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Linguistic Justice, Soviet Legacies and Post-Soviet Realpolitik: The Ethno-Linguistic Cleavage in Moldova

Moldova is deeply divided along ethno-linguistic lines. The principal polarization is found in the gulf between the speakers of Russian and of the state language, Romanian/Moldovan.¹ To the first category belong not only Russians, but also national minorities such as Ukrainians, Gagauzians and Bulgarians, who tend to employ Russian more than the state language. The two main linguistic groups inhabit two largely separate societal spheres, with different media and educational institutions.² Moreover, while following independence Moldova swiftly signed and ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,³ ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages⁴ was still pending in 2013.

This paper will, first, provide an overview of the political circumstances surrounding the ethno-linguistic divide in Moldova since independence in 1991. Second, it will link some of the existing attitudes on language to the Soviet policy of institutionalisation of nationhood, and the resulting perceptions of exclusive ethnic identity; these perceptions will be further linked to inter-group tensions that extend to questions of linguistic justice. Third, the concept of linguistic justice

¹ In the Moldovan Constitution the language is referred to as 'Moldovan'.

² This paper excludes a specific discussion on the Transnistrian breakaway region and the autonomous region of Gagauzia, as they are beyond the scope of this analysis.

³ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ETS No. 157, adopted 1 February 1995, entered into force 1 February 1998. It was signed by Moldova in 1995 and ratified in 1996.

⁴ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, ETS No. 148, adopted 5 November 1992, entered into force 1 March 1998. Moldova signed in in 2002, but this was not followed by ratification.

will be examined, in light of the complexities in applying the notion in post-Soviet states, including Moldova. Forth, it will take a closer look at the effects of Moldova's approach to language: the tensions between ethno-linguistic groups and the politicisation of language issues. It will then identify the difficulties in bringing about justice in the linguistic realm, given the differing perceptions of justice and nation-building. The paper will argue that the linguistic (and political) divide can only be overcome through the de-institutionalisation of ethno-linguistic difference, the de-politicization of language, an inclusive identity and an openness to hybridity.

Moldova: A Divided Society

According to the 2004 census, the last for which data is available, in Moldova (minus Transnistria) 75.81% of the population self-identified as Moldovan, 8.35% as Ukrainian, 5.95% as Russian, 4.36% as Gagauz, 2.17 % as Romanian, 1.94% as Bulgarian, and 1.32% as representatives of other ethnic groups.⁵ The Moldovan government reported in 2009 that 75.2% of the population used as main language of communication Romanian/Moldovan, 16% Russian, 3.8% Ukrainian, 3.1% Gagauz and 1.1% Bulgarian.⁶ These figures tell us that those who primarily use the state language (75.2% of the population) largely coincide with the percentage of the population that self-identify as either Moldovan or Romanian (77.97%). It also follows that national minorities (22% of the population) overwhelmingly use Russian as main language of communication. The remainder uses Ukrainian, Gagauz and Bulgarian, although they are likely to use Russian as language of inter-ethnic communication, as will be seen below. This creates two largely separate linguistic spheres.

Behind the linguistic divide are two principal factors: first, an uncertain Moldovan national identity,⁷ which *inter alia* causes the state language to lack the prestige and full acceptance as the sole official language of Moldova; and the fact that Russian, the dominant language during the Soviet period, enjoys a residual prestige, which however does not mean that its speakers do not feel menaced by their language's loss of its official status in 1989. The uncertainties surrounding Moldovan identity are best exemplified by a lack of consensus even as to the *name* of the state language – referred to either as 'Romanian' or 'Moldovan'. This largely reflects Moldova's position between Romania and Russia, which have both laid claims on the

⁵ Polish, Romani or others/undeclared.

⁶ In the Third Report by Moldova to the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC), ACFC/SR/III(2009)001, 29 February 2009.

⁷ On the fuzzy contours of Moldovan identity, see: Ciscel (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010) and King (1999).

territory of Moldova.⁸ Thus, Moldova has been subjected to waves of Russification/Sovietization and Romanization (King 1999). Among the Soviet measures adopted in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR, 1940-1990) was the forging of a Moldovan identity as separate from the Romanian one.⁹ The Soviet official discourse treated ‘Moldovan’ as a separate language from Romanian.¹⁰ Although the issue of a possible separate Moldovan language is still contested, it has been argued that ‘Moldovan’ is virtually indistinguishable from ‘Romanian’ - the only discernible difference during the Soviet period was the alphabet: Cyrillic for ‘Moldovan’, Latin for Romanian (Ciscel 2006). Thus, Moldova does not have a unique linguistic identity that can differentiate it from other (nation-) states. It is the only post-Soviet republic that does not have ‘its own’ titular language.

The events since 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, have intensified the divide, and even led to a part the country, Transnistria, breaking away from Moldova. The liberalization of *glasnost* and *perestroika* enabled the formation of the Democratic Movement of Moldova in the 1980s, which developed into the nationalist Popular Front of Moldova (hereinafter Popular Front) in 1989. Ethnic mobilization, including mass demonstrations organized by the Popular Front, led to the adoption by the Moldovan Supreme Soviet of new legislation, which proclaimed ‘Moldovan’, written in the *Latin script*,¹¹ the state language: the Law on the Status of the State Language¹² and the Law on the Functioning of the Languages Spoken in the Territory of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter the ‘Language Law’¹³). Strong ethnic mobilization in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw moves towards the Romanization of Moldova, championed by the Popular Front. With changes of government, linguistic priorities have shifted but continued to be in the background of political battles. Four phases can be distinguished: 1) ethnic mobilization, with a reaction to Sovietization and the Russian language, and with the ultimate objective of reunification with Romania (1989-1994); 2) a more moderate pro-Romanian line and the setting aside of plans of reunification, following the 1994 elections,

⁸ Bessarabia (the part of current Moldova west of the river Dniestr/Nistru) was unified with Romania in 1918, after being part of the Russian Empire. It was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. The part of Moldova East of the river, instead, became part of the USSR in 1924 as the ‘Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic’ (MASSR), a region inside Soviet Ukraine.

⁹ On Soviet ‘Moldovanization’, see King (1999).

¹⁰ On Moldovan identity as a construct, see Win van Meurs (1998).

¹¹ Over the years the issue of the Latin versus the Cyrillic alphabet has also caused tensions between Chisinau and the breakaway region of Transnistria.

¹² No. 3464-XI of 31 August 1989.

