

Rumanian national identity in the Republic of Moldova

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The collapse of Communist regimens in Eastern Europe and in the countries of Soviet Union's area, brought, through different ways of transition, to the resurrection of nationalism, that during the Soviet regimen seemed to be disappeared.

This process was common to all the East European countries, but very different was how these nationalistic aspirations have been turned into political actions and into relations among nationalities. The conflicts between opposite interests in some cases, as in Estonia, found a pacific solution, in others, as in the war of Yugoslavia, caused a real devastation, in some others, as Moldavia, they provoked violence and division of territories, *de facto* before than *de jure*.

How can we explain these different features, these different solutions to the same problems that affected all the ex communist countries in the so-called "transition"? Surely, the socio-economic conditions, before the fall of Berlin's wall, greatly influenced the following decision taken in economy and politic. But, I think, the self imaging, the cultural perception and the self -representation of world were the elements who directly influenced the collective aspirations and choices, who rationally worked on particular and nationalistic perception of reality.

That's why we are going to analyse the cultural differences, and the link to the different constructions of collective identity, in various European countries, not only between East and West, but also among the East European nations. It will be carried on by analysing myths and collective memories, models of behaviour and relationships, and by studying how these elements react to incoming needs and aspirations.

1. Nationalism in Eastern Europe

Nationalism was born in the middle of XVIII century when a feeling of belonging to a society, settled in a permanent way on the same territory and united by common institutions and traditions, spread in the cultural and politic elites, before in England and then in France. As underlines Hobsbawn¹, in English political thought, the term "nation" was assimilated to the concept of "people" and "State", that is to say to the corpus of citizens and their collective sovereignty. That's what is called "territorial nationalism", typical of countries as England and France in which the consciousness of being part of the same community corresponds to an ethnic and cultural uniformity and to tradition widely consolidate and accepted. Also in France, as in England, the idea of "nation" saw the light on the second half of 1700, opposing system of Orders and corporations and favouring the conception of a united social corpus². The belonging to this nation at first was not ethnic and cultural but institutional and political³, as we can read in the words of Sieyès: "What is a nation? A corpus of associated that lives under the same law and are represented by the same legislative institutions"⁴, whereas Tallien in the spring of 1795, in a debate on citizenship said: "The sole foreigners in France are the bad citizens"⁵.

The representation of French nation was a social body, divided into orders and levels but united and belonging to the same sacral common law, the sole

guarantee of equality and freedom. The French nationalism, more than the English one, influenced the European political thought, also because of the great echo of French revolution, the success of Napoleonic armies and the faith in an illuminist world, ruled by the new principles. But this influence brought also negative effects, as notices Hanna Arendt, because the national idea was really different in those societies in which it remained an "unarticulated ethnic consciousness" and in which there wasn't a consolidated identity among territory, population and State, that has been the base of the nationalistic evolutions of England and France⁶.

Whereas in the western European countries we have a kind of nationalism that Hans Kohn calls "western territorialism", in the central-eastern Europe we have an "ethnic nationalism", based on principles that had no matter with the coincidence between State and nation and that were based on the common-blood origins, common culture and language. That's what Hanna Arendt called "forms of tribal nationalism", according to them, the nation is not considered the territory limited by borders, but all the contexts in which the members of the "tribe" could have lived⁷. The long series of wars in Eastern Europe, involving all the populations of the area, little by little brought to a mixing of different people on the same territory. So, the affirmation of the principle of ethnic and cultural homogeneity as the base of the state-legitimation would have necessarily brought dramatic effects.

The coming out of *pan-nationalistic movements* was the answer to a wide spread sense of eradication. In this situation, in fact, the crisis of traditional basis of power and institution themselves couldn't give the same answer of the western countries. In view of the process of secularisation, the lost of legitimation of traditional political power and the social conflicts generated by industrialization, the nationalistic development of State, that favoured social cohesion in western countries, got into contradiction with the multicultural and multi-ethnic great Empires. In fact, the pangermanism reached the climax not in the mono-ethnic German states, but in Austria and the pan-Slavism spread in Serbia and Russia but not in Poland, where there was a population ethnically and culturally homogenous, traditionally settled on a specific territory. Pan-nationalists didn't bring on the irredentist claims of the XIX century's nationalism, but aimed to overstep the limits of national borders and to construct a *people's community* with the same destiny and with the same political message.

An attempt of overstepping the problem of "territory", that is to say the definition of a field where nation-state could be settled, was made, at the beginning of the century, by the theory of "nationalism without territory" of exponents of German social democracy, especially Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. Bauer, refusing the romantic conception of "spirit of people", refers to the cultural autonomy of community. He considered community, in fact, as a whole of persons interacting each other, who elaborated their own communications' code and a specific interpretation of world⁸. We speak about heritages of induced faculties and transmission of common cultural goods in every nation that allows us to decipher reality through the different ways of representation, typical of each ethnic group.

