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**FROM BESSARABIA TO REPUBLICA MOLDOVA:
THE MENTAL MAP OF SYMBOLIC SPACE CONSTRUCTION'S PROCESSES**

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From Bessarabia to Republica Moldova: the mental map of symbolic space construction's processes

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Abstract¹

This paper will research the processes of symbolic construction of the Republic of Moldova space in the context of the formation of normative practices related to political projects of the collective identity and of the quest/manifestation of the collective identity in the modern world reference system. For the purpose of this research, the space is represented by the symbolic universal features of identity, which delimitates the geographical and administrative status of a territory, as well as marks its construction and enrichment with the necessary meaningfulness. Thus, during the last two centuries, within the social and political practices of political identity construction, the space and its boundaries in the Republic of Moldova have supported multiply the self-description discourses filled with constants of continuity and legitimacy models.

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“Placed in the center of Europe, we have nevertheless, lived for centuries at its outskirts.... To survive, we should have found a common language both with our oppressors, and with those, who had good intentions about us. This also must have been done in such a manner, that none of the two is offended.”

Ion Druta, writer

In 1973 Clifford Geertz put under question the anthropological methods of culture description, since, according to his opinion, the texts and their content differ from the reality that they try to describe, while the ethnographical data are only *representations*, consequently, *interpretations*. Surprisingly, but following the ethnographical experience, acting as tools to describe reality, maps started to express congruent characteristics, no matter how accurately these maps were represented. It turned out that the space has the capacity to reflect what the people are doing in order to exist; consequently, it is built and represented in multiple configurations. The boundaries established by the human communities in three dimensions: time, space and widely recognized standards, are able to maintain the image of the collective identity, as well as that of the appeared legitimacy. This image is able to unite and mobilize people within its reach at a collective and an individual level. The image of everlasting space, on the background of the time transience, is portrayed by the communities as one of the rare constants, searching for which, they establish boundaries, institute events, actions, traditions, collective memories and expectations.

In this context, the region between the Prut and Dniester rivers is one of the “newly-made” spaces, which appeared on the background of political and war collisions as a result of a next ordinary “change in the political balance” in South-Eastern Europe. According to the Bucharest agreement (1812) sealed between the Ottoman and Russian empires, Bassarabia was annexed, while the self-description discourse has become a component of the political projects and restriction practices, of the rethinking and settlement of the space. This process can be looked at by the researchers from the perspective of collective visions and attitudes, which express the meaning and the most significant events of the past based on which its communities have formed their

world-view structures. The purpose of this research is to analyze the identity discourses of the region between the Prut and Dniester rivers, proceeding from the concept that any community has its own mythology, which expresses the most sustainable understanding of oneself and of one's inhabited space. In particular, the research is focused on various aspects of intellectual tradition, world-view constructions and narratives embedded in the process of rethinking «the newly produced territory» during the last two centuries (from 1812 to 2007).

Our research holds a special interest in ideological patterns of space organization identification; different in form and content, these patterns reflect basic features of the implemented political projects of restriction, settling, submission and control. If looked at in terms of cultural meaning, rituals and symbols, this aspect reveals a quite complicated discursive formation, bearing multiple conflicts, misunderstandings and stereotypes. The identity discourse itself, in the context of the historical and political reality of the Republic of Moldova, is ambiguous, mythologized, and embedded with political and other sorts of connotations. In this context the deconstruction of ideological projects and narratives is often perceived by the majority of researchers as being a rather risky and inadmissible endeavour. The traditional approaches to history research tend to follow a quite comfortable scenario of identity formation according to some schemes set in advance in order to complete some political tasks or some expected perspective of nation-building. On this background, the article provides, beyond essentialist approach, the analysis of the identification and organization of space as a tool and as a factor of the power, cultural hegemony, as a mechanism to build an “imagined community” in interaction with its “imagined space”.

Recalled in various contexts of space organization as Basarabia², the Moldovan Soviet Socialistic Republic, the Republic of Moldova³ or Moldova, the relatively united identity of this space roots back to 1812. The annexing to the Russian Empire of the region between the Prut and Nistru rivers, a region that didn't have yet an independent identified territorial identity, called for the need to build a new administrative unit, as well as a new identity discourse of this empire's outskirts, which extended to the West as a result of the frontier transfer and laid across the border

² The mentioned geographical area refers to the space between Prut and Dniester with a surface of 45 630 km², annexed to the Russian Empire accordingly to the Bucharest agreement 1812.

³ The total surface of the territory of the Republic of Moldova – 33 7000 km², population in 1989 - 4335360 persons, in 1997 – about 4,32 mill. persons.

line, for several hundred kilometers. Before 1812 Basarabia, as part of the Moldovan state was considered as being only its South-Eastern region. For instance, in the *Descriptio Moldavae* (1716) written by Dimitrie Cantemir, the chapter *On the geographical location of Moldova, its antique and new boundaries, and on its climate*, it is mentioned as one of the border regions: “Moldova is partly covered by mountains, especially on those lands which adhere to Transilvania, then partly becomes a plain, where it looks to the Polish Ukraine, Basarabia and Danube”. The author further clarifies that “The eastern frontier of the country used to be the Black Sea; but in time, when the Turkish weapons have cut Basarabia and Bender, the Moldova’s border was moved to the North”. Basarabia was conquered by Turks earlier than the entire Moldova was, it “got under their power and doesn’t currently use the laws of Moldova, even though by the Danube banks, there are towns and villages, inhabited by Moldovans, who are following the Christian religion, but who undergo the tyranny of two barbarian peoples, since Basarabia is partly inhabited by Tatars, partly by Turks, who obey the orders of Seraskir. This region is now divided in four parts: the Budgeak, Akkerman, Chilia and Ismail lands.”⁴

The *Manifest* of king Alexander I and the *Rules of the formation of temporary administration in Basarabia* (1813), with the intent to establish the empire space in these new outskirts, were providing a special administrative and legislative status to this newly made region, as an exception and with the intent to “show rule of the citizens, corresponding with the region’s customs, traditions and laws”.⁵ In the *Statute for the formation of Basarabia region*, from April 29, 1818, the basic chapter addressing the naming and the power bodies clarified the region’s *border status*: “this border region, according to its location and to the indicated number of fortresses, requires, also due to the occurrence of other significant circumstances, that the region’s administration, including the civil one, is included in the main administration and that it falls under the supervision of the Military Command”.⁶

Regardless undertaking additional security measures, the territorial attachment seemed nevertheless a useful and important acquisition for the empire from the perspective of the transfer of the empire’s boundaries to the South, to the Danube river mouth. F. F. Vighel having been to

⁴ Д. Кантемир, *Описание Молдавии*. Кишинев, 1973, стр. 8, 9, 25-26; See also: Ion Chirtoagă, *Din istoria Moldovei de sud-est pînă în anii 30 ai secolului al XIX-lea*, Ed. Museum, Chişinău, 1999.

⁵ Российский Государственный Исторический Архив, Ф. 1286. Оп. 2. Д. 70. Лл 57-58.

⁶ *Полное собрание законов Российской империи*. Собрание первое. Том 35. 1818. СПб., 1830, стр. 222-227. The historical documents from the Central Military-Historical Archive prove the fact that because the bordering situation of Basarabian region, the army chiefs were expressing their views to transform Basarabia in a special military administrative unit. (Cf. Степан Булгар, *История и культура гагаузов*, Изд. Понтос, Кишинев, 2006, стр. 128).

Basarabia after 1812, as a Member of the Supreme Council, remarked in his “Notes” that the most important thing about the events following the Bucharest agreement is that «the Russians stepped again on the banks of Danube, the river that was familiar and never forgotten to them since their first Princes”.⁷ Apparently, the geo-political priorities determined the choice of naming the newly made region; in the name of its Southern part – adhering to the Black Sea and to the Danube river mouth - Basarabia.