¹³ No. 3465-XI of 1 September 1989. Although this law was originally adopted as a law of the MSSR, it remains in force even after Moldova’s independence, insofar as it does not contradict the 1994 Constitution of Moldova. The Constitution stipulates at Article 13 that ‘[t]he State language of the Republic of Moldova shall be Moldovan, using the Latin script.’

when the Popular Front became a minority;¹⁴ 3) the Communist government (2001-2009), and the stabilization of the volatile party scene in the decade following the Soviet Union's collapse (Protsyk, O. & Osoian, 2000: 8); 4) the post-Communist phase (2009 to present), characterized by acute political instability. Calls for reunification with Romania in the early period of ethnic mobilization alarmed the Russian-speakers east of the river Dniestr/Nistru (Transnistria). Following fighting in 1991-92, in which the Transnistrians were supported by Russian forces, Transnistria declared independence. In addition to polarizing the population (Protsyk, O. & Osoian, 2000: 4), the declaration of independence created a *de facto* separate state, which negotiations have been unable to resolve, resulting in a conflict that remains 'frozen'. While in Moldova (minus Transnistria) the state language, as stated in the Constitution, is Moldovan, east of the river the Russian language predominates.¹⁵

Under the Communist Party leadership (2001-2009) there were attempts by former Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin and Communist MPs to legislate so as to make Russian an official language alongside Moldovan, as well as to reintroduce Russian as a compulsory subject in all schools. The opposition resisted these attempts. Following the change of government in 2009 there has been a greater emphasis on the promotion of the state language, referred to primarily as 'Romanian' rather than 'Moldovan'.¹⁶ Indeed, while the Communists have tended to refer to the state language as 'Moldovan', nationalists and unionists (those who sought unification with Romania) have referred to it as 'Romanian'. These conceptual positions have been referred to as 'Moldovanism' and 'Romanism', revealing a bifurcation of majority nationalism by which the first position is 'state-seeking' and the second aiming at unification (Protsyk & Osoian 2000:14-15).

Since 2009 the country has been affected by severe political instability. Despite the Communist Party winning 49.48% of the votes in the parliamentary elections of April 2009, more than any other competing party, it became an opposition party when a governing coalition was formed in August 2009 - the Alliance for European Integration (AIE). President (since 2001) Vladimir Voronin resigned in September 2009, with a deadlock in the election of a new president

¹⁴ This year the Democratic Agrarian Party gained a majority.

¹⁵ The legislation of the breakaway region recognized Russian as an official language of Transnistria, together with Moldovan (in the Cyrillic alphabet) and Ukrainian. In addition to Transnistria, the Bălți district in Northern Moldova is a predominantly Russian-speaking area. Gagauz and Bulgarian are also spoken in the South of the country. The 1994 Moldovan Constitution guarantees autonomy to Gagauzia, as well as to Transnistria. In addition, in 1994 Moldova adopted the 'Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia'.

¹⁶ See the state language logo 'ro' on the government's website: <http://www.gov.md/homepage.php?l=ro>.

that lasted until March 2012.¹⁷ Yet, another political crisis was precipitated a year later, when the government run by the AIE (comprising the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party) collapsed following a confidence vote and amid accusations of corruption, and after the Liberal Democratic Party left the coalition. The vote led to Prime Minister Vlad Filat (and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party) being ousted following a confidence motion brought by the Communist Party. In April 2013 there was a vote by the Parliament to dismiss its speaker, Marian Lupu (and Filat's former ally in the Alliance), further aggravating the political crisis. Hence, Moldova's historical background and recent events are characterised by a highly unstable political environment, and the politicisation of language issues, with the crystallization of two effectively exclusive forms of language-based identities.

The Soviets' Institutionalisation of Nationhood

Part of the explanation for the linguistic divide in contemporary Moldovan society can be traced back to Soviet policies, and particularly its 'institutionalized definitions of nationhood' (Brubaker 1994). The concept of 'nationality'¹⁸ occupied a special place in Soviet societal and territorial arrangements. It originated from an acute need for diversity management, given the multitude of ethnic and linguistic groups, with varying forms of loyalties and belongings, present in the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet doctrines did not see ethnic groups as immutable and fixed, but able to evolve, these groups also had an essence, found in specific traits and biologically inherited.¹⁹ These primordial characteristics would develop, and evolve, under Soviet guidance (Hirsch 2005: 267). This concept came to be seen as the groups' 'coming together' (*sbliuzhenie*): while maintaining some internal traits groups would progress towards the creation of the *sovietskii narod* (Soviet people). Soviet policies saw the 'coming together' through the creation of the (supra-national) *sovietskii narod*, which would mark the transcendence of difference, flattened out by communism (Hirsch 2005: 316-7).

The overcoming of difference was, however, a long-term (and highly ambitious if unethical) goal. The existing diversity required immediate attention, and mechanisms to manage

¹⁷ The parliament having failed to elect a new president following Vorinin's resignation, Mihai Ghimpu became acting president. The parliament was dissolved in September 2010 after a constitutional referendum on a reform proposed by Ghimpu, which failed to support the reform. Marian Lupu was elected Speaker of the Parliament in September 2010, and also served as acting president. In March 2012 Nicolae Timofti was finally elected president in a parliamentary vote.

¹⁸ It is used here in the sense of *natsional'nost* in Russian, or 'ethnic group'.

¹⁹ Although in the 1930s ethnicity was established on the basis of self-identification, this was soon modified, and made to coincide with the parents' ethnicity (in the case of mixed marriages, one could choose the nationality of either parent).

it. This is when the system of institutionalized nationhood came into play. Brubaker argues that the Soviet era saw the institutionalisation of two types of nationality: the ‘territorial and political’, and the ‘ethnocultural and personal’ (Brubaker 1994: 47). In the first case, the larger ethnic groups were assigned ‘their own’ territories (such as the MSSR for the Moldavians²⁰), with a form of ethnic federalism; at the same time, each individual also had a nationality (an ethnocultural identity), regardless of place of residence. One’s nationality was reinforced through the census takers, and in its being specified in internal Soviet passports and all documents, obliging people to continue to restate their ethnicity (Gorenburg 2003). It created a system where ‘territorial nationhood’ and ‘personal nationality’ existed simultaneously, and in tension with each other. Among the various consequences, two are of relevant to our discussion. First, nationhood became a fundamental social category. This was done, effectively, to contain nationalist movements – to allow their expression of national identity only within the framework of Soviet institutionalized nationhood. Second, national identity was codified at the *sub-state* level, and maintained distinct from statehood and citizenship (Brubaker 1994: 49-51) – with the notion of ‘Soviet people’ being constructed as supranational. This is why nationalism in the Soviet Union was equated with *ethnic* nationalism (Opalski 2001: 301). The emphasis on nationality did not leave much space for the development of a civic consciousness - or a form of statehood that was not based on nationality. Soviet values being, arguably, artificially constructed, and conceived as supranational, it is likely that individuals continued to fall back on ethnicity for self-identification.

Nationality was also at the basis of much of the organisation of Soviet society. The local administration of the republics was partially transferred to local (ethnic) leaders through the process of ‘indigenisation’ (*korenizatsiya*).²¹ Local leaders filled positions in the local administration, the local Communist party, the judiciary and industry; overall, in local government titular groups were overrepresented, and affirmative action policies continued up to *perestroika* (Gorenburg 2003; Slezkine 1994). Language was considered a salient ethnic marker in the Soviet Union, which led to the establishment of an education system in multiple languages.²² Persons belonging to minorities were often required to study the mother tongue determined by their ethnicity, regardless of personal linguistic preferences (Slezkine 1994: 432).