Nationality is not the result of a biologic and racial belonging but of a common history that passes on customs and beliefs, which are going to become inner. It's a sort of cultural nationalism without territory, that simply overstep every limit: nations, in fact, can be countless because they are not subject to those spatial limits which, in any case, would determine their numbers. So, nationalities become

communities culturally autonomous but subjects to the same institutions and supporting the same interests. "We have in this scheme, says Hermet, the dissociation between State and individual. National belonging refuses both of them to make its personal choice, always revocable, that doesn't mean adherence to any sovereign machine, but that is bound to a political submission by his activity and its limits, far from every nationalistic commitment"⁹.

Someone could object that it was only theoretical perspective, but it actually influenced the reforming processes in Moravia and Bukovina before 1914 and the institution of a Muslim independent nationality, without its own territory, by Tito in 1968. The conception of nationalism without territory had a great fortune in all the socialist parties and in some countries of Eastern Europe, because it seemed to offer the way to overstep the contradictions between the nationalistic conflicts and the internationalism of class' conflict: Czech workers were culturally different from Poland ones but equal as economical status.

Even Lenin, who firstly opposed the idea of a federal party, structured in order to represent the different national identities, after 1905 changed his mind and realized that from the nationalistic conflicts, happening in the peripheral areas of the Empire, could come the necessary aid to the success of proletarian revolution. That's why Lenin and The Communist Party, following the political line of Stalin's essay on Marxism and the national question¹⁰, considered nation as "a human permanent unity, historically composed by language, territory, economic life and psychic constitution; all these elements form a cultural community". This definition brought to restrict the category of "nation" to a very limited number of populations and ethnic groups: Jews, for example were excluded because they hadn't their own territory, whereas were considered a nation the Georgians or the Armenians. Adopting a classification and a hierarchy of nationalities, the Soviet Communist Party tried to make together two contradictory elements: the principle of nationality, even if without self-determination, and the internationalism of the class war. Nationality was a characteristic registered in all the personal documents, as the physical ones, but without any specific right or prerogative connected to it. For example, in a Moldavian passport there was written "Moldavian" at the same way of "blond" hair, "blue eyed" and so on...

The collapse of Communism and the internationalist ideology ended up by saving, in all the ex communist's influence countries, that national belonging as the sole element of historical continuity. It was the same nationalism that had been restricted to the range of personal characteristic, statistically measurable and politically uninfluential. The terrible crisis that involved, with the burning out of collectivistic system, all the ex communist countries, was not only an economical crisis, because it involved also the construction of a system of values and a legislative order. It was a deep crisis that brought to searching a national identity that could favour the self-recognizing and the self-evaluation. Smith notices that "the ethnic groups, after their constitution, tend to be strongly tight in *normal* conditions and to persist even for centuries. In this conditions they form a sort of *moulds* in which all the cultural and social processes can take shape and on which every fact and pressure can be influent"¹¹. So, the national feeling ended up by representing the sole element of historical continuity and self-recognizing for those who came out from the collapsing of communist ideology.

2. Constructing national identity

Moldavia became an independent principality on the second half of XIV century, after the rebellion of vassals against the King of Hungary. In 1359, in Moldova, Bogdan drove out Dragos, voivoda prince and usurped the throne. The will of dynastic autonomy of Moldavia's prince was realized also through the religious obedience, in fact, both in 1359 and in 1386, he appealed to the patriarch of Constantinople against the pressures of King of Hungary. Religion, in this case, orthodox against catholic one, became an instrument to mark the differences from the powerful and aggressive "neighbours".

The new dynasty tried soon to construct a dynastic and political legitimisation: Stefan Cel Mare entrusted the construction of the historical State memory to official historians and magnified the predecessors in the necropolis of St. Nicholas of Radauti. But, in spite of Moldavian princes' efforts to become a new powerful dynasty, they were obliged, since the beginning of their regency, to contrast a very hard geopolitical situation. To survive they had to make up new alliances and sudden changes of political positions. Emblematic is the case of Petru Rares, the son of Stefan Cel Mare, who, defeated by Hungarians, Polishes and Valachies, lost the throne. He could rise to the throne again, only after the negotiation with the Turkish Sultan Solimano who obtained a series of gifts collected by Petru's wife, Helen Catherine Brancovici, a Serbian noblewoman.

However, as notices Catherine Durandin, how could do a little principality, pressed by kingdoms and empires so largest and bigger than it? "Opposing a little, negotiating a little... Stefan Cel Mare paid his contribution to the Sultan, acknowledged himself as a Poland's vassal in 1459, then in 1462 and 1485, Hungary's vassal in 1475, then stopped the payments in 1473 and 1487 and from 1500 to 1504, then revoked polish and Hungarian sovereignty..."¹²

The Stefan Cel Mare's victory against Ottomans in 1476, according a Rumanian historical tradition began with Balcescu, represented a key-moment to comprehend the link between the leader and his people. It marked the kind of cultural identity that Moldova ended up by assume, too. In fact, the wedding between Stefan Cel Mare and the only daughter of Marina Despina, Serbian princess, favoured the incoming to his court of Serbian and Bulgarian artists and men of letter. They brought a strong Byzantine cultural influence in this court at the same time in which the Hungarian court of Mattia Corvino was opening the door to artists and humanists of western world. So, the Rumanian iconography of Stefan Cel Mare is strongly influenced by Byzantine representations and is similar to that of Constantine, winning against Massenzio. This scene can be seen in the pictures of Moldavian monasteries in which the Byzantine conception of space and way of painting is fused with gothic way of building and decorating. An example is the Church of St Nicholas of Radauti, a western kind of Basilica adapted to be an orthodox one¹³.

