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THE VIRTUE OF DIVERSITY: PERCEPTIONS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA OF YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CIVIL SOCIETY REGARDING SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF EU ACCESSION

Adrian-Gabriel CORPĂDEAN, Ph.D. Associate Professor

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

adrian.corpadean@ubbcluj.ro

Ana Gabriela PANTEA, Ph.D. Associate Professor

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

ana.pantea@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: *The military aggression of Russia against Ukraine has provoked collective anxiety within the population of the Republic of Moldova around a potential targeting of the country, while increasing collective efficacy and nationhood. The article explores the construction of identity among young Moldovans in civil society, particularly in the context of EU accession. Moldova, as a multiethnic state, has been grappling with identity disputes since its first multiparty elections in 1994. The authors investigate ethnic identification and positioning towards international actors, aiming to understand how internal and external loyalties overlap and can emerge in building a new civic identity beyond the post-Soviet legacy. The study shows a reevaluation of ethnic components and the connection with geopolitics. Before the Ukrainian war, the prolonged economic and political crises in the country, as well as the great power politics, had prompted the younger generations to be disconnected from the political, economic, and social aspects of public life. As such, they maintain a sense of social integration within their familial and friendship networks, which contributes to their sense of belonging within Moldovan society. The article examines the connection between self-identification and the geopolitical structures within the Republic of Moldova. The empirical part of the research involves 18 semi-structured interviews with Moldovan youth involved in civil society organizations, focusing on patterns of self-identification, including Pan-Romanianism, Moldovianism, Transnistrian ideology, and Gagauzian regional identity. The study also highlights the importance of pluralistic identification in which economic development is crucial in building up a consistent identification narrative.*

Keywords: : post-Soviet identity; multiethnic state; youth organizations, EU enlargement policy, Russian leverage.

1. Introduction

The article provides a theoretical and empirical analysis of the multiple layers that are negotiated in the construction of identity among young people involved in civil society activities in the Republic of Moldova, in the context of EU accession. Fifteen years after the initiation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Republic of Moldova started its transition from the geopolitical division between two conflicting alliances - the European Union (EU) and Russia - and is finally moving towards the EU as, in 2023, the two sides decided to open accession negotiations. Brussels employs its normative and economic influence with the explicit objective to integrate the Republic of Moldova, but Russia utilises its cultural, energy, and military leverage to maintain close ties with its “near abroad”.

Since 1991, the Republic of Moldova, as a multiethnic state, has been characterized by a dialectical relationship between language/dialect, ethnicity, and kinship claims. Identity disputes have been a significant concern since the country’s first multiparty elections in 1994 (Danero–Iglesias 2015). The debates revolve around the meaning and content of Moldovan identity and nation, with the most debated aspects being, before 2023, the naming of the state’s language and the content of its history. In 2023, the official language of the Republic of Moldova was proclaimed to be Romanian (Official Gazette 97-99/2023), which was a significant milestone in the quest to disengage from the post-Soviet legacy and to look forward. Nevertheless, the disputes on Romanian versus Moldovan identity, the shadow economy or mass migration have contributed to the perception of the Republic of Moldova as a weak state with fluctuant positioning between the EU and Russia, struggling over strategic decisions. Externally, scholars argue that the Republic of Moldova is weakened by the geopolitical pressures of irredentism, while internally, the state attempts to generate loyalty when pre-existing allegiances still exist (Schrad 2004: 479). Such critics ignore the Millennials and the Z generation of the Republic of Moldova, who are civically more active and conscious. In addition, they do not pay attention to the multiethnic character of the state, the divergent interests of the international players or the Transnistrian file, which all contribute to shaping the internal discussions. As such, the authors investigate two factors: ethnic identification, and positioning towards international actors. The goal of the present article is to bring together perceptions of the way in which internal and external loyalties overlap and can be overcome in building a new civic identity beyond the post-

Soviet legacy. Despite the importance of ethnicity, kinship and language use in the Republic of Moldova, academic research seldom explores the meanings of identification (Kennedy 2010: 516). The latest census acknowledged Moldovans as forming a clear majority (75.1% in terms of ethnicity and 38.6% as mother tongue, see National Bureau of Statistics 2014), Romanians to be a minority (7% in terms of ethnicity and 25% as mother tongue), as well as Russians as being a minority (4.1% in terms of ethnicity and 21.8% as mother tongue), while other data collection efforts have not gone beyond these mutually exclusive categories. Many scholars have taken positions on what Romanian and Moldovan civic identities represent (Arambosa 2008; Ciscel 2006; Gherasim 2012; Heinz 1991), often exacerbating political or personal biases while ignoring the potential plurality of meanings or blurring of these categories of identification. The present paper is an endeavour to decrypt the relationship between two overlapping dimensions which massively influence identity - identitarian foundation, as well as international actors.

