REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA BETWEEN NATION STATE BUILDING AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY ARMONIZATION: A RETROSPECTIVE*

PUTINĂ Natalia,
PhD in political sciences, Coordinator researcher
Head of S. L."Sociology of Politics"
Moldova State University

The Republic of Moldova lived through two decades of independence. In these circumstances, the assertion of the national state has the irreversible consequences. Meanwhile the political situation in the country is unclear and duplicitous. Political dynamics of the Moldovan state was deeply influenced by the ethnic factors. Most of the current problems of transitional macro level essentially for the particular interests related to national identity, the nature of socio-political relations, relations goal-means mentality and descend from the totalitarian Soviet regime. Soviet state was not in fact a nation-state but centralized multiethnic state in which statehood nations have a formal character. The fight against the Soviet Union took the nationalist shape with popular support on behalf of the nation, especially in the Baltic republics, Russia,Ukraine, and Moldova. Thus, nationalism was a restructuring tool used by democratic movements and political elite as perpetual evidence of national identity and mobilizing principle of self-identification.

Keywords: ethnical politics, national state, ethnic minority, statehood

In the Republic of Moldova to build the national state, with a diverse population according to ethnically cultural aspect was quite difficult. It should be mentioned that the "national" attribute is not identical with the "ethnic" category because, to the foundation of the Moldovan statehood serve not only ethnic Moldovans - the majority population, but also the representatives of all other ethnic groups from the country. Domestic political scientist V. Saca, reflecting about the Moldovan transition, asserts that the biggest paradox of Moldova is the fundamental element - "nation-state" which does not real work, because of its full lacks of sovereignty. The divisions of national identification interests and historical identities of the ethnic groups, within in the forming state, plus strong positions of the totalitarian mentality and behavior in its construction, led to serious instability and conflicts [26]. In this context, I. Munteanu approached in his article "National State: discourse of the legitimacy", that for the moment, only the state can be able to integrate in political terms a stable community of people to join in the international community. Obviously, the concept of nation-state

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assumption is not based just on "strict cultural-linguistic and religious cohesion", but also is the ability to provide answers to questions regarding the consensual diversity [19, 11].

Moldova's statehood building focused on two major issues:

a) building a modern democratic state to represent the general interests of society by creating fundamental legal and institutional mechanism regarding the state existence,

b) formation of the Moldovan people, its sovereignty carrier under a multinational, a task that proved to be more complicated than the first.

The ethnic composition of the population of any country with significant minority groups, and attempts to assess the quantitative and qualitative relationships between natives' people and ethnic minorities, have always been considered a difficult and delicate issue. A significant impact is the issue regarding the dynamic nature of political and legal status of national minorities. At the first moments of ethnic legal frame development and improvement, there was not a coincidence with the specific interethnic relationships and possible conflicted risks and, on the other hand, was make by a fundamental disagreement regarding the final goal [8, 6]. Since its independence, the Republic of Moldova has faced with many of the common problems for the entire post-Soviet space: economic decline, political turmoil, ethnic disagreements and uncertain relations with some neighbor states. This process was perform simultaneously by implementing the complex transformations in order to create governing institutions of the state and fundamental bases of democracy and market economy [24].

The international academic opinion regarding the creation of new democratic states tends to give the complex explanations of the political process here. Some authors describes the process of democratization of these countries "as a triple transition" by: democratization, economic liberalization and "state-building" [21] in contrast to the "double transition" of post-authoritarian states from Southern Europe and Latin America. At the same time, this political process from the Republic of Moldova has four dimensions characteristic, which involves both such elements as: democratization, economic liberalization and "state/nation-building" [13, 128]. On the other hand, it also mentioned about an "Imperial", transition marked by reminiscences of the Soviet ideology [13]. As we see, the new state tasks of the Republic of Moldova were quite complex and difficult, which delayed the transition period to be passed and led to a manifestation of the unique events for the state from the post-communist space.