Moldova settled between Christianity and Islamism ended up by becoming a cross-point of cultures, traditions and religions in which the Byzantine heritage was melted with the Turkish influence and the western suggestions. All these elements imposed to reflect on the conception of power and on the legitimacy of the principles about the birth of nations. It brought to research and find a legitimacy of their people in a return to Rome's greatness. The subject of the descent from

Romanian Empire appeared firstly in the Renaissance era, in the works of commentators as Ureche, Miron Costin and Dimitre Cantemir. This latter, in his description of Moldova, tells that the invasions of Sarmatians, Huns and Goths, destroyed Moldavia and Romanian colonies. The inhabitants, frightened, ran away on the mountains of Maramures and there could survive. After many years, one of them, Dragos, stated to go beyond the mountains with 300 companions. During a hunt, the Dragos' beloved dog, Molda, died in a river. So, Dragos, in memory of his dog, named the river "Moldova" and gave to the territory in which the sad fact happened the name of his people "Roman". The companions of Dragos, discovered those beautiful places, dismounted from the horses and considered Dragos the first prince of those lands. But Cantemir adds also that the Turkish named in a different way Moldavia, as "Ak Ulak" and its inhabitants "Bogdanli" as the name of their prince, whereas Hungarians and Polishes called them "Volohi" that is to say, "Italians"¹⁴.

According to Eliade, the myth of Dragos is a typical tale of a culture of hunters. Since the ancient time, in fact, the animal that escaping led to an unknown land, that becomes occupied, represents a "breaking point: from death to life, from pagan to sacral, from ordinary condition to sovereignty; we encounter superhuman beings (fairs, witches, witch doctors) dead men or demons; we pass from steppe to fertile plain, from larva stadium to the real and glorious existence, from anonymous life directly to history or from submission to autonomy. In all these cases, the breaking point led to a new way of living. So, these myths and legends, when they are connected to historical events, get to represent the excellent "beginnings", the origin, the act of foundation and then become the starting point for the national historiography"¹⁵.

Undoubtedly, Drago's legend represented for Moldavians and Rumanians the evidence a posteriori of their specific and unquestionable descent from Ancient Romans, and in the same moment the originally difference from their "neighbours". Eliade, too, in his volume "From Zalmoxis to Gensis Khan" seems to enforce the thesis by Rumanian historiography and Rumanian political class, of a descent from Romans progenitors, justifying, in this way, the continuity of Rumanians' settlements in those lands. The problem is not theoretical, as it could seem at first glance. It interests very important themes in relation to the construction of national identity, because it contributes to upset a millenarian self-perception: that of a poor and backward population, confined in the countryside of poor villages, slave to a dictatorial and haughty aristocracy of Hungarian, Greek or Russian origin.

The image of a Rumanian, on one hand poor peasant and on the other hand expression of a millenarian culture, heir of a great and mythical past, is typical of nationalistic mythology of XIX century. The popular ballad *Miorita*, by the poet Vasile Alecsandri, published in the review *Bucovina* in 1850, was very important for the construction of a national feeling, because it represented the best evidence of the creative genius of Rumanian people. Alecsandri writes to Jaen Cratiunescu: "For some of these poems, I did what a jeweller does with the precious stones... I kept them as jewels, that I discovered ruined and rusty. I cleaned them and all their original brightness has come out. That's my merit. But "the treasure belongs to the people, who was the only capable to create these original marvels"¹⁶. From these words comes out the consciousness of having found the most important

features of that popular culture which, from Rousseau to German idealism, ended by representing the "spirit of nation". That's what would have been possible for Rumanians to put themselves at the same level of other Europeans.

The research of a glorious identity comes from the Moldavian leadership's perception of being at the borders of European civilization, that is to say being considered not at the same level of the other European nations. Vasil Alecsandri on 1848, wrote to a French friend: "I am a danubian peasant, almost a barbarian, a Moldavian: that's all" and follows: "My country is beautiful, rich, picturesque, both for its primitive colour and for its lack of civilization. It's a small oasis, very unknown because it looses itself in three deserts: Austrian Empire, Muslim despotism and Russian absolutism. In my country there are almost ten millions of inhabitants who are still in the barbarian of patriarchal customs"¹⁷. Demetre Barianu, a pupil of Michelet in Paris, emphasized this negative perception to a letter to his master: "This land, that would be the sacral land for all my people, you don't want to see, you don't want to hear it about. For you it doesn't exist, it has so name, it's a barbarian country. You hate it. It's the kiln that has vomited barbarics on your West"¹⁸.