To understand the salience of perception of the Moldovan nation and identity, discussions with young active citizens have primarily centred around self-identification, civil activism and great players, all having undergone significant changes after 2020, due to the reconfirmation of a pro-European path and the identification of a more insecure international context after the war in Ukraine. Additionally, the present study shows that there has been a reevaluation of the role of the individual components of nationalism (pride, loyalty) and of the reconnection between young individuals and the international arena (Brubaker 1996; Jones and Wallace 1992; Helve and Wallace 2000). As many of them acknowledge, they are more engaged today than four years ago in the civil society. Young individuals become active citizens through their progression in a biography that is established by the family, the state, and the international arena (Heinz 1991).

2. Theoretical framework

Geopolitical competition over a territory or regime change is crucial in understanding the emergence of nationhood and national identities. According to Soehl and Karim (2021), a turbulent geopolitical past decreases the speed of building liberal nationalism and amplifies restrictive forms of self-identification. It is indeed the case of the Republic of Moldova, which has faced numerous structural transformations over the last century.

Even in the '90s and early 2000s, amid the post-Soviet context of the Republic of Moldova, the state failed to provide essential services and what was perceived as the formerly established and secure transitions of young people were replaced by a variety of uncertain and risky life paths. Due to high rates of youth unemployment, many individuals were compelled to pursue professional opportunities abroad or engage in informal economic activities (Roberts et al. 2000; Herța-Șerpi 2022). The connection between young individuals and the government met with low levels of trust as the government ceased to offer a range of social and economic opportunities. This led to a prevailing sense of scepticism and disappointment towards traditional politics and geopolitical partnerships in general (Spanning et al. 2000). Several studies have observed the significant familial bonds that have aided young individuals during these challenging decades (Roberts and Jung 1995). Additionally, informal networks of friends and acquaintances have played a significant role in offering social support and facilitating access to resources for the young (Roberts et al. 2000).

In the present study, the authors test the following hypotheses: (1) the youth of the Republic of Moldova increase their loyalty towards the state (in terms of trust in state institutions and prospects) as they react to EU accession; (2) the Russian aggression in Ukraine has impacted the way in which they perceive themselves and societal change in the country; (3) civil engagement is increasing and bi-partisan national loyalty is reduced.

The constructivist approach to the study of ethnicity and nation – as a prominent perspective on post-Soviet space (Suny 1993; Herța 2017) – views social and political groupings as ongoing processes shaped by subjective self-perception. This theoretical approach will be linked in the following with the geopolitical element (Soehl-Karim 2021), as an attempt to define the identification of Moldovan youth beyond the ethnic dimension. Other layers of identification are not considered in the present study, even though on the one hand, sociologists have highlighted the significance of networks and family in identification (McAdam et al. 2001), whilst scholars in International Relations, on the other hand, are focused on the impact of institutional change and recollections of past imposed identities (Suny 1993).

3. Research Design

The authors use qualitative data collection, by conducting 18 semi-structured interviews between November 2023 and January 2024 with youth from the Republic of Moldova who are involved in civil society organisations (CSOs), i.e. current and former personnel within the 18-35 age limit (Striepe 2021). The structure of the interview is displayed in Table 3 and the list of interviewees appears in Table 4, at the end of the paper.

Fourteen interviews were conducted in Romanian, while four interviews were conducted in Russian, the predominant language of communication in Transnistria, with the help of a local translator. Aside from conducting interviews, the authors were also engaged in observation in the cities of Chişinău, Tiraspol, and Comrat from November 2023 to January 2024. The in-person interviews took place in those localities, while two interviews were conducted online. The inquiries directed at young CSO members mostly revolved around their self-identification and the political and geopolitical preferences, with specific emphasis on the conditionality and constraints they face in daily interactions with linguistically different co-nationals.