The apparently simple transfer of the military borders between two military coalitions has nevertheless revealed the borders of the differences in life styles and value systems. In September 1823, the same person, F. F. Vighel informed the General Governor Vorontsov: “The Basarabia region doesn’t only hold special rights, like the Ostzeisk provinces re-attached from Poland to Russia, but has a certain special way of existing, alike the Polish Kingdom and the Great Finish Duchy. It lies between three Empires, and is separated from Austria and Turkey, just as from Russia, by quarantine and customs lines”. The author of the letter describes the society, “in which one can see some remnants of the Eastern traditions and the beginnings of the European literacy. This can be seen in Chisinau now, and in some other small Basarabia towns, as clearly, as this was happening in our motherland just one hundred years ago. The similarities in the life style of the richest Moldovans and our own ancestors are shamefully to us, striking, and thus, Chisinau deserves even more so the Russians’ attention. The naming of Boyars, their long clothing, long beards, high caps and the rich furs that they use, their poor courtesy and their rudeness remind our ancient kings”⁸. The reflection on the cultural differentiation and on “what mainly makes it (Basarabia – author’s remark) different from other belongings” is thought of by the author as a (re)projection of a strategy, that has been already used for other outskirts of the empire, a strategy of making legitimate the rule over “this uneducated land”; “in order to build up the level of education and justice, it is yet necessary to arm the governor with irony batons for a while”⁹. The issue of autonomy and of the local aristocracy rights, being sensitive to the Russian administration, became the determinant factor for the formation of the mythologeme, which provided the local aristocracy with the spot outside the symbolic line: “People from good families and who are slightly educated: whose number is rather limited refrain from service, while the other Matadors of

⁷ Ф. Ф. Вигель, *Записки*, Издание Русского Архива, Москва, 1891; As well as: Ф. Ф. Вигель, *Замечание на нынешнее состояние Бессарабии, сентябрь, 1823 г.*, Москва, 1892.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

Basarabia were recently, as mentioned above, servants to Moldovan and Greek nationals, who, at their turn, were the salves of the Turks. And so, could one expect any noble feelings, knowledge of law and persistent completion of duties from people, recently corresponding to this lowest level of slavery”. Despite the official policy of the king’s power, requesting for this region, to avoid conflicts with the local institutes and to interfere minimally with the internal affairs of the region, Vighel considers that the only and the unavoidable manner in which the increasing evil can be stopped is by “destroying this Council, which is not as useless, as it is harmful. The Council (being under the influence of the local aristocrats – author’s remark) was established by the Supreme Authority in the capital and the beginning of it, we looked at with pleasure...”.¹⁰

The sent-over A. S. Puskin, in 1820, in "the damned city of Chisinau", found there a city of multicoloured caftans, Turkish pants, [феск,] turbans, European tail-coats and military uniforms. After having been to Basarabia, the Polish nobleman Józef Ignacy Kraszewski remarked that in 1843, Moldovan was still the language on Chisinau streets, while locals were wearing traditional caps made of sheep, long caftans and were smoking tobacco with long Turkish pipes. Thinking of this city as "Eastern" and poorly civilized, he still notes that the local aristocrats at that time are used to order their clothing from Vienna and are supporting the fashion shops, while the organ-grinders play the Strauss waltz in the streets.¹¹

During the upcoming decades, a concentration of space occurred around the newly made administrative center-pole. The city of Chisinau (mentioned by the locals as Chisinau), is first recorded in historical documents in 1436, before the XIX century, as an ordinary village of the Lapusneanu Pircalabia, and according to some data, it is only by 1821 that its population reached 50 000 people.¹² The new city was proposed as the center of the Basarabia region in 1818 and was built in such a manner that it can serve to the power as a principal tool of organization and control, as well as a model for political and cultural meanings run by the empire and expressed in rituals and symbols practiced by the power.

¹⁰ The manuscript of *Замечания о нынешнее состояние Бессарабии*, Центральный державный исторический архив Украины, г. Киев, Ф. 186. Оп. 5. Д. 65. Л. 5; The text mentions that Bessarabian nobles hearing about the letter sent to the general Gubernator Vorontzov via the chancellery of Supreme soviet, where this letter was re-written, „were deeply offended by it”, „wanted to kill him and lamented on him”. In result, Vighel was pressed to move to Odessa, and then, as mayor, to Cherci (Керч) (Из примечаний к письму М. К. Зозулина, старшего советника Бессарабского губернского правления, 1874 к копии письма Ф. Ф. Вигеля, Центральный державный исторический архив Украины, г. Киев, Ф. 186. Оп. 5. Д. 65. Л. 1.)

¹¹ Ștefan Ciobanu, *Chișinăul*, Editura Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, Sectia din Basarabia, 1925, p. 52.

¹² Cf. Иоанн Скурту, Думитру Алмаш, и др., *История Бессарабии (от истоков до 1998 года)*, издание 2-е, Кишинэу, 2001, стр. 39-40.

The *mission civilisatrice*, acknowledged by the tsarist rule at the newly made border of the empire¹³, as well as the integration problems, moved forward the variety of rather practical tasks in transforming the conquered space into a part of the empire, and the population hereof in its nationals. Consecutively they sent officials from Petersburg to Basarabia to research the current situation on site: L. S. Vajkov (Л. С. Байков), P. P. Svin'in (П. П. СВИНЬИН), P. D. Kiselev (П. Д. Киселев). It was almost to the extent of abolishing the Basarabia region and transforming it to a province in 1828 that the kingdom rule was coming back to the issue of its autonomy and administrative management, introducing statutes, clarifications and annexes in local laws.

Intellectual practices, from travel notes¹⁴ and ethnographical statistical researches¹⁵, to topographical findings and the projection of railroads, symbolically built a new space, by means of imagined approval or abolishing the differences, as well as by the transfer to the system of general categories which provided special meaningfulness to the empire presence. The province continuously was becoming an object of scientific discourse, which was trying to demonstrate how and why this territory is a Russian one, and not otherwise. "The predominant religion in the Basarabia region is Greek-Russian. [...] The customs and the traditions of the locals cannot be the same, since the nations which form the population of the Basarabia region, differ, but as Moldovans form the main part of the inhabitants, all the rest (except for the Yids) adhere to their customs. The customs of the ordinary Moldovan people are significantly alike the Little Russians, [...] The main, indigenou inhabitants of this land are in essence Moldovans or Valahians, which, as above mentioned, are the descendents of Roman colonists. They still speak a semi-roman or a dilapidated, broken Latin dialect. They are called Moldovans after the river Moldava; but the Polish, Hungarians and other neighbours call them Valahians, just like they call all Italians. This name has different origins: some from the Roman commander Flaka, others from valis (*vallis* valley), but it is most likely that since Valahians are in essence all of Italy origin, this name was given to them from the Volsci – the citizens of a part of Italy, called Latium and placed between

¹³ «Сия пустынная страна / Священна для души поэта: / Она Державинным воспета / И славою русскою полна. / Еще донныне тень Назона / Дунайских ищет берегов...» (А. С. Пушкин, «Баратынскому. Из Бессарабии»)

¹⁴ Cf. Игнатий Яковенко, *Описание Молдавии и Валахии и российской Бессарабии*, СПб, 1828; Н. Надеждин, *Прогулка по Бессарабии*, Одесса, 1840; А. С. Афанасьев-Чужбинский, *Поездка в южную Россию*, том III, часть 2, Типография Возунова, СПб, 1863.