The same attitude and the same feeling we can find, many years later, in Cioran, who writes in his *Transfiguration of Rumania*: "The great nations or - to spiritualise this concept- the great cultures have disembowelled History with their violent will of self-affirmation. A trace of fire is what remains in the world of the great culture's flame, because a great culture is similar to a cosmic attack. But what remains of the defence strategy of a little culture? Dust, not a cannon's dust, only the dust that the autumn wind spreads off. I'm searching in vain the spring of little cultures". The author emphasises this concept of his culture's marginality when he says: "The national prophesying of little cultures doesn't go beyond the real historical moment, whereas the Russian one has ever been a sotereology. Which kind of messianism could ever exist in Rumania if we have never projected any monumental destiny?"¹⁹.

Actually, even if *Miorita* represents a little literary masterpiece, known and traduced even in France - "a sacral and touching thing till to break the heart"²⁰ - as says Michelet, we must notice that it doesn't offer a great and shining image of Rumanian people. This ballad talks about a lamb, which informs its shepherd that two companions of him, envious of his flocks, have decided to kill him. But the shepherd, instead of defending himself or escaping, decides to accept his destiny and goes to die in a valley rich of flowers. He asks the killers to bury him next to his lambs and his dogs and not to tell anyone of his death. On the contrary, he goes on, they have to say to a desperate mother that he has gone married with the "first of the queen" and the owner of the world"²¹.

This peaceful acceptance of death, this lack of rebellion that we see in the ballad, is a typical of Rumanian people, as Alecsandri explains in a letter of 1861. He says that Rumanians believe in faith and destiny and are superstitious, as the image of the wedding with death shows. Also, Michelet underlines this aspect of the ballad: "Man doesn't oppose to death but accepts it, easily marries this queen, the fiancée of the world, and consummates without moaning. It seems like yesterday he came out of his nature and now it's pleasant to return into its breasts"²².

For more than a century, this ballad was at the centre of the debate on Rumanian culture, because it seemed a sort of mirror of the national feeling. Eliade notices

that this ballad is very interesting from different points of view: ethnologically and historically, in order to research the origin of popular lyric; anthropologically to discover all the possible variations (more than 700 at the moment); culturally, to get from it the features of Rumanian people. Caracostea, for example, affirmed that there's not an historical basis in Miorita, but it is the result of a *primitive human experience* that originated a *poetic vision of the world*, that is to say, in his interpretation, *love for pastoral life* that goes beyond death.²³

Opposed to Caracostea, the largest part of cultural interpretations of Miorita underlines the pessimistic vision of reality²⁴. Lucien Blaga dedicates to the ballad the volume *Spatiul Mioritic*, in which he connects the anti-historical and fatalistic attitude, typical of Rumanians with the transfigurations of death, that we can find in this ballad and in many others lyrics. So he can affirm that the feeling of love for death is typical of popular spirituality of Rumanians²⁵. Eliade researches ancient symbolic representation in order to best comprehend some passages of the ballad and he recognizes that in the ballad there's a strong poetical effort to turn a painful event into a sacramental one. He brings the example of ancient symbols as the "rite of posthumous wedding", celebrated after the man's death in the South-East Europe. "The mioritic wedding, in fact, represents an original solution to an incomprehensible, brutal and tragic destiny. So, the adhesion of all the people and the intellectuals to the mioritic drama is comprehensible. Both the popular poets who continually sang and improved the ballad, and the intellectuals who learnt it at school, shared a secret affinity. The mioritic hero could give a sense to his pain, accepting it not as a personal, "historical" event, but as a sacramental mystery. He has resolved to give a sense to the absurd itself, opposing to the disgrace of death the phantasmagoria of wedding"²⁶.

The resigned acceptance of the absurdity of death is a subject that we can find also in other popular legends like *Master Manole and the monastery of Arges*. It's a Rumanian variation to a Balkan ballad, discovered and published by Alecsandri in 1852, in the period of full-nationalistic ideology. It's the history of a master-builder and his bricklayers, who, in spite of their ability, cannot build the monastery of Arges, because all that they construct by day, it breaks down by night. The prince, seeing that the works seem not to go on, threaten to bury all of them in the foundations. Master Manole, in desperation, falls asleep and dreams that, to finish the construction, he must wall in the first young bride he will see the morning after at dawn²⁷.

But the first bride he sees at dawn is just his wife, the wild flower, which is obliged to wall in.

The Rumanian variation of this legend, that refers to the rites of building, as remembers Eliade, is characterized by the resigned and serene attitude of the young bride, who accepts her destiny, whereas in the Balkan versions of this ballad she cries and curse her misfortune²⁸. This passivity to death, proper of collective imaginary of Rumanians, was noticed also by foreigner observers as Michelet, who said, about Miorita, that there was in it too much resignation and added, "unfortunately this is a national feature".

