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**VICTORY DAY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA:
SELECTIVE REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING IN A POST-SOVIET
PROJECT OF NATION-BUILDING**

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Introduction

Since 1992, as stipulated under the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, May 9 was declared the “Victory and Memorial Day of heroes perished in the battle for National Independence”. Conceived from the Soviet ideology, the May 9 holiday had been subject to significant modifications during the last decades, in the post-totalitarian territory. However, this holiday in Moldova has managed to retain some of the core aspects that were characteristic of the former ideological landscape. Thus, this holiday is largely operated by the authorities, who use it to implement various identity projects, specifically with respect to the building of the “Moldavian nation”. The ideological mythology of a “Soviet soldier-liberator” and of the “eternal friendship of Soviet Union nations”, as well as propagandistic *dichs* about the “victorious role of the Red Army at the time of Europe’s liberation from the fascist plague”, and the “liberation of Moldova from the German-Romanian occupation”, are represented as the attributes of the project for building a “multinational nation” in the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, they are to ensure the continuity of a “multinational population” in Moldavian Social Socialist Republic (MSSR) – Republic of Moldova (RM) statehood.

Nevertheless, the independence of the Republic of Moldova in 1991 and the declaration of sovereignty brought forth adoption of national symbols and condemnation of the Soviet regime. Additional relevant matters concerning the transformations of the national landscape also were taking place. With the Communist party of Moldova (CPM) winning the 2001 parliamentary elections, the political elite became concerned with the issue of national identity, and respectively with the transmission and regulation of collective memory – a selective remembering and forgetting.

The legitimate potential of political projects through the ideological reference of images from the past has caused selective obliteration. Being in governance, the Communist Party of Moldova has essentially revived the old symbols. The holiday of May 9 has regained its primary role. Thus, based on the decision adopted by the Special Committee for the organization of the May 9 celebration, it was “decided that a moment of silence

would be kept throughout the whole territory of Moldova, on May 9, at 10:00 a.m.; for this period all motor-vehicles and pedestrian circulation, including the operation of any equipment and radio/television broadcasting, would be suspended” (Moldova Azi 2001). It was suggested that the population “should keep the minute of silence whilst in an upright position”. It has already been established as a tradition for the soldiers of the Second World War that, at the cinema “Patria”, under the symbolic atmosphere of 9 May 1945, they will receive food, 100g vodka, “just like in the lines”, a slice of black bread, and a free ticket for the film “In August 1944”.

The President of the republic, Vladimir Voronin, promised the Red Army veterans that they would gain “all respect they [veterans] deserve”, and that “all and any measures” would be taken “with regards to repairing the injustice committed”. This was said in reference to the Soviet Army’s role during the liberation of the Moldavian territory, thereby legitimizing the significance of this holiday as follows: “Nowadays it is the only holiday, which has no boundaries between the former Soviet Union countries; a holiday subject to neither new political, nor historical interpretation” (Moldova Azi 2001). This initiative was developed and subsequently implemented during the communist period, contributing to the project of “Moldavian nation-building” and animating, at the same time, numerous competitive discourses with respect to collective memory.

The objective of this study is to examine the relation between public symbols, collective memory, and the project of nation-building in the Republic of Moldova, by making references to the case of the celebration of May 9. Established during the Soviet period, with a whole set of symbols strengthening the ideological totalitarian discourse, the holiday of May 9 is currently viewed in the Republic of Moldova as a core element of authoritative discourses and an ideological dimension of the project on “Moldavia nation” building. The dimension of symbolic messages promoted in authoritative discourses and the symbolic messages perceived by “ordinary people” turn this holiday into the battle arena of political symbols, collective memory, and identity constructions. In light of this, we have a good opportunity to study the mechanisms of the instrumentalization of the historical past and the implementation thereof into the nation-building project in the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, on the basis of the collected examples and those selected from the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova, we are going to unveil the semantic metamorphosis of the “May 9-Victory day” holiday - which has resumed its role of *ideologeme* in the official discourse, in order to understand how the message changes its trajectory within the col-