²⁰ A territorial unit bearing the name of the titular nationality.

²¹ *Korenizatsiya* was a formal policy only in the 1920s and 1930s, but preferential treatment continued in the following decades (Brubaker 1994: 58).

²² However, schools in titular languages continued to decrease in number throughout the Soviet Union (Gorenburg 2003). Moreover, while minority languages were promoted through education, Russian tended to dominate in most spheres of language use, as it served as language of inter-ethnic communication throughout the Soviet Union.

One's mother tongue is referred to in Russian as *rodnoy yazyk*, which can be translated loosely as the language of one's kin, or of one's ethnic group. This is why, when the Soviet census-takers inquired on one's *rodnoy yazyk*, respondents have tended to cite the language of the ethnic group, even when they were more fluent in, or used more commonly, Russian, or when they did not know the language of the group at all. In this manner, language became strongly associated with one's ethnicity. Moreover, by crystallizing, through its institutionalisation, individual ethno-cultural and linguistic identity, the Soviet Union created a form of 'institutionalized multinationality' (Brubaker 1994: 49). It resulted in an agglomeration of ethnic units - or 'an exhaustive and mutually exclusive set of national groups' (Brubaker 1994: 49). The affirmative action measures noted above further contributed to an artificial division between groups.

Where does this leave Moldova at the end of the MSSR? The breakup of the Soviet Union was in line with the political-territorial structure that already existed - Union republics becoming independent states. It gave states the opportunity to match the territorial units (and their existing institutions), to ethno-cultural identity in the creation of new polities. Tolz argues that Russia (and other former Soviet republics such as Moldova), faced with the need to create a post-Soviet state from what was once a Union republic, had to reconcile two elements: '*civic* identities, based on inclusive citizenship, *and* [...] exclusive *ethnic* identities, based on [...] culture, religion, language, and common ancestry' [italics added] (Tolz 1998: 993). Such a process would involve forging an overarching identity for the state's multiple groups, while at the same time enabling such groups to rediscover their own cultures, languages and/or religions that might have been marginalised (in some cases repressed) during the Soviet period. It would result in a combination of civic and ethnic attributes, to replace the vacuum left by 'Soviet values' further to the Union's collapse.

Two problems are linked to this. The first is that, as noted, the post-Soviet world has hardly a set of civic principles that may become constituent parts of a new form of statehood. Minorities and elites of successor states are accustomed to conceiving themselves as members of *distinct nations*, and in this manner they also conceive the state in ethno-cultural, rather than civic, terms (Brubaker 1994: 69). The second relates to the difficulties in shaping a post-Soviet identity specifically in Moldova. In the process of de-Sovietization, peoples of newly-independent states reach for elements of their pre-Soviet past; in Moldova, the pre-Soviet past is linked to the Romanian one, and has led to some Romanian-speakers seeking reunification, or at least closer links, with Romania. This fuels antagonism between the two main language groups,

as it tends to marginalize Russian-speakers. The animosity between the two main groups, which continuously reinforces the gulf between them, is linked to notions of linguistic justice, addressed in the next section.

Linguistic Justice in Old and New States

Linguistic justice is not a straight-forward concept, or an objective that is easily attained. While a (liberal) state aims to be neutral, treating all citizens and groups equally, in fact it is hardly possible to create conditions of perfect equality for all linguistic groups - and in all spheres of language use - within a state (Wright 2001: 48). Wright argues that '[l]anguage choice is a zero-sum game', by which the use of one language implies the non-use of another. It can lead to a situation in which the enjoyment of linguistic rights by a group can be perceived by another group as a limitation of their linguistic rights (Wright 2001: 48). Thus, a challenge is posed when the state language (the language of the dominant group) is placed at a higher level than the language of one or more (vulnerable) minority(ies) in a state. Kymlicka & Patten write:

[T]he very process of selecting a single language can be seen as inherently exclusionary and unjust. Where political debate is conducted in the language of the majority group, linguistic minorities are at a disadvantage, and must either invest the time and effort needed to shift as best they to the dominant language or accept political marginalization (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 16).

The accommodation of multiple language groups can only achieve partial results: while states can be officially bilingual or multilingual, arrangements are usually made on the basis of territoriality, effectively creating individual localities that are virtually monolingual (Wright 2001: 48).²³ It is not only at the level of the state that conditions of linguistic asymmetry are created. It is also the case at the global level. Thus, de Swaan (2001) points out that people tend to learn dominant languages for their region ('central languages'); subsequently they learn languages that are dominant across regions ('supercentral languages'); and, ultimately, they seek to learn a language widespread at the global level – currently the case with English ('hypercentral language'). Difficulties in guaranteeing linguistic neutrality, devoid of asymmetries, has led to attempts to present language as merely *instrumental*; if language is presented as 'just' a channel for communication, the choice of state language can be seen as a pragmatic one, which does not carry symbolic and political undertones (Kymlicka & Grin 2003: 8). This is far from the truth. Language is linked to power (Wright 2001) and identity, as well as being saturated with meaning.

²³ For example, in Switzerland and Belgium.

Hannum (1991: 1441) notes that failure to grant linguistic rights has been ‘the hallmark of the repression of minorities’.

Within a state, linguistic justice can arguably be attained when members of *both* the minority and the majority learn each other’s language, with the creation of symmetric bilingualism. However, this type of bilingualism also implies a proliferation of translations – a system that is the more complex the more languages it involves. Clearly, an officially recognised lingua franca leads to enhanced efficiency by enabling direct communication without translations and interpretation; yet one cannot have this efficiency without a form of asymmetric bilingualism (and possible perceptions of unfair treatment by linguistic minorities). How to solve this conundrum? Van Parijs argues that the ability to communicate directly with all members of society’s multiple groups creates a ‘public good’. Justice is brought about by ensuring that members of *both* the majority and minority groups bear the costs for it, with linguistic minorities receiving compensation for their direct costs, as well as their time and effort, in learning the language of the dominant group (van Parijs 2003: 157). If members of the majority were not required to provide compensation, the public good would be enjoyed by them at no cost, resulting in ‘free riding’ (van Parijs 2003: 155). The linguistic asymmetric structure of a state is therefore seen as being amenable to correction through a movement of funds.

A different approach is offered by Laitin & Reich (2003), who stress that any decision as to the possible preservation of minority languages ought to be approached through democratic means. Society as a whole ought to decide - through fair means such as voting - whether minority languages are sufficiently valued as a common good to be preserved through active measures that employ public resources. Effectively, minority languages, if not generally considered a common good, should be left to progressively wither. However, this position runs the risk of creating a ‘tyranny of the majority’, with spaces for minorities being progressively squeezed out of the public space. It is exactly the lesser-used languages, whose intrinsic worth might not be immediately apparent to the various societal groups, that tend to be in need of protection – sometimes to prevent their disappearance. More relevant to the topic of this article is the fact that the approaches proposed by Van Parijs and Laitin & Reich do not take into account the condition of ‘reversed’ minority. The expression refers to a numerical majority within a state that is, despite its size, in a disadvantaged position,²⁴ including when its status, or the status of its language, has been progressively devalued. Movements of borders, and colonial and post-colonial situations,

²⁴ For example, Black South Africans in apartheid South Africa (Ermacora 1983: 284)

are the backdrop of these cases. In these situations, the scenario in which the above theories were formulated is turned on its head.