According to the active mobilization of public policy, promoted by the Soviet Union in order to internationalize the plurality of nations located on the territory, after its collapse, many republics, including the Republic of Moldova became one of the states with a high percentage of national minorities. The author I Casu taking into consideration the quality of the recently described Moldovan political process, - describes the necessity of the de-Sovetization for our country in economic, political or

military spheres, will be a necessary precondition for Europeanization. However, post-Soviet Moldova needs a priori or simultaneously southeastern Europeanization versus Europeanization itself. Our country has felt the need for a strategy of de-Sovietization and de-communization because of lack of the benefits and outcomes of transition, comparing with the Baltic countries [3, 242]. Throughout the former Soviet Union where the communist regime were exploited the nationalism, has been catalyzed the development of xenophobia, the national minorities have suffered the consequences of that process. Soviet regime tried to dispossess the nations and ethnic communities' sense that was absorbed by it, under color of care to develop and protect their cultures [19, 110].

Previously, there were exposed opinions regarding the democratic evolution of Moldavian political process as objective and conscious action, but on the other hand, the democratization of our country could be explained trough the "pluralism by default" paradigm conceived, as a Soviet legacy. "Pluralism by default" refers to a situation where the political competition increases, not as a result of the institutionalization of civil society or opposition, but rather as a state of polarization and fragmentation of political elites as well, and as an indicator of the inability of the state to monopolize political control [31].

The Republic of Moldova can be viewed as a difficult and controversial case in exercising its statehood. This state became known for the international community due to the existence of ethno political changes that have influenced the elements of the political system. We are referring here to the two conflicts in southern and eastern republic (Comrat, Tiraspol), which contributed to the emergence of secessionist movements and the creation of autonomous republics with the illegal status. However, these fighting movements for external self-determination have determined the political inability to manage the ethno-political differences of a newly created multinational state [23]. German sociologist and philosopher R. Darendorf approached in the context of the democratization of Eastern Europe: "The more homogeneous is country, the greater are the chances to develop the democratic process. The state with a diverse ethnic structure will prioritize issues related to the territorial integrity, ensure law and order, less will be concerned about the issues of the democracy itself" [32]. These reflections of the scientist are rightly, and described the realities of the Republic of Moldova.

The identification of determinatives regarding the ethno political processes in the country has become a research problem for those interested in studying the former Soviet space. In this context, the author W. Crowther mentions three factors: the foreign policy issues, the domestic political factor and duplicitous character of the identity of natives.

According to T. Gurr, internal political situation of the states cannot be regarded as exclusive and unequivocal primary cause of the contradictions. The international

factors obviously lead to the appearance of the conflict or complicate the efficient and rapid solving of them [10].

The external factor is most often approached in the literature, as one determinative in the evolution of political and ethno political processes from the Republic of Moldova. However, for many researchers the Republic of Moldova is an area of study, both in terms of identity politics, and the identity impact in establishing the external relations of the state [12]. The genesis and impact of external factors upon the Moldovan political life are focused on the several key points: geographical determinism, demographics and ethnic minority groups relations with their ethnic homelands, geopolitical factor.

Taking into consideration the historical context, both during before soviet era and in the Soviet period an important role were played by the interethnic relations, which determined the orientation and direction for the mobilization process in the Republic of Moldova. The inter-community tensions are often characterized by the relationship between the ethnic communities and the nation state. The fundamental problem consists in the way of establishment of the relationship between the community and the state. Local researcher E. Anghelasserts that "in the state with many ethnic segments cohabitation, the state is led undoubtedly by the majority nation" [1, 10]. At the same point of view M. Smith expresses that "a political order designed to ensure unity and stability in a society characterized by the multicultural pluralism cannot be based only on the subordination of another cultural segment of society" [29]. He also is skeptical about the development of democratic governance in the divided societies with the ethno-cultural aspect, because of many ethnic conflicts provoked by the ethnic groups [27, 26], and there is an additional approach of E. Gellner that asserts the impossibility of existence to a third cultural pluralism apart, except the inclusion or creating national state [9]. Like E. Gellner, W. Kymlicka says that states are quite biased in defining titular culture, characterizing the majority rule trough the term of cultural hegemony, expressed in particular by the prevailing official language/state, national symbols and historiography for majority holding [15].