¹⁵ Cf. А. Зашук, *Материалы для географии и статистики России, собранные офицерами генерального штаба. Бессарабская область*, СПб., 1862 г.; Idem, *Этнография Бессарабской области*, // Записки Одесского Общества Истории и Древностей. Одесса, 1863, том. V, стр. 491–586.

the mouths of Tibra and Kírċē (Цирцеєм). The word *Volsci* changed into the word *Volchi*, and then into *Vlochi*.”¹⁶

The focus of the similar type of historic literature mainly outlines the geographic territory, its ideological and physical conquest and “successful integration” in the empire’s mechanism.¹⁷ Topographical research developed by the tsarist government should have contributed to the process of mental comprehension of territory. Veltman A.F.¹⁸ who was on military service in Basarabia in 1818-1830 as a military topographer, as part of his main duties in the province worked out one of the first “Descriptions of the ancient history of Basarabia” with the annex of the historical map of Basarabia and Trojan’s walls lines – Upper, Lower, Prut and Snake walls¹⁹.

The cartography, having created premises for the transition of the real territory into the limits of the accessible and somewhat acceptable arsenal of knowledge, partially accounted for its reduction, concentration and leveling in relation to everything the Empire had.

Besides, unlike physical maps that are mainly aimed to reflect, historical maps gave the possibility to depict and conceive. Out of the whole list of historical monuments in the framework of the empire’s discourse, especially relevant according to the degree of importance, deemed to be the traces of the former fame of a different empire. The published guidebooks of the second half of 19th century preserved numerous descriptions of the Trojan’s wall as one of the Roman Empire’s frontiers. P. Andreev, when depicting the Trojan’s wall resembling by “its name the era of Romans dominion in ancient Dacia, current Basarabia”. “When and who built the Trojan’s walls is unknown, but archaeologists are prone to think that they were erected by Bastarnae who lived here in the 3rd century B.C. Their current name as Trojan’s walls, preserved so well in the memory of people, is likely to reflect those times when the Roman emperor Trojan held the war against Dacians, the inhabitants of Basarabia in the end of the 1st and beginning of the 2d century A.D. This name became so used among the indigenous population that they transformed the name

¹⁶ П. П. Свиньин, *Описание Бессарабской области*, // Записки Одесского Общества Истории и Древностей. Одесса, 1867, том. VI, стр. 357, 361, 355.

¹⁷ Cf. Марк фон Хаген, *Империи, окраины и диаспоры: Евразия как антипарадигма для постсоветского периода*, // *Ab Imperio*, nr.1, 2004, (<http://abimperio.net/scgibin/aishow.pl?state=showa&idart=897&idlang=2&Code=>)

¹⁸ Veltman A. F. (1800 – 1870) – Russian writer. Was sent to Basarabia as military topographer. In Chisinau he became closet to A.S. Pushkin and V. F. Raievski. Pasionated by Archeology and History of the region. Beginning with 1842 was in charge as vicedirector of Kremlin Armoury, then Director (1852). From 1854 – member correspondent of Academy of Scineces.

¹⁹ *Idem*, *Начертание древней истории Бессарабии*, Москва, 1828.

“Trojan” into a common one standing for all ancient walls in general, encountered in quite many other places of Basarabia.”²⁰

Building railways - a symbolical embodiment of modernization and the settlement of new territories found its place in the representation of Basarabia’s territory as part of the Empire. One of the Empire’s Illustrated guidebooks on railways mentioned in its description of Basarabia that “the environment is not typically usual, with new pictures running in front of eyes, but at the same time you can hear Russian everywhere around, although at times it is a spoilt Russian you can still run across purely Russian individuals and you can feel that it is still part of Russia, part of that powerful organism that imbued half of Europe and Asia, uniting and assimilating a great many of tribes and peoples.”²¹

Empire’s ideological patterns having become more and more generalized have inevitably become most accessible answers to numerous routine situations. However, the process of adapting ideological mythologemes at the Empire’s outskirts at times took place under the influence of social trends, cultural paradigms, as well as specific configurations of the outskirts, determined not only by government policy, but also by the character and traditions of the indigenous population. The next phase in the development of Basarabia province²² is related to the publication of the program of reforms by Alexander II in 1856. Distribution of land to peasants²³ in Basarabia in 1869²⁴ occurred with inconsequence and antipathy, so typical to Russian empire. It raised the specific gravity of small owners, although did not legitimate total private property of peasants on land and preserved the elements of communal land use relations.

The undertaken institutional reforms reflected the ideas of division of powers principle, the equity of citizens before law. There were established new local government bodies in districts and provinces called *zemstva*. These were elected once in three years according to the principle of three electoral colleges: those of citizens, individual land owners and peasants’ communities. Having

²⁰ *Иллюстрированный путеводитель по юго-западной железной дороге*, 3-е изд., испр. 1899, стр. 434-435. In dependency of the period and political context, in the future, the problem of origins of Trojan’s walls, was an uncertain number of times re-discussed by researchers, without a certain response. On the history of the investigations and debates see: Radu Vulpe, *Valurile antice ale Basarabiei*, in “Cuget Moldovenesc”, Bălți, an. 12, nr. 11-12, 1943, p. 79-86; Георге Постикэ, *Валurile lui Траян ши археология (сек. VI-XI)*, Литература ши Арта, Кишинэу, 8 септемврие, 1988.

²¹ Андреев П. Н., *Иллюстрированный путеводитель по Юго-Западным казенным железным дорогам*, Киев, 1898, стр. 409.

²² In 1828 the status of *oblasty* was changed by *gyberbija*.

²³ They were liberated under the rule of Constantine Mavrocordat in 1749. After 1812 Russian power structures did not take the decision to introduce in Basarabia the institute of serfdom.

²⁴ In the South regions of Basarabia, from the beginning of 1864.

rather limited rights and competencies and being the electoral bodies of the local government, *zemstva* however brought their share for the renewal of the social life in the province. The reforms revived some instruments of power and administration, but at the same time decreased to a greater extent the status of the privileged province and at times, due to its borderline position, starting with the middle of the 19th century resulted in ethno-political conflicts.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the population of Basarabia initially incorporated more as an Orthodox population and less as ethnic societies, was mainly perceived by the local government as laymen and didn't require special attention not until after the second half of the 19th century. Besides, the Russian national project for a long time was in a latent condition, thus the problem of russification of foreigners was not on top of the list until the middle of the 19th century²⁵.

The changes started under the influence of the Romanian national state project establishment. The increase of Romania's influence on the national discourse raised suspicions from the Empire's authorities. Earlier, "the generally avoiding conflicts Moldovans", had become "the object of rapt attention"²⁶. In spite of substantial efforts undertaken against Romanian influence, the tsarist officials, on all levels repeatedly declared that the nucleus of the problem is the *bordering* geographical position of the *gyberbija*, situated too close to bordering Romanian state. Besides, Russian political statesmen expressed disappointment about the fact that after the Bucharest peace till the end of the XXth century Basarabia didn't play the role intended for it when annexed to the Russian Empire. After several decades from the annexation it became clear that it will not be the intermediate step for "further conquests in the Balkan peninsula and that it will not serve as a transition phase in our offence to Bosphor. Besides, during this period the general direction of our East policy changed, not having in mind just all Christians from the Ottoman Empire, but even more inclined to protect the Slavic interests in the Balkan Peninsula; from this last perspective the roman population from both halves of Moldova (one half being Basarabia and the other being the Romanian part) as well as Walachia (altogether with Bucovina and Transylvania composing current Romania), as if the separation of northern and southern Slavs could impede their fraternal unification in the future."²⁷

²⁵ The Law from 1854 offered to the Russian language in Basarabia the status of official language. (Cf. Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1991, p. 189.)

²⁶ Cf: Gheorghe Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, Ed. Prut Internațional, Chișinău, 2000, p. 123 – 125.)

²⁷ Л. Кассо, *Россия на Дунае и образование Бессарабской области*, Москва, 1913, стр. 229.

