

**THE LANGUAGE OF THE MOLDOVAN MINORITY
IN UKRAINE, FROM “MOLDOVAN” TO “ROMANIAN” (1998-2024)**

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Abstract: In October-November 2023, the Ukrainian authorities decided that the “Moldovan language” textbooks and schools in the Odessa region should change again to “Romanian language” ones, as they had been in 1990/1992-1998. The name of the language of instruction in the schools serving the Moldovan-Romanian minority in independent Ukraine was called “Romanian” until the change to “Moldovan” in the Odessa region in 1998-2000. Most self-styled Moldovans in Moldova, as well as in the Chernivtsi region plus about half of those of southern Bessarabia in the Odessa region in localities with Moldovan/Romanian language schools in Ukraine accept and had accepted in the earlier post-Soviet period that the “Moldovan language” is Romanian. The support for the «Romanian language» seems to have increased during 2023. The change to “Romanian language” schools was to a substantial extent due to the pressures of the Romanian government and of the current Moldovan authorities. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) authorities had changed the name of the official language of Moldova from “Moldovan” to “Romanian” in March 2023. The change in Ukrainian official policy also followed the decisions of three local school districts in southern Bessarabia to change the name of the language of instruction from “Moldovan” to “Romanian”, and the parents’ and teachers’ massive petitions asking for the same change in most of the communities with Moldovan/Romanian schools. This suggested that by then, more people preferred the schools to be called “Romanian” rather than “Moldovan”.

Keywords: *Romanian Language; Moldovan Language; Ukraine; Moldovanism; Odessa Oblast*

*Introduction*¹

In October-November 2023, the Ukrainian authorities decided that the “Moldovan language” textbooks and schools in the Odessa region/oblast should

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¹ I would like to thank Dr. Ion Marandici, a research and policy analyst at Elections Canada a specialist in Moldovan affairs, for the feedback that he has provided me on this paper, and for his encouragement that I should send it for publication.

be transformed again to “Romanian language” ones, as they had been in 1990/1992-1998. This was to a substantial extent due to the pressures of the Romanian government and of the pro-Western, center-right PAS (Party of Action and Solidarity) – dominated Moldovan authorities. PAS had changed the name of the official language of Moldova from “Moldovan” to “Romanian” in March 2023. The decision of the Kyiv government also followed the decisions of the school boards of three local school districts in southern Bessarabia to change the name of the language of instruction from “Moldovan” to “Romanian”, and the parents’ and teachers’ massive petitions asking for the same change, which suggested more support than opposition to the policy.

The “Moldovan language” written in the Latin alphabet is the Romanian language; “Moldovan” is a subdialect of “Romanian”. The name of the language of instruction in Moldova’s schools starting in 1990, after Moldova’s change to the Latin alphabet in 1989, was always “Romanian”. This was originally true of the schools serving the Moldovan-Romanian minority in independent Ukraine until the change to “Moldovan” in the Odessa region in 1998-2000. Most self-styled Moldovans in Moldova, as well as in the Chernivtsi region plus about half of those of southern Bessarabia in the Odessa region of Ukraine in localities served by the Moldovan/Romanian schools, have accepted in the post-Soviet period that the “Moldovan language” is Romanian. Among those whose children were served by the “Moldovan language” schools in the Odessa region, those preferring «Moldovan» and «Romanian» have been, at least until recently, about evenly divided, before an increase in the preference for «Romanian», though the ones in localities without such schools have preferred “Moldovan”.

In 1998, one year after Romania had recognized Ukraine’s borders, including possession of northern Bukovina, northern and southern Bessarabia and Herta, lost by Romania in 1940 and 1944, those with a Romanian identity in southern Bessarabia were seen by the Ukrainian authorities as “troublemakers”. Yet those who preferred the “Romanian” label for the language have voted for pro-Western parties, unlike the Moldovanists, and have willingly participated in the war against Russia since 2014. The 2015 anti-conscription riots of the inhabitants in several southern Bessarabian Moldovan villages suggested that the Sovietized “Moldovan language” textbooks had not served the interests of the Ukrainian state in making the Moldovan population loyal and ready to defend Ukraine. The pro-Western voting patterns of the southern Bessarabian Moldovans in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections suggest that the pro-Russian, pro-Soviet “Moldovan language” textbooks were no longer having their original pro-Russian impact. The mass local activism among the Moldovans of the Odessa oblast was predominantly in favor of calling the language “Romanian”. However, it was the pressure of the Moldovan and especially Romanian authorities that that was decisive in the reversion to «Romanian language» schools in 2023-2024.

Identities and the Historical Legacy of the Period before 1991

In the Odessa region, including in Ukrainian southern Bessarabia ("Budjak", "Budzhak" or "Bugeac"), the "Romanian" identity has been substantially less widespread than in the Chernivtsi region, and even the northern Bessarabian part thereof. The Moldovan ethnic and linguistic identity has been dominant, which does not mean that all of those with such an identity have preferred the language of education to called "Moldovan". One of the reasons for this is the fact that, after a period of direct Ottoman rule from 1484, 1538 or a bit later (depending on the area) rather than being part of the autonomous principality of Moldova, the Moldovans in the area mostly treated the Russian annexation of the area as liberation in 1812.

In the Odessa region, the "Romanian" identity has been less widespread than in the Chernivtsi region (which included Bukovina and Herta, where it has been generalized well before the Soviet occupation of 1940), and even the northern Bessarabian part thereof, where the "Moldovan" identity had historically predominated. It has been a minority phenomenon among the members of the Romanian/Moldovan ethnic constituency, especially in the area to the northeast of the Dniester River, which has lately not had any "Moldovan"/ "Romanian" schools, but also in southern Bessarabia. Moldovanism is the ideological view that holds that ethnic Moldovans are distinct from ethnic Romanians, as distinct from the Romanianists, who think that they are ethnic Romanians. Linguistic Moldovanism is the ideological view that the Moldovan language is distinct from the Romanian language, whereas Romanianism is the view that the Moldovan language is the Romanian language, with differences in accent and subdialect. The Moldovanist ideology has been much more widespread in the Odessa region, including southern Bessarabia, than in the northern Bessarabian area of the Chernivtsi region. It correlated with a pro-Russia orientation that has largely withered away, especially after Russia has attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the Russian troops have committed various atrocities. Most of the Moldovan/Romanian population in the region has had a "Moldovan" rather than a "Romanian" identity. Yet, just as in 1991, at least half of those who have been served by "Romanian" and then "Moldovan" and then "Romanian" language (village) schools (a minority of the total) in the Odessa region have very recently indicated that they accept that their language is "Romanian".

It must be noted that in the Republic of Moldova, "more than half of the self-proclaimed Moldovans (53.5%) said that they saw no difference" between the Romanian and Moldovan languages according to a survey conducted by Pal Kolsto et al in 1998.² In 1991, when Ukraine and Moldova became independent, or in 1990-1992, and recently, by 2023, this acknowledgement of the fact that

² Pal Kolsto with Hans Olav Melberg, "Integration, Alienation, and Conflict in Estonia and Moldova", in Pal Kolsto (ed.), *National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), p. 34. The article discusses the data of the survey. The data also includes Transnistria, the mostly Russian-speaking area of eastern Moldova. It should be noted that, out of 1,200 individuals who were surveyed, 761 had a "Moldovan" self-awareness and forty-one had a "Romanian" self-awareness. See Kolsto, p. 35. The percentage of individuals with a Romanian identity is now much larger.

the Moldovan language is in fact Romanian has been characteristic of the labels used by half or most southern Bessarabian Moldovans in Ukraine served by Moldovan/Romanian language schools. Yet this was not necessarily the case at some points in between.³

One of the phenomena which explains the spread of the “the Romanian language is different from the Moldovan language” view are differences in how the people speak the language, partly due to the massive Russification in the Odessa region and to cultural and even linguistic patterns more propitious to Moldovanism than the ones in the northern Bessarabian part of the Chernivtsi region or the Republic of Moldova itself. In other words, the greater use of Russian and recently Ukrainian language words in day-to-day discussions by individuals speaking “Moldovan” in Ukrainian southern Bessarabia has induced many to say that the Moldovan language is different from the Romanian language. Most of the Moldovans/Romanians of the region are under the influence of Russification and Russianization⁴, caused primarily by a Russian⁵ language education. Sometimes, more often than the results of the Ukrainian census of 2001 indicate, their colloquial or even native language is Russian.

According to the 2001 census, 79.74% (75.87% in the rural areas and 91.12% in the urban ones) of the “Moldovans” speak Russian fluently as a first or as a second language that they speak often and well. This was true of only 56.31% of the northern Bessarabian Moldovans discussed above (54.24% of the rural ones and 72.42% of the urban ones), but true of the Moldovans/Romanians of the Odessa oblast, and even more true of those living in the areas to the east of the Odessa region.⁶ Therefore, including Russian language words in the Moldovan/Romanian language in northern Bessarabia would not necessarily make oneself understood. It should be noted that only a minority of the urban “Moldovans”

Those with this identity universally regard the Moldovan language as Romanian. In some recent opinion polls, most of those with a Moldovan or Romanian identity in Moldova have indicated a preference for Moldova’s union with Romania. See, for example, the various polls to which there are links at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_of_Moldova_and_Romania.

³ I am relying on what Moldovans/Romanians from the area whom I have encountered in the area when I visited it in the 1990’s, and more recently in Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova, and Iasi and Galati in Romania, have told me. Similarly, I have encountered a number of individuals who once identified their language as Romanian, then as “Moldovan, which is distinct from Romanian”, then as Romanian again who claimed that they had said that they had said that Moldovan was different from Romanian not based on facts, but based on emotions, and “because I am a Moldovan”.

⁴ Russification refers to the abandonment of one’s identity or at least native language in favor of Russian. Russianization refers to the speaking of Russian in the public sphere and of one’s native language in the private sphere.

⁵ I have calculated this based on the statistics dealing with the knowledge of Ukrainian and Russian among the inhabitants of the rayons of the Chernivtsi oblast based on the numbers in Ion Popescu and Constantin Ungureanu, *Românii din Ucraina – între trecut și viitor* [vol. 1, *Românii din Regiunea Cernăuți (Studiu etnodemografic și sociolingvistic)*] [“The Romanians in Ukraine – between past and future, vol. 1, The Romanians in the Chernivtsi Region (An Ethnodemographic and Sociolinguistic Study)”] (Oradea: Treira, 2006), p. 119.