These skeptical judgments about the impossibility to achieve the democratic principles in the ethnic pluralism was criticized by some authors who proposed less radical solutions for stability of the national-divided societies by implementing the regulatory policy strategies. These strategies can be divided two main tools: an approach based on constitutional and institutional design of the consociated democracy, federalism and autonomous regions, the second approach is based on the "diversify the group rights" [16]. In this context, the entire conglomerate of post-Soviet authors notes that the Republic of Moldova had the most balanced policy for the multi-ethnic character recognition, and in some respects it was quite liberal [7, 38], by adopting the legal and institutional structures and promoting the collective rights of minorities.

We agree with the idea that a unmanaged plurality can deprive the state of its role as the main arbitrator within ethno cultural sphere because, despite the fact that the state uses political homogenization and unification of ethno cultural sphere, most plural societies face with the ethnic division (ethnic cleavage). There is no regime interested in the unlimited multiplication of ethno-cultural diversity but the problem of the ethno cultural and political boundaries is closely related to the social class - identification. It should be mentioned that the multiculturalism policy is based on the rational foundation; its main purpose is to get to the compromise, of the peaceful coexistence of all citizens and to preserve the territorial integrity. At the same time, the multiculturalism needs to be implemented by the abstract or ideal principle of the social organization through the measure and rationality [33, 37]. Thus, we asserts that the Moldovan state authorities demonstrated at the primary and training phase an inability, and lack of the experience in managing its ethnic complexity. In some cases the governors just were emphasized the civic and multiethnic character of the state, therefore they were created the anxiety among the minorities [11, 357].

Another determinative of the political process in the Republic of Moldova, as we previously mentioned, was the duplicitous nature of national identity of the titular nation. Although the Republic of Moldova was not previously existed as an independent state (in the existing territorial limits),Ch King asserted that, "the Republic of Moldova has produced the most famous national movements during the period of perestroika". In fact, this is the only successor state of the USSR, where the native population is divided by belonging to the essence of culture, language and history [12]. Dialogue between the political forces that support this duplicity was a crucial early declaration of sovereignty, but is also present in the discourse of politicians today. Masses attitude vis-a-vis these issues have played a decisive role in the Moldovan transition, starting with the anti-Soviet mobilization and continuing with the consolidation of the regime "moderate ethnic" inherited from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic [6].

It should be noted that split of the the country emerged and developed in accordance with the political principle not to the ethnic groups, at that time in the Republic of Moldova, were present two political powers, two systems. Thus, the attitude towards union with Romania to Moldova's population split unionists and partakers of independence, which contributed to the activation and strengthening separatist forces in southern and eastern Moldova. The mobilization trend analyzes Gagauz and Bulgarians, and other similar type actions performed on the eve of the Soviet collapse and so far, is represented by facts and interesting documents, but full of all sorts of expenses and myths, overcome and dispel which proves to be a quite complicated task for specialists [30].

Returning to the issue of ethnicity, the researcher Ragin Ch. identifies three reasons/major goals of the ethnic mobilization phenomenon: development, competition, reactionary [25]. Although his theory was formulated in the context of

mobilizing the non-titular ethnic groups, it can be applied for the permanent population. For example, the ethnic mobilization intensified in some plural societies when population of the titular groups and non-titular competed for the same rewards, such as language status and dominance in the territory. In the Republic of Moldova to the national liberation, movements stood a competitive reason, focused around the language policy. Thus, the titular nation's attempt to make officially the native language provoked resistance from the national minorities [28, 151]. The status of ethnic relations in the country threatened the process of statehood formation and consolidation. The ethnic mobilization of majority population generated the "reactionary nationalism" by the representatives of national minorities and caused the involvement of external forces such as Russia. Despite of the ethnic conciliatory policy promoted by the government the trend of institutionalization of its political structures hit growth potential resistance from the separatist movements [4, 324-325]. At the same time, both Moldovan and Gagauz through emancipation movement tended to improve their status quality. Ch Ragin's theory, related to the ethno political events that took place in this area is fully recovered.