Thus, those fresh political trends and social opinions were conveying a new sense and order in the creation of the ideology of a *different* territory at the outskirts of the Empire. “This people – the Romanians have a special imprint and I cannot hide that looking at the map I am annoyed with these 8 million people being so alien to the Slavs, inhabit the wonderful Carpathians slopes, as if creating a wedge between the Slavic tribes and impeding their unification”²⁸.

Meanwhile, the national Romanian project, which began in the middle of the 17th century, in the second half of the 19th century developed rapidly over Prut river passing according to the classification of Miroslav Hroch, from phase A, meaning the revival of interest of a small group of intellectuals towards the ethnical language and culture, to phase C, when the national idea received the social support of the masses. Intellectual and political endeavors oriented towards the creation of a national statehood resulted in the creation of the Romanian state in 1859. Historical science, being not only an interesting occupation, but also an argument in political disputes generated in Romania a whole generation of intellectuals engaged in the elaboration of the national history discourse. Its internal discords were minimized and subordinated to the unification principle and the unitary historical concept offered one single geography supported by the effigy of a whole national territory embracing three flows: the Danube River, Nistru River and Tisa River. Thus, the political mythology of the national project laid on two sacral foundations: *the unity* and *the nation's fate*.

But, if the nation's fate is predestined then it must exist also some sort of historical and geographic predetermination of its territory and borders “united around the Carpathians chain” and being almost perfect from the outlook of national unity.²⁹ Thus, in the spirit of intellectual romanticism insistently bringing on the political stage the problem of national borders and producing its “ideal map” of the national state, in the second half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century, creating the Romanian discourse of the Basarabian irredent.

The poet Mihai Eminescu, one of the architects of the national project said:

”my belief is that beginning with the 14th century Basarabia was neither integrally nor partially

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ In the representations of Romanian historiography, from the second part of the XIXth century, the mounts unified, and the rivers divided the national space. (Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Ed. Humanitas, București, p. 199).

neither under Turks nor under Tatars, but it was part of an independent Moldova, although weakened and with ceded territories”³⁰.

After him ever since the ancient times of Romanians’ being “our Basarabia, this *lambeau de terre*, was honoured to be the integral part of the great, although transient country ruled by Stephan the Great, son of Alexander the Kind. It will stay the same way forever, an integral part of either Walachia in the 14th century or Moldova in the 15th century until its conquest by Russia”.³¹ “Our rights for Basarabia are coming from the ancient times and are very well founded [...] Basarabia was ours when Russia was not yet neighboring us, Basarabia is ours lawfully. It was conquered with ploughs and defended with arms from the 14th till the 19th century.”³²

New Age trends defined the trajectory of changes within the mythological contents of the national project, shifting the emphasis from the historical mission of nation’s founders as separate heroes to the masses. The literature of this age of historical romanticism created the effigy of “laymen” and those were able to defend the continuity of their national history.³³ “Romanian peasants are the same everywhere, from Tisa to Nistru”³⁴, “between the peasants from the river valleys of Nistru, Răut, Bîc and the left bank of Prut river and the peasants from the right bank and river valleys of Siret, Moldova and Bistrița there are no other differences except for the existent forms of state organization and elitist culture”.³⁵ The created image of western borderland of the Romanian civilization under other power kept the attention by the representations about virgin sources of Bassarabia’s traditional culture. “In this patriarchal world, everyone had to stay the way he’d always been”, being “in the way of all troubles”, the part of land from Prut to Dniester rivers, under permanent menace of predatory raids coming from the North and the East. “As the Romanian history, the folk songs and everything related to the cultural legacy of people is awaiting us (the researchers – author’s remark) over Prut river. Let us not linger!”³⁶

³⁰ Idem, *Basarabia*, in *Basarabia română. Antologie*, (ed. Florin Rotaru), Ed. Semne, București, 1996, p. 3. The paper is written on April 7, 1878.

³¹ Idem, p. 23.

³² apud: Tudor Nedelcea, *Eminescu apărătorul românilor de pretutindeni*, Craiova, 1925, p. 74-75.

³³ Lucian Boia, *Două secole de mitologie națională*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 39.

³⁴ Mihai Eminescu, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Însemnătatea ținuturilor de peste Prut*, in *Basarabia română. Antologie*, (ed. Florin Rotaru), Ed. Semne, București, 1996, p. 54. (The paper presented at the Session of the Romanian Academy in May 12 1912.)

³⁶ Idem, p. 61.

Led by professional curiosity a famous Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga made his first trip to Basarabia in 1905. What he'd seen there consolidated his concepts regarding the traditional culture of Moldovan population, but revealed to him *a different* profile of Basarabia.

“Chisinau is a big war center. [...] Barracks located in all parts of the city, orchestras singing military marches, officers in lively groups and individually. [...] This poor annexed Basarabia, has now become a well defended region.”³⁷ An invisible borderline is passing through the life of the city and countryside, separating two uneven worlds. From one part “the peasants, uncompromising in their proud moldovenism (“moldovenie” – author’s remark). Nothing under present circumstances can compromise them”. From the other part, the urban zone, whereas “the Jews and tramps earn a living from smuggle and usury”, “bureaucrat officials” and “the land owners if not Russian then at least russified”. “Peasants have no idea of a political life. They recognize themselves the same way as a century ago as being only the people from their own village, region or from the little river running in front of their eyes.”³⁸

Modernization processes that touched the western part of the Empire in the end of the 19th–beginning of the 20th century, under the conditions of cultural bordering and the social-economical outskirts of Basarabia generated disputes, determining the problems related to the marginal status of the region. In spite of the fact that almost half of Chisinau’s population consisted of Jews, this city proved to be one of the main anti-Semite centers of Russian Empire.³⁹ S. D. Urusov, the Russian prince appointed by the tsarist government as the governor of Basarabia in May 1903 after the Jewish massacres, “had the chance to take the responsibility for all the negative sides of the Russian state life of the last decades on the one hand, and on the other hand had to make efforts for adjusting it on new grounds”.⁴⁰ Being considered a liberal and up till that time knowing of Basarabia “as much as he knew of New Zealand”, Prince Urusov was sent by the tsarist government to the Western outskirts of Russian Empire so as “without favoring the Jews” to

³⁷ Idem, *Neamul românesc în Basarabia*, Editura Librăriei SOCECU & Co, București, 1905, p. 135.

³⁸ С. Д. Урусов, *Записки губернатора, (Кишинев, 1903-1904)*, Изд. В.М. Саблина, Москва, 1907; переизд. Изд. Литера, Кишинэу, 2004, стр. 227.

³⁹ Charles King, *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală*, Chișinău, Ed. Arc, 2002, p. 23.