Eliade believes that this national feeling is the necessary consequence of the geopolitical position and the related events that involved Rumanians against too much stronger "neighbours". He writes: "Rumanians, as other populations of Eastern Europe, reacted against the invasions and the historical upsetting

changes. What we called “the terror of history” is the consciousness that we have been condemned by history, despite of all our efforts, all the sacrifices and all the heroic actions. We have been condemned by the numerous invasions (as those of barbarians from the end of Roman Empire till the late Middle Ages) by the military power and the imperialistic fanaticism of the neighbouring populations that overpowered us. When we have a strong difference between invaders and invaded, there’s no military or political defence that could contrast the “terror of history”. Obviously, it doesn’t mean that the military or political defence of invaded populations can be brought on without success. But, actually, the situation couldn’t change: scarce political groups of peasants couldn’t resist to the invaders for long”²⁹.

In this passage, the scholar of History of Religions loses his scientific approach and embraces, with pathos, the nationalistic theory about the Rumanians’ origin and about the peasantry essence of their culture. The invasions he talks about are those of the ancient times, and the peasants, subjects to the terror of history, are the descendants of the Roman colonies and before them, of the Dacians, who remained in the Rumanian territories after the retreat of the Empire from the western side of Danube. Eliade, as the famous historian Iorga, as the anthropologists Gusti and Brailoiu, as the great poet Blaga, find in the culture of the village the ethnic and spiritual structures of nation. In the introduction of the volume *la place des Roumains dans l’histoire universelle*, Iorga writes: “Among the nations who are *not* still integrated in the history of humanity, that is to say the real universal history, we must include the 14 millions of Latins of the East, who are still called Romans”³⁰

3. The renaissance of nationalism

When, in 1881, the Rumanian state was born, the Bessarabia, that is to say the territory belonged to the principality of Moldavia on the eastern side of Moldova river, was under Russian influence since 1812. The situation in Bessarabia was so described: “ In Bessarabia, Russian land, the Rumanian element is composed by landowners and peasants. The first are “russified” and can reach high ranks and levels. The latter are quite and easy from a nationalistic point of view; there aren’t structures for their de-nationalisation and even the Church, whose official language is the Russian, has a little influence on them”³¹. In 1905 in Bessarabia lived 1.897.000 people of Rumanian’s origin and 707.000 of other ethnic groups. But this relation was inverted in the cities in which the presence of Rumanians was scarce. The intellectuals were few, most of Jewish origin, but all of them attracted by the radical and revolutionary Russian movements more than the question of nationalism. From the reports of Rumanian patriots we can see a reality not much irredentist: the local Russian, Jewish, or Moldavian youth was a russified generation, educated to the revolutionary principles; the peasants didn’t attend to the Rumanian classes because they believed that language was not useful; the clergy seemed to be subject to Russian power...

To have the first group of Rumanian nationalist we must wait for the revolution of 1905 and the creation of a new Parliament (Duma). After these events, a group of nationalists connected with the theological seminary of Chisinau created a folio “Basarabia” of *national democratic* inspiration. Their program asked for political

autonomy of the region, the introduction of Rumanian language in schools and in the State Administrations, financial aids to redeem the lands in order to create a little propriety for peasants... This group was soon dissolved because of the electoral defeat and of the reaction of the Russian and Rumanian conservative forces of Bessarabia. But the ideas of the group re-emerged in 1917, when, during the Russian revolution and the growing anarchy, the soldiers of Moldavian origin, stationing in that territory, met in congress and proclaimed the political autonomy of Bessarabia.

The military movement was in contact with the organisations in the village that fought to obtain lands for peasants and to realise a revolution, which actually was more social than national. In fact were the Bolshevik threatening and the civil war in the countryside to make the *Bloc Moldavo's* officials ask for aid to Rumanian government. On January 1918, it sent to Chisinau a division of XI Army. The reports don't agree on how local population received the Rumanian army. But it's certain that Rumanian soldiers made very often violences and robberies and that not only the Bolshevik groups and the Jewish and Russian intelligentsia but also the Moldavian people developed a discontent toward the Rumanian brothers, a feeling that brought to a sort of cultural refuse of them. A try of repairing this situation was made by the promise of increasing salaries to those Rumanian professors in case of transferring in Bessarabia.

After the end of soviet system, this scarce national feeling seemed to be changed. As the Communism collapsed, the population of Republic of Moldova was divided in two factions, which brought to the conflict between a Russian nationalism – represented by the largest part of the Moldavian population of Russian origin (particularly in Transnistria) – and the Rumanian nationalism. So, all the changes realised in the country, that seemed to be directed to the construction of a democratic system, were, on the contrary, addressed to a nationalistic conflict, gravitating towards two poles: Rumania and Russia.

This crossing nationalism led to the war of 1992 and to its secessionist results. On one hand, in fact, was created the Transnistria, on the other hand, with the spreading of the self-governing idea, was peacefully created a new ethnical enclave called Gagauzia³².