lective conscience, depending on the “vectors” and the “mystic cords” of memory and oblivion. We will attempt to elucidate the way the May 9 Holiday is celebrated in Chisinau by analyzing the agenda of the holiday, how it develops, and how the discourse of the governing power bolsters the collective memory by resorting to symbols, myths, and *dichotomies*. We will select the most significant performances held this year and compare them with those organized in previous years. We shall point out the most obvious implications and symbolic practices related to the process of nation-building in Moldova: for the governing power *versus* collective conscience. We will determine the political and social layer for which the governing power designs ideological scenarios for, as well as how well they integrate into society. We shall touch upon the „liberation” mythology, especially on the conditions of victimization and conveying the memory of the “soviet soldier-liberator”, and also on the symbolic marginalization of the memory of the Romanian Army soldiers, natives of Bessarabia. In our study we shall also refer to some other aspects, such as: the role of the veterans (Soviet *versus* Romanian Army): their attitudes towards the discourse of the governing power, the veterans’ identity and their interaction with /integration into the official ideology and political symbols. All these objectives are to be carried out in order to understand: why the May 9 day became the arena of competitive memories and how they integrate/ fit into the project of the governing power to build a Moldovan nation.

The studies have been carried out predominantly within the Chisinau (Moldovan capital city) community, aiming, at this stage, to investigate the real *patterns* of the governing power’s discourse within the nation-building project. The methods of participative observation, oral history and ethnographic survey have been applied throughout.

The data collected through interviews and thematic questionnaires (Annex nr. 1) have been carried out during the preparation works and the development of the May 9 holiday in Chisinau, involving people who had experience in participating in such kinds of commemorations, both during the soviet and post-1991 periods, as well as people who only took part in the celebration of the holiday during the post-soviet period (most of them being my students attending the course of „Political Semiotics”, and for whose enthusiasm and good will, expressed while taking part in collecting this empirical material, I am very grateful).

In addition to mass-media resources and the archive materials collected within this project, the study represents further field research that was previously carried out in 2005-2006 within the post-doctoral investigations.

„Moldova-our home” versus „Europe–our home”: metamorphoses of an identical project

As has already been mentioned, various examples related to the mechanisms of selective memory and oblivion of the past could be encountered during the post-soviet period in Moldova. In the period between 1991-2001, we may attest attempts made to revive the collective memory domains through the eradication of the ideology which has disturbed the memory and the collective identity in this area. In the post-2001 period, however, a reverse process started - the revival of soviet symbols and ideological slogans which evoked the „brotherhood of peoples”, „the greatness of the soviet soldier- liberator”, the „Moldavian” patriotism, within the framework of such *ideologemes* as „Moldova - my homeland” and „May 9 – Victory day” (Annex nr. 2). Next, the officials promoted a distorted image of the past through either active or passive participation of the masses in the rituals of power legitimation. The construction or the renovation of the monuments dedicated to the „Soviet soldier- liberator”, the „Eternitate” Memorial Complex and the Memorial Complex called „Capul de Pod Serpeni”, together with building a Cultural Center „Moldavian village”, the inauguration of the national holiday „the Wine Festival”, the proclamation of the year 2005 – the year of „Stefan cel Mare si Sfant”, the “15th anniversary of the Moldova independence” in 2006, etc. – these are only a few examples of the process of manipulation of the past to legitimize the present status of Moldova (Annex nr. 3). The promotion of these ideologemes does not assume that the historical truth is to be respected; more often than not, the ideologemes imply loyalty towards officials, and sometimes they are even of a propagandistic nature. At the same time, the symbols and holidays connected with the pro-Romanian discourse were marginalized; as for instance, the national holiday „Limba noastra”, the commemoration of July 26 as the day of the „liberation of Bessarabia from the soviet occupation”, or December 1, the national day of Romania and that of the pro-EU message such as the „Europe Day” (Annex nr.4). In our opinion the latter represent notorious examples of the confrontation between the collective memory discourse and that of the governing power.

Passing from „Stephen the Great and Saint” to the „Soviet Soldier-Liberator”

The 2007 May 9 holiday was noteworthy as Chisinau was then overloaded with national, historical, political, ideological, and cultural symbols. The Chisinau residents celebrate the

May 9 holiday depending on their attitudes towards the historical discourse due to the fact that it has become to signify a “memory date” in the post-soviet area, symbolizing the Victory Day, the Europe Day, the Day of the Moldovan Final Football Cup, the name day etc, at the same time. And so does all the Moldovan community.

The celebration of the May 9, from the point of view of the „Victory Day”, did not seem to differ much from the previous holiday in Chisinau: the laying of flowers, the officials’ speeches began being delivered in “the state language” and ending in the „language used by the Moldovian ethnical groups to communicate among them”, and the unofficial part - 100 grams of vodka provided for the approximately 10 thousand veterans of the Red Army, concerts offered by military orchestras playing soviet music, etc. As a mass-media representative has mentioned, „the May 9 Victory holiday has turned out to be traditionally and apathetically festive this year, and remains to be of a military soviet nature” (Amariei 2007). Several days before the holiday, posters were hung throughout the city. They included posters for „Victory Day”¹, the official TV-channel „Moldova-1” and others which stand by the governing power (especially NIT TV channel). They also broadcasted soviet movies on the „Great War for Motherland Defense” and the meetings with Red Army veterans. (Annex nr.5) The celebration of the May 9 holiday began with the public transport standstill downtown, on the central Stefan cel Mare road, and the district was surrounded by police and security officers.