⁴⁰ С. Д. Урусов, , *Записки губернатора, (Кишинев, 1903-1904)*, Изд. В.М. Саблина, Москва, 1907; переизд. Изд. Литера, Кишинэу, 2004, стр. 9.

investigate the situation and settle the causes of Chisinau massacre. The conclusions the new governor came up with were rather unexpected and undesirable for the tsarist government and Urusov was subsequently sacked for their publication and even charges were pressed against him. “Main consequences of the massacre, as I’ve soon been able to see, should have been looked for not in external damages, but within the disturbed common work, commercial and industrial stagnation, but mainly in the state of public opinion that generated amidst population enmity and discord.”⁴¹ Basarabia province “shaped as a pea”, its oblong part bordering Prut river, “separating Russia from Austria and Romania”, presented the new governor a whole series of special qualities in relation to other parts of the Russian Empire. “Great Russians (Великороссы), Little Russians (малороссы), Jews, Polish, Turks, Greek, Armenians, Bulgarians, German colonists, the Swiss from Chabeau village, some people called Gagauz and finally the main majority of Moldovans – all of them completely overwhelmed me at the beginning.”⁴² A distinct place in Basarabia is occupied by Ismail district “re-annexed to Russia in 1878 after the war with Turkey. Earlier this district was part of Romania and comprised three prefectures: Ismail, Bolgar and Cahul with the main cities bearing the same names. [...] There are no institutions, no zemstva, no volost and village governments with district heads in the Ismail district. Here preserved the Romanian commune regime. [...] So the Ismail district staid up till now an exception of the Russian district regime; it will probably wait for the general reform of our local government unless after some international combination it will go back to Romania again, which is stretching its maternal arms towards it over the borderline Prut river.”⁴³

Nevertheless, the long process of international assertion and recognition of the Romanian national state in second half of XIXth century, has complicated and kept away prospects of returning territories in this part of the Russian border. Diplomatic and political collisions, that brought Romania in a dilemma of choice of prospects of joining Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina or Basarabia, instead of joining forces of Antanta or the Tripartite alliance, focused Romania to join on August, 27th 1916 on the side of Antanta forces. In the autumn of 1916 armies of Central States have occupied the major part of the territory of Romania, having made a situation as dramatic as unforeseeable in the future. By the beginning of 1917, the southern part of front of operations had overwhelmed Bessarabia with meetings and slogans to overthrow imperial government, and end

⁴¹ Ibidem, стр. 28

⁴² Ibidem, стр. 44.

⁴³ Idem, стр. 206-207.

the war. The first mass actions of Bessarabians, on a wave of a birth of national consciousness, spring of 1917, have led to collective actions and formation of political associations that for the first time formulated programs of socio-political transformations and autonomy of Bessarabia. In April, 1917, the Moldovan National Party, in May same year - Moldovan central committee of soldiers and officers, in August - Bessarabian Peasants Party have been created. Ideas of transformation of province into an autonomous republic, often, under the influence of soldiers from Transylvanian battalions, as well as owing to development of political situation, have been used in slogans for unification of Romanians. The new legislature of the selective meeting (Sfatul Tarii), proclaimed on December, 2nd (15) 1917 Moldovan Democratic Republic. In extremely hard domestic and foreign conditions, by the end of winter 1918 as an exit from extending anarchy and Bolshevism threat, Sfatul Tarii adopted on March, 27th (April, 9th) 1918, *the Declaration on unification with Romania*.

However, except for expected pro-Romanian discourses among the Moldovan revolutionaries, beginning from February, 1917, other statements could be heard too. For example, on the congress of teachers in May 1917, the main reporter, Paul Gore, after calling the audience “Romanian brothers”, heard in response: “We are not Romanians, we are Moldovans!”⁴⁴. Reticence of Bessarabian Moldovans to pan-Romanian national project was caused by their isolation, after 1812, from the main stages of realization: Anti-Turkish revolts of 1821; standardization and latinization of language in the middle of XIXth century; formation in 1859 of the Romanian statehood, political class and royal dynasty (1866). Considering linguistic and cultural russification of the major part of the Moldovan intelligentsia, higher level of political repressions, and a large proportion of illiterate people among Moldovan population, one can draw a conclusion that national movements before the beginning of XXth century were not an influential force in Bessarabia. Revolution of 1905 has shown an embryonic, but short occurrence of a small national movement in the Moldovan intelligentsia in circles of Moldovan associations in universities of the Western part of the Russian Empire. But open political disorders and publishing activity which has begun in 1905 did not last long. The followed reaction against national movement has left only some of its veterans. During last years before the First World

⁴⁴ (apud: Irina Livezeanu, *Moldavia, 1917-1990: Nationalism and Internationalism Then and Now*, // Armenian Review, Summer/Autumn 1990, Vol. 43, No. 2-3/170-171, p. 153-193.)

War national movement in Bessarabia was limited to its most important centre – the magazine *Cuvânt Moldovenesc* (Moldovan Word), under the guidance of Pentelimon Halipa.

Naturally after February 1917, Moldovan revolutionary movement, painfully transforming into a national movement under conditions of border region and sharp competition with ideology of Bolshevism and nostalgia for “old Russian days”, later found itself unlike to be able to continue independent movement, on a trajectory of freedom, independence and national unification, without military and political participation of Romania.

The new stage for Bessarabia begun after unification with Romania, in March 1918, from general political euphoria of unification to adaptation process of the province to political institutions of power of royal Romania, has presented a number of problems that later forced making concessions to the cabinet of the conservative government of Alexander Marghiloman and limit the status of the province originally stipulated in *the Declaration on unification*. Shortcomings of dominant political competences, as well as practices in development of the new province, have escalated some problems, first of all, regarding the independent status, democratic freedom of the population and mechanisms of their realization in Bessarabia. As a unified province, Bessarabia preserved after 27 March (9 April) 1918, large administrative and political autonomy⁴⁵, and until November 1918 – elective authorities. Functions of the Sfatul Tarii and Board of Directors of the province authorities, have been provided in *the Declaration on unification* and consisted in “voting for budgets, control over all employees of *zemstvoes* and cities, appointment of all local administrative serving by an executive office”. Despite intentions to keep temporary autonomy, owing to promulgation of the royal decree, on May 23rd, 1918, last session of Sfatul Tarii was closed, and the post of the general commissioner of Bessarabia on June, 13th was assigned. In April 1920 the Board of directors has been abolished, enough resolute actions of the central government for unification of standards of administration, together with some actions “for enforcement of order and justice”, that caused social and economic changes, have infringed on interests and defined motivation of counteraction of certain social segments in Bessarabia. First of all, it was characteristic for a provincial *zemstvo* of Chisinau.

⁴⁵ The second clause of the declaration on unification clarified that “Bessarabia reserves a provincial autonomy headed by Sfatul Tarii, elected by overall, equal, direct and secret vote, with the executive office and administration”. (*Declația Sfatului Țării Republicii Democratice Moldovenești*, in „Cuvânt Moldovenesc”, 10 aprilie, 1918; translation: Ioann Scurtu, Dumitru Almas, etc., *История Бессарабии (от истоков до 1998 года)*, издание 2-е, Культурное Общество «Онисифор и Октавиан Гибу», Кишинэу, 2001, стр. 91.)

Apparently, during this period a definitive political identification of two basic passionarian groups occurs, with opposite discourses to Romania or Russia (Soviet Union), and in relation to them, a third, equally using ideological resources of first two and fed by regional self-identification, group interests, as well as limitation of political system of royal Romania. In intellectual circles, the fact of unification had apologists and critics as a symbolical resource of political competition between passionarian groups. On one pole of this discourse in the spirit of national romanticism historian Stefan Ciobanu dedicated some monographies about Bessarabia and stated that ‘national movement in Bessarabia appeared as a deep disorder of all people, as a big breath of masses and a collective action’.⁴⁶ National movement of Bessarabian Romanians, according to the author, fit well together with general aspiration of people in the western part of Russian empire: Finns, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Belarusians, Poles and Ukrainians, “who have inexhaustible reserves of energy and creative forces, culture that surpasses Russian, despite resourceful efforts of the imperial governments on their denationalization”.⁴⁷ The image of Bessarabia as *interstitio*, that is, a certain cultural space since 1812, between Romania and Russia and survived/rejected processes of imperial expansion became new explanatory image of this discourse.