Through the fieldwork, the authors tested patterns of self-identification: Pan-Romanianism, Moldovanism, Transnistrian ideology, and Gagauzian regional identity. The main debates - between Moldovanism and pan-Romanianism - have developed a concept of Moldova that is either partially European or completely pro-European (Suveica 2017). Moldovanist discourses, as a reminiscence of the official Soviet position on the Moldovan nation, frame the Republic of Moldova as having a language, ethnicity, culture, and history that are separate from Romania and, sometimes, from the EU (Protsyk–Osoian 2010: 15). The findings on the field have revealed nuances of Moldovanism and pan-Romanianism that augment the findings of Knott et al. (2022) in the context of EU accession. The authors consider Transnistrian political identity and Gagauz ambiguous self-identification as distinct categories. The findings of the interviews show that there is no Transnistrianism *per se*, as the citizens of the so-called Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic define their identity through territorial *status quo* and belonging to the *russskiy mir*. Prior to the extensive identity-building exercise led by the Transnistrian leadership, particularly the first “President”, Igor Smirnov, the concept of a “Transnistrian people” did not exist. As a consequence, the present paper interprets this identification as an ideological construction or a political identity, and not as a socially assumed

designator. In the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (AUG) the identity is neither defined linguistically (with the inhabitants using primarily Russian in their everyday interactions), nor ethnically (as the territory is heterogenous in terms of ethnicity and there is a low number of active speakers of Gagauz language). Such an ambiguous regional identity depends upon donors and shows how these diverse, pluralistic spaces, without economic development, cannot build up a consistent identification narrative.

The following table indicates the findings on the field through semi-structured interviews:

Table 1 Mapping identification into inductive categories							
Inductive category	Number of interviews	Age range	Language	Identification of the Others at international level	Pro-Europeanism	Pro-Russism	Relational implication
Pan-Romanianism	6	18-35	Romanian	The Russian Federation	Clear acknowledgment	Clear rejection	Embedded within Romania or with a European path
Moldovanism	6	18-35	Romanian and Russian	Moderate, but blurred answers	Nuanced acknowledgment	Blurred answers	Separated from Romania, but not competing
Transnistrian pro-Russian ideology	4	18-35	Russian	EU	Clear rejection	Clear acknowledgment	Competing with Romania or with a European path
Gagauzian irregular identity	2	18-35	Russian, Gagauz, and Moldovan	Blurred answers	Ambiguous acknowledgment	Nuanced acknowledgment	Separated from Romania, but not competing

4. From Soviet passport to EU citizenship

The Republic of Moldova has been confronted with the challenges of defining its identity in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse (Cash 2007). The Communist regime in the Republic of Moldova from 2001 to 2009 sought to establish a cohesive "Moldovan identity" by means of official ideology, employing public diplomacy and educational initiatives. Nevertheless, the implementation of this strategy elicited a mixed response from the heterogeneous population, comprising a substantial Russian, Gagauz, and Ukrainian minority. The enduring impact of Soviet identity is seen via the persistence of cultural and linguistic differences within the country (Crowther 2001; Katagoshchina 2002).

To have a comprehensive understanding of the Republic of Moldova's current identity struggle, it is essential to examine the historical, social, and economic aspects that have influenced the country's citizens' self-perceptions. The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in both the emergence of independence for the Republic of Moldova and a subsequent era characterised by political and economic upheaval. The turbulent times significantly influenced the development of the country's identity, as it grappled with reconciling its historical connections to the Soviet Union and its aspiration for a renewed national identity. The political structure and cultural character of the Republic of Moldova had been dominated by Soviet structures, as noted by Casu (2001), who emphasizes the importance of rural-urban division as a significant part of the identity. The interviews conducted for the present paper were held in urban settings, even though the interviewees often evoked the opposition between urban and rural, the pro-Europeans and the admirers of *russkiy mir*.

Nevertheless, the dominant characteristic of the Moldovan identity is its link to the Romanian one. As mentioned in the interviews, Moldovan identity is a Romanian identity:

We have the same language. However, there is no such thing as Moldovan as a distinct entity; it solely refers to the territory. Nevertheless, our collective identity, as a group of individuals belongs to a specific nation, the Romanian one. This identity is closely tied to our language. The term "Moldovan" is not recognised or does not refer to a distinct entity. From our perspective, there is no distinct Moldovan identity; it is simply a variation of Romanian. (D.B.)

They expressed a perception of consistency in relation to a persistent effort to uphold the "accurate" interpretation of history for a revived Moldovan identity intertwined with the Romanian identity.

The present-day situation is similar to a situation where an older brother assists his younger brother. Romania is the older brother, while Moldova is the younger sibling. Assistance is needed due to a situation involving blood and language. (L.E.)

The Republic of Moldova faces challenges in establishing its identity due to geopolitical factors as well.

With such neighbours as Russia not so far away, you have to be careful who you declare yourself to be. (D.M)

Balancing independence and managing its position between the EU and Russia has impacted the Republic of Moldova's identity development (Demińska and Iglesias 2013). When examining the Soviet identity, the literature takes into account the viewpoints of different socioeconomic factions, such as ethnic minorities, political groupings, and cultural establishments. Each of these groups fulfils a distinct function in influencing the development of the Republic of Moldova's collective self-perception, contributing in an intricate way to the overall portrayal (Wolfschwenger–Saxinger 2020; Casu 2001). The combination of these variables has influenced the course of the Republic of Moldova's identity development and continues to influence its sense of the self in the present day (Casu 2001).