The May 9 festivity started in the morning by laying flowers and wreaths for the Stephen the Great and Saint (Stefan cel Mare si Sfant) monument in the Chisinau downtown. (Annex nr. 6) At 09:30 a.m., the Moldovan officials, headed by President Vladimir Voronin, came into view. The ritual developed in the presence of the diplomatic missions accredited to Moldova and a few passers-by. There were two instances that caught my attention, in addition to the “diplomatic mistake” committed by the president, who was about thirty minutes late for the official scenario, and the discontent among the public, who „were not allowed” to lay flowers at the monument due to some other commemorative activities and the fact that representatives of the Romanian Embassy attended the ceremony. Firstly, the only delegation which made the sign of a cross in front of the Stefan cel Mare voivode was that of the Romanian Embassy, the other foreign diplomats only congratulated the Moldovan officials on the occasion of the Victory Day holiday. Secondly, the Chisinau “ordinary people” who attended the ceremony were wondering

¹ It should be noted that up to the collaps of the USSR, the May 9 holiday was celebrated as the "Winning Day", the term „victory” was being avoided, perhaps because it sounded too Romanian-like.

what connection there might be between the celebrations of the Victory Day and the medieval Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt voivode.

When the ceremony near the Stefan cel Mare monument was over, the car cortege drove the officials towards the central commemorative place – the Memorial Complex „Eternity”. (Annex nr. 7) The head of state described this memorial as being „the most sacred” of all the public monuments devoted to the Second World War in Moldova.² The May 9 holiday is also perceived by the war veterans as being „a sacred day”.

The audience attending the celebration developed at the Memorial surpassed the one present at the Stefan cel Mare Monument, thus confirming the modification of the official scenario of the governing power, which stems from the collective memory, from a „holiday *for* the people” into a „holiday *of* the people” (Bodnar 1992). (Annex nr. 8) The audience was made up of veterans, including the participants in the war for Moldovan independence and integrity in 1992, parents and children, and representatives of several political structures. (Annex nr. 9) They came directly to the Memorial defying the changes carried out by the Moldovan communists, who decided to add one more activity to the traditional celebration of the Victory Day - the symbolic visit paid to the Stefan cel Mare Monument. It should be noted that this monument has a ponderous symbolic value within the Moldovan public discourse and that this symbol is conveyed in the discourse of the governing power related to the May 9 holiday.

Despite this state of affairs, the message conveyed by the governing power in attempting to show the symbolic connection between the roots of the present Moldovan state (which come from medieval Moldova lead by Stefan cel Mare), and the period during which the country was part of the Soviet Union, being „liberated” and „restored” in the aftermath of the war by the “Soviet soldier- liberator”, was only partially perceived. This

² The monument was erected in 1975, in the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the Victory of May 9, 1945. Occupying a huge amount of space, the Memorial of Victory is still “crowned” with the twenty-five metre pyramid made of five conventionalized rifles that have been conceptualized to unite the whole complex and simultaneously to divide it into the sector of the soldiers' burial place and the square for meetings. A large five-point star, with the Everlasting Fire, blazing in its centre, is at the base of the pyramid. Along the north-western side of the memorial there are six stone steles, representing scenes of battle from the period of the Second World War. The monument should be regarded, according to the initial message of its creators, as a proclamation of victory in a land “liberated” by the Soviet Army: “It was constructed in commemoration of the soldiers who died for the liberation of Moldavia and its capital - Kishinev from the fascist invaders at the time of the Second World War in 1941-1945”. From 1989 until 2001, the Memorial was practically forgotten, and was not present as a site of memory in the context of the post-Soviet Moldovan power discourse. But with the inauguration of the Vladimir Voronin communist government in 2000, the situation changed. The Victory Memorial reappeared after 2000, in the framework of official holydays and celebrations reminiscent of the Soviet epoch, being totally renovated at the initiative of power structures for commemoration of Victory Day in May 9, 2006 and renamed as Memorial Complex “Eternity”; re-named accordingly to the power discourse's signification of this holiday.

was due to mechanisms of the selection of images from the past stored in the collective memory that were different to those applied in the discourse of the governing power. The veteran community proved to be indifferent to the historical symbols invoked in the discourse which, in fact, attempted to legitimize the sovereignty as an innovative element fit into the soviet propagandistic style of the heroism of the red army, remaining faithful to the monument of the soviet soldier and the eternal fire at the Memorial. We consider that these are namely the symbols the war veterans identify themselves with.