⁶ On the Romanian-language schools in the Odessa oblast, see “MINELRES: The Romanian Minority in Ukraine”, at <http://lists.microlink.lv/pipermail/minelres/2004-November/003694.html>, Policy Paper nr. 704R/19 Iunie, a text received from the Center for the Prevention of Conflicts and Early Warning from Bucharest, Romania on August 13, 2004. The “Moldovans” from other regions will be ignored.

and "Romanians", many of whom do not live in municipalities, have Romanian as their mother-tongue in the Odessa region. Among the 31,405 urban "Moldovans" in the Odessa oblast, 12,327 (39.25%) used "Moldovan" as their native language in 2001, 2,585 (8.23%) used Ukrainian, 16,279 (51.84%) were Russian-speakers, and 214 (0.68%) used "other" language. Among the 310 urban "Romanians", only 102 (32.90%) declared their native language as "Romanian", 36 (11.61%) listed it as Ukrainian, 159 (51.29%) listed it as Russian, and the rest (4.19%) identified it as "other", generally "Moldovan". Most of those "Moldovans" who identified their mother-tongue not as "Moldovan", but as something else, were urban inhabitants (19,708 out of 33,061, or 59.61% in 2001).⁷

One could say that this linguistic pattern also applies to, for example, many older and middle-aged urban Moldovans in the Republic of Moldova, but this is much less common than in Ukrainian southern Bessarabia. Besides, when I travelled by maxi taxi (van or minibus) in 2012 between Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, and Iasi in Romania, the historical capital of the principality of Moldova and vice versa, I encountered an interesting pattern also observed by others. Within the context in which the people were speaking with the Moldovan accent and Moldovan subdialect words found in both the Republic of Moldova and in Romanian Moldova, I was not able to anticipate who would hand to the border control person Moldovan and Romanian passports. This is because of the disappearance of linguistic Russisms (Russian language words) among the younger rural Moldovans of the Republic of Moldova, and even plenty of older ones, and of many urban ones.

A principal factor influencing the patterns in the Odessa oblast has been the nature and evolution of the "Romanian"/"Moldovan" language educational system. Starting in 1990/1992 until 1998-2000, the language used in the Romanian language schools was called "Romanian", and then there was a switch to "Moldovan" in 1998-2000 until this has been recently reversed in 2023-2024. The Odessa region's authorities since 1998 until they were overruled by Kyiv in 2023 were promoting "Moldovan" as opposed to "Romanian" ethnic and linguistic identities through the educational system. They (to be sure, different people) had implemented a policy more favorable toward "Romanian" ethnic and linguistic identities during the late Soviet period and early post-Soviet period, in 1990/1992-1998. In 2002/2003, the students in the "Moldovan schools" represented 2.5% of the students in the region, whereas the Moldovans represented 5.04% of the population of the region/oblast, which meant that about 42% of the Moldovan students were attending Moldovan schools. All of these schools were in the Bessarabian part of the oblast.⁸ The 58% of the Moldovans who were not attending Moldovan or Romanian language schools, and their children (the

⁷ See the Ukrainian census results of 2001 (currently dead links) at http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/nationality_population/nationality_1/s5/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=60&rz=1_2&rz_b=2_1%20%20%20&n_page=4 and http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/nationality_population/nationality_1/s5/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=80&rz=1_2&rz_b=2_1%20%20%20&n_page=5.

⁸ See Ion Popescu and Constantin Ungureanu, *Românii din Ucraina – între trecut și viitor* [vol. 1, *Românii din Regiunea Cernăuți (Studiu etnografic și sociolingvistic)*] (Oradea: Treira, 2006), pp. 34, 46-48.

statistic is from two decades ago), have been the most likely to say that the language was “Moldovan, not Romanian” and to favor “Moldovan language schools”. Yet it could be argued that their views do not matter. It was thus possible that those who wanted “Romanian language schools” were only about a quarter of the Moldovan/Romanian population in the region, but about half of the population in the localities (villages) served by Moldovan schools from families whose members attended them.

The failed August 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, significantly fostered the spreading of “Romanian” self-ethnic and linguistic identification among the ethnic Romanians (“Romanians” plus “Moldovans”) in the Chernivtsi region. By contrast, in the Odessa region, the sudden shock had a lesser impact in the same direction.

The number of self-identified “Moldovans” and “Romanians” on the territory of the present-day Odessa region has decreased very much since the time when southern Bessarabia came under Soviet rule in 1940. Southern Bessarabian initially formed the Izmail oblast in 1940-1941 and 1944-1954, and subsequently became a part of the Odessa region.⁹ By 2001, the ethnic Moldovan/Romanian (“Moldovan” + “Romanian”) population represented 12.80% of the population of the region, while the ethnic Ukrainians represented 41.14% and the ethnic Russians 20.17%.

For the entire larger Odessa oblast/region, which included the Izmail oblast since 1954, the absolute number of Moldovans/Romanians has gone up between 1959 and 1989 and has subsequently decreased. In 1970, out of 135,979 Moldovan/Romanians, 118,096 (86.85%) declared the language of their stated nationality as their native language, while 12,110 (8.91%) declared that it was Russian and 5,415 (3.98%) declared another language, including Ukrainian¹⁰. The numbers increased to 145.3 thousand (including 144,534 “Moldovans” and 0.7 thousand “Romanians”) in 1989 and then decreased to 124,475 (including 123,751 “Moldovans” and 724 “Romanians”) in 2001. The decrease between the last two censuses occurred overwhelmingly in the Bessarabian areas of the rayon, where 74% of the decrease occurred, from 93.6 thousand to 78.3 thousand (out of 617.2 thousand southern Bessarabians). In 2001, the Moldovans formed 12.7% of the population of the area called southern Bessarabia in the Odessa oblast.¹¹ Unlike in the Chernivtsi region, there were allegations of census pressures in 2001, when numerous people declared not a “Romanian” ethnicity and language, but a “Moldovan” one out of fear. Yet even this was possible because a less

⁹ See David R. Marples, *Stalinism in Ukraine in the 1940's* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 36. In the sub-county districts of Reni, Bolgrad and Fantana Zanelor (Ismail), according to the Romanians census of 1930, there were 163,700 inhabitants, out of which 34.65% were Romanians, 21.89% Russians, 2.48% Ukrainians, 25.44% Bulgarians and 15.54% inhabitants of other ethnicities. See Vitalie Varatec, “Dezmembrarea teritoriala a Basarabiei”, in *Revista de Istorie Militara*, no. 6 (17), 1992, p. 21. In 2001, the same geographical area had 255.4 thousand inhabitants, out of which 39.9 thousand (15.6%) were Moldovans (a substantial decrease in comparison to 1930), 61.2 thousand Ukrainians (24%), etc.

¹⁰ See Nicholas Dima, *Moldova and the Transdnestr Republic* (Boulder, Colo: East European Monographs; New York: distributed by Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 109. Also see M. N. Guboglo, “Ethnolinguistic Processes in Southern Moldova”, in *Soviet Sociology*, vol. 13, no. 3, Winter 1974-1975, p. 47.

¹¹ Popescu and Constantin, pp. 33-34, 45-49.

ethnonationalistic population tolerated it.¹² According to the results of the December 2001 Ukrainian census, only 90,690 (73.28%) of the 123,751 self-styled "Moldovans" of the Odessa region listed the "Moldovan language" as their mother-tongue. By contrast, 7.66% (9,474 individuals) listed Ukrainian and 22,669 (18.32%) listed Russian as their mother-tongue. A sizable minority of around one hundred of the 918 (0.74%) who listed "other languages" as their mother-tongue mentioned "Romanian". Among the 724 self-identified ethnic Romanians, only 304 (41.99%) declared their native language as "Romanian", whereas 119 (16.44%) declared that it was Ukrainian and 215 (29.7%) said that it was Russian. Practically all of the other 86 (11.88%) self-styled "Romanians" called their mother-tongue "Moldovan".¹³

The political attitudes of the southern Bessarabian (Budzhak) Moldovans should be broadly speaking differentiated from those of the ones in Moldova proper.¹⁴ From 1484 or 1538 or later (depending on the specific area), the Budzhak/Bugeac was no longer a part of the autonomous (and Orthodox Christian) principality of Moldova which was using Moldovan/Romanian as its official

¹² There are allegations that in 2001, individuals in the Odessa region were threatened with dismissal from their jobs if they declared that they were "Romanians". It was also claimed that the ethnicity of some individuals was listed arbitrarily by census-takers who did not even ask these individuals what their ethnicity was. See George Coman, "SOS romanii din Ucraina!" ("SOS the Romanians of Ukraine"), in *Ziua*, March 4, 2003, accessed at <http://www.ziua.ro/archive/2003/03/04/docs/5846.html> on June 5, 2005 (the link is no longer working). Also see <http://bugeac.networklive.org/> (the link is no longer working). For the results of the 1959 census, see Robert King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1980), p. 98. For the results of the 1970 census, see Dima, *Moldova*, p. 109. For those of the 2001 census, see <http://pop-stat.mashke.org/ukraine-ethnic2001.htm>, which is working. Also consult http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/nationality_population/nationality_1/s5/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=80&rz=1_1&rz_b=2_1%20%20%20%20&n_page=5 for all of Ukraine (the link is no longer working). For some of the detailed results of the census of 1989 and for the predominant ethnicity of the localities in various rayons, see Marius Mioc's text at <http://www.moldova.net/printthread.php?t=2660> (the link is no longer working), accessed in July 2005. It relies on the data in the periodical *Cugetul*, published by Ministerul Stiintei si Invatamantului din Republica Moldova ("The Ministry of Science and Learning of the Republic of Moldova"), no. 5-6, 1993.

¹³ See the official Ukrainian census results for the Odessa region at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Odesa/>, http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/nationality_population/nationality_1/s5/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=60&rz=1_1&rz_b=2_1%20%20%20%20&n_page=4 (the link is no longer working). Compare these with the official results for the Chernivtsi region at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Chernivtsi/> (the link is no longer working), and particularly with those in the Zakarpattia (Transcarpathian) region at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Zakarpattia/> (the link is no longer working). In the latter region, 99.1% of the Romanians speak Romanian as their mother-tongue. The percentage of Ukrainian speakers among the local Ukrainians in the same region is 99.2%. The data for other regions of Ukraine may be found at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/> (the link is no longer working), while the nationality (ethnicity) data is available at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/> (the link is no longer working). According to the Moldovanist activist Anatol Fetescu, "in this zone [the Odessa region], there live around 700 individuals who declared that they were Romanians". He also claimed in 1999 that their number had no way of increasing. See the interview with Ion Varta, "Copiii din Sudul Basarabiei sunt siguri ca vorbesc aceeasi limba cu semenii", in the newspaper from Moldova *Flux*, 18 February 1999, at http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.romanian/browse_thread/thread/c22a8de32ab66ab6/079c15fa19fdb5a9?q=Anatol+Fetescu&num=2#079c15fa19fdb5a9 (the link is no longer working).

¹⁴ I should note that the boundaries of the Ottoman Budjak were not identical with those of Ukrainian southern Bessarabia, but for the purposes of this study, I will ignore the minor differences. Some small areas of southern Moldova were part of the Budjak, but there are no data that differentiate between that area and the rest of the Republic of Moldova.

language by the late 17th century, but directly a part of the Ottoman Empire. (Since the area was under Moldovan rule only from the late 14th century until 1484 of 1538, the period of direct Ottoman rule was both longer and more consequential than that of Moldovan rule. The southernmost part was under Wallachian rule until the early 15th century, when it came under Moldovan rule, and many of the Moldovan/Romanian inhabitants in there speak with a Wallachian accent.) Islam was the official religion in this area under direct Ottoman rule, Romanian was not the official language, and there was ethnic cleansing of the local Moldovan/Romanian majority by the Turks and especially ethnic Tatars, whom the Russian authorities evacuated to Crimea in the early 19th century. Some Moldovans fled to Moldova proper or to Dobrogea in the Ottoman Empire (now in Romania), where the Tatars were held under control by the Ottoman authorities. Some were killed and some were enslaved.