As it was mentioned in two interviews, Moldovanism is still present:

I am fluent in Romanian, citizen of the Republic of Moldova, and I identify as Moldovan. (C.I.)

Regarding yourself as Moldovan is seen by many not only as disrespectful, but also as an entirely incorrect perspective. Ștefan cel Mare was a Moldovan in the truest sense. It is worth noting that he wrote in Cyrillic script. (O.B.)

Furthermore, the political and educational programmes that were put into effect during the Soviet era have had a significant influence, including bilingual education and access to Russian media, which are widely used today by those who engage with Moldovanism or by ethnic Russians. The spread of official ideology and the encouragement of a single "Moldovan identity" in the multiethnic, stratified milieu of the Republic of Moldova with divergent ideological preferences have created the current complex relationship between loyalty to the state and supranational entities and the protection of various types of cultural and linguistic heritage. This ongoing contradiction resonates in current discussions on national civil identity and is a focal point of disagreement within Moldovan communities.

As it is expressed in an interview:

My father consistently refuses to acknowledge his Romanian heritage. Due to manipulation. Moldova was under Russian rule for over a century. And a hundred years don't pass so easily. Both my parents identify themselves as Moldovans. They are unwilling to declare themselves as having Romanian ethnicity. My father claims fluency in Moldovan, as he was instructed in the language during his education at a Soviet institution. They were unable to express themselves in Romanian language. (F.J)

The argument of a generational shift to Romanian self-identification is the result of changing political regimes and education systems.

The four inductive categories presented above are linked to geopolitical preferences. The self-identified Romanians (unionists or not, pragmatic or just nostalgic) generally hold a dual citizenship and express a pro-European ideology. The interviewed Moldovanists, even though they often hold a Romanian citizenship as well, offer the most varied answers regarding self-identification as they are both for EU integration and willing to maintain strategic ties with Russia. They used the most religious and Soviet nostalgic terms in their narrations, even though they were willing to give the interview in Romanian language. The political way Transnistrians self-identify is as Russians by language and cultural preference and they see their lives in terms of destiny, in spite of the economic impoverishment they face. Many of them already hold a Moldovan citizenship. The most ambiguous self-identification patterns are noticeable in the case of the Gagauz community. Even though they embrace Russism and speak Russian in their daily lives, many of them have already applied for the Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship. In order to present these contradictions, the next chapter will focus on the question of dual citizenship.

5. Experiencing dual citizenship

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in the establishment of new states and the emergence of new forms of politics related to identity and citizenship outside national borders (Eyal and Smith 1996). Considering the legal dimension of the issue, the Moldovan citizenship law has evolved from conditional *jus soli* to unconditional *jus soli*, which defines membership of the Moldovan nation at birth (Vink and Groot 2010). The 1991 Citizenship Law, which was the first of its kind in post-Soviet states, led to widespread anxiety over the meaning of citizenship and the requirement to choose between Moldovan and Soviet

citizenship. In 2002, the constitution was amended to drop the ban on holding multiple citizenships, leading to the “Law on Dual Citizenship” signed by President Voronin in 2003 (Recent updates to Moldovan citizenship legislation 2021).

Similarly, in North Macedonia, Kosovo, Taiwan, and Republika Srpska, many Moldovans hold multiple citizenships. Kin majorities are the demographic groups within a certain geographical area that are acknowledged as having the same ethnic background as an external kin-state (Knott 2022), in this particular case Romania. International organizations like the Venice Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have tolerated the use of leverage by kin-states against home-states to offset discrimination toward minorities. The OSCE has repeatedly warned the external actors not to grant “citizenship en masse to citizens of another state, including if this happens as the result of a sum of individual applications” (Knott 2022: 48), because it might threaten bilateral relations. Moldovans as a kin majority hold state power and are not exposed to discrimination and marginalisation as minorities within the kin-state. Nevertheless, almost one third of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova hold a dual citizenship (Necșuțu 2021).

The Romanian citizenship policy is a favourable circumstance. Undoubtedly, our grandparents and parents were unjustly deprived of their citizenship through coercive means. While the citizens, who were Romanian, did not voluntarily relinquish it, the then Communist policy of the Soviet Union wrongfully confiscated it from them. (R.U.)

Individually, we gradually adopt the identity of being European. By acquiring the Romanian citizenship, every citizen of Moldova obtains the European citizenship. Once five million Moldovan citizens obtain the Romanian citizenship, this will effectively address the issue of Europeanisation and European integration in Moldova. (A.L.)