Although, it is said that “remembrance is often a deviated way of forgetting” (Le Rider 2005, p. 165), when the veterans are asked what they remember of this day, their discourse often dwells upon two past images, supported by behavior patterns, symbols and commemorative practices: (1) the *remembrances of the Victory*, which rest upon the glorious myth about the Red Army, the commemoration of the soviet soldier-liberator and ideological *dich's* about soviet patriotism; these elements have been attested within the discussions with the veterans settled in Moldova after the Second World War, and (2) the *remembrance of the War*; focused on the horrors and the victims in the wake of that war, the commemoration of all who lost their lives and on the general human values and traditions; the elements listed in the second item have been attested in discussions with the Basarabian native veterans who were enrolled in the Red Army, and sometimes, in turns, both in the Romanian Army and in the Soviet one.

When asked, in this context, “*What does homeland mean to you?*” most of the Russian speaking veterans who had settled in Moldova after the Second World War, answered as it follows:

- *My homeland is the USSR; the place where we were born and where we are living now.*

The veterans of the Soviet Army and being autochthons:

- *My village is my homeland.* (Annex nr. 10)

According to the analyses made in the course of these years, the answers to the question about their national identity and circumstances that made them spend their life in “sunny Moldavia”, again reflected the official Soviet discourse:

- Nadejda, veteran: “*Chisinau was destroyed after the war and the Motherland duty asked us to rebuild it.*”
- Nikolai, veteran: “*I liberated this land and stayed on here for work.*”
- Alexandr, veteran: “*I stayed here to serve my duty with the military.*”

Their answers reflect not only their pride in contributing to the “bright future of the Soviet people,” but also their sense of helping the people of the Republic of Moldova especially:

- Tatiana Petrovna came in August 1949 as an engineer-technologist from Nijegorod: *“Khishinev was down after the famine; it was in ruins, [there were] casualties ...; the victory of the Soviet Union was a victory of all peoples... I came to the Memorial early in the morning to commemorate the participants in this war.”*

As important to their identity is the feeling of pride and their belief in the “glory” of this past. In their collective memory, only one image of the Second World War exists: Victory of the Soviet Soldier and Army. In the framework of these commemorations there is no place for either “other losses” or other victorious states because the image of the „Enemy” persists. Their collective memory remembers and honors the fallen, but only those who fell on the winning side and celebrated the Soviet Army as a symbol of freedom and liberation.

I could not avoid the question about „*What significance does May 9 hold for you?*”, and I have generally received the same answers marked by certain ideological *dichs* specific to the soviet period:

- Olga, a veteran, and very proud of the fact that her husband was in control of the first „Katiusha-s” during the war: *„this is my favorite holiday of all those celebrated by me in the course of the year.”*
- Alexandru, (16) veteran, engineer: *“this is an international victory”, “the Victory Day will exist as long as the veterans commemorate it.”*
- Nicolai, veteran: *“We have been called to defend our Motherland from Siberia to Potsdam, and after that – to reestablish the soviet power on this territory.”*
- Maria, veteran: *“This is a saint day, as we have lost millions of lives on our way to Victory.”*

Neither of them wanted to remember the tragedies that followed after the Victory Day, and caused by the emancipative regime: exiles, famine, and the cultural restrictions that the local population went through

As for the non-official part of the holiday: numerous discussions held with participants at the official celebration of May 9 in Chisinau over the course of years, have shown the transformations of the power discourse within the non-official celebration of the holiday. After the official ceremonies, people convened at the Memorial’s square. They held posters with images of the Second World War Soviet marshals and generals and sang songs

related to the Second World War period. (Annex nr. 11) These symbols referring to memories of war are passed on to the young generation as well. On examining the contents of an interview held with the young generation representatives, we found out the following information referring to the Second World War: Most persons mentioned marshal Jukov as being one of the most prominent Great Patriotic War commanders.” (КИШИНЁВСКИЕ НОВОСТИ, 2007)

In fact, the presence of a lot of young people at the Victory Day commemoration was remarkable. They laid down wreaths of flowers at the memorial or sincerely offered them to veterans with the same formula: *“Thank You for the Victory”*. (Annex. 12) The significance of May 9 for the members of the young generation who attended the Memorial commemoration represents:

- Sasha and Katya, 17 years old: *“...the feeling of pride for our fathers and grandfathers. We came here to remember this, to congratulate veterans and to give them flowers of peace.”*

At a particular moment, the celebration took an unpredictable turn: in the middle of the holiday actions, a group of participants hung a poster with the slogan *“My Motherland is the Soviet Union.”* (Annex nr. 13) This act attracted the people’s attention and a lot of them drew pictures on the background of this slogan. The embezzlement of the message referring to the “Soviet Army - the liberator army” of „my Motherland – Republic of Moldova” became part of the informal memorial ceremony. This time the slogans written were part of the official decor, and the inscription could be read just from the opposite side; the hostility towards the discourse on the soviet *dich’s* manipulation and the turning of these *dich’s* into certain levers referring to the „Moldavian” project was emphasized.

Communities of the Republic often tend to replace the soviet symbols, represented by the red stars placed on the unknown soldier monuments, with Christian symbols, represented by crosses, commemorating the fallen during the Second World War, both in the framework of the May 9 and the „Commemoration of the Faithful Departed Day”, when, according to the Orthodox-Christian tradition, people go to the cemetery and the faithful departed are commemorated with funeral meals. I shall illustrate this idea by using fieldwork material collected in the course of 2005 in the same community of Chisinau. But firstly, I would like to mention that by pure chance in 2005, the Faithful Departed Day (*Paştele Blajinilor*) coincided with the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory Day in the Second World War on May 9 Thus, on the basis of the field re-

search of 2005, the rituals of Orthodox commemorations, performed at the Central Cemetery, were addressed to all losses experienced during the Wars and during the peace period. Sofia and Vasile, both retired people, said:

- Sofia, 67 years old and her husband Vasile, 75 years old: *“This is a very important day for our family. We come to the tombs of our lost ones and commemorate them: both those who died in battle and those who died a natural death, as we are Christian-Orthodox people”*. (Annex nr. 14)

These celebrants did not make an association between the memory of human losses and the image of victory. Moreover, the people who visited the Cemetery spoke with pity and compassion for the losses of those who had died in the Second World War.

I have another witness too:

- Gavriil, eighty years old: *I visited the war memorial, but I refused to participate in the ceremony because this is a strange place for me... The Soviet Army was an Army of the Soviet occupation.”*

All these aspects are still present in the collective memory of the Chisinau community. Those who identify themselves with the traditional cultural dimension of their national identity have different attitudes and attach different significance to May 9:

- Gavriil, eighty years old: *“The day of May 9 is the Victory day for the Russian Empire. For the native people of Moldova it is a day of a new occupation.”*

This day is spent in the Chisinau Cemeteries. Their rituals of commemoration are devoted to all victims of this conflagration, without taking into consideration the army in which they had participated:

- Viorel, teacher of geography: *“It was a tragedy for all people. The soldiers were not asked in which army [they wished] to fight.”*

The opinions expressed by these people had political connotations.

- Ion, fifty-five years old, physician: *“This day should become a day of reconciliation and serve to commemorate all losses, according to our traditional orthodox rituals: going to church, coming to the cemeteries, lighting a candle for their soul.”*

In this context, the topic of one article published recently in the Moldovan mass media, reflects exactly this new dilemmatic metamorphosis of the collective memory: “Put crosses on the obelisks” (Amariei 2005).

Not only the non-admission to sponge out the departed, but also remembrance is important for the departed. In 2006, I performed field research in a region near Chisinau, to compare the perception level of the power project outside the capital, in Ialoveni. (An-

nex. 15) When asked about the significance of the holiday and rituals performed for the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed Day and the Victory Day, most inhabitants (2006) honestly told me that they used to celebrate these two both in the soviet period and at present, as follows:

- Gheorghe, fifty-six years old: *We come and commemorate them, we remember, we give alms-gifts, (...) I have always come to the cemetery.*
- Olga Budeanu, fifty-five years old: *... father came back from the war (...) and on May 9 we bring flowers for the monument in the centre; both the cemetery and the monument ... all veterans gathered together; and there was a holiday (...). And during the soviet period everyone used to go to the cemetery.*
- Anastasia, seventy-five years old: *That's our tradition ... the day of May 9 was celebrated by my brothers who participated in the war, now I go to the church, I give alms-gifts and I go to the monument, as well.*

We may notice that ordinary people managed to adjust the ideological discourse, by means of commemoration practices, to an unforeseen context, by commemorating their ancestors' community and relatives in both cases.