The development of post-Soviet Republic of Moldova is required to be considered for several reasons: national mobilization processes and the creation of the state of the majority population, reactionary nationalism of ethnic minority representatives, external actors' perceptions about their ethnic diaspora in the new social and political order; applied strategies in order to solve the ethno political conflict. These conflicts were analyzed through different approaches and were characterized by the following marks: ethnic or regional, mass or elite [2, 4]. If Gagauz conflict has the ethnic roots, then Transnistrians have justified their separatism by the regional principles [28, 151]. In the Republic of Moldova the argument of the generated conflicts is made by the convergence of three other factors: hostility masses, radical political leaders and ethnic security dilemma [2, 4]. If the opinions expressed above Moldovan politics versus minority is balanced, overthrowing the normality multiethnic by conciliators following gestures of the President M. Snegur, through adopting the so-called "zero option" for citizenship and the decreasing popularity of the Popular Front [17].

Further, we propose to evaluate the impact of Moldova ethnic politics, based on analysis of the evolution of its legal framework. We must recognize that *the legislative process in the regulation of minority rights* was a difficult one, generating discontent reactions, both from titular nation representatives and national minorities.

The first significant piece of legislation was the *"Law on functioning of languages in MSSR"* adopted in 1989, followed by the "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova" of 27 august 1991, passed by 52 of the 130 We Moldovan MPs, including 6 of the 12 Gagauz deputies. Independence caused a real psychological shock for the national minorities, expressed with particular acuity in the Russian

residents for which Moldova's independence from Soviet citizens meant loss of status and benefits that they provide.

"Law on Citizenship" of February 24, 1992, is another important bill, which had a major impact on the population segment belonging to national minorities are treated equally in matters related to the granting of citizenship State. Unlike the Baltic States, Moldova adopted the so-called variant "zero" giving citizenship to all residents of the country, living in Moldova after the adoption of the "Declaration on the Sovereignty of June 23, 1990". A qualitatively new stage separate state policy vis-a-vis the minorities is inaugurated on July 29, 1994, by adopting the "Constitution of the Republic of Moldova", followed by a set of laws including the *"Law on the Status Special Legal Gagauzia"*, *"The law on the status of national minorities"*, *"National Policy Concept of the Republic of Moldova"*.

Since the early 90s of last century, the Parliament has repeatedly expressed the conviction of the imminence of a law of national minorities. We find that over the years, there have been numerous attempts to create such laws, but few have ended. A good example was the development and adoption of the law on the legal status of national minorities, characterized by the existence of a large number of projects:

1. The "Law on the rights of national groups MSSR", developed by the 11th Legislature of the Supreme Soviet of the MSSR and reflects the realities of the 1989-1990 years.
2. The "Law on the rights of national communities" developed by the Interethnic Advisory Board in 1992. Its basic idea is focused on providing cultural autonomy of the-municipalities where ethnic communities are no less than 64% of the population.
3. The "Law on guaranteeing the rights of citizens belonging to national, linguistic and religious groups" prepared in 1992 by the Commission of Human Rights and National Relations from the Parliament. The project had a relatively concise text, placed in the 19 articles.
4. The "Law on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Moldova", prepared in 1992 by Deputy A. Lisetschi. The project was characterized by an excess of guaranteed rights granted to the minorities against the majority population, the degree of positive discrimination that were promoted was quite pronounced.
5. The "Law on the Rights of Persons belonging to national minorities", produced in 1994. It includes the status of state language to the Russian language, which would come in conflict with the law, but also with the Constitution [22, 151-152].