Nevertheless, Bessarabia, after unification, along with separate improvements in economic and social life,⁴⁸ could not rise to level of other historical provinces.⁴⁹ From undeveloped province in the European part of the Russian empire, Bessarabia became a backward Eastern province of Royal Romania with a prevailing agricultural sector. Even supporters of unification had to state a large number of problems of integration of the province into general Romanian context: from economic problems caused by backwardness of infrastructure and communications adapted for strategic military needs of the former empire, to social and cultural problems caused by special structure of its population.⁵⁰ On top of that, there was inability of the political system to solve it

⁴⁶ Ștefan Ciobanu, *Unirea Basarabiei. Studiu și documente cu privire la mișcarea națională din Basarabia în anii 1917-1918*, Ed. Universitas, Chișinău, 1993, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Idem, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Иоанн Скурту, Думитру Алмаш, и др., *История Бессарабии (от истоков до 1998 года)*, издание 2-е, Культурное Общество «Онисифор и Октавиан Гибу», Кишинэу, 2001, стр. 140-180; см. так же I. Agrigoroaiei, Gheorghe Palade., *Basarabia în cadrul României întregite (1918-1940)*, Ed. Universitas, Chișinău, 1993.

⁴⁹ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare, 1918-1930*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 1998, (*Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995.).

⁵⁰ Bessarabia was a province with diverse structure of the population in Royal Romania. In 1930, here lived 352000 ethnic Russian, 314000 Ukrainians, 205000 Jews. 87 % from the general number of the population lived in cities, and

effectively, as well as closeness of border with the USSR, that was associated with a pending Bolshevik danger⁵¹, that inclined the Romanian administration to application of rigid tactics of forced measures and interdictions, and responded in collective consciousness in a wave of misunderstanding and disappointments in results of unification.⁵²

Source of constant instability was uncertain political status of the province as a part of Romania. Bessarabia was a unique territorial acquisition which was not supported by any international agreement. Unification was not recognized not only by the Soviet Russia but, unlike former Austro-Hungarian territories, by Western powers. The border of Bessarabia was the last and most disputed of the discussed questions at the Paris Peace Conference. U.S. delegation, and in particular president Woodrow Wilson was confused about absence of any plebiscite on this issue among provincial local population. Also, delegations of the Great Britain and France, anxious about struggle against Soviet Russia, did not plan to make changes in the territorial rights and interests of forces being on the side of the former imperial power.⁵³

Failure of the Soviet-Romanian negotiations has pushed transfer of the Moldovan question into ideological dimension. Embodied in 20-40th years by Stalin the Bolshevik modernization program of the empire provided for transformation of multinational empire into the state of the nations. Each republic received a communist party and national government, and title nations in republics gained certain rights. Population identification according to ethnic markers prescribed by the party and its grouping by national categories has provided formal legitimacy of administrative divisions and an outline of newly created cultural borders. However, ideological orientation on world revolution and territorial expansion have left the trace on configuration of the national project. In this area, in 1924 in territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, there was formed a Moldovan Independent Soviet Socialist Republic which according to the plan of initiators of the project, could “play the same role of political propaganda factor as the Belarus republic in relation to Poland, and Karelian republic - in relation to Finland. It would serve as an object of

majority of ethnic Romanian preferred in countryside that created the Romanian administration additional difficulties in its efforts on province modernization. (Charles King, *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală*, Ed. Arc, Chișinău, 2002, p. 40-44.)

⁵¹ “In public opinion of the country, about Bessarabia, it was generated erroneous opinion. When someone speaks about east province, usually for fun or in seriously someone necessarily uses a word *a Bolshevik*.” (From performance of politician Dimitrija Bogosha, on November, 10th, 1938; Dimitrie Bogoș, *La răspântie: Moldova de la Nistru. 1917-1918*, Ed. Știința, Chișinău, p. 183.)

⁵² See Iulian Frunțașu, *O istorie etnopolitică a Basarabiei, 1812-2002*, Ed. Chișinău, Chișinău, 2002, p. 138-140.

⁵³ Charles King, *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală*, Ed. Arc, Chișinău, 2002, p. 37.

attention and sympathies from Bessarabian population and will strengthen the claim for unification with area across Dniester (i.e. Bessarabia – author’s remark).”⁵⁴

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 has formed a basis for re-annexation of Bessarabia in June 1940 as a result of the categorical notes of the Soviet government regarding “century old unity of Bessarabia occupied mainly by Ukrainians” and “the fact of violent tearing away of Bessarabia” from Soviet Union ⁵⁵. On August 2nd, 1940 VII session of the Supreme Council of the USSR has passed the law on creation of allied Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. By this period, identity of Bessarabians, nevertheless, did not involve the statehood concept, except for a very short period in 1917-1918. Along with formation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, identity of this territory gained a clearer character. Although the Soviet pseudo-statehood did not allow realization of the real rights, certain symbols, from the state opera to the flag and the coat of arms, were to maintain in political consciousness an image of the Moldovan republic as part of the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

The new national project of the Soviet power in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, that stated as a basic principle condemnation of “bourgeois nationalism” and apotheosis of “proletarian nationalism”, inherited from old imperial nationalism a number of contextual signs. Searches of for Slavic roots in historical and ethnic aspects, elimination of frontier signs between Prut and Dniester where elements of “Slavic and not Slavic” world would cross, became mythological constants of the new national project. Treatises on history of MSSR actively started to “establish” national past in reply to “call of the party and government”. The lucky findings were vague (that is, written sources) times of the Middle Ages which gave enough operative area in the new ideological and built upon fractioned scheme, theories Moldovan ethnic genesis. Let's show only some of literary archetypes published in '60 - '70th years texts of the Moldovan history. “*In the beginning there was nothing*” – “after devastating invasion of Huns in last third of IV century the territory between Prut and Dniester become almost completely deserted. The 5th century in this

⁵⁴ From the report about necessity of creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic initiative group led by G.Kotovski. The note contained detailed reasons for formation of the Moldovan republic, the main of which are decision of fate of Bessarabia, its return to structure of the USSR, and subsequent distribution of revolution to the Balkans. (Скворцова, А. Ю., Смирнова И. Г., Бомешко Б. Г., Лисовина А. П., Репида Л. Е., Шорников П. М., *История Приднестровской Молдавской Республики*, Т. 2, ч. I, РИО ПГУ, Тирасполь, 2001, стр. 83-84.)

⁵⁵ The telegram of the people's commissar of foreign affairs of the USSR of V. M. Molotov to the plenipotentiary of the USSR in Romania Kingdom A. I. Lavreniev, on June, 27th, 1940, Архив Российского министерства иностранных дел, Ф. 059. Оп.1. П.319. Д. 2194. Лл. 89-90.

⁵⁶ Iulian Frunțașu, *O istorie etnopolitică a Basarabiei, 1812-2002*, Ed. Cartier, Chișinău, 2002, p. 218.

territory is presented by very rare archaeological findings”⁵⁷. Later, according to logic of development of cosmogonic scenario there was the first subject that personifies creators - founders of a new paradigm – “In the end of Vth - beginning of VIth century in the history of Dniester – Carpathian lands starts a new stage connected to mass movement of Slavs to Southeast Europe. They moved from Central and Eastern Europe and by the end VIth - beginning of VIIth century, after breaking the system of shore fortifications in northern border of the Byzantine Empire - Danube, went South, and occupied all territory of Balkan Peninsula. In Dniester – Carpathian lands Slavs moved ahead from the North to the South in the valleys of Siret, the Prut and Dniester.”⁵⁸ Then, basic action of overcoming / development of chaos / free area – “Unlike fast advancement of nomad tribes, Slavs along with agricultural, settled character of life moved slower, therefore simultaneously with settlement there was a process of economic development of territory. In VIth - VIIth centuries Slavs had occupied a considerable unit of territory of the Dniester-Carpathian lands”.⁵⁹ The name gained by the founder should give sense and legitimacy to the sources, the subsequent events and a certain personification of space in the world around: “gradually uniform Slavic space, in the land of Central and Eastern Europe, was divided into Eastern and Western Slavs. In Old Russian annals “The story of time years” says about settlement of the East Slavic tribe unions in the Eastern Europe. In the extreme Southwest of the territory of this settlement lived Tiverts and Uliches. [...] In the territory of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic now there about 100 known East Slavic monuments from the end of IXth - beginning of XIIth century”.⁶⁰ By the middle of 10th century, the Kiev state has united East Slavic tribes where “Uliches and Tiverts were the last to join”, “and became a part of culture of the East Slavic world”. As a matter of fact, there is a reprojection of Prut-Dniester spaces in the periphery of Roman world into periphery of the Slavic world. Later, as a result of movement of Slavs in two streams, after passing Carpathians Mountains, and partially settling in emptied Dniester-Carpathian lands, to the west and south of Carpathians with romanized population (the second participant of the creative process) and as “long and close contacts of romanized population and Slavs formation by IX century of a new ethnocultural community - Volokhs. The “brightest” page of this narrative is the episode of *Moldovan ethnic genesis*. “Voloshsky population which has settled in XII-XIV