Attempts to introduce new traditions referring to the Soviet heroes' commemoration, with a view to legalizing the Soviet power, failed. These traditions were not adopted by the collective memory, to be replaced by Christian commemorations. When societies face radical changes, the phenomenon of transforming the past occurs, as a legalization mechanism for the new regime „Invented traditions” may benefit from a partial or temporary success. With regards to the rural area, the solution was an appeal to traditional and Christian spirit, to ensure the perpetuation of a secular identity.

During the research process referring to the May 9 holiday celebration rituals in different regions of the Republic, we attested interesting mutations of the „higher level” discourse, with adjustment to individual scenarios and behavior models adopted by the common people. Notorious are the cases of the “liberatory soldier” image being replaced with those of their own heroes, autochthonous inhabitants of the respective communities, and the erection, in their honor, of monuments usually situated near churches. (Annex nr. 16). Also, in certain regions, there were cases where there was a complete generalization of the discourse and symbols promoted by the ruling authorities. This was exemplified by exclusion, the Soviet heroes' monuments marginalization of the community memory, and sometimes even by changing to traditional and religious values by means of erecting sanctuaries near the monuments abandoned. (Annex nr. 17)

... and up to the Symbolic Marginalization of the „Romanian Army Veterans” by the Power Authorities Discourse in Chisinau

The Memorial's sculptural composition represents scenes of the Second World War battles, symbolizing, according to the official discourse, the invincibility of the Soviet Army and Soldiers. However, only the moments of Victory have been selected, whilst entirely neglecting horrors of war and the slightest form of commemoration for the Romanian Army soldiers. It should be mentioned that during Second World War, Bessarabians were enrolled not only in the Soviet Army, but they also participated on behalf of the Romanian Army. The authorities are silent about the memory of these others, these fallen soldiers. The Romanian Army Veterans, although officially recognized as having equal rights several years ago, are still considered to be marginalized, as they have not been mentioned in any of the official discourses. Their image and the memory of events commemorated by them do not comply with the ruling authorities discourse on the significance of May 9 in Moldova.

However, common people have overcome the „Enemy myth” ideology, represented by the Romanian Army veterans, who benefit from the same merits. For example,

- a seller at the Chisinau Central Market: *“It would only fair not to forget the Romanian armies soldiers. In my opinion, one should be aware of the fact that they were not the ones to start the war - they did their soldierly duty”.* (Независимая Молдова 2007)

Voronin steadily claimed that "the memory of the nation comes to its natural, human state, and it is not to fear new attacks from those who wish to review our history" (Moldova Azi 2004). Did the president of the Republic of Moldova refer to the Romanian Army veterans as well?

Regarding the memory of the military men who were killed in the war, most of the representatives of the local administration for the local communities spoke at the official ceremony of May 9, before the service in memory of those killed in action, was held. As a matter of fact, it was explained to us on more than one occasion:

- Gheorghe Armasu, fifty-six years old: *People who have been killed in action are not guilty. (...) we must commemorate them, remember them. It is natural to commemorate. Regardless of whether they were Soviet or not, they didn't take to the field of their own free will (...).*

Appealing to the Durkheimian perspective, communities from the Republic have shown the trend of recalling the ordinances and practices of memory as mechanisms of solidar-

ity for the community and not as contexts for disputes and social, cultural, and political impingement. And speaking about identity *patterns*, anchored in the collective memory, we establish the devotion and piety with which these acts are performed. The memory, due to its presence in any action of perception, reflection, and communication, is one of the essential conditions for the identity_discretion of everyone. Thus, memory becomes the principal atmosphere in which identities are built.

The ruling powers, both in the Soviet and post-Soviet period are concerned not about the past per se, but about how the past is reported to meet the needs of the present and the future. The so-called „recuperations” of national traditions and „reanimations” in memory of historical personalities are an ideological program, and their significance is pre-figuration and control; a militant symbolism which is sometimes anachronistic.

The phenomenon of the „discovering” of new traditions and the revival of the „glorious past”, the demolition of old monuments and the erecting of new monuments, represents only the most „obvious” segments of the process of the society identification in the context of new changes. The authorities in the Republic of Moldova are interested not only in re-writing history, but also in re-organizing collective memory, despite the reticence of the latter with regards to radical/contradictory changes.