The typical Budjak Moldovan, and also most of the Moldovans and other ethnic Romanians colonized in there by the Russian Tsarist Empire starting in 1812 felt that the Russian annexation of the territory was a form of liberation.¹⁵ In the parts of Moldova proper annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, the attitude was more complicated and ambiguous. Even though the attitude was positive among some for material reasons (greater prosperity), there was no feeling that the Russian annexation had liberated these Moldovans from Moldovan rule. The latter was cherished in the Moldovan historical memories. Moreover, Moldova's Ottoman vassal status had been less direct than Russian rule. The official Romanian-Russian bilingualism at the beginning of the period of Russian rule meant an upgrading of the role of the Romanian language in the Budjak and its subsequent downgrading was seen as a return to past patterns. In the part of the province that had been under direct Moldovan rule, there was a continuous downgrading of the official and educational use of the Romanian language, which was resented, until any official or educational role for the Romanian language disappeared around 1870. The typical Budjak Moldovan viewed Russian rule from 1812 to 1917/1918 in a mostly positive light. A part of southwestern and southern Bessarabia was restored to Moldovan rule in 1856, and it was under Romanian rule in 1859-1878, after Moldova united with Wallachia in 1859 to form Romania. The population with a Romanian identity and sometimes even with a Wallachian rather than Moldovan accent is more numerous in that area.

During the period of interwar Romanian rule in 1918-1940, a large majority of the Moldovans/Romanians of the (southern) Bessarabian part of the future Odessa region, unlike sometimes up to a majority of the ethnic minority voters, cast ballots in favor of parties that indicated a preference for the maintenance of Romanian rule. Nevertheless, the icons of the tsars were still popular in the local Moldovans' homes, more popular than in the province as a whole, and the

¹⁵ For the early history of the area, see, for example, George F. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia, 1774-1828: A study of Imperial Expansion* (Boulder [Colo.]: East European Quarterly; New York: distributed by Columbia University Press, 1976).

furniture of the Moldovans, etc., was more Russian style than in the rest of Bessarabia, not to speak of Romania as a whole. There were plenty of Moldovans who appreciated the liberation of the area by the Russian tsars in 1812, which can broadly speaking not be said about the Moldovans in the Bessarabian part of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the liberation of Bessarabia in 1918 by the Romanians from the Bolsheviks. The average Moldovan in the area preferred Romanian over Soviet rule, but also the period of pre-Soviet Russian rule from 1812 to 1917-1918 over Romanian rule. The period of Romanian rule of 1918-1940 and 1941-1944 is not widely remembered by the local Moldovans/Romanians, and the median Moldovan would say that there were some good things and there were some bad things during the period of Romanian rule, just as what they would say about the Soviet Union.¹⁶

By contrast, the typical Moldovan in both the Republic of Moldova and in the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine views both the period of Russian imperial and especially of Soviet rule as oppressive toward the Moldovans. An opinion poll from 1998 indicated that 60.6% of the Moldovans of Moldova including Transnistria, as compared to 73.3% of the Estonians of Estonia who were asked the same question, answered "yes" to the question "Do you agree that Moldovans were oppressed in the Soviet Union" (26.4% fully agreed and 34.2% partly agreed), while 26% disagreed (13.8% partly disagreed and 12.2% definitely disagreed).¹⁷ (A clear example of oppression was the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet on the Moldovan/Romanian language in early 1941, which was reversed in 1989.¹⁸) The majority was not large enough to always guarantee a pro-

¹⁶ My published work related to these topics includes Ionas Rus, "Romanii si minoritarii in Basarabia interbelica" ("The Romanians and the Minorities in Interwar Bessarabia"), in *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* ("Moldovan Historical Review"), vol. 5, no. 1(17), January-March 1994, Chisinau, Institutul de Istorie a Academiei de Stiinte a Republicii Moldova ("The Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova"), pp. 29-39. Also see my book, Ionas Rus, *The Electoral Patterns of the Romanian Far Right during the Interwar Years (1919-1937)* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Muller, 2009), most of which had previously appeared in article form as "The Electoral Patterns of the Romanian Right in the Interwar Years (III)", in *Arhivele Totalitarismului* ("The Archives of Totalitarianism"), no. 3-4, 1999 (Year 7, no. 24-25), pp. 8-32; "The Electoral Patterns of the Romanian Right in the Interwar Years (II)", in *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 1-2, 1999 (Year 7, no. 22-23), pp. 12-31; "The Electoral Patterns of the Romanian Right in the Interwar Years (I)", in *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 4, 1998 (Year 6, no. 21), pp. 8-24; Ionas Aurelian Rus, "The Roots and Early Development of Moldovan-Romanian Nationalism in Bessarabia (1900-1917)", in *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 2009, pp. 8-22, which discusses the elections to the All-Russian Constitutional Assembly elections of 1917, and Ionas Aurelian Rus, "The Rise of Moldovan-Romanian Nationalism in Bessarabia (1900-1917)", in *Interstitio. East European Review of Historical Anthropology*, December 2008, vol. 1, no. 2 (guest edited by Jennifer Cash and Irina Livezeanu), pp. 51-66. Also see Ionas Aurelian Rus, "Bessarabia under Interwar Romanian Rule, 1918-1940: National Self-Determination, and Political and Socio-Economic Patterns", paper presented at the World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, May 19, 2023.

¹⁷ See the data from Pal Kolsto with Hans Olav Melberg, "Integration, Alienation, and Conflict in Estonia and Moldova", in Pal Kolsto (ed.), *National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), p. 45. By contrast, 42.8% of the Estonians of Estonia "definitely agreed" that the Estonians were oppressed in the Soviet Union, 30.5% "partly agreed," 11.2% "partly disagreed", 8% "definitely disagreed" and 7.5% did not know. So, the line that the Soviet occupiers came as liberators in 1940 was not approved by a large majority of the titular population.

¹⁸ There are many ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians in the U.S. who think that this should still be the case. They have often agreed that policy of the Transnistrian secessionist authorities of having "Moldovan in the Cyrillic" alphabet is the right one.

Western majority in Moldova and the Moldovan government, though there has sometimes been such a majority. By contrast, the Moldovans of southern Bessarabia in Ukraine have seen Russia as a liberator in 1812, and the Soviet period was seen in an ambiguous way (Communism had good aspects, such as social justice, and bad aspects, such as the local Stalin-made famine in Bessarabia in 1946-1947, the Moldovans were both oppressed and benefited from the Soviet Union, preserving a non-Communist Soviet Union would have been acceptable if the Moldovans/Romanians would have had their minority rights guaranteed, etc.). This allowed for a more positive than negative view of post-Communist Russia among the local Moldovans/Romanians, most of whom were until recently worshippers of the Russian Orthodox Church (though a minority are worshippers of the Romanian one), until the war in Ukraine changed most people's minds. What should be remembered is that the contrast between the Bessarabian Moldovans/Romanians of the Chernivtsi and Odessa regions, and the Republic of Moldova, is not completely a Soviet era and post-Soviet phenomenon, but it reflects the legacy of the past, of many facets of the past.

In the Odessa region/oblast, including in Ukrainian southern Bessarabia ("Budjak", "Budzhak" or "Bugeac"), the "Romanian" identity has been substantially less widespread than in the Chernivtsi region, and even the northern Bessarabian part thereof. The Moldovan ethnic and linguistic identity has been dominant, which does not mean that all of those with such identity have preferred the language of education to called "Moldovan". One of the reasons for this is the fact that, after a period of direct Ottoman rule from 1484, 1538 or a bit later (depending on the area) rather than being part of the autonomous principality of Moldova, the Moldovans in the area mostly treated the Russian annexation of the area as liberation in 1812.

1998-2014: The Victory of Moldovanism in the Schools of the Odessa Region

Whereas in the Chernivtsi region, the promotion of a Romanian identity in the public sphere has been victorious and is reflected in the curriculum of the "Romanian schools" in the 1990's and later, the "Romanian schools" in the Odessa region, at first "Romanian schools", became "Moldovan schools" in 1998. The pro-Moldovanist activism was more "in the news" in the period from 1998 until at least 2010.

I have discussed the topic of the Moldovans of southern Bessarabia quite extensively in my paper "'Moldovan' and 'Romanian' Nation-Building in the Odessa Region of Ukraine (1989-2004)",¹⁹ and in chapter 9 of my dissertation²⁰, which deals with the period until 2005. I have excluded a great deal of material in this paper to avoid too much overlap with my 2007 paper.

¹⁹ Paper presented at the 12th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Columbia University, April 2007.

²⁰ Ionas Aurelian Rus, "Variables Affecting Nation-Building: The Impact of the Ethnic Basis, the Educational System, Industrialization and Sudden Shocks", Ph.D. in Political Science, defended April 2008, degree awarded October 2008.

The top local leader of those in the Odessa oblast who claimed that the local Moldovans are "Moldovans, not Romanians" has been a noisy, provocative, in your face, anti-Romania²¹ public figure born in 1951, Anatol Fetescu. When he was middle aged, he seems to have been very energetic, though his energy level seems to have declined lately. A document has shown that he had collaborated with the KGB and its Ukrainian successor, the SBU, in 1989-2011, which discredited him among some people.²² He had served as a former agricultural engineer and Communist Party instructor at a party school during the Soviet period. Fetescu later became a businessperson and amateur linguist, historian, and political scientist. By 1997, he was already starting to promote Moldovanism, starting in 2004 through the newspaper *Luceafarul* ["The Morning Star"], which originally appeared in "Moldovan" with Cyrillic characters, and later with Latin characters, as well as in Ukrainian and Russian. Anatol Fetescu's line and activities were supported by the central authorities in Kyiv and by the Russophone officials in the largely Russian-speaking Odessa region in the predominantly Russian-speaking city of Odessa.²³

The Ukrainian authorities supported him for reasons that did not have to do exclusively with the alleged popularity of Fetescu's views among local inhabitants of Moldovan/Romanian origin. Only in the summer of 1997, on June

²¹ I would like to thank Natalya Belitser for this characterization of Anatol Fetescu. The Romanian-language press with a Romanian orientation is equally critical of Fetescu, but in less detail. My observations of his postings on social media are consistent with Natalya Belitser's perspective.

²² See "Cel care a fost instrumentul Kievului pentru "moldovenizarea" românilor din Ucraina, dovedit ca om al serviciilor secrete ucrainiene. O spune chiar SBU!" ("The one who was the instrument of Kyiv for the "Moldovenization" of the Romanians in Ukraine, proven as a man of the Ukrainian secret services. The SBU even says it!"), in *Romanian Global News* at <https://rgnpress.ro/2020/08/cel-care-a-fost-instrumentul-kievului-pentru-modovenizarea-romanilor-din-ucraina-dovedit-ca-om-al-serviciilor-secrete-ucrainiene-o-spune-chiar-sbu/>. A picture of the actual document through which the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) indicates that he had collaborated with them appears in the picture in the article.