The condition of ‘reversed’ minority is common in post-Soviet states. The languages of numerical (titular) majorities are in fact ‘minorized majority languages’ (majority languages that necessitate the protection normally reserved to endangered languages); in turn, Russian is a ‘majorized minority language’ (a language spoken by a numerical minority but *de facto* with the prestige of a majority language) (Skutnabb-Kangas 1995).²⁵ Rivalry often ensues between the titular group and the once-dominant group - the Russians – while the past Russian domination can lead to a discourse of victimization by the titular nationality.²⁶ As a reaction to the inferior status to which the titular group was relegated during the Soviet era, post-Soviet states often aim at reversing the power dynamics by becoming ‘nationalizing states’ - states that effectively attempt to build a nation-state around the titular nationality (Brubaker 1994). The method chosen is that of ‘one language-one state’, rather than engaging in ‘state-building’ with a multicultural liberal approach (Kymlicka & Grin 2003: 25). Titular languages acquire a symbolic meaning, with a role not only in nation-building but also in identity construction.²⁷ Of the 14 former Soviet republics,²⁸ only in one Russian is a state language placed at the same level as the titular language (Belarus); in two more countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) Russian is recognised as an ‘official language’ but not a ‘state language’ (legally, it is placed at a level inferior to the titular languages). In all other post-Soviet countries the titular language is the only state language. These states have opted for ‘nationalism’ over ‘nationism’ – in Fishman’s sense of the expressions (Fishman 1968). In the case of ‘nationism’, the aim is state-building, which is, overall, civic – a process with which multilingualism can coexist, and even be a factor in its legitimization; with ‘nationalism’, a (nation-) state is built around an ethnicity that tends to use its own language as legitimization, and where language becomes the main symbol of the nation. A close nexus is established between ‘language politics’ and ‘identity construction’ (Stepanenko 2003: 123).²⁹

A post-independence drive for emancipation is also common in colonial contexts. During foreign domination, a colonial language (the language of the rulers), as *lingua franca*, acquires a

²⁵ See also Kymlicka & Grin (2003: 5). Estonia, Latvian and Lithuanian are ‘endemic languages’ – spoken in one country only – and with a relatively low number of speakers: approximately 1 million, 1 ½ million and 3 million speakers respectively (Järve 2003: 92). Such ‘small’ languages offer limited professional and financial prospects.

²⁶ For example, in the Baltic states at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Järve 2003: 93).

²⁷ This point is made, in relation to Ukraine, by Stepanenko (2003: 118-123).

²⁸ Excluding Russia, formerly the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

²⁹ In neighbouring Ukraine, processes of state-building through Ukrainization have ascribed to language the role of the primary identity marker (Stepanenko 2003: 123).

different function from the language of the ruled: the former is used in official and public settings, and is a source of prestige, while the latter is employed in informal situations. Those aiming at social mobility often tend to linguistically assimilate so as to rise to the ruling political class (Fishman 1977); in this manner, the local language becomes increasingly associated with lack of social prestige, exclusion and poverty (Ferguson 1959). Thus, ultimately a colonial language creates a sense of inferiority in the ruled group; to continue to use the colonial language after independence would signify a prolongation of such inferiority (Wright 2004: 72). In the former Soviet Union, the use of the Russian language can similarly be interpreted as newly-independent states continuing to be under Russia's sphere of influence, and/or it can be an uncomfortable reminder of Soviet rule.³⁰ It is not by chance that in post-Soviet republics the first laws adopted were those declaring titular languages the official languages of the new states, displacing Russian.³¹ In the case of Moldova, the rejection of the the Cyrillic alphabet was also a sign of emancipation from the Russian language: Moldovans rejected the main factor of that separated them from the Romanians (King 1999: 3).

Yet the seeds of the 'nationalizing state', Brubaker argues, were effectively planted during the Soviet Union.³² The Union *republics* were given a taste of autonomy, but remained effectively dependent on the central Communist apparatus. Thus, the republics did not truly 'belong' to the titular nationalities, although in principle they were established as 'their own' territories. The opportunity to correct this lacuna was provided with independence (ibid, 66). The new states have attempted to make the ethno-cultural element converge with the boundaries of the states – so as to eliminate the tension that had existed between Soviet territorial structure and its ethno-cultural nations.³³ Meanwhile, the saliency of ethnicity in the Soviet period, and the fact that nationality was a clear 'boundary marker', has led to ethnic minorities perceiving themselves as belonging to different nations from the titular nationalities (Brubaker, 1994: 67-68). Mirror attitudes are present in the numerical majority - the titular nationality. This exclusionary approach to national identification, Brubaker argues, is resilient, and survives even when the dividing line between nations has blurred through intermarriage and assimilation. Groups continue to be '*represented as distinct*' [italics added] (ibid, 68), given the perceptions of belonging to (separate)

³⁰ See Kymlicka & Grin (2003: 24), in relation to the frequent use of Russian words in Armenian.

³¹ In Moldova this happened already in 1989, before the declaration of independence.

³² With this the author is far from arguing that there was no national identity prior to the formation of the Soviet Union – in the cases of Ukraine and Armenia for example (see Suny 1998: 96-105). However, these nationalistic sentiments were primarily confined to the local intelligentsia, and the Soviet Union can effectively have acted to reinforce and popularise them.

³³ Referred to above (The Soviets' Institutionalisation of Nationhood - p.5).

nations. Thus, in post-Soviet states minorities themselves tend to relate to ‘a form of citizenship that is mediated by nationality’. They seek to protect their collective rights as ethno-cultural groups against a real or perceived ethnocentric state established by the titular nation (ibid, 68). This position tends to prevail even though successor states have some interest in developing inclusive forms of citizenship - whether through incentives of international organisations (the European Union and Council of Europe) or powerful neighbours (first of all – Russia). With exclusionary identities, and legacies of Soviet nationalities policies, tensions between the titular nationality and other groups are hard to avoid.