The President of the State, Vladimir Voronin, affirmed during a business visit to Soroca on 9 September 2003, that “the monument will become a contribution to our national culture - it will become a part of our national treasure” (Независимая Молдова 2003). We should mention here, as Vladimir Tismaneanu tries to mention, too, that national pride does not contain anything bad per se. The tragedy begins when this natural feeling ceases to mean only „love for the little group we belong to in the society” and exacerbates, becoming an ideology of hostility, hatred and envy. (Tismaneanu 1999, p.196)

War of Holidays

I would like to mention that the official speech of the President in 2007 emphasized the attention we should pay to the memories of the past, declaring that „no historian and no politician will ever be capable of underestimating the importance and significance of undying heroic deeds accomplished by the peoples from the former Soviet Union, and from the coalition against Nazi Germany” (Salut.md 2007). With reference to the Soviet people and the allusion to the Moldavian people, which is also a multinational nation, the President did not fail to mention that Moldovan people strive for a „common and bright

European future”, but “without denying its own heroes, and its feelings of gratitude towards all of those who brought us freedom” (Независимая Молдова 2004).

The vagueness in the speeches of authorities concerning the European Integration project, which often contravenes with the project of developing Moldovan people, can be noted in the placement of state symbols around the memorial. This year the only national symbol present at the Memorial was the country’s flag. This clearly demonstrated that the symbolic idea from previous years, partially sustained by the official speech of the President (Official site of Presidency 2004), to put up not only the flag of the Republic of Moldova, but also the flag from the capital of the state, as well as the European Union flag – has not been implemented. The symbolic combination of those three flags was present only behind the memorial and the dimensions of the flags were significantly reduced. (Annex nr. 18) This perfectly reflected the speech of the authorities about the Victory Day versus Europe’s Day. “The Conflict” between those two holidays became perfectly visible in 2006, when during a Parliamentary session the communist majority fraction declined the proposal from the opposition to approve at least one declaration for Europe’s Day (Official site of Parliament 2006). These semantic confrontations are selectively used in the public discourse.

- Fyodor Vartic, maxi-taxi driver, sustains that “*May 9 is the liberation day for the whole of Europe.*” (Независимая Молдова 2007)

In Baltsey and Cahul, two important urban localities from the North and, respectively, South of Moldova, for the first time have had organized public activities for the Europe’s Day. In Cahul for example, these activities were concluded with the cultural activity “Hora Europei” with the participation of art collectives from the locality. And in Baltsey – a TV talk show with debates about the European integration.

I have noticed that due to official holidays of the RM related to “Victory Day”, these measures took place on 8 May. (salut.md 2007)

Conclusions

A scrupulous view of the practices and rituals performed on the May 9 Commemoration Day allows me to speak of the existence of several discourses referring to the commemoration object. Two of them are obviously the most important – *official* (ideological) discourse and *unofficial* (public) discourse, both of them being oriented in the collective memory dynamism. The first discourse is based on the Great War for Motherland De-

fense³ sacral memory, and it is oriented at commemoration of the „Soviet soldier liberator” and myth of the „Soviet people heroism”. The second discourse, emphasized by us, is associated with the war horrors and human losses of 1940-44/45, directly referring to the events following the 1944-1945 period. This discourse is not part of the Soviet ideology, but of a Christian tradition, supported by the memory rituals of those „who are not among us any more”, and irrespective of the political identity of these people. In this context, let’s remember the words of John R. Gillis, who claimed that the “core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity (Gillis 1994, p.4).

Obviously, there are a lot of factors that may give an incentive to a new historical approach towards the perception of past, including the events of the Second World War; as James M. Mayo says, „historical events and their interpretation considerably changed the perception of the past” (Mayo 1998, p.73). It should be mentioned that my research is not aimed at reestablishing the truth of historical events, but at revealing their images and determining the roles of these images in the collective memory and identity of the post-Soviet society.

Research works performed in 2007, as well earlier research, have shown that the official memory in Moldova is based on the communities’ nostalgic memories, according to the Soviet model. Their identity is associated with the images of this „Golden Age”. The majority of them are established in Moldova, in the context of the „Sovietization” process by means of „industrialization”, „collectivization” and „cultural revolution”. On the basis of Soviet slogans about „peoples fraternity”, „communist victory” and the „Soviet nation-building”, most of these people did not become integrated in the Moldovan society autochthonous culture.

We may find that, in the case of the Victory Day holiday, the remembering and forgetting mechanisms applied by the ruling authorities’ discourse within the „nation-building” project, do not coincide with the collective memory ones. These mechanisms denote an obvious ambiguity, even when referring to the discourse on the past of the most devoted to the power segment – that of the veteran community, especially those established within this space in the context of „the Soviet power rebuilding”. We found that, though they are willing to recognize this land as being their Motherland, they are not eager to accept

³ Another proof is the simultaneous existence of an alternative name of this event: The Great Patriotic War (GPW).

the historical symbols of local inhabitants, not even in the semantic context established by the ruling authorities' discourse. These days, veterans prefer to experience the intensity of the Victory day, on the grounds of the symbolical value of the Memorial, and not the Stefan the Great Monument.