²³ See the official Ukrainian census results for the Odessa region for 2001 at <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Odesa/> (accessed April 2005, now a dead link). Also see the map of the regions of Ukraine based on the 1989 census in Taras Kuzio (ed.), *Contemporary Ukraine: Dynamics of Post-Soviet Transformation* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), p. XXI, and Bohdan Nahaylo, *The Ukrainian Resurgence* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 239. According to these sources, there were more Ukrainian-speakers than Russian-speakers in the Odessa region according to both the 1989 and 2001 censuses. In the most recent census, 46.3% of the population was Ukrainian-speaking and 41.9% was Russian-speaking (compared to 47.1% in 2001). However, Odessa is a mostly Russian-speaking city that did not even have a Ukrainian ethnic majority in 1989; 48.9% of its inhabitants were labelled as ethnic Ukrainians in the last Soviet census. On the past widespread political "Russophonism" (Russian-speaking or Russophone "ism") in the Odessa region, most of whose population seemed to have desired that Russian should be the second official language in Ukraine, see Nahaylo, *Ukrainian*, pp. 232, 236-237, 321, 322. See "Dosarul Transnistria (2)", in *Evenimentul*, May 27, 2006, accessed at <http://www.evenimentul.ro/articol/dosarul-transnistria-2.html>. Also consult "Un nou an de învățămînt în școlile din Transnistria", in *Evenimentul*, August 26, 2006, accessed at <http://www.evenimentul.ro/articol/un-nou-an-de-invatamint-in-scolile-din-transnistria.html>, but no longer accessible. The article "Situația actuală la "români" și "moldoveni" ("The Current Situation for "Romanians" and "Moldovans") of May 26, 2011, at <https://ora25.ro/situatia-actuala-la-romani-si-moldoveni/>, we may read "Starting from 2004, "with the support of the Odessa region governor Serghei Grinevețkii", in Odessa the organ of the "National-Cultural Association of Moldovans from Ukraine" (President A. Fetescu) – the weekly *Luceafărul*, "Moldovan language edition" was launched in Odesa., having as editor-in-chief Andrei Hropotinschi, "the head of the Moldavian philology department of T. Gr. Șevcenko University" from Tiraspol". Tiraspol is the capital of the Transnistrian secessionist region, and the state school and university teaching of "Moldovan" in Transnistria has been in the Cyrillic alphabet, just as during the Soviet period.

2, 1997, did Romania recognize Ukraine's borders with Romania. After this, the Ukrainian authorities punished Romania for its past recalcitrance on this issue. In 1997, the Ukrainian parliament had already listed "Moldovan" as one of the languages of the ethnic minorities of the country that should benefit from protection according to the treaties signed by Ukraine. During the same year, representatives of the "Moldovan" minority started to attend conferences on the education of ethnic minorities.²⁴

In 1998, in the Odessa region, Fetescu founded "Asociația național-culturală a moldovenilor din Ucraina" ("The National-Cultural Association of the Moldovans of Ukraine"). On September 1, 1998, the "Romanian schools" or "mixed Romanian-Russian" schools in the Odessa oblast (nine pure and nine mixed Romanian-Russian back then, sixteen overall at the current moment, mostly mixed Romanian-Ukrainian) were officially transformed into "Moldovan schools" or "mixed Moldovan-Russian" schools. This change was implemented even in the villages where most villagers clearly disagreed with the change. Among these were the three villages (now four) with Orthodox churches that were a part of the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church ("Mitropolia Basarabiei") of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. The other churches, while they have held religious services in Romanian, previously called "Moldovan", were under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. The required textbooks, which have been published in Ukraine, have used the Latin alphabet. However, "Moldovan-language" textbooks printed in the Cyrillic alphabet have also started to be imported from the Transnistrian secessionist region of Moldova. This has been done to accommodate the preferences of a minority of the group, and more precisely of some of the parents who supported Fetescu's movement.²⁵

Fetescu pushed for the enforced transformation, and the justification of the transformation, of the "Romanian" schools into "Moldovan" ones, notwithstanding the dissatisfaction of many, probably most, teachers, who were sometimes forced to comply with the change by the Ukrainian security service (SBU). Other school principals and teachers who opposed the change were punished by dismissal, demotion from principal to regular teacher, or "relocation" to other positions. Some of those who disapproved stayed in their positions and complied by trying to find a compromise formula. Since most of the overwhelmingly female teachers have disliked the term "the Moldovan language", they have instead used the neutral term "the mother tongue". The fact that the Ukrainian authorities were no longer recognizing college diplomas and transcripts from the Republic of Moldova was another grievance.²⁶

²⁴ See "Roundtables on Ethnic Minorities Education in Ukraine", in *Open Society Education Update*, November 21, 1997, <http://www.osi.hu/epsu/newsltr/97nov21.html> in July 2005, but no longer accessible.

²⁵ See "Un nou an de învățămînt în Școlile din Transnistria", in *Evenimentul*, August 26, 2006, originally accessed at <http://www.evenimentul.ro/articol/un-nou-an-de-invatamint-in-scolile-din-transnistria.html>, but no longer available on the internet.

²⁶ See Corneliu Rusnac, "Deputatul comunist Victor Stepaniuc ține lecții de istorie" ("The Communist deputy Victor Stepaniuc is holding history lessons"), at *BBCRomanian.com*, May 17, 2007, accessed at http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/05/070517_moldova_ucraina_profesori.shtml on May 17, 2007. On the other hand, I was on the margins of the process of helping credits from Moldovan universities to the United

How did the developments in Moldovan politics factor in all this? After a victory of the forces labelling the language of the Moldovans/Romanians as "Romanian" in the 1990 Moldovan elections (who formed the government and elected the president of the Republic), there was the victory of the forces labelling the language as "Moldovan" in 1994. However, in the March 22, 1998, elections, the forces calling the language "Romanian" won again. This produced fears that Moldova would unite with Romania in Kyiv, but this did not happen because most Moldovan citizens preferred independence. The Moldovan constitution could not be amended to call the language "Romanian" at that time, but the government representing the pro-Western forces on its websites listed it as "Romanian". This was a factor in favor of the change to "Moldovan schools" in the Odessa region.

How did the Transnistrian problem factor in all of this? We should remember that only on August 18-19, 1999, did Ukraine fully recognize the secessionist, eastern Moldovan, mostly Russian speaking Transnistria as a part of Moldova.²⁷ Even in 2003, the Ukrainian World Congress was indicating its support for Transnistria's independence.²⁸ It should be recalled that the Moldovan territories east of the Dniester River were a part of Soviet Ukraine in 1920-1940. The Ukrainian reaction is historically understandable. In late November 1917, the Moldovans of present-day Transnistria voted predominantly, probably almost half, for the electoral ticket of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party.²⁹

The fact that a survey in the separatist, mostly Russian-speaking Transnistrian region of eastern Moldova, a survey indicated that 66% of the Moldovan students wanted to study in Romanian was a hint that a high percentage wanted the same

States through the program "Citizenship and Service Education" that benefited from U.S. Department of State money. My syllabus for Introduction to International Relations was used as a model at Moldova State University in Chisinau. My later consulting with the United Nations Development Programme in Chisinau also helped with this. Therefore, the problems with Moldovan higher education were real. Yet so were those with Ukrainian higher education.

²⁷ See the article "Ukrainian-Moldovan Border Treaty, An Unsung Success", at <https://jamestown.org/program/ukrainian-moldovan-border-treaty-an-unsung-success/>, *The Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Monitor Volume: 5 Issue: 153, the commentary from August 23, 1999, which says, "Moldova, for its part, never raised territorial claims on Ukraine; Transdnister's Ukrainian population is not considered a diaspora, because it is indigenous to the region and contiguous to the Ukrainian nation. Some Ukrainian circles in Transdnister favor attachment to Ukraine, citing the region's affiliation to Soviet Ukraine from 1920 to 1940... The treaty just signed in Kyiv, as far as Ukraine is concerned, sanctifies Moldovan sovereignty in Transdnister."

²⁸ The article "[52] Ukrainian World Congress Ready to Defend Transdnister Independence" at <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2003/03-08-29.rferl.html#52> of March 8, 2003, states "[52] Ukrainian World Congress Ready to Defend Transdnister Independence. The World Congress of Ukrainians recently held in Kyiv declared its readiness to protect Transdnister's right to independence, *Infotag* reported on 28 August, citing Vladimir Bodnar, chairman of the Union of Transdnistriian Ukrainians. Bodnar said the forum has expressed concern over the situation in Transdnister and readiness to render all possible assistance to the Ukrainian community and other ethnic groups living in the region in order to "protect them from the Romanian nationalists in Moldova." Bodnar said participants in the forum pledged to lobby their countries' governments to defend Transdnister's right to self-determination and independence. Bodnar, a former deputy speaker of the Transdnister Supreme Soviet, is currently co-chairman of the JCC and chairman of the organization of ethnic Ukrainians in Transdnister. There are more than 180,000 Ukrainians living in the separatist region.

²⁹ See Oliver H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 81, 148-149, 160.

thing in the southern Bessarabian part of the Odessa region.³⁰ A study by two Russian professors based on a survey of the Transnistrian population from January and February 2020 suggests a similar pattern in Transnistria in more recent years. In a sample heavily and intentionally focusing on Russian speakers, 3% of the surveyed respondents desired that Moldovan/Romanian in the Latin alphabet should be used, while only 4.4% had gone to “Moldovan language schools”.³¹ While it could be argued that some of those who prefer the Latin alphabet like to call the language “Moldovan”, the Transnistrian statistics suggest that Anatol Fetescu’s original push for the Cyrillic alphabet was always very inappropriate. At any rate, the “Moldovan schools” in the Odessa oblast were an alibi for the ones, albeit in the Cyrillic alphabet, in Transnistria.

Romania punished Ukraine for the “Moldovan language schools” in the Odessa oblast by recognizing the Rusyn minority of Romania, toward which there had been some past reluctance. Minorities have the right to have representatives in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies if they get enough votes. The General Union of the Associations of the Hutsul Ethnicity obtained 646 votes in 1996, but did not get representation because the Hutsuls were seen as ethnic Ukrainians, though the Union of Croats of Romania, with 486 votes, did.³² The Cultural Union of Ruthenians of Romania, founded in 2000, obtained a seat in 2000 with 6,942 votes, which were less numerous than the Union of the Ukrainians of Romania, which obtained 9,404 votes.³³ However, in Romania, unlike in Slovakia, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, etc., there are no Rusyn ethnic schools, and there never were; even during the interwar period, there were only Ukrainian language schools. (On the other hand, the Romanian censuses of 1930 and 1941 did have the “Hutsul” ethnic category in Bukovina, though the self-styled Hutsuls declared themselves as speakers of Ukrainian.) In the Romanian census of 2002, only 257 individuals declared that they were Rusyns because in Romanian society, those who declare themselves as Rusyns are widely seen as pro-Russian.³⁴

Many of the “Moldovan language” and “Moldovan literature” textbooks from Ukraine are still available on the internet, though a few have disappeared. The first author who was typically listed was Anatol Fetescu’s wife, Larisa. These textbooks were pro-Soviet, anti-Romania and anti-Romanian, somewhat pro-Russian, especially toward Russia before there was an independent Ukraine in 1991.³⁵

³⁰ See “MINELRES: Tatiana Corai on the Romanian Schools in Transnistria”, at https://minelres.lv/mailling_archive/2005-February/003802.html, February 1, 2005.