⁵⁷ *История Молдавской ССР. С древнейших времён до наших дней*, Изд. Штиинца, Кишинёв, 1982, стр. 32.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

centuries in the territory to the east from Carpathians, formed a basis for formation of the Moldovan nationality. After moving to a new, poorly populated land, Volokhs found themselves in natural-economic and political conditions differing from places of stay of other branches of Volokhs in the Carpathian-Danube lands. These new conditions and contacts with eastern Slavs promoted origin and development of original ethnic lines in comparison with other Volokhs”. The main ethnic difference of the Moldovan nationality from other East Romance communities consisted in that it formed thanks to contacts of Volokhs in XII-XIV centuries with the remaining partially East Slavic (Old Russian) population in the territory of Dniester-Carpathian lands.⁶¹

Thus, the most successful result of Marist-Leninist terminology, applied to Bessarabian historical narrative believed that the general ancestors of Romanians and Moldovans are *Vlakhs* and *Volokhs*, at a stage previous to ethnic genesis, were divided into two branches, interactions with Southern Slavs and Eastern Slavs. A reduction in this discourse of complex ethnic processes to ideological conjuncture has brought Prut-Dniester space to a role of a historical border zone between the Slavic and Romanian world, and, as a matter of fact, displayed a certain part of representations about borders and a vector of territorial expansion of the empire. Certainly, Moldovans "derived" from double Slavonization of the Eastern Roman population, according to the Stalin theory of the nations, by the end of XIX century should be ready for formation of "the Moldovan bourgeois nation" into "the Moldovan socialist nation",⁶² and by 1940 to formation of Moldovan statehood.⁶³ Cultural differences, in a new political context, have found a paramount importance and used for marks of ethnic distinctions and borders between Moldovans and Romanians. The historical material once again became a struggle field for «possession of the past». Romania, according to ideological indications, had a role of *alien*. Such alienness was consolidated, in particular, in practice of the Soviet historiography and attributed Romanian

⁶¹ Idem, page 44-45. «The main ethnic difference of the Moldovan nationality from other East Romance communities is that it derived thanks to contacts of Volokhs in XII-XIV centuries with remained partially East Slavic (Old Russian) population in territory of the Dniester-Carpathian lands » (Idem, p. 45)

⁶² Idem, page 217-220; «the Basic ethnic territory in which borders there was a formation of the Moldovan bourgeois nation, included Bessarabian province, and also regions left-bank along Dniester, covering a unit of Podolsk and Kherson provinces. In the end of XIX - the beginning of XX century in the specified territory the Moldovan bourgeois nation was generated. At this time here there were all its basic signs which have found reflection in national consciousness of the Moldovan people. Formation of the Moldovan bourgeois nation as a part of Russia occurred under conditions of the multinational state.» (p. 219-220).

⁶³ Cf. А. Лазарев, *Молдавская советская государственность и бессарабский вопрос*, Кишинев, 1995; С. Афтенюк, *Ленинская национальная политика Коммунистической партии и образование советской государственности молдавского народа*, Кишинев, 1996.

historical sources after year 1812 to "foreign", inclusive, and between wars when Bessarabia was part of royal Romania.

Wilhelmus Petrus Van Meurs, a researcher of Dutch origin, in the monography dedicated to historiography of Bessarabia during the Soviet period, considering the history of formation of the Moldovan nation in the Soviet historiography, has reached a conclusion that journalists, historians and politicians misused with a duality and relativity terms of "Moldova" and "Bessarabia". The same as and in a case with concept "Soviet people", there was a change in definition of "Moldovan people" in its territorial sense. According to the Constitution of 1978 the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was "a Republic of Moldovan people" the formulation prompting that other minority of republic belonged to the Moldovan people, and the territorial component of this concept has surpassed the ethnic.⁶⁴

In the beginning of 90th, after disintegration of the USSR, "dividing" function of history has addressed to necessity and inevitability of occurrence ("restoration") of new state formations and, accordingly, on strengthening of sovereignty of the "new" power. Reconstruction of an image of the national past at mass level actively went under the influence of political processes, as well as under the influence of social practices. Most Post-Soviet states where the project of national building, to History was attributed a role of "catalyst of processes of ethnic Renaissance" and theoretical base of ideas of statehood. Apparently, scope of political projects influenced directly upon the image and scale of references to mythological components of mobilization narratives. In the Republic of Moldova a new political class dissatisfied with contribution of professional historians in building the Moldovan nation, have opened for themselves a new direction of literary-political activity.⁶⁵ Invention of the past in the Republic of Moldova became a kind of political occupation without scientific rules and critical analysis where depending on motivation of ideologists saw "potential directions of mass mobilization".

Its authors addressed the image of the territory of the Republic of Moldova as a sacral space of development of the Moldovan nation. In spite of the fact that the historical centers of medieval Moldova remained behind republican borders, the main boundary of resistance of this mythologeme was a geographical one, was easily overcome, by transferring the discourse from

⁶⁴ Wilhelmus Petrus Van Meurs, *Chestiunea Basarabiei în istoriografia comunistă*, Ed. ARC, Chişinău, 1996, p. 138-139.

⁶⁵ On the given problem: Павел Терешкович, *Конструируя прошлое: Исторические ресурсы современных государственных идеологий (Украина и Молдова)*, // *Перекрестки* № 1-2/2005, Журнал исследований восточноевропейского пограничья, стр. 5-20.

scientifically-historical into literary-ideological measurement: "Here is our Moldova!"⁶⁶ As the first governor of the Land of Moldova said, in the coordinates of mythogeography of the Moldovan national project this phrase sounds as an antithesis on where it still can be. „All of us actually well know that all of us are Bessarabians, a special, uneasy tribe in open areas of Europe. It is our great "national secret". We are not going to convince anyone of our loyalty. Because we are placed immediately in the middle this old continent for freedom of which our ancestors laid their heads many times. We do not have to be ashamed of our "provincial" origin.”⁶⁷

Political plays on history have opened the charm of a myth of "Golden Age" because against chaos and confusion of the present, the past is represented as a place of unity and sequence. The integrity of designed identity cannot be shown otherwise than from long time and continuously, and presence of eternal symbols gives special importance to each stage and any fact of history.