It was a kind of nationalism not pro-Moldavia but pro-Rumania. "Perhaps, that's the specificity of Moldavian case. The idea of *moldovism* appeared weaken and soon became *rumanianism*"³³. As a consequence, soon after the collapse of communist regimen and the starting of political reformations, in Moldova the movement for the reunification with Rumanian motherland was very strong. The new-born papers of those years had a categorical approach: "*Tara*, expression of popular Centre-democratic Front, attacks anyone who dares refuse the reunification with Rumania within few months; *Sfatul Tarii*, official paper of the first Moldavian post-sovietic parliament, underlines the necessity of reunification. In the meanwhile the important Russian newspaper "Izvestia" says that: "The population of Transnistria fear the process of Rumanianisation" whereas some magazines of Bucharest critic the hesitancy of the Moldavian President³⁴. These are the evidences of the inevitable tensions of a country in which 1/3 of the families belonged to different ethnic groups. In fact the 65% of the population was Rumanian, the 14% Ukraine, the 13% Russian and the 3,5% Gagauzian. Different from some others ex communist European countries – as Hungary in which the

main ethnic group represents the 90% of the population, or Poland with its 97,6% - the Republic of Moldova was naturally predisposed to develop this kind of nationalism.³⁵ The expectations for a quick reunification with Rumania, as happened in the case of East Germany, were quite strong. But only a little part of Moldavian people was really in favour of this solution, whereas the majority of them preferred to remain autonomous, even if in the area of CSI. Moldova has been one of the first ex sovietic republic with a strong and violent nationalism. It characterised the period of transition and brought to the constitution, on the left side of Nistru river, of a political subject with state attributions, even if not internationally and formally recognised. What happened to Rumanian nationalism? Was it really disappeared?

To give an answer to this question we must destroy the commonplace that considers the nationalistic movements, arisen after the collapsing of Communist system in the Eastern Europe and in those countries that belonged to URSS' influence, as a simple continuation of those movements born in the pre-soviet period. According to this commonplace and the related thesis, the communist system has stopped the nationalistic evolution of every state's politic and has allowed a peaceful cohabitation among the various ethnic groups, in the name of working-class internationalism. Actually, this interpretation can be criticised from various point of view: for example, the anti-Semitism strongly revived in the '50s and after Stalin's death. It led to the purge of many Jewish officials from the Party in the so called *brothers*-countries and led also in Israel to the exodus of the '80s. More, the forced russification realised in the states of URSS and in the communist countries of Eastern Europe contradict this thesis. Nationalism was not really died in those years, at least not the *Great Russian* nationalism, which, adopting a demographic politic of emigration from central Russian regions to peripheral ones, favoured the creation of multiethnic conglomerates. So, Chisinau became little by little a semi-Russian city, because of the increasing presence of Russian people and of the cultural russification of Moldavians.

The great prevalence of Russian culture and, above all, Russian language, ended up by becoming a *boomerang* for the Russian component of Republic's population. In fact, after the collapse of URSS, the majority of Rumanian origin, always at the borders of politic, tried to accede to the high ranks of political power, that, since then, have always been occupied by the officials of Russian origin. The dramatic events of the spring of 1992, when the burning out of nationalistic movement reached its climax, brought to a secessionist solution: every nationality in its own state with its own laws.

The Republic of Moldova and the Russian one in Transnistria have marked their differences all along these years: everyone has reinforced its frontiers and searched its own way in politic, economy and in the social field. But the situation is not so simple because in every nation live together different ethnic groups. "For what concerns the interethnic relations in the "rumanianised" part of Republic of Moldova, there's a sort of established balance. In the schools, Russian language is taught without problems, the Russophile theatres perform their plays, in the electoral lists of political parties there are Russian, Ukraine's and Gagauzian, even if not numerous.

On the contrary, in the secessionist region, "the last bastion of the orthodox communists, museum of Soviet Union", there isn't Moldavian nationalism, because

it is forbidden. There isn't any valorisation of the multicultural potential of this region, where the 39% of the population is Moldavian. On the contrary, we have in this case the negation of diversity. In the press of Transnistria we find those who nostalgically dream of a return to the Soviet Union and those who pursue the integration with Russia or Ukraine"³⁶. The sole balance, of we can talk about, is in the access of every ethnic group to the state administration and to the state economic resources in two small – or very small –different States. In this case, we have the identification of nationalism with the linguistic question to affirm not a common destiny with the other Rumanians, but on the contrary, to obtain in Moldova the access to power. This power in fact, has always been belonged firstly to nobility, then to a bureaucracy who imposed, through its different language, a secular dependence and exclusion.

The decision of not to follow the way of unification with the motherland Rumania, has not been a matter of discussion for Moldavian in the recent years. The terrible political and economic conditions of the post-Ceausescu Rumania, that now are still the same, caused this decision and contributed to keep a large part of population in this indefinite situation. "For what purpose is it possible share misery and difficulties? It's better to stay oneself by its side".³⁷

The ethnical nationalism, that refers to common roots, to the belonging of a same culture and aims to cohesion and common goals, turns itself into a useful means to improve the social conditions and ranks. It's a sort of ethnicity that, contrary to what say its supporters, doesn't aim to the affirmation of a cultural specificity, which nobody denies, so much as to achieve the economic and political purposes, by using the nationalistic machine³⁸.