³¹ See Andrei S. Tuluma and Denis Yu. Zubalov, “Impact of Language Ideologies on Language Practices in Pridnestrovie”, in *Journal of Siberian Federal University: Humanities & Social Sciences* 2022 15(11): 1552–1572, available at https://elib.sfu-kras.ru/bitstream/handle/2311/148777/01_Tulum.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, especially pp. 1564–1565.

³² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996_Romanian_general_election.

³³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Romanian_general_election#Chamber_of_Deputies. On the foundation of the organization in 2000, see the website of the Cultural Union of Ruthenians of Romania at <https://rutenii.ro/despre-noi/>.

³⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographic_history_of_Romania.

³⁵ See, for example, L.I. Fetescu and V.V. Chiosea, “Limba Moldoveneasca: Manual pentru clasa a 9-A a institutiilor pentru invatamant general cu limba moldoveneasca de predare” (“Moldovan Language: Textbook

There were differences of opinion concerning the merit of the transformation of the "Romanian schools" in the southern Bessarabian part of the Odessa region into "Moldovan schools". I have argued elsewhere that the individuals from families served by the "Moldovan schools" were about evenly divided between those who preferred "Moldovan" and "Romanian", yet those who were not served by these schools, especially in the areas east of the Dniester that were not a part of interwar Romania, preferred the "Moldovan" label.³⁶ The facts on the ground allowed the Ukrainian authorities to choose to support either the Moldovan or the Romanian linguistic identities in southern Bessarabia, as they did the former in 1998-2023, and the latter until 1998, and since 2023. In 1998, the Ukrainian authorities chose to support the "Moldovan" linguistic identity because they viewed those with a "Romanian" one as troublemakers.³⁷ Troublemakers did not necessarily mean irredentists (and pro-Romania irredentism was minimal), but also people who were criticizing Ukraine for not providing sufficient educational opportunities in the Romanian language to the Moldovan/Romanian minority. In this respect, Moldovanists such as Fetescu have avoided criticizing Ukraine on this account, which is not surprising for a former SBU collaborator, which has made their point of view less popular lately.

There have been some efforts to make the Moldovan/Romanian schools of the Odessa region return to their "Romanian", non-Communist or non-Soviet, ideological character of the early and middle 1990's, yet the Ukrainian elections do not necessarily tell us how widely supported they were. Leonid Kuchma, whose presidency had helped transform the "Romanian schools" in the area into "Moldovans schools", had won the support of most of the Odessa region's Moldovans/Romanians in the presidential elections of 1994, when he did better in the more pro-Russian Eastern Ukraine, without arguing that the schools should become "Moldovan". He retained the support of most of them during the 1999 elections, when he did better in the more pro-Western western Ukraine. Most of the supporters of the return to the "Romanian language" voted for the pro-Western victorious Viktor Yushchenko in 2004, for the pro-Western Yulia

for the 9th grade of the Institutions of General Education with Moldovan as the Teaching Language") for ninth grade at <https://pick.net.ua/9-class/1911-limba-moldoveneaska/>. The links to other textbooks may be found at <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/3806-pick-moldovska-mova-md-5-fetesku2/>, <https://pick.net.ua/9-class/3759-pick-literatura-md-9-fetesku2/>, <https://pick.net.ua/8-class/3514-pick-moldovska-mova-md-8-fetesku/>, <https://pick.net.ua/1-class/2196-abecedar-partea-1-1/>, <https://pick.net.ua/9-class/1910-literatura-30/>, <https://pick.net.ua/1-class/2197-abecedar-partea-2/>, <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/2351-limba-moldoveneaska-1/>, <https://pick.net.ua/3-class/3067-pick-moldovska-mova-chitannya2-md-3-fetesku/>, <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/3807-pick-moldovska-literatura-md-5-fetesku/>, <https://pick.net.ua/8-class/3515-pick-literatura-md-8-fetesku/> and <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/2350-literatura-34/>. Some of the textbooks that have disappeared could once be found at https://issuu.com/portfel_schoolbooks/docs/9_klas_moldovska_mova_fetesku_2017. The Romanian language textbooks could be seen at <https://pick.net.ua/8-class/3528-pick-rumunska-mova-ro-8-govornyan2/>, <https://pick.net.ua/6-class/796-limba-romana-3/>, <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/514-limba-romana-1/>, <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/2109-limba-romana-6/>, <https://pick.net.ua/9-class/3756-pick-rumunska-mova-ro-9-govornyan3/>, <https://pick.net.ua/5-class/3804-pick-rumunska-mova-ro-5-govornyan2/>, etc.

³⁶ Ionas Aurelian Rus, "Moldovan" and "Romanian" Nation-Building in the Odessa Region of Ukraine (1989-2004)', Paper presented at the 12th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Columbia University, April 2007.

³⁷ Anatol Fetescu's newspaper articles in the press and on Facebook have certainly argued that. The questions of the SBU interrogators to the Romanianist activists suggest the same.

Tymoshenko in 2010, who lost. In those elections, most local Moldovans voted for the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich. In 2014 and 2019, both most local Moldovans and those who wanted “Romanian language schools” voted for pro-Western candidates (Petro Poroshenko in 2014, and Volodymyr Zelensky, but so did many who wanted “Moldovan language schools”. In both elections, the two winners got a majority of the Odessa region, including south Bessarabian, Moldovan vote. The parliamentary elections revealed similar patterns.

Anatol Fetescu’s original intent to reintroduce the Cyrillic alphabet (as during the Soviet period) was very unacceptable to a large majority of the students in the “Moldovan-language schools” and to their parents. Therefore, to prevent unrest, the Ukrainian educational authorities retained the use of the Latin alphabet in these educational establishments.³⁸

By the initial period of the Yushchenko presidency (2005-2010), in early 2005, the formerly pro-Kuchma and pro-Yanukovich, yet adaptable, Anatol Fetescu had become the chief of staff of the Socialist Odessa Oblast governor Vasyl Tsushko, who is himself of partly Moldovan ancestry, and is fluent in Moldovan/Romanian. Fetescu in effect became the deputy governor. Fetescu was probably selected because of his affiliation with the Socialist Party of the regional governor after the 2004 elections.³⁹ It is by no means clear when Fetescu has changed his political affiliation after being pro-Viktor Yanukovich. In any case, his use of patronage helped Moldovanism and various Moldovanists, and his wife, Larisa, was the main author of the “Moldovan language” and “Moldovan literature” textbooks. In exchange for a relative lack of protest during the period to the content of the “Moldovan language” and “Moldovan literature” textbooks that were unappetizing, their villages got better roads and they benefited from other material advantages. Yet while a practitioner of patronage and nepotism, Fetescu does not seem to have been corrupt in the sense of illegal corruption. Yet neither were the Romanianist leaders, who were originally less adaptable.

The key leader in the last few years of those with a Romanian ethnic identity, who has played a key role in the victory of the idea of “Romanian language schools” has been Anatol Popescu, president and founding member of the “BASARABIA”/”Bessarabia” National-Cultural Association of Romanians from the Odessa region (Ukraine).⁴⁰ He is not a public employee, but a lawyer⁴¹,

³⁸ On “the demands of Moldovan communal organizations” (in reality only Fetescu’s organization) for a return to the Cyrillic alphabet, see Stefan Broasca, chief editor of the review *Plai romanesc*, ‘Reanimarea “limbii moldovenesti” si a “moldovenismului”’ (‘The Reactivation of the “Moldovan Language” and of Moldovanism in Ukraine: Ethnic Imperative or Political Command?’), in *Ucraina: imperativ etnic sau comanda politica?* (‘Ukraine: Ethnic Imperative or Political Command?’); at Florin Dyrda’s (Darda’s) website at <http://www.cv.ukrtel.net/boian/ISTORIE/istorie.html>, accessed July 2005, but currently no longer accessible. The numbers of individuals who privately identify themselves as “Romanians” and as speakers of “Romanian”, often as a secondary identity, are higher than the official census figures would suggest.

³⁹ I would like to thank Natalya Belitser, an analyst at the Pylip Orlik Institute, and Andy Ignatov (Ihnatov), project manager at the Kyiv NGO “Maidan”, for the information that that they have provided me on Fetescu, Tsushko and the latter’s hiring practices, etc.

⁴⁰ You may see the website of the organization at <https://www.facebook.com/basarabiareala/>. Another important activist was the teacher, Zinaida Pintea. See Ionas Aurelian Rus, ““Moldovan” and “Romanian” Nation-Building in the Odessa Region of Ukraine (1989-2004)”, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ See <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anatol-popescu-39113226/?originalSubdomain=ua>.

and thus not subject to as much government pressure, and he is very good at getting media attention. The fact that he has been younger and "cleaner" than Fetescu has helped his cause. The Romanianists finally had an adaptable leader who knew how to attract the attention of the Romanian-language press in Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania, as I will show below.

In the late 1990's and later, the "Romanian schools" in the Odessa region became "Moldovan schools" in 1998. The pro-Moldovanist activism was more "in the news" in the period from 1998 until at least 2010.

2014-2024: The Triumph of the "Romanian Language" in the Schools of the Odessa Region

So how was it possible to return to "Romanian language schools" in 2023-2024? The causes for the change were multiple. The background was Ukraine's war against Russia. It was also a fact that those who called their language "Romanian" were more loyal to Ukraine than many of those who called it "Moldovan". Other factors were the changed circumstance that the "troublemakers" were no longer associated by the Ukrainian officials with the Romanian ethnolinguistic orientation. The irredentist statements against Ukraine of Moldova's Socialist pro-Russian, Moldovanist president Igor Dodon were also a factor. There were also the pressures of the parents of the children. Most of those who got involved preferred the "Romanian language". There was also the pressure of the Moldovan authorities in favor of "Romanian language schools" since 2021. Yet the decisive factor was the pressure of the Romanian government, and particularly of the prime minister Marcel Ciolacu, especially in the context of Romania's enormous help for Ukraine after Russia attacked the latter country in 2022, and especially in 2023.

The February Revolution in Ukraine 2014, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the takeover of eastern and central Donbas by pro-Russian forces (in fact, Russian soldiers) led to the undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donbas (2014-2022). The self-styled ethnic Romanians in Ukraine, and those who indicated a preference for the language to be called "Romanian" in the educational system, as well as the self-styled "Moldovans" in the Chernivtsi region, who were served by "Romanian language schools", were loyal to Ukraine. The conscripted individuals went to war without any anti-conscription riots. By contrast, plenty of self-styled "Moldovans" of the variety that wanted the language in the schools to be called "Moldovan" in the Odessa region were initially more on the pro-Russian side and initially refused to serve in the Ukrainian army in the Donbas.