Former president of the Republic of Moldova, P. K. Lucinschi, begins his reflections on identity and statehood of Moldova and Moldovans with an archetypological template of the sacral centre: "Moldova really was and is, as they say in a known folk song, 'a heavenly spot', 'the country with the most fertile earth'".⁶⁸ Spatial installation Moldovan national building project has offered political-geographical borders the spiritually-organic model of space. Vasile Stati, in the *History of Moldova*, remarked: "the Eye catches the valleys of Prut where pure fields extending until Dniester, reflecting pure plains - hazy space on the size similar to ocean. Majestic Dniester waters in a shade of coast with narrow walls... If goddesses from the Greek legends would learn about these places, they for certain would lodge here, having left the mountains. And Prut, the rich river, flow among boundless steppes with fertile fields on coast...".⁶⁹ Myths of the heroic past have entered images of "the nation Golden Age" and its ancestors of founders: "So happens, that since XIII century, but especially in XIV, Carpathian-Dniester Romanized population differed from others and to defend the territory, was called Moldovans. Under this name, and only under this

⁶⁶ Vasile Stati, *Istoria Moldovei*, Vivar-Editor, Chişinău, 2002, p. 15; Виктор Спепанюк, *Государственность молдавского народа. Исторические, политические и правовые аспекты*, ФЕР „Tipografia Centrală”, Кишинев, 2006, стр. 19.

⁶⁷ Виктор Боршевич, *Время нашей мифологии: "Каин, где твой брат Авель?"*, // «Независимая Молдова», от 28 февраля 2007 г.; <http://www.nm.md/daily/article/2007/02/28/0301.html>.

⁶⁸ П. К. Лучинский, *Молдова и молдаване*, Изд. «Cartea Moldovei», Кишинев, 2006.

⁶⁹ Василе Стати, *История Молдовы*, ФЕР «Tipografia Centrală», Кишинев, 2003, стр. 13.

name, it has been perpetuated in national creativity, in own documents of the State office, in all Moldovan-Slavic chronicles and the Moldovan annals in Moldovan language...”⁷⁰

Victor Stepaniuc, in aspiration to build symbolical legitimacy of the Moldovan statehood, stated: “the population formed as a result of merge of radical free Dacks with Romanized Dacks, from the West, and with the Slavs who have come from the East”, in Carpathian-Dniester area and on the land to the east of Dniester the Republic Moldova call Moldovans, and the country Moldova.⁷¹

However, the question at issue of identification of collective "I" in relation to cultural space and remained without the unequivocal answer, having broken a harmonious fabric of an ideological monolith: tradition, territory, the nation, indivisibility, the sovereignty. P. K. Lucinschi, states: “We, Moldovans, like settled somewhere on suburb [Balkan – author’s remark] peninsulas, however balkanism has concerned also us. Probably, here it is a question about balkanism which, according to some experts, is translated as the politician, false shine, idle talk, requisitions, squandering, tolerance. [...] in my opinion, balkanism is not a metaphor, but a reality. It is similar to a family in which there is no harmony, and all its members cannot reconcile among themselves in any way, ready just about to blow up, nobody listens to nobody ...”⁷² Enough, the author believes, to track names of settlements, the rivers, behind surnames and nicknames, to understand, how much we are mixed, “... Risky even if not ridiculously, to speak about pure ‘Latinists’, pure Slavs, when before you a huge demographic hearth what was almost one thousand years the north and the south of Danube - a hearth in which the set of sorts has mixed up and melted, tribes, ethnos and the people. Thus it is possible to speak about what pure Moldovans, Russian or Romanians?».⁷³

Dmitry Ciubasenco, a political analyst on a question on presence of one nation in Moldova as obligatory attribute of the state answers: “What nation lives in Dniester-Prut area, today to difficult to say. Officially it is ‘the people of Moldova’, but these people so ill-matched, and it is so mixed up than talking about formation to its basis of the political nation is not necessary yet”. Having laid aside Ukrainians, Russian, Gagauz, Bulgarians, it is possible to note, that Moldovans do not have unity. Most of all disagreements among them concerning the one who they are, in

⁷⁰ Idem, *Штефан Великий, Господарь Молдовы*, ФЕР «Тирография Централă», Кишинев, 2003, стр. 56.

⁷¹ Виктор Спепанюк, *Op. cit.*, стр. 23.

⁷² П. К. Лучинский, *Молдова и молдаване*, Изд. «Cartea Moldovei», Кишинев, 2006, стр. 65.

⁷³ Idem, p. 46-47.

what language they talk, and what to do with the country they have after break-up of the USSR. “There are Moldovans who consider themselves Moldovans, and the language - Moldovan. There are Moldovans who consider themselves Moldovans, and the language - Romanian. There are Moldovans who consider themselves Romanians, and the language - Romanian. There are Moldovans who consider themselves speaking Romanian as Romanians, but support preservation of statehood of Republic of Moldova (variants - with Transnistria or without) “. There are also Bessarabian Romanians, according to the author convinced that sooner or later this silly game in their opinion in the Moldovan statehood will be completed also all will return to a normal path, that is Bessarabia (or what remains) will reunite with Romania.⁷⁴

Romanian researcher Lucian Boia, in the book dedicated to Romania as the country in South-Eastern borderland, noticed that this country is, by the nature is also Balkan, East and Central European, simultaneously, not belonging completely to any of these paradigms. Romanians, accordingly to the author are separated not only in relation to aliens, but also among to themselves. In the context of stereotypes about inhabitants of three historical provinces, the author stated that Bessarabians are differentiated most of all from other Romanians. “Are they still Romanians? At least, they are called Moldovans”. Romanians do not understand why Bessarabians could not be Romanians: as were a component of historical Moldova and then Romania; they speak in the Romanian language, therefore there can be no doubts of their national identity. Such interpretation, however, assumes revaluation of factors (language and history) at the expense of others. In national building first of all to be important the desire to be (or not to be) a Romanian or a Moldovan.⁷⁵ Only minority of the population of the republic at the moment openly supports an ideal of unification with Romania. The former Romanian elite has irrevocably receded to Romania as a consequence of territorial loss of Bessarabia, or has been destroyed by the Soviet power. The past cannot be restored. Romania has concluded all contracts with Romania and Ukraine recognizing new political configurations and borders. As consequence, the author concludes, today there are two Romanian states, to tell more truly, one Romania and one Moldova.⁷⁶

According to American researcher Charles King, Republic Moldova is a unique country in the Eastern Europe where discussions about national identity between a political class and cultural

⁷⁴ Дмитрий Чубашенко, *План "ИД" - деворонизация всей страны*, in “Молдавские ведомости”, № 37 (934) /23.05.2007, стр. 1.

⁷⁵ Lucian Boia, *România: țară de frontieră a Europei*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 203-206.

⁷⁶ Idem.

elite are still conducted.⁷⁷ For Moldovans the nationality, throughout XX century was a negotiable and variable concept of community with changeable enough cultural and political borders. “The territory of modern Moldova always was a borderland zone the challenged and divided external forces wishing to transform Moldovans to their semblance». ⁷⁸ There is nothing more unstable, considers a Romanian historian Al. Zub than identity of the population being on a border zone, with such convulsive history and such tragic fate.⁷⁹

Studied object under the name “Moldovan people”, certainly, to greater degrees is a phenomenon created by process, political, social and economic and cultural construction, because Moldovan society never existed in such form until 1812. Each of the mentioned periods has imposed at the level of collective consciousness and configurations of knowledge special imprints of *identity* of community. Political projects of nation building in this area, often enough derived a territorial constant as the main model of representations of identity, having consolidated it as a steady size of collective experience and mental structures, and generated numerous and non-uniform attempts of designing regional and cultural and political self-sufficiency.

Instability of new collective identity of the Republic of Moldova and its ambivalent geography of discourse at crossroads, at least of two meganarratives, - imperial and national, has combined components characteristic for a border zone of collective mythology, schemes of collective perception and systems of symbolical judgment. As a consequence, in the early nineties, the former Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was split into two parts, generated along the river Dniester additional border between Republic Moldova and unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, from the very beginning defined a set of problems connected with their legitimacy, attributes of statehood and collective identity.

⁷⁷ Charles King, *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală*, Ed. Arc, Chișinău, 2002, p. 231.

⁷⁸ Idem, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Idem, p. XVI.