From the account given above, we can conclude that the legislative authority of the Republic of Moldova has been a long-standing dilemma in terms of outlining ethno-cultural groups ‘status living on our territory. Tense situation to the interethnic relations in the 90s made difficult and tendentious legal definition of these ethnic segments therefore legislator over time were using the different formulas: the national groups, national communities, citizens belonging to national, linguistic and religious groups, persons belonging to national minorities. Controversial was the issue of the

volume and content of their rights, on the one hand were meant to protect ethnic diversity, but on the other hand, were not to diminish rights of the majority population.

Finally, with a big delay, an act specifically to regulate the status of minorities in Moldova was adopted in 2001. Thus, the *"Law of the Republic of Moldova on the rights of national minorities and the legal status of their organizations"*, adopted on 19 July 2001 completes the legal framework in this area. While drafting this law has undergone quite long and difficult, it has not found a positive appreciation among the researchers who characterized it as a plagiarism of *the "Law on languages spoken in the Moldavian SSR"*, demonstrating once again the "politicized" character of the legislative framework [1, 11].

On the December 19, 2003 was adopted the *"Law no. 546-XV on ratification of concept of the national policy on the Republic of Moldova"*. This document contains a number of the principles, priorities and tasks regarding the integration and consolidation of multicultural and multilingual nation of Moldova. The political significance of this legal act consists in the general principles, which the public authorities should guide in order to develop the diversity and national identity. The researches related to the evolution of the legal framework for the management of inter-ethnic relations derived in this paper allow us to identify that the ethnic policy of the Republic of Moldova has two qualitatively different stages, so the special manner in which were perceived the essence and causes of the political ideological conflict, and by its applied processes:

At the first stage, conventional period between 1989 and 1994 (February), the legislation regarding the national minorities in the Republic of Moldova was adopted in strict compliance with the human rights and fundamental freedoms without exception to the ethnic origin, language, sex or religion, as they are set in the international legal documents. *The second phase* started after the parliamentary elections on the February 1994, it was marked by the deviations from the requirements and recommendations of the Council of Europe, by admitting internal borders drawn on the ethnic criteria and the beginning the federalization process of Moldova [8, 8]. The character of the legal system to regulate the minority rights as well as the old mentality to perceive those rules were generated the destabilized interethnic relations.

Undoubtedly, the reality request for political expression and harmonizing of the legal framework regarding the regulation and harmonization of interethnic relations in all spheres and levels of social activity, life and aspirations of the population of each individual and in accordance with the requirements of the new realities. The social practice and the rigors of time determineto adopt and implement a set of legal acts, on the one hand oriented to the regulation and normalization of interethnic relations, and on the other to strengthen the cohesion and unity of the whole people, in a common and indivisible homeland space for all citizens of Moldova [18, 195].

If the mid-1990s, brought to the Republic of Moldova the progress to the political process democratization, despite that fact the democratic rules began to

institutionalize, is too soon for our state to be consider a "strengthened democracy" [5]. The various national minorities that live on this territory ethno political mobilizing have used the powers of democracy, but their way to promote the interests of their community often comes into conflict with the priorities of democratic consolidation [27, 12]. The German researcher C. Neurkirch appreciates the Moldova's efforts towards democratization, but at the same time, the author is concerned about the minimum opportunities of economic development, stability and prosperity, as long as the Transnistrian conflict will not be resolved [20, 90].

Obviously, the regulation of interethnic relations, harmonization and their reclamation can be successful only if the state is really a main instrument of unity within the ethnic variety, constituting the fundamental premise of effectively solving all other problems of coexistence for the ethnic groups in a multiethnic society. Perception of the state as promoter of the interests of all ethnic groups inhabiting is the primordial ethnic cohesion and free affirmation of each human individual. When it is anchored within a single ethnic community aspiration, above the whole society, sustainable development perspective can be questioned or even in danger.

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