In 2015 (it was reported on February 5), in the village of Limanskoe (Frecatei in Romanian) close to the town of Reni, there was a riot against people drafted into the Ukrainian army, in which people from neighboring overwhelmingly ethnic Moldovan villages joined in.⁴² According to the 2001 Ukrainian census,

⁴² The source was available at <http://russia-insider.com/de/2015/02/04/3146>, which is no longer available, "Ukraine: Odessa District Rises up Against Mobilization: Call-up papers burned and Ukrainian patrols blocked in the district of Reni". The original source was *Slobodnaya Pressa*, a Russian news site, is available at <https://svpressa.ru/>. The Romanian language media also covered the event, but not widely or in detail, because it was embarrassing.

Limanskoe was 93.34% “Moldovan-speaking”, 3.85% Russian-speaking, 0.91% Bulgarian-speaking, 0.91% Gagauz-speaking, 0.79% Ukrainian-speaking, 0.03% Belarusian-speaking and 0% Romanian-speaking.⁴³ That incident should have constituted a warning sign to the Ukrainian authorities that the “Moldovan language schools” had been a failure in terms of “patriotic education”. My sense is that enough Ukrainian officials perceived the reality correctly, but that the change in policy was originally only to allow more freedom for “Romanian cultural events” (musical/folklore bands, the theater groups from Romania got more freedom for cultural events in the area, etc.)

The fact remains that the attempted anti-Ukraine secessionist coup in the Odessa Region in 2014 that would have created a Bessarabian Republic like the Donetsk and Luhansk ones but did not take place, had some support from Moldova, including from pro-Russian ethnic Moldovans who were Moldovanists.⁴⁴ While I have not seen any evidence of a Moldovan ethnic role in these plans in the Odessa region, the “I speak Moldovan, not Romanian” group initially displayed a “wait and see” attitude rather than active hostility to this idea secessionist idea. Those who were saying that they speak Romanian, or who accepted the “Romanian language” label was hostile to the secessionist idea because of their pro-Western and anti-Russian attitudes, but not because of their Ukrainian patriotism. One often hears from these people the line, “We are loyal to Ukraine, but we are not Ukrainians”. This is a rejection of ethnic as well as civic Ukrainian nationalism. By contrast, in the Chernivtsi and Transcarpathia regions, some ethnic Romanians, including northern Bessarabian self-identified Moldovans who prefer “Romanian language” schools, do identify with Ukrainian civic nationalism.

After the February 2014 Revolution, partly because of these issues discussed above, more cultural freedom was allowed to those in the Odessa Region of Romanian ethnic identity, or who were calling the language “Romanian”. More musical, theatre, etc., groups from Romania could tour the area. Books could be imported to Romania more easily. The Romanian Orthodox Church had more freedom than in the past. The Ukrainian authorities were indirectly communicating that they were open to compromise, albeit only in terms of allowing more individual rather than group rights to the members of the minority (“Romanian” festivals, but not “Romanian” schools). The locals who wanted “Romanian schools” did not find this enough, but many thought that it was an improvement over the past. That compromise was not acceptable to Romania, to the Romanian

⁴³ The demographic statistics were obtained from <http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Dialog/Saveshow.asp>, but no longer accessible. In 2001-2002, in the locality, there were twenty-two classes in “Moldovan” with 518 students (93.17%), and 3 Russian-language classes with thirty-eight students, all of whom also studied “Moldovan”. In 2002-2003, there were twenty-two classes in the “Moldovan language” with 497 students (93.6%), and 3 Russian classes with thirty-four students, all of whom were also studying “Moldovan”. The “Moldovan-speaking” students were studying in “Moldovan” (and learning Ukrainian), while the non-“Moldovan-speakers” were studying in Russian and learning Moldovan as well as Ukrainian. The source for the above-mentioned educational statistics is Ion Popescu and Constantin Ungureanu, *România din Ucraina – între trecut și viitor* [vol. 1, *România din Regiunea Cernăuți (Studiu etnodemografic și sociolingvistic)*] (Oradea: Treira, 2006), p. 47.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Paul Goble “Some Ukrainians Fear Moscow Planning ‘Bessarabian Republic’ in Odessa” at <https://jamestown.org/program/some-ukrainians-fear-moscow-planning-bessarabian-republic-in-odessa/>.

diaspora in the United States, including those originally from the Republic of Moldova, or to those with a Romanian ethnic or linguistic identity in the Republic of Moldova. This was partly because of the switch to more teaching in Ukrainian in the "Moldovan schools", and to the Ukrainian (including SBU) support for politicians with a "Moldovan" ethnic and linguistic identity in Moldova.⁴⁵

Within this context, the lobby for those with a Romanian ethnic or linguistic identity outside the area was more impressive and influential than one might think. The prime minister of Romania in 1992-1998, Nicolae Văcăroiu was born in 1943 in Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky (Ukrainian)/ Cetatea Alba (Romanian)/ Akkerman, the second largest city in southern Bessarabia. He was also the president of the Senate of Romania in 2000-2008, and the acting president of Romania in April-May 2008. Eugen Tomac, the member of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies in 2012-2019, member of the European Parliament for Romania in 2019-2024 and state secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania in 2009-2012, was born in 1981 in Ozernoe (Ukrainian)/Babele (Romanian). The Romanian government in 1998-2023 pushed for the change of the "Moldovan language schools" into "Romanian language schools", as we shall see below. Maia Sandu, the current president of the Republic of Moldova (2020 to now), a former prime minister (2019) and minister of education (2012-2015) of Moldova, also supported this transformation.⁴⁶

Ukraine's 2017 education law, though perceived as promoting linguistic Ukrainianization, was beneficial to the Romanianist argument, albeit in an indirect way. It provided for the increasing teaching in Ukrainian in the minority language schools. It also created more opportunities for education in the native language for the languages associated with the European Union, such as Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian than for other languages, such as Russian. This led numerous parents to petition for the language to be transformed from "Moldovan" into "Romanian". The Ukrainian authorities gave assurances that the "Moldovan language", because it was identical to Romanian, would be treated as a language of the European Union, which happened in some localities, but not in others. After that, when the parents sent requests in the late 2010's and the early 2020's for the transformation of the "Moldovan schools" into "Romanian schools", there was fundamentally no opposition from the village Moldovanists. The opposition came from urban Moldovanist activists living in urban localities

⁴⁵ I did criticize the Ukrainian authorities over the fact that the schools were "Moldovan language schools" rather than "Romanian language schools" after my fourth analytic exchange presentation on Moldova for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the U.S. Department of State in July 2016 to the relevant analyst dealing with Ukraine. In Ionas Rus, "A New President in Chisinau: The Election of Nicolae Timofti as Moldova's President and Its Consequences", paper presented at the analytic exchange "Moldova: Prospects for Political Stability and Conflict Resolution", sponsored by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State and the National Intelligence Council, October 2012, the Ukrainian authorities were criticized regarding the fact that the schools in the Bessarabian part of the Odessa region were "Moldovan language" rather than "Romanian language".

⁴⁶ See Silviu Vasilache, "Ministrul Educației de la Chișinău susține învățământul în limba română și în Ucraina" ("The Minister of Education from Chisinau supports education in Romanian and in Ukraine"), in *Bugeac*, December 24, 2015, at <https://bugeac.net/interviu/ministrul-educatiei-de-la-chisinau-sustine-invatamantul-in-limba-romana-si-in-ucraina/>.

with no “Moldovan schools” such as Anatol Fetescu. The “Moldovan schools” idea came to be seen as something supported “from above” rather than “from below”, promoted by somebody who had worked with the Ukrainian secret service (SBU) after Fetescu’s 1989/1991-2011 links with it were demonstrated by the SBU in 2020, and lately as something that promoted Ukrainization, etc.⁴⁷

Moreover, the ethnolinguistic Moldovanists of the Odessa region seemed tainted by the territorial claims of Moldova’s Socialist, pro-Russian, ethnic and linguistic Moldovanist President, Igor Dodon (2016-2020), against Ukraine on more than one occasion, including in 2014.⁴⁸ That went hand in hand with his declarations that Crimea is a part of Russia, including in 2016.⁴⁹ A common argument made in Ukraine for keeping the schools “Moldovan” was the fear of Romanian territorial claims against Ukraine. Yet the pro-Russian, Moldovanist, left-wing, forces in Moldova, not those with a Romanian or linguistic identity, had territorial claims against Ukraine. Various opinion polls indicate that the self-identified ethnic Romanians in Ukraine are much less likely to want border revisions than the self-identified Moldovans. Thus, in the Chernivtsi region, among the self-identified ethnic Romanians, only 17.7% desired a border revision in

⁴⁷ See ‘Consiliul Național al Românilor din Ucraina trage un semnal de alarmă privind situația școlilor “moldovenști” din regiunea Odessa. Ce face Bucureștiul?’ (‘The National Council of Romanians in Ukraine is sounding the alarm about the situation of “Moldovan” schools in the Odessa region. How’s Bucharest?’), at <https://rgnpress.ro/2021/01/13/consiliul-national-al-romanilor-din-ucraina-trage-un-semnal-de-alarma-privind-situatia-scolilor-moldovenesti-din-regiunea-odessa-ce-face-bucurestiul/>. There is the theory that the Ukrainian SBU no longer needed Fetescu’s services in 2011 because, by “betraying” Kuchma and Yanukovich in 2024, he had become an ally to the Orange forces in Ukraine. Yet this past link to the Orange forces made him acceptable to the Ukrainian authorities in 2014-2023.

⁴⁸ See my article, Ionas Aurelian Rus, “Igor Dodon’s Past Support for Irredentism Against Ukraine”, published by *Moldova.org* on July 18, 2017, at <https://www.moldova.org/en/igor-dodons-past-support-irredentism-ukraine/>. I wrote: “Dodon ... made some irredentist statements in the studios of *Unimedia* in the Republic of Moldova on March 19, 2014. This occurred soon after the occupation of Crimea by Putin’s Russia, which is referenced in the taped recording. Dodon first said, “Let us not forget that, in the year 1940, illegally, certain territories of the Republic of Moldova were excluded from its composition and were artificially united with another state. I will not reveal (this), but the people understand very well. I don’t think...” Then Ms. Robu asked him, “Please tell me to what you are referring more exactly”. Dodon then added, “I think that the people understand very well [that I am] referring to the south and the north of the Republic of Moldova. And thus, why not, under these circumstances, and after a precedent has already been created. There is already a precedent. After the Crimea precedent, why shouldn’t we think about this thing in relation to the territories that were historically, for hundreds of years, a part of the Republic of Moldova?” The reporter asked him, “Therefore, are you referring to Chernivtsi, to Bukovina?” Dodon added, “I am referring to the historical south and the historical north of Moldova”. The reporter asked, “From whom should we demand it?” Dodon answered, “And your next question was?” The reporter continued, “No, I asked you from whom we should demand these...” Dodon added, “I expressed my opinion. Elena, I expressed my opinion very clearly”. Elena added, “You told me...” Dodon: “The message...” Elena: “You expressed it half-way”. Dodon: “The message for those who wish to understand it was understood very well by them”. Elena: “But for those who have not understood it?” Dodon: “Those who have not understood it will come to us, to courses, to hours (i.e., classes), and we will explain it to them so that they would understand”. The Romanian language form of the article, “OPINIE/ Sprijinul trecut al lui Igor Dodon pentru iredentismul împotriva Ucrainei” (“Opinion: Igor Dodon’s Past Support for Irredentism Against Ukraine”) was also published by *Moldova.org* on July 18, 2017, at <https://www.moldova.org/opinie-sprjinul-trecut-al-lui-igor-dodon-pentru-iredentismul-impotriva-ucrainei/>. I was listed as “autor invitat” (“Invited author”). While I was invited to write the Romanian language version of the article, after that, I decided to also publish it in English. Dodon had made more such statements.