Soviet and post-Soviet Realities

Many of the existing tensions originated in the Soviet period. Institutional arrangements in the MSSR aimed at guaranteeing first and foremost that the needs of Russian-speakers (many of whom were recent migrants) would be met, generating feelings of resentment in representatives of the titular nationality. In the MSSR Russian became the language of the urban *intelligentsia*, higher in prestige than Romanian/Moldovan – although formally Russian and Moldovan enjoyed equal status as official languages. Russian was the language used by the government, in higher education as well as being the language inter-ethnic communication. Romanian-speakers in the MSSR had to learn Russian, and switched to Russian when communicating with Russians (and other Russian-speakers), while the latter did not tend, nor were they expected, to learn Romanian/Moldovan. Despite this, and although Russians tended to perceive the Soviet Union in its entirety as ‘their own’ territory, in the republics they resented the affirmative action benefiting titular nationalities (Brubaker 1994: 59; 68). Moreover, Russianness was effectively truncated – in the sense that the Soviet Union was not intended to progress towards a Russian nation-state, and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) had fewer titular institutions than the other republics. Slezkine provides an illustrative analogy: he takes Vareikis’ 1924 comparison³⁴ of the USSR to a communal apartment, in which each room is occupied by a national unit, except for the Russians. Instead, the Russians are allocated, in the centre of the apartment, ‘a large and amorphous space not clearly defined as a room, unmarked by national paraphernalia, unclaimed by “its own” nation [...]’ (Slezkine 1994: 415) Thus, although the Russians were the dominant group in the Soviet Union, they did not have a room of their own.

³⁴ I. Vareikis and I. Zelenskii, *Natsional’no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Sredne-Aziatskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924), 59, cited in Slezkine (1994: 415).

In addition to the old resentment vis-à-vis non-Russian nationalities, Russians in post-Soviet republics find themselves numerical minorities, having experienced a significant drop in status after being the dominant group of a superpower. Many wish to retain the rights enjoyed during the Soviet Union, and fear (real or perceived) ethnocratic tendencies by the new governments (Brubaker 1994: 68). At the same time, the claims of Russians, as well as of other minorities, are a challenge to the ‘nationalizing state’. The Moldovan government continues to struggle to upgrade Romanian/Moldovan to a widely-recognised state language, and to reduce the role of the Russian language. On the one hand, census data³⁵ show that approximately three quarters of the population predominantly use Romanian/Moldovan rather than Russian (or other languages); moreover, the status of Romanian/Moldovan has been enhanced since independence: there appears to be an increasing openness to the learning of the state language, particularly among young people (ACFC 2009: §146). On the other hand, old perceptions persist – sustaining views of Russian as the language of education, business and, generally, power (Ciscel 2006:584; Ciscel, 2008: 380). Russian continues to dominate many areas of social life in Moldova, being the language of choice of a sizeable part of the business community (one should also note Moldova’s economic links with Russia). Limited resources are allocated to the teaching of the state language to minorities, including Russians, resulting in insufficient bilingual teachers and teaching materials, as well as in few incentives and opportunities, particularly in regions where persons belonging to minorities are concentrated (ACFC 2009: §147).

Additionally, persons belonging to Moldova’s (non-Russian) national minorities, such as Ukrainians and Gagauz, remain primarily Russian-speaking. One of the reasons is that the teaching of minority languages is provided only in schools with Russian as main language of instruction (ACFC 2009, §146).³⁶ As a consequence, persons belonging to minorities other than Russians study the state language as *third* language,³⁷ frequently resulting in lack of fluency. This type of educational system can increase the tendency of persons belonging to national minorities to identify more with the Russian minority, rather than their own minority group. Indeed, in some areas, such as regions with high concentrations of Ukrainians, most of the teaching takes place in Russian (ACFC 2009, §137-138). As in the Soviet period, minorities continue to use Russian as

³⁵ Cited above (see Moldova: A Divided Society).

³⁶ In 2008, 280 schools had the state language as main language of instruction, while 145 schools operated in Russian but also taught one minority language and the state language (ACFC 2009: §136). According to the Activity Report of the Ministry of Education for the year 2011, 79% of students who received secondary school diplomas had studied in the state language and 21% in Russian. In higher education, 78,4% studied in Romanian, 19,5% in Russian, 1,3% in English and 0,8% in other languages.

³⁷ The teaching of the state language is compulsory in all schools.

the language of inter-ethnic communication. It reinforces the strong polarization between the two main language spheres.

An important aspect of the deadlock in resolving the linguistic divide is the ‘hybrid’ status of the Russian language in Moldova. While the Moldovan Constitution states that Moldovan, in the Latin script, is the state language, it also stipulates that ‘the State shall recognize and protect the right to the preservation, development and functioning of Russian and of other languages spoken in the territory of the country’. As noted, Russian is defined in Article 3 of the Language Law as ‘language of inter-ethnic communication’. Therefore, it seems to be placed in a third category between those of ‘official’ and ‘minority’ language. Another example is provided by the Law on the Rights of Persons belonging to National Minorities and the Legal Status of their Organizations of 12 July 2001. Article 6(1) reads:

The State shall guarantee the fulfilment of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities to pre-school education, primary education, secondary education (general and vocational), higher and postgraduate education *in Moldovan and Russian*, and shall create the conditions for fulfilling their right to education and instruction in the mother tongue (Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Hebrew, Yiddish, etc.) [italics added].³⁸

Here minority languages are treated separately from Russian, which instead is referred to in the article together with the state language.

This linguistic polarization is combined with a degree of mutual resentment that did not subside with independence. Both the main linguistic groups have noted a lack of ‘respect’ from the other side: post-independence ethnographic research by Cisel (2007) points to frustration among the Romanian-speaking population, due to the fact that the state language continues not to be spoken by much of Moldova’s population.³⁹ At the same time Russian-speakers perceive their language as being downgraded and devalued. The reference to ‘respect’ is linked to a perception that the way the language group is treated by the rival group is ‘unfair’, and therefore connected

³⁸ Almost the same wording is present in Article 18 of the Language Law. On the right to education, see also Article 35(2) of the Constitution, guaranteeing the right to choose the language of education; and Article 8 of the 1995 Law on Education: ‘[t]he State shall ensure [...] the right to choose the language of education and instruction at all levels and stages of education’.

³⁹ Already in 1994, Chinn wrote: ‘the Romanian population [...] is becoming increasingly frustrated with its inability to use its own language for everyday activities such as calling a taxi or making a purchase in a store.’ (Chinn 1994: 309). The 1989 Language Law required civil servants to know both the state language and Russian by 1994. While Romanian-speakers tended to be already bilingual, many Russian-speakers have failed to become so, citing various difficulties in achieving bilingualism, including the absence of favourable conditions to acquire new language skills (Chinn 1994: 309). By 2013 there had been only moderate progress. Among the initiatives in this area is the project ‘The Language Training Programme for Public Servants in Minority Populated Areas of Moldova’, implemented by the organization ANTEM in cooperation with the Moldovan authorities and also with the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. See ACFC (2009: §146).

to notions of justice. As members of each group feel that identity is menaced by the other group, the duality of ‘us’ and ‘them’ continues to be reinforced. The threat, whether real or imagined, triggers protectionist tendencies.⁴⁰ We come to an impasse, by which the complexities related to language, and the issue of linguistic injustice, remain unresolved.

