE

7.1. Sources

Groups at vk.com (vKontakte)

Republica Moldova (3654 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club38550>, RM)

The Russian Youth League of Moldovan Republic (2604 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club25140890>, RYL)

Moldova Mare – Great Moldova (2080 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/moldovamare>, MM)

Moldova (1567 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club3406004>, TIM)

ICS Moldova Mare (1347 members in 15.7.2015, <http://vk.com/club3636430>, ICS)

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Slovar sociolingvisticheskikh terminov

Sociologiya – Slovar

Tolkoviy slovar Ozhegova

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APPENDIX 1

Map of Moldova



(Source: Perry Castenada Map Collection)