⁴⁹ See ‘Moldovan presidential race leader says Crimea “Russian”’, published by *Unian*, 10/25/2016, at <https://www.unian.info/politics/1588871-moldovan-presidential-race-leader-says-crimea-russian.html>.

favor of Romania in 2003, while among the self-identified Moldovans, 38.1% wanted it in favor of Moldova.⁵⁰ The greater irredentism among self-identified ethnic Moldovans in the area explains why the regional Ukrainian authorities have been happy that the schools for the "Moldovans" in the Chernivtsi region call the language "Romanian" rather than "Moldovan". The Bukovinian and Eastern Galician origin Ukrainian diaspora, in North America (Canada and the United States), has also preferred "Romanian language" schools, not in the least because of the past generations' struggle against the Russophile and Ruthene/Rusyn orientations.

There was also another factor. While the Romanian government pressed the Ukrainian authorities to change the language of the schools from "Moldovan" to "Romanian" for a long time, the Moldovan government has also recently supported the same line, more than it did in other previous periods of pro-Western governance in Moldova. This became apparent after PAS, the Party of Action and Solidary ("Partidul Actiune si Solidaritate") won the parliamentary elections of July 11, 2021, after Maia Sandu, the leader of the party, won the Moldovan presidency on November 15, 2020.

The Russian attack against all of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, made it imperative for Romania to help supply military supplies (weapons and ammunition) to Ukraine, which it did. This has indeed happened on a mass scale. The shipments have tended to also pass through Moldovan territory, through Giurgiulesti, where Moldova's only harbor on the Danube is located, notwithstanding Moldova's neutrality. Throughout much of 2023, more military supplies for Ukraine entered through this Romania-Moldova-Ukraine route than through Poland. Many pictures of trains with military supplies have appeared on Romanian social media. Most of Ukraine's grain exports have also recently passed through Romania.⁵¹ Romania and Moldova have also received and housed large numbers of refugees from Moldova, primarily from southern Ukraine, quite often Russian-speakers, and not always well-behaved or popular.

Starting in December 2019, in most of the sixteen "Moldovan" or partly "Moldovan" schools in the Odessa region, a majority of the parents and of the

⁵⁰ See Anatolii Kruglashov, "Bukovyna: A Border Region with a Fluctuating Identity", in *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 35–36 (2010–2011), p. 139, at https://www.academia.edu/10844826/Bukovyna_A_Border_Region_with_a_Fluctuating_Identity?email_work_card=view-paper. By some point in 2015, the self-styled Moldovans in the Odessa region were more likely to be irredentist than the self-styled Romanians. By comparison, most ethnic Hungarians/Magyars seem to have been unfriendly toward the Ukrainian state. "Most Hungarian respondents in a poll agreed that Ukrainian independence had 'brought worse than good'. Over 75 per cent expressed 'very little' or 'no attachment to Ukraine at all – even fewer than towards the former USSR, to which 69 per cent expressed very little to no attachment. On the other hand, the sense of attachment to Hungary was strong for 37 per cent and very strong for 27 per cent....". See Judy Batt, "Transcarpathia: Peripheral Region at the Centre of Europe", in Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, Portland, OR., Frank Cass, 2002), p. 167.

⁵¹ See, for example, Oleksiy Leonov, "OPINION: Ukraine – Romania: Gratitude Where It's Due", in *Kyiv Post*, September 10, 2023, at <https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/21341>. Also see Anna Neplii, "Romania's Support for Ukraine deserves greater recognition", in *Kyiv Post*, June 22, 2022, at <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/romania-support-for-ukraine-deserves-greater-recognition.html>. Also see "Romania plans to involve Air Force to speed up transit of ships with Ukrainian grain through Danube River", in *Ukrainska Pravda*, July 28, 2023, at <https://www.yahoo.com/news/romania-plans-involve-air-force-123952778.html>.

teachers asked for the transition from the “Moldovan language” to the “Romanian language”.⁵² The Romanian authorities, and especially the Romanian foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu, repeatedly pressed Ukraine for the language of the schools to change from “Moldovan” to “Romanian” in 2021-2022, just as they had done before that, both before and after the Russian massive attack of Ukraine in 2022, with the assistance of the Moldovan foreign minister Nicu Popescu.⁵³ Subsequently, on March 16, 2023, after a parliamentary vote with a large majority, and consistent with a 2013 decision of Moldova’s constitutional court that declared “Romanian” as the official language of Moldova, which relied on the fact that Moldova’s declaration of independence called the language “Romanian”, “Romanian” was declared the official language of the Republic of Moldova.⁵⁴ On March 22, 2023, Moldova’s president Maia Sandu signed this into law.⁵⁵ On March 24, 2023, the law came into effect when it appeared in “Monitorul Oficial”, in which all the laws of the country are published.⁵⁶ On March 30, the constitution of the Republic of Moldova was changed to “The official language of the Republic of Moldova is the Romanian language”.⁵⁷

⁵² See “Reabilitarea Limbii Române în școala din Borisăuca, regiunea Odessa: Un pas major către păstrarea identității naționale” (“Rehabilitation of the Romanian Language in the School in Borisăuca, Odessa region: A major step towards preserving the national identity”), in *BucPress*, August 21, 2023, at <https://bucpress.eu/reabilitarea-limbii-romane-in-scoala-din-borisauca-regiunea-odessa-un-pas-major-catre-pastrarea-identitatii-naționale/>. The outlet is published in Chernivtsi.

⁵³ See, for example, ‘Ministerul de Externe: Bogdan Aurescu cere Ucrainei să recunoască oficial inexistența “limbii moldovenești”’ (“Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Bogdan Aurescu asks Ukraine to officially recognize the non-existence of the “Moldovan language””), in *Digi24*, June 19, 2021, at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ministerul-de-externe-bogdan-aurescu-cere-ucrainei-sa-recunoasca-oficial-inexistenta-limbii-moldovenești-1568981>. The article notes that ‘Minister Bogdan Aurescu reiterated the request to Ukraine that, starting from the recognition of the identity between the Romanian language and the so-called “Moldovan language”, confirmed by the Ukrainian side in April 2021, it should officially recognize the non-existence of the “Moldovan language”’. Also see “România, solicitare fermă pentru Ucraina: Kievul să nu recunoască ‘limba moldovenească’” (“Romania, firm request for Ukraine: Kiev not to recognize the ‘Moldovan language’”), in *Stiripesurse.ro* (<https://www.stiripesurse.ro/>), on November 30, 2022, at https://www.stiripesurse.ro/romania-solicitare-ferma-pentru-ucraina-kievul-sa-nu-recunoasca-limba-moldoveneasca_2680810.html. The Romanian foreign ministry website notes that, ‘Minister Bogdan Aurescu, together with his counterpart in Chisinau, reiterated on this occasion the request to Ukraine to officially recognize the non-existence of the so-called “Moldovan language”, based on the recognition of the identity between the Romanian language and the so-called “Moldovan language” confirmed by the Ukrainian side in April 2021, while stressing the importance of respecting the identity rights of Romanians in Ukraine, by ensuring the same standards enjoyed by ethnic Ukrainians in Romania, in line with President Zelenski’s statements of April 2022.’ See “Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu Participated in the First Meeting of the Trilateral of Foreign Ministers of Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in Odessa”, September 15, 2022, at <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/59634>.

⁵⁴ See ‘Phrase “Romanian language” to be set in all laws of Moldova’, at *Moldpres*, March 16, 2023, at <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2023/03/16/23002127>.

⁵⁵ See <https://presedinte.md/rom/comunicate-de-presa/presedinta-maia-sandu-a-promulgat-legea-care-confirma-ca-limba-de-stat-a-republicii-moldova-este-cea-romna>.

⁵⁶ See ‘Legea prin care sintagma “limba moldovenească” a fost înlocuită cu “limba română” în legislația națională, inclusiv în Constituție, a intrat în vigoare’ (“The law through which the phrase “Moldovan language” was replaced by “Romanian language” in the national legislation, including the Constitution, entered into force”), in *Ziarul National*, March 24, 2023, at <https://www.ziarulnational.md/legea-prin-care-sintagma-limba-moldoveneasca-a-fost-inlocuita-cu-limba-romana-in-legislatia-nationala-inclusiv-in-constitutie-a-intrat-in-vigoare/>.

⁵⁷ See <https://protv.md/actualitate/modificat-si-in-constitutie-limba-de-stat-a-republicii-moldova-este-limba-romana-foto—2648619.html>. After the provisional Bessarabian parliament “Sfatul Tarii” had voted for the union of Bessarabia with Romania on March 27, 1918, the king of Romania, Ferdinand, proclaimed the union of Bessarabia with Romania on March 29, and it appeared in Romania’s *Monitorul Oficial* on March 30.

This initially did not have any impact on Ukraine. In early June 2023, the Ukrainian Minister of Education was still insisting that the language in the schools of the Odessa Region will, and should, continue to be labelled as "Moldovan".⁵⁸ This decision came at a most inopportune time in Romanian-Ukrainian relations, when the Romanian hospitals were inspected by American officers for their suitability for the treatment of the wounded from the Ukrainian offensive against the Russian troops in Ukraine.

On May 25, 2023, in the village of Borisauca (Borysivka in Ukrainian, which was 91.8% Romanian-speaking in 2001), the school board decided to switch from the "Moldovan language" curriculum to the "Romanian language" curriculum starting on September 1, 2023, the first day of the new school year.⁵⁹ Soon thereafter, two other schools from the region, from Dumitresti (Dmytrivka in Romanian, which was 93.54% Romanian-speaking in 2001) and Satu Nou (Novosilke in Ukrainian, which was 93.22% Romanian-speaking in 2001), decided the same thing.⁶⁰ None of these localities had parishes of the Romanian Orthodox Church or a more widespread than average Romanianism. It seemed that similar decisions would soon be made in other localities. These decisions contradicted the line that the preference for calling the language "Romanian" was just the position of a minority of those in the localities served by the Moldovan/Romanian schools. What seemed was that some of the previous supporters of the idea of calling the schools "Moldovan" had changed to support for calling them "Romanian". In some cases, this was because of problems with getting diplomas from "Moldovan language" schools in Romania and Moldova from the people who had attended "Moldovan language schools". Yet the villagers also wanted to benefit from the greater opportunities for education in a language of the European Union granted by Ukrainian law. Moreover, societally, in Ukraine, Romania was no longer seen as more of an adversary, but as an ally.

See the proclamation of King Ferdinand of Romania, "Unirea Basarabiei cu Romania" ("The Union of Bessarabia with Romania"), March 29, 1918, published in *Monitorul Oficial*, republished in Ștefan Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Populația, Istoria, Cultura* (Chișinău: Știința, 1992), pp. 118-120. Measures such as this were partly the result of meetings and agreements between Moldova's PAS president Maia Sandu and the leaders of small parties in favor of union with Romania, which endorsed her for the presidency in 2020 and PAS for the 2021 parliamentary elections. My sources on these meetings were Nicu Popescu, Moldova's foreign minister from 2021 to 2024 and the former leader of the National Liberal Party (of the Republic of Moldova), the former parliamentary deputy Vitalia Pavlicenco.