Language Politics

In addition to creating societal frictions, language issues have become embroiled in political battles in various post-Soviet states. The politicisation of language is not new.⁴¹ It is also no easy task to determine to what extent political leaders’ references to language issues are part of political machinations or reflect a genuine desire to reassert one’s identity, and that of one’s ethno-linguistic group, through language. Some authors see a much greater role being played by political interests and elites’ political manoeuvring. According to Schöpflin (2000), post-Communist elites have followed an opportunistic, rather than idealistic, logic – aiming at retaining their political power through the maintenance of ‘old patterns of loyalties’, with the help of nationalistic rhetoric as and when needed.

On a similar vein, Brubaker argues:

Soviet and post-Soviet “national struggles” were and are not the struggles of nations, but the struggles of institutionally constituted national elites – that is elites institutionally defined *as national* – and aspiring counter-elites (Brubaker, 1994: 48).

In relation to Ukraine, Stepanenko maintains that politicians have been more concerned with their personal interests rather than those of language groups. In practice the support for the Ukrainian language by the state (and Ukrainian political leaders) has been a ‘ritualistic political act’, to satisfy the nationalistic feelings of a sizeable portion of the electorate (Stepanenko 2003: 118). Despite the adoption of legislation aiming at ‘Ukrainizing’ Ukraine, the country continues to be bilingual, having reached, by inertia, a ‘language balance’ (Stepanenko 2003: 121).⁴² Rather than result-driven language policies, in practice a *laissez-faire* approach has been embraced. The reasons, Stepanenko suggests, might be due more to political considerations and the sensitivity of language issues rather than the practical difficulties in Ukrainization. The nationalistic rhetoric is

⁴⁰ In the case of Ukraine, and post-Soviet Ukrainization processes, Stepanenko notes a resistance by Russians (and Russian-speaking minorities such as Belarusians, and even Russified, Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians). It has been linked to a threat to their linguistic identity. Tensions are generated by the dominant ideology of ‘one state, one language’ in a bilingual country (Stepanenko 2003: 117-118), and a need to defend (minority) identity against the state.

⁴¹ See also, in relation to the former Yugoslavia, Pupavac (2003).

⁴² With Ukrainian serving as official language in government and education, whilst Russian is more actively used in the sphere of informal and unofficial communication.

used in a controlled, manipulative manner to pursue particularistic interests - as well as with caution, so as not to excessively upset the natural balance between dominant linguistic groups.

What about Moldova? What is apparent is that the issue of language is politicised and divisive. Politicians have tended to embrace either the position of ‘Moldovanism’ or ‘Romanism’; the differences in approaches between the Communists and nationalists have already been noted; in particular, the Communists’ efforts have concentrated on the recognition of Russian as an official language alongside Moldovan/Romanian. A closer look to this basic distinction reveals a more nuanced picture. Some politicians have shifted between positions; for example, Former President (1990-1997) Mircea Snegur went from a strong pro-Moldovanist position to a more moderate one, which has been linked to electoral maneuvering in the period prior to the 1996 presidential elections (Protsyk & Osoian 2000: 16). In September 2012 Marian Lupu⁴³ surprised the rest of the ruling Alliance for European Integration when he stated that he had ‘changed his mind’ and that Moldovans spoke ‘Moldovan’, not ‘Romanian’, as he had asserted in the past.⁴⁴ One can also note that while Moldovan politics appeared to have solidified into two camps in 2009 (the Alliance for European Integration - AIE - and the Communists), such camps soon developed into fluid, unstable alliances (Wilson 2013).⁴⁵ The formerly clear division between pro-European *and* Communist (pro-Russia and pro-Russian) political poles has become blurred. Individual parties of the AIE have at times joined forces with the Communist Party to undermine each other.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Liberal Democratic Party, while being overall pro-reform, pro-European and pro-Romanian, has sought to gain as broad popular support as possible, by attempting to represent multiple interests. And although the Communists direct their loyalty and allegiance to the East, they have also had a pragmatic approach to the subject of European integration.

⁴³ Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament and leader of the Democratic Party, which is part of the ruling coalition. Lupu was acting president of Moldova between December 2010 and March 2012.

⁴⁴ “Lupu spune „Nu” limbii române” [Lupu says “No” to the Romanian language], *JurnalTV*, 25 September 2012. <http://www.jurnaltv.md/ro/news/lupu-spune-nu-limbii-romane-396153/>

⁴⁵ While Filat was ousted following a motion brought by the Communist Party - whose leader, Voronin, accused the government of worsening the country’s economic situation - other leaders from *within* the coalition had called for Filat’s resignation, due to infighting and internal rivalries. Wilson (2013) notes that the Liberal party leader Mihai Ghimpu had been ‘obsessed’ with removing Filat. There has also been intense rivalry between the Democratic Party and Liberal Democratic Party – the latter financed by Vladimir Plahotniuc, Moldova’s only oligarch and media mogul (since 2012 with over 50% media share).

⁴⁶ Filat used Communist votes to remove Plahotniuc from his position of deputy chair of parliament on 15 February 2013. On April 25th, it was a mix of Liberal Democrat and Communist votes that dismissed Democratic Party leader Marian Lupu as speaker of the Parliament (Wilson 2013).

Against this background, there might have been cases of political manipulation, where parties seek to exploit language and identity issues to gain supporters, by fuelling grievances. This might have been the case in confrontations in the summer of 2012 in Bălți, in the North of Moldova, where there is a concentration of Russian-speakers. During a ‘Union March’ (promoting unification with Romanian), a group of (anti-unionist) activists, primarily Russian-speakers, resorted to violence against the police that had been summoned to protect the marchers.⁴⁷ In another case, Vladimir Mișin, an ex-Communist Party member, declared in 2012 that he wished to create a party primarily for the representation of Russian-speakers.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, on 31 August 2012 (national Language Day), Dorin Chirtoacă, mayor of Chisinau and Liberal Party MP, stated that it was only ‘a matter of time’ before ‘Romanian’ would be used in the Constitution.⁴⁹ There have been calls in the parliament to ban the name ‘Romanian’ for the state language altogether.⁵⁰ The issue rose again to prominence in March 2013, when Ana Gutu, an MP of the pro-Romanianist Liberal Party, submitted a case to the Moldovan Constitutional Court on the interpretation of Article 13, stating that ‘Moldovan written in the Latin script’ is the official language of Moldova. She argued that the expression ‘Moldovan’ should be replaced with ‘Romanian’, as the latter is, she submitted, the only scientifically valid expression to designate the language.⁵¹ Gutu also proposed a new draft law on language policy.⁵²

⁴⁷ “Violențe la Bălți!” [Violence in Balti], *jurnal.md*, 5 August 2012, <http://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/violen-e-la-bal-i-video-live-text-224673/>

⁴⁸ “Mișin: În Parlament trebuie să răsună limba rusă!” (In Parliament the Russian language must resound), *Unimedia*, 7 June 2012, <http://unimedia.info/stiri/video-misin-In-parlament-trebuie-sa-rasune-limba-rusa-48629.html>; “Mișin: Vom readuce limba rusă în Parlament” (We will bring the Russian language back in the Parliament), 7.06.2012, <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/miin-vom-readuce-limba-rus-n-parlament-230866-rom.html>.