Actually, an ethnic community has very effective means for mobilize, coordinate collective actions and support a specific ethnic group and its elite. This aggregate becomes the necessary instrument to satisfy the incoming needs considered as vitals not in psychological but in economic terms. In a situation of economic crisis, provoked by the collapsing of Communist system, the easier solution is not the construction of a common entity in which everyone can cooperate according to his capabilities and possibilities, but the attempt of obtaining for himself and his group the largest part of the resources available. In a situation of progressive impoverishment, as that of the ex-communists countries, especially in the Balkans, the temptation to get for oneself large parts of collective goods is much stronger as much deeper is the anxiety in an uncertain and difficult future. Instead of being tight together, the winning solution is the exclusion of the other, realized by state constitutions that assign citizenship only to those belong to a certain ethnic group or speak a certain language.

It's evident that in regions in which for centuries the official language has been Russian, it was impossible that the state officials could know and speak other languages from it. Also, the population of Russian origin in Moldova, even if born there, didn't know Rumanian because it hasn't been necessary. In fact, the language used in public acts, school and university was the Russian. The imposition of Rumanian language actually meant the cutting off of the ruling class. Against this attempt, the Russian minority violently opposed, firstly with a short conflict then with the constitution of Transnistria.

It's difficult to say if the conquering of the key-powers ranks, in a context of economic disaster and of geo-political exclusion, has been a real conquest for

Rumanians. They have always been, as claimed philosophers and poets since 1800, at the borders of different cultures and civilizations, at the crossing point of an orthodox Russia, a Christian West and an Islamic East.

As the small principality of Stefan Cel Mare, whose statue is settled in the place of Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova is narrowed between powerful neighbours, is frightened and suspicious to them, incapable of elaborating a political project that could go beyond the day-to-day needs and the research of international funds. It suffers, without rebellions, that hard destiny that the *terror of history* taught to wait, because every saviour come in this centuries, has always turned himself into oppressor and exploiter: from Hungarians, Turkish, Russians to the same Rumanian brothers...

¹ Cfr. E. Hobsbawm *Nazioni e nazionalismi* Turin, Einaudi 1990, first chapter.

² The new political meaning of this concept is resumed in the art. 3 of the Declaration of Rights of 26 August of 1789 in which the principle of every sovereignty is identified in the nation. The same idea was strongly affirmed in the Constitution of 1791: "Sovereignty is one, indivisible... it belongs to the nation". See Title III, art.1 in *Les constitutions de la France depuis 1789*, Paris, Garnier Flammarion, 1979.

³ The process of nationalization of public authority was not limited only to the constitutional field. "All that real became national: national assembly, National Guard, national education, national gendarmerie... national territories national debts". *Godechot, nation, patrie, nationalism et patriotisme en France au XVIII siècle* in "Annales historiques de la Révolution française" n. 206, 1971, p.494.

⁴ E.J. Seyès, *Che cos'è il Terzo Stato?* Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1991, p. 29

⁵ cited by V. Azimi *L'Etranger sous la Revolution* in AA.VV *La revolution et l'ordre juridique privé: rationalité ou scandale?* Paris. Puf. 1988, p. 702

⁶ H. Arendt *Le origini del totalitarismo* Milan, Ed. Comunità, pp. 323-324. She writes: "To compete with the national pride of western countries, they hadn't a colonized territory, a State, a glorious historical past to show. They could only show themselves, that is to say, in the better case, their language (as language could be something to boast about), in the worst case their slavian, German, Czech origin, or whatever else. In a century that simply considered a population as a potential nation, to the oppressed population of Austria-Hungary, of Russia and of Balkans didn't remained much more. They hadn't the necessary conditions to the national trinity composed by population, territory and State, as long as the borders have been changing for centuries and the emigration has not stopped yet. People didn't know anymore the meaning of "patria" and "patriotism", the responsibilities connected to it for a community geographically limited. These are the problems of those mixed populations living from Baltic to Adriatic sea and ruled by the Asburgical monarchy".

⁷ E. Pichl *Georg Schoenerer 1938*, I vol, p.152. Schoenerer writes that his master was Hitler: our distinctive feature is that we gravitate not on Vienna but everywhere German people lives".

⁸ O. Bauer *La questione des nationalités et la social-démocratie*, Paris RDI, 1988, pp140 and following; see also K. Renner *La lotta delle nazioni austriache per lo Stato* (1902) and *La crisi del dualismo* (1904).

⁹ G. Hermet *Nazioni e nazionalismi in Europa* Il Mulino, Bologna 1997, p. 264.

¹⁰ J. Stalin *Il marxismo e la questione nazionale* 1913.