⁵⁸ See "Ucraina va tipări manuale de limba și literatura "moldovenească" în ciuda solicitărilor comunității românești, ale Bucureștiului și partidelor politice de la Chișinău" ("Ukraine will print "Moldovan" language and literature textbooks despite the requests of the Romanian community, Bucharest and political parties in Chisinau"), in BucPress, June 10, 2023, at <https://bucpress.eu/ucraina-va-continua-sa-tipareasca-manuale-de-limba-si-literatura-moldoveneasca-in-ciuda-solicitarilor-comunitatii-romanesti-a-bucurestiului-si-partidelor-politice-de-la-chisinau/>. The letter of the Ukrainian ministry of education appears in both Ukrainian and Romanian.

⁵⁹ "DOC Lyceum from Odessa changes syntagma "Moldovan language" in syllabus, introduces Romanian language", in *Moldpres* (the Moldovan official news agency), August 24, 2023, at <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2023/08/24/23006703>.

⁶⁰ See, for example, "Încă două școli din Sudul Basarabiei, regiunea Odessa vor reveni la predarea în limba română" ("Two more schools in Southern Bessarabia, Odessa region will return to teaching in Romanian"), in *Romanian Global News*, September 19, 2023, at <https://rgnpress.ro/2023/09/inca-doua-scoli-din-sudul-basarabiei-regiunea-odessa-vor-reveni-la-predarea-in-limba-romana/>.

On October 10, the Romanian prime minister and president of the Social Democratic Party Marcel Ciolacu asked the Ukrainian president Zelensky for the derecognition of the Moldovan language. Zelensky seemed supportive and sympathetic, but evasive, and with a propensity for delay.⁶¹ After having previously raised this issue in a meeting with the Ukrainian prime minister in August, Marcel Ciolacu, in Romania, on October 18, 2023, when he visited Kyiv, he said that the Ukrainian authorities had promised to derecognize the Moldovan language.⁶² Yet not every person in the Ukrainian state apparatus seems to have been supportive of this new line. The covers of two textbooks for the Moldovan language textbooks for 2024 were e-mailed by mistake by the publisher to Anatol Popescu, the Romanianist leader from the Odessa region, instead of to Anatol Fetescu, the Moldovanist leader from the same region. They appeared in the Romanian language media on November 15, 2023, after the former emailed the information to the press.⁶³ An angry Ciolacu called the Ukrainian authorities, as did his foreign policy counselor, and the problem was solved in a way that they considered appropriate.⁶⁴

On November 16, 2023, the Ukrainian authorities, including the Ministry of Education, ended the use of the term “Moldovan language” and replacing it by the term “Romanian language”, as one may see in the translation of this text on the website of the (Ukrainian) Ministry of Education and Science.⁶⁵ The Ukrainian press indicated on January 13, 2024, that the last three schools had just changed

⁶¹ See “Zelensky Promises Romania to Solve the Issue of Non-existence of Moldovan Language”, in *European Pravda*, October 11, 2023, at <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/10/11/7171150/>.

⁶² See ‘Limba română, decretată limbă oficială pentru românii din Ucraina. Marcel Ciolacu: “Apreciez sprijinul președintelui Zelenski”’ (‘The Romanian language, decreed as the official language for Romanians in Ukraine. Marcel Ciolacu: “I appreciate the support of President Zelenski”’), in *Digi24.ro*, on October 18, 2023, at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/marcel-ciolacu-limba-oficiala-pentru-minoritatea-romana-din-ucraina-este-de-astazi-limba-romana-nu-moldoveneasca-2547515>.

⁶³ See “Ciolacu și Zelenski au vorbit ceva, Ucraina se pregătește de altceva: cum arată manualele de limbă și literatura “moldovenească” ce vor fi tipărite pentru copiii români din Odessa” (“Ciolacu and Zelenski talked about something, Ukraine is preparing for something else: what do the “Moldovan” language and literature textbooks that will be printed for Romanian children in Odessa look like”), in *Libertatea*, November 15, 2023, at <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/ciolacu-si-zelenski-au-vorbit-ceva-ucraina-se-pregateste-de-altceva-cum-arata-manualele-de-limba-si-literatura-moldoveneasca-ce-vor-fi-tiparite-pentru-copiii-romani-din-odessa-4718444>.

⁶⁴ See “M-am umplut de nervi, am adormit pe la 1:30”. Precizările lui Ciolacu după ce a văzut știrea cu manualele în “limba moldovenească” (“I was so nervous, I fell asleep around 1:30.” Ciolacu’s comments after seeing the news about the textbooks in the “Moldovan language”), in *HotNews.ro*, November 16, at <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-26687955-haideti-spinem-tot-adevarul-reactia-lui-marcel-ciolacu-dupa-elevii-romani-din-ucraina-vor-invata-continuare-dupa-manuale-limba-moldoveneasca.htm>.

⁶⁵ See ‘Official statement regarding the use in Ukraine of the term “Romanian language” instead of the term “Moldovan language”’, at <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/news/oficijna-zayava-shodo-vikoristannya-v-ukrayini-ponyattya-rumunsk-a-mova-zamist-ponyattya-moldovska-mova?fbclid=IwAR016lJXKqG2gBDvIBeyYQqnVyo92gJLceQd3TpnzFBjadfQErV6ZTep2cQ>. The text appears below. ‘The Government of Ukraine adopted a decision regarding the use of the term “Romanian language” instead of the term “Moldovan language” in Ukraine. Currently, work is underway to bring the current legislation of Ukraine in line with this decision, which includes many internal regulatory legal acts. Separately, we note that all further acts of the government will be adopted considering the agreements. And all civil servants who allow violations of the government’s decision will be subject to disciplinary action. The facts reported in the media regarding the printed textbooks refer to the copies approved for printing in May this year. The main edition of these textbooks was printed in the summer before the decision was made not to use the term “Moldovan language”. Today, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has stopped any additional printing of these textbooks. And also develops a mechanism for replacing previously printed copies with textbooks in the Romanian language”’.

the name of the language from "Moldovan" to Romanian" according to the Ukrainian ministry of education.⁶⁶ Finally, Ukraine's December 2023 minorities law improved the minority rights of the Romanian minority and of other minorities (excluding the Russian minority) to almost as good a level as they had been before 2017, when Ukrainization started to be pushed through the educational system.⁶⁷ The Romanian authorities were satisfied.⁶⁸ This happened after Romania had criticized previous versions of the law.⁶⁹

Ukraine clearly had no other option than to accept the Romanian request. The Polish authorities had called the Ukrainian authorities ungrateful for Poland's assistance.⁷⁰ A similar statement from Romania would have hurt Ukraine's cause.

So, there was a return to "Romanian language schools" in the Odessa region in 2023-2024. The causes for the change were multiple. The background was Ukraine's war against Russia. It was also a fact that those who called their language "Romanian" were more loyal to Ukraine than many of those who called it "Moldovan". Other factors were the changed circumstance that the "troublemakers" were no longer associated by the Ukrainian officials with the Romanian ethnolinguistic orientation. The irredentist statements against Ukraine of Moldova's Socialist pro-Russian, Moldovanist president Igor Dodon were also a factor. There was also the pressure of the parents of the children. Most of those who got involved preferred the "Romanian language". There was also the pressure of the Moldovan authorities. Yet the decisive factor was the pressure of the Romanian government, and particularly of the prime minister Marcel Ciolacu, especially in the context of Romania's enormous help for Ukraine after Russia attacked the latter country in 2022, and especially in 2023.

Conclusions

In October-November 2023, the Ukrainian authorities decided that the "Moldovan language" textbooks and schools in the Odessa region should change again to "Romanian language" ones, as they had been in 1990/1992-1998. This was to a substantial extent due to the pressures of the Romanian government and of the current Moldovan authorities. PAS had changed the name of the official language of Moldova from "Moldovan" to "Romanian" in March 2023. The change in Ukrainian official policy also followed the decisions of three local

⁶⁶ See <https://dumskaya.net/news/poslednie-moldavskie-shkoly-odesskoy-oblasti-per-181559/ua/>.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Marcin Jêdrysiak Krzysztof Nieczypor, "Ukraine: another amendment to the law on national minorities", at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-12-13/ukraine-another-amendment-to-law-national-minorities>.

⁶⁸ See "Romanian Foreign Minister welcomes amendments to Ukraine's law on national minorities", in *RBC – Ukraine*, December 9, 2023, at <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/romanian-foreign-minister-welcomes-amendments-1702078515.html>.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Madalin Necsutu, "Romania President Presses Ukraine on Minority Rights", in *BalkanInsight*, January 5, 2023, at <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/01/05/romania-president-presses-ukraine-on-minority-rights/>.

⁷⁰ See "Diplomatic spat after Poland calls Ukraine 'ungrateful'", in *Euronews*, August 3, 2023, at <https://www.euronews.com/2023/08/03/diplomatic-spat-after-poland-calls-ukraine-ungrateful#:~:text=Following%20the%20statement%2C%20Poland's%20ambassador,and%20as%20such%20are%20unacceptable%2C>.

school districts in southern Bessarabia to change the name of the language of instruction from “Moldovan” to “Romanian”, and the parents’ and teachers’ massive petitions asking for the same change in most of the communities with Moldovan/Romanian schools. This suggested that by then, more people preferred the schools to be called “Romanian” rather than “Moldovan”.

The name of the language of instruction in the schools serving the Moldovan-Romanian minority in independent Ukraine was called “Romanian” until the change to “Moldovan” in the Odessa region in 1998-2000. Most self-styled Moldovans in Moldova, as well as in the Chernivtsi region plus about half of those of southern Bessarabia in the Odessa region in localities with Moldovan/Romanian language schools in Ukraine before 2023 in the post-Soviet period have accepted that the “Moldovan language” is Romanian. The support for the «Romanian language» label seems to have increased during 2023.

In 1998, one year after Romania had recognized Ukraine’s borders, including possession of northern Bukovina, northern and southern Bessarabia and Herta, those with a Romanian ethnic or even only linguistic identity in the Odessa region were seen by the Ukrainian authorities as “troublemakers”. The 2015 anti-conscription riots in which the inhabitants of a few southern Bessarabian Moldovan villages participated suggested that the Sovietized “Moldovan language” textbooks had not served the interests of the Ukrainian state well in terms of making the Moldovans loyal to Ukraine. The pro-Western voting patterns of the southern Bessarabian Moldovans in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections suggest that the pro-Russian, pro-Soviet “Moldovan language” textbooks were no longer having their original pro-Russian impact. The mass local activism among the Moldovans of the Odessa oblast was predominantly in favor of calling the language “Romanian”. Yet it was the pressure of Moldova and especially Romania that was key in the reversion to «Romanian language» schools in the region in 2023-2024. Romania’s massive help for Ukraine in the war against Russia since 2022 was an important reason official Kyiv could not refuse the Romanian official request.

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