⁴⁹ “Chirtoacă: Limba română în Constituție - o chestiune de timp” [Chirtoacă : Romanian language in the Constitution – a matter of time], 31 August 2012, *Unimedia*. <http://unimedia.info/stiri/video-chirtoaca-limba-romana-in-constitutie---o-chestiune-de-timp-51657.html>.

⁵⁰ They were followed by street demonstrations (Cisecel 2010: 24).

⁵¹ “Ana Guțu vrea să obțină pentru limba română statutul binemeritat” [Ana Gutu wants the Romanian language to have the status it deserves], *Unimedia*, 30 March 2013. <http://unimedia.info/stiri/doc-ana-gutu-vrea-sa-obtina-pentru-limba-romana-statutul-binemeritat-58976.html>. It is noteworthy that a 2012 public opinion poll by the Institute for Public Policy revealed that 65% of the respondents believe that the name of the state language should be ‘Moldovan’, and 22.7% ‘Romanian’. 7.6% said the state language should be ‘Moldovan’, specifying ‘Romanian’ in brackets; 2% believed that the state language should simply not be mentioned at all in the Constitution “Moldovenii vor ca limba oficială a RM să fie moldovenească” [Moldovans want the official language of Moldova to be Moldovan], *JurnalMd*, 20 November 2012, <http://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/bop-moldovenii-vor-ca-limba-oficiala-a-rm-sa-fie-moldoveneasca-doc-674766/>.

⁵² According to the authors, the draft law would stimulate the integration of linguistic minorities in Moldova, promoting the Romanian language, while also protecting minority languages. However, the draft law also sparked reactions from the Russian-language media in Moldova and Russia, which criticized the initiative as detrimental to the Russian language. “Proiectul Anei Guțu cu privire la politicile lingvistice a stârnit reacții aprinse în rândul jurnaliștilor ruși” [Ana Gutu’s draft law on language policy sparked a heated response among Russian journalists], *Unimedia*, 4 April 2013, <http://unimedia.info/stiri/Proiectul-Anei-Gutu-cu-privire-la-politicile-lingvistice-a-starnit-reacii-aprinse-in-randul-jurnalitilor-ru-59188.html>.

The introduction of Russian as a second state language has been used as part of political platforms. This objective has appealed not only to ethnic Russians but other minorities as well, given their frequent lack of fluency in Romanian/Moldovan. It has been pursued by mainstream parties, as ethnic minority parties have been unable to enter parliament.⁵³ Thus, the mainstream parties incorporated political slogans with ethnic undertones, while at the same time these parties offered a springboard for representatives of minorities to rise to prominence (Protsyk & Osoian 2000: 9-10).⁵⁴ However, despite the Communists' control of the parliament and presidency in the 2000s, they ultimately refrained from taking practical steps to indeed make Russian a second official language, the electorate being split on this issue (Protsyk 2007: 9-10). Thus, the Moldovan political scene, as far as it relates to language policies, might simply amount to a façade of ideologically-driven language policies, with politicians in fact embracing a pragmatic (and utilitarian) approach. Indeed, language can easily be exploited by populist politicians, just because of its powerful role in nation-building, and its symbolic role in the struggle between ethnic groups. When language issues become embroiled in political battles there is a shift from *language policies* to *language politics*. Moldovan society finds itself in a 'politics trap' that implies an impasse in resolving tensions linked to language and addressing feelings of injustice.

Addressing Injustice?

The fact that titular nationalities in post-Soviet states have embraced the 'nation-state' model reveals a mental image of what a *normal* country should look like – one has one language for one nation (Kymlicka & Grin 2003: 15). The introduction of this form of 'normality' aims at correcting the 'abnormality' of the USSR, and its artificial multi-ethnicity – with the Soviets drawing or shifting borders, the migration of Russians to Union republics and forced displacement of partial or entire groups of people, including on the grounds of ethnicity. Thus, Kymlicka & Grin (2003) argue that, in the post-Communist world, there is a highly normative discourse built around feelings of entitlement in relation to language: language claims 'embody views about what is 'right' and 'proper', about what is 'owed to', or 'deserved by' particular groups' (p.23). It is a utilitarian approach, which is not measured against costs and benefits, but

⁵³ For example, the Socio-Political Movement "Ravnopravie" (SPMR) [Equal Rights] and Gagauz parties. The 2007 Law on Political Parties prohibits the establishment of political parties on the basis of ethnicity (as well as on the basis of language, religion, gender, wealth or social status). Law on Political Parties No. 294-XVI of 21 December 2007, at Article 3(6).

⁵⁴ The Communist Party between 1994 and 2009 had on average 61.65% Moldovan/Romanians MPs and 35.92% minorities (Ukrainian, Russian, Gagauz and others), through inclusive recruitment – while centre right parties had 100% Moldovan/Romanian MPs. Russians have been overrepresented in the Moldovan parliament (8.20% representation for a 5.90% population) (Protsyk & Osoian 2000:11-19).

rather reflects people's projections of 'the appropriate status' of languages and their speakers (p.22). Different narratives exist one alongside the other: while several Romanian-speakers wish to address past injustices, the Russian-speakers can easily interpret as unjust the lowering of the status of the Russian language. Thus, two separate mental images of what the state should look like do not naturally converge, but remain incompatible opposites. Pragmatic solutions such as pecuniary compensation to linguistic minorities are unlikely to address such approaches, as they often stem from deeply-felt grievances.

Conflicting views of justice are not only common in divided societies like Moldova, but are linked to differing individual perceptions as to what norms are just and legitimate. However, the identity markers sharply separating the two main groups in Moldova complicate the bridging of differences. It is also a question mark whether individual members of political elites have a genuine desire to settle language divisions, or wish to exploit language issues for political ends. There may well be multiple (and conflicting) motivating factors driving the discourse around language; for some, this discourse is indissolubly linked to feelings of 'respect' and justice; for others, politics and power struggles also come into the equation. While dire economic conditions in Moldova certainly results in fewer resources to implement language policies (including for the teaching of the state language), specific challenges are posed by differing perceptions and political interests. They complicate the development of a unitary, effective language policy.

Administrative measures 'from above' with regard to language and identity are unlikely to succeed unless there is a careful consideration of the socio-political context and its plurality of views, including on matters relating to identity and cultural affiliations (Stepanenko 2003: 126-127). The development of norms on language policies should follow democratic debate (Grin 2003: 7). According to Patten (2003), while the situations of languages and their speakers differ, there ought to be, at a minimum, basic conditions that are fair in the realisation of one's linguistic identity, without the discriminatory treatment of specific linguistic minorities. Kymlicka & Grin (2003: 14) link fairness to participation: they refer to 'equality of bargaining powers' among different linguistic groups. The 'real world test', which legitimises language policies, is whether the various linguistic groups agreed upon them, through their involvement in decision- and policy-making (ibid). Policy-making should also take into account the fact that in post-Soviet - as in many - societies there is no a level-playing field for various groups, whether social, ethnic or linguistic. This is even more the case when different ethno-linguistic groups have been discriminated in a recent past, and placed at different levels in a hierarchy of social categories.