¹¹ A.D. Smith *Le origini etniche delle nazioni* Il Mulino, Bologna 1992, p. 55

¹² C. Durandin *Histories des roumains* Fayard 1995, p. 58. The data reflect the alliances and the changes in alliances, the vassalling to Hungary and the lost tribute to Ottoman Empire can be explained by the victory against Turkey in 1475 - 1476, by the moldavian prince and the king of Hungary, Matia Corvino

¹³ On the subject of Serbian and Byzantine influence on Rumanian culture see M. Cazacu and A. Dunitrescu *Culte dynastique et images votives en Moldavie au XV siècle. Importance des modeles serbes* Cahiers Balkaniques n. 15, Histoire de l'Art, Paris, Publications Langues O, 1990; *Hommage a Saint Etienne Le Grand - 535 ans depuis son sacre*, in Anuarul Institutului de Istorie

A.D. Xenopol, XXIX Iasi, Editura Academiei Romane, 1998; A Pippidi *A la recherche d'une tradition politique byzantine dans le pays roumain* in *Nouvelle Etudes d'Histoire* publiées a l'occasion du XV Congrès Internationale de Sciences Historiques, Bucarest Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania 1980.

¹⁴ On this subject see: G. Ureche *Cronique de la Moldavie depuis le milieu du XIV siècle jusu'à l'année 1594, texte roumain aux caracteres slavons avec traduction française, notes historiques, tableau généalogique...* Paris, Ernest Leroux 1878; I. Bogdan *Cronicele slavo-romans din sec XV-XVI* Editura Academiei Republicii Populare 1959

¹⁵ M. Eliade *Da Zalmoxis a Gengis Khan* Rome, Ubaldini ed. 1975, pp. 144-145

¹⁶ J. Cratiunescu *Le peuple roumain d'après ses chants nationaux. Essay de littérature et de morale*, Paris 1874, pp.327-328

¹⁷ V. Alecsandri *Opere. Corespondenta* Bucharest, Editura Minerva 1981, pp.323-324

¹⁸ R. Rosetti *Documente privitoare la misiunea lui Bratianu la Constantinopol in toamna 1876 si alte documente din arhiva lui G. Cantacuzino* Bucharest, 1943, p. 55

¹⁹ E. Cioran *Hisotrie et Utopie*, Paris Gallimard, 1960, p. 87

²⁰ J. Michelet *Legendes démocratiques du Nord Parsia*, 1854, p. 351

²¹ Cfr. M. Eliade op. cit p. 201

²² J. Michelet op. cit. p. 353

²³ D. Caracostea *Miorita la Armini* in *Omagiu lui Ion* Bucharest 1927, pp. 91-108

²⁴ L. Russu *Le sense de l'existence dans la poésie populaire romaine* Paris 1935, p. 64 and followings. Dan Botta in an essay *Ondeggiamento e morte* describes death as the limit of happiness. Botta exalts the wedding-death of the shepherd, whose soul lives in the white spheres of joy and compares it to the nostalgia of death – in the Thracian sense of the word. He put the shepherd of Miorita in the complex of values that he gets from his Thracian origins. L. Russu, studying the sense of existence in the Rumanian popular poetry, as Michelet, underlines the passivity and the resignation that seem to characterize Rumanian people: the shepherd, in fact, doesn't react against his destiny.

²⁵ L. Blaga *Spatul Moioritic*, Bucharest 1963, p. 120 and followings.

²⁶ M. Eliade op. cit, p. 222

²⁷ The tragedy in the ballad goes on: the Prince goes to see the monastery and realizes that it is a work of art. So asks to brickworks if they think to be able to build an other one, and after their positive answer, orders they could die at the top of its walls. The brickworks try to fly away but falling down everybody die. Where Manolo crashed to the ground a fountain with salty water, full of tears came out.

²⁸ Cfr. D. Caracostea *Material sud-est european si forma romaneasca* in *Revista Fundatiilor regale*, dic. 1942, pp 619-666

²⁹ M. Eliade op. cit. p. 223

³⁰ N. Iorga *La place des Roumains dans l'histoire universelle* Bucharest, editions Scientifiques et encyclopedie, 1980, p. 32

³¹ cited by C. Durandin op. cit. p. 214

³² the 150.000 inhabitants of gagauzian origin (that is to say the Turkish stock but of orthodox religion), obtained, by supporting the secessionists of transnistria, an autonomous space within the Republic of Moldova.

³³ V. Moraru *Pluriculturalismo e separatismo: il caso moldavo* in A. Montanari (a cura di) *Identità nazionali e leadership in Europa* Rome, Juvence 2001, p. 402.

³⁴ Cfr. V. Barsan *Masacrul Inocentilor*, Bucharest 1998

³⁵ *Transition* n. 2, pp. 10-17

³⁶ V. Moraru op. cit p. 402

³⁷ These considerations are confirmed by the socio-economic context in Rumania in the '90 and by now. In fact, even if who was pursuing, there, models of modernization and liberalization, like the western ones, had to change his mind.

³⁸ On this way of interpreting interethnic conflicts see: D. Bell *Ethnicity and social change*; B. Anderson *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* London, Verso editions and New left Book, 1983; N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan (eds.) *Ethnicity, theory and experience* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975.

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