The national identity rebuilding process of applying commemoration mechanisms referring to those fallen in the course of the Second World War reflects the metamorphoses of confrontation between the official discourse and the discourse of collective memory. Memorial places, referring to the Second World War changed their historical messages, depending on the official discourse and according to the power legitimization interests, which doubled the living memory and the Moldovan society perceptions. During the post-Soviet period in Moldova, the semantics and perception of monuments changed on repeated occasions, depending on the collective identity of this „imaginary community” (political, ethnical, confessional, etc). Such changes were always part of the commemoration rituals and identity constructs, feeding the collective memory activity. Participating in the Soviet rituals dedicated to the Soviet soldier liberator, the society, however, did not forget about the traditional commemoration rituals. These rituals included not only the official memory images, but also the images of those living in the collective memory as members of this „imagined community”, that is, relatives and acquaintances. In the context the social memory practices of such communities, the borders between „liberators” and „defeated” blended (and continue to blend), leaving place only for the „fallen” and/or „victims” of totalitarian regimes.

Thus, the Republic of Moldova is frozen between the visible and invisible borders, separating the pro-authoritative East from the pro-democratic West. The settlement of this dilemma is hindered by the fact that the collective memory of this space, situated in the inter-space between East and West, keeps the memory of the Stalinist exiles alive, and also the organized famine, and the political repressions, of which the ruling authorities' discourse says nothing, applying the selective oblivion mechanisms for these memories of past. New models and projects are applied by the ruling power to these images, as well as the historical memory referring to events preceding the soviet power (1812-1917/40/41/44). In this context, autochthonous communities worked out their own mechanisms regarding the perpetuation of collective identity, based on the ancestral values: religion, family, day-to-day labor activity, ethnical and cultural traditions as opposed to political valences of the ruling authorities' discourse. In this case, the commemoration

tradition, as well as language and history, represent the resistance of collective memory against the amnesia promoted by the ideological discourse in the Republic of Moldova. Summarizing the above-mentioned facts, I may conclude that the holiday of May 9 represents an arena for public symbols and collective memory, in the context of the nation-building project in the Republic of Moldova. The Moldovan community – a community of competitive memories – does not accept *in integrum* the communist authorities' instrumentalized discourse referring to the historical past. Consequently, the nation-building ideological project represented, in this case, by the *ideologeme* „May, 9 – Victory day” is strong evidence of the collective memory multi-vocality with respect to the power authorities' legitimate discourse. The process of selective remembering and forgetting, in the context of a vast post-Soviet nation-building project, mediated by the ruling authorities' discourse, is indispensable for the existence of contradictory competitive memories, sometimes even parallel, which are to equilibrate the discourse about the future of the historical past of the Republic of Moldova.

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Appendix: Questionnaire used to collect data on celebration of 9 May

The May 9th: symbols, messages, significations (2007, RM)

Name:

Age:

Locality:

1. What significance does may 9 hold you?

2. Do you celebrate this day officially (at work, on the street etc.) and/or **unofficially** (with the family, friends, etc.)?

3. What symbols and slogans do you remember from the holiday this year?

4. What messages, in your opinion, to they convey to the participants at the celebration?

5. What do they mean to you?

6. Could you identify with them? Please, explain.

7. Do you consider May 9 to be an important holiday for the Moldovan society? Why?

8. Which collective identity, do you think, is promoted at this holiday?

The May 9: symbols, messages, significations (during the Soviet period)

Name

Age

Locality:

1. What significance did May 9 hold for you during the soviet period?
2. Did you often participate at the official celebration of this holiday?
3. Was it a voluntary participation (at the parades, etc.)? Were there stipulated punishments on behalf the official part?
4. How was participation organized for these kinds of public events? Which age groups, social groups, and political segments were involved?
5. What slogans were chanted? Who devised these slogans? Was it possible to chant all of them? What happened in the case of a 'strange' slogan for the CP or Soviet power?
6. Which symbols dominated the celebrations and what were their significations?
7. How did you procure the flags, slogans, fanions, etc? What happened with them after official celebrations?
8. To what extent could you identify yourself with these symbols, slogans, etc?
9. What did you do after the official celebration?