Yet democratic debate on language policies is complicated by various factors in Moldova. First, as noted, political rivalries mean that language issues are in a ‘politics trap’: more effective policies can only be developed through the (at least partial) de-politicisation of language issues; this would imply a lesser role for realpolitik in the development of language policies, and greater considerations for the welfare of society as a whole. Second, the Soviet discourse of exclusive ethno-cultural and linguistic identities impairs the creation of an overarching, Moldovan identity at the state level. Third, memories of past injustices, and what are perceived as existing injustices, fuel tensions and delay indefinitely the reaching of satisfactory compromises. The insistence upon a state constructed around the model of the ‘nation-state’ is perilous: it can create feelings of injustice, and oppression, in representatives of minorities; indeed, nation-states, when successful, allow only minimal manifestations of ‘difference’, whether in the shape of former colonisers or minorities (Kymlicka & Grin 2003: 25). It further leads to frustration in the titular nationality when only modest progress is made in nationalizing the state. Fourth, feelings of injustice and victimization can be linked, Järve argues (2003: 93), to the ‘weak state syndrome’, effectively ‘a by-product of the post-communist transition.’⁵⁵ A weak identity can easily result in feelings of insecurity as a nation and in a ‘crisis in statehood’, which, in turn, can lead to the anchoring of statehood to linguistic rights.⁵⁶ Similarly, it has been suggested that ‘language debates are dominated by political concerns, rather than linguistic realities, until such time as the new states and the ethnic groups within them no longer feel insecure and threatened’ (Pupavac 2003: 143). Romanian-speaking Moldovans do not appear to feel secure with their identity, oscillating between Moldovanism and Romanism. Meanwhile, the Russians also experience uncertainty as to their identity: suddenly a minority in Moldova after being the dominant group in the Soviet Union, they have been left to carve out a new identity for themselves. Fifth, there are difficulties in involving various stakeholders in decision-making, linked to the limited opportunities for participation and consultation present in contemporary Moldova.⁵⁷

An argument can be made for an integration strategy that places a stronger emphasis on ‘common history, traditions, and a shared society’,⁵⁸ diverting attention from, and desensitizing,

⁵⁵ Järve was specifically referring to the Baltic states.

⁵⁶ See for example Pupavac (2003: 152), in relation to Croatia.

⁵⁷ There are currently no specific mechanisms to incorporate the views of persons belonging to minorities in decision-making, to translate their stated needs into policy, and no corresponding obligations by the authorities in this respect. The Co-ordinating Council of Ethno-cultural Organizations, which operates under the umbrella of the Bureau of Interethnic Relations as an advisory body has not been considered by some minority representatives as an influential body that can impact upon decision-making (see ACFC 2009, §63). It follows a tradition of top-down decision-making that was characteristic of the Soviet Union’s centralized political structure.

⁵⁸ This was the ACFC’s recommendation in commenting on the Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013:

the issue of language. Efforts may be placed on the creation of a form of Moldovan consciousness that allows for non-exclusionary approaches to ethnicity and language. A shift in focus may assist in bridging divides based on exclusive ethno-cultural consciousness, ultimately leading to a lessening of the tensions between Moldova's two main language groups.⁵⁹ At the same time, unity through civic attributes does not forcefully exclude the accommodation of diversity, through Moldova's various groups maintaining, or reinterpreting, their cultural distinctiveness. Yet a post-Soviet, independent Moldova has existed for just a little over two decades: it will take time for ethno-linguistic groups to feel more secure before the exclusivity of their identities, inasmuch as it is defensive and aiming at self-preservation, becomes less rigid, enabling the building of cross-cultural bridges.

Conclusion

Moldova is confronted by the fact that Romanian/Moldovan is not a fully-functioning state language, and is in need of wide-ranging measures for its promotion. Many Moldovan citizens have no or poor knowledge of it, while the language also suffers from a residual post-Soviet perception of its 'inferiority' to Russian. At the same time, Russian has not become official alongside Romanian/Moldovan. The two main groups (and political elites) have followed mutually exclusive narratives and remained largely antagonistic. The primary identification with one of the two language groups impairs the development of an overarching Moldovan consciousness. At the same time, language issues are a source of political controversy, with a continuous entanglement of language and politics.

Linguistic groups perceive themselves as distinct nations, placed antagonistically to each other – drawing from fundamental perceptions reinforced during the Soviet period. It results in a form of exclusivity of identity (Romanian- *or* Russian-speaker). To this divide one has to add the divisions between the perceptions of state language (as 'Moldovan' or 'Romanian'), adding

The new Strategy [...] appears to centre around the Estonian language as the main symbol of common statehood and, consequently, seems to focus on the insufficient State language proficiency of persons belonging to national minorities as a main impediment of integration. [...]. The Advisory Committee therefore considers that more should be done to promote other symbols of common identity than citizenship and language, such as *common history, traditions, and a shared society*. [...] There should be more concrete measures targeting Estonians to promote their openness and willingness to accept an integrated society (ACFC, 2011 §68-9) [italics added].

Keating (1996: 5) similarly refers to 'common values, customs, historical memory, a sense of a common identity'.⁵⁹ In the case of Moldova, the ACFC has also recommended to the Moldovan authorities that, in legislating or developing policies in the field of languages, they fully consider the specific features of the linguistic situation in Moldova and 'the sensitivities of the groups concerned' (ACFC 2009: §116);⁵⁹ and that school education and the media promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue, including through public debates (§87; 132).

another layer of complexity and delaying the forging a common (Moldovan) identity that can transcend linguistic divisions.

The Moldovan ‘nationalizing state’ aims at ultimately replacing the lingua franca, reversing the historical roles of Russian and Moldovan/Romanian, so as to create a new type of asymmetry that shifts power dynamics from one to the other main language group. Two parallel processes have been pursued in unison: the revitalisation of the titular language and de-Russification. It amounts to, effectively, creating a ‘nation state’. Yet this project runs the risk of causing minorities to be marginalised, at best tolerated, rather than being recognised as a valuable component of society. As Wright (2001: 48) points out, in righting old injustices the real challenge lies in guaranteeing that no new injustices are created in the process.

Moldovan language policies seem a reaction to past Russian imperialism, rather than workable solutions that can be accepted by various groups, and developed through public debate. Complicating factors are the limited opportunities for consultation and inclusive decision-making in the shaping of language policies, as well as an extremely volatile political environment. Categories seem too ossified to allow for the fluidity of identity, or for the development of overarching (plural) identities. The situation calls for shifts in the configuration of identity which foresees a greater openness to hybridity. Until one moves away from the ‘institutionalization of nationhood’, attributes of cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity will continue to be placed antagonistically to each other, rather than being perceived as potentially compatible and multi-layered.

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