For Moldovans, the value of the Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship has significantly increased due to its association with European Union membership. The Romanian citizenship quickly became a means for Moldovans to gain legal rights pertaining to employment, and migration to European Union member states. This choice became available when there were limited alternatives (Guțu–Gheorghiu 2004).

What is the reason behind Romania issuing passports in Moldova and why does Russia provide passports to citizens of separatist districts in Moldova? The reason is identical: by having citizens present, one can eventually assert their own authority or entitlement. However, the exact number of passports issued in Chișinău and the number of individuals residing here remains unknown. (J. G.)

In addition, the ideological component regards Romanian citizenship as serving as a sort of compensation, acting as a “remedial right” (Dumbrava 2014: 109), which corrects the historical injustice faced by close relatives who involuntarily lost their Romanian citizenship due to Soviet occupation. Nevertheless, this duality might affect the development of the current national identity. The interviewees deeply appreciate the opportunity of a dual citizenship, often invoking maternal grandparents, who had their Romanian citizenship revoked against their will.

6. Two elephants in one room: the separatist region and the autonomous territory

The Transnistrian region encompasses 12% of the Republic of Moldova's landmass. The population is composed of three nearly equal ethnic groups: Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, who identify themselves politically and through linguistic denomination as Russian speakers. The complex geopolitical dynamics of the territory prompts an examination of border-making practices, considering the interplay between Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities, international actors and the main donors (Morar 2021). The literature emphasises that each actor controls critical resources such as access, funding, know-how, energy supplies, military force, and symbolic capital, as there is a bargaining leverage on both sides of the Dnister river. Consequently, the restricted civil society – which is under constant surveillance – exhibits agency both locally, when interacting with *de facto* authorities and national authorities, and at regional and international levels, when engaging with external donors and organisations (Comai 2017; Borgen 2006; Blakkisrud–Kolstø 2011).

We are Russians who are captured at the border with Moldova. We continue to fight for our ideals and our state. (A.V.)

I am a Moldovan citizen, but having a Romanian passport grants me the ability to travel to Transnistria. I volunteer at an elementary school to teach them Romanian and help the kids to develop their Romanian language skills. (P.J.)

I am an athlete, and I coach football to kids for free and for fun. I had been interrogated by the police about why I don't do something more useful and lucrative (A.V.).

In contrast, the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (ATUG) is ethnically more diverse, but Russian serves as the *lingua franca*. The autonomous status and economic impoverishment of Gagauzia have hindered its ability to engage in identity construction throughout its relatively brief existence. The lack of substantial initiatives aimed at constructing a common identity and the absence of policies promoting nationalism have resulted in a vague

environment where individuals can express and encounter apparently contradictory allegiances and senses of belonging (Holsapple 2022). The residents can embrace a wide range of ethnic and national identities, but these are strategically employed when expressing their sense of belonging. This is because they find themselves in a sub-cultural position (Fellerer et al. 2020) with affiliations and identities that may not align with each other. This phenomenon is marked by the contrasting utilisation of historical heritage in rebuilding discussions about identity, and strategies of altering loyalties to maximise benefits from Turkey, Russia, or Romania. Subsequently, the civil society lacks initiatives or policies for the preservation of the Gagauz language or support for private initiatives.

The ethnic identity of the area is characterised by a diverse and intermingling nature. We are accustomed to residing in a diverse community comprising not only Gagauzians but individuals from many backgrounds. There is no distinction made between being purely Gagauzian or being Moldovan or any other nationality. There is no longer a clear differentiation. We are accustomed to the notion that there are a large number of individuals, each possessing unique characteristics. (R.O.)

M.N., a secretary in Comrat, provides an elucidation as to why, notwithstanding her lineage having a Bulgarian father and Gagauz mother, she aligns herself with the Russian identity:

Unfortunately, I am not proficient in the Gagauz language. I identify myself as Russian. (M.N.)

The response demonstrates how the Soviet legacy of associating ethnicity with language may still heavily influence the perspectives of many people in Gagauzia.

In a 2008 address, Mikhail Formuzal, the former leader of Gagauzia between 2006 and 2015, supposedly made a relevant declaration in this regard:

Our former president asserted that our nation is an integral component of the Russian world because the mastery of the Russian language serves as a safeguard for our self-preservation, encompassing the preservation of our ethnic identity. (M.N.)

As a result of historical events involving territorial changes among the Russian Empire, Romania, the Soviet Union, and independent Moldova in the past 150 years, the people from Gagauzia often choose whether or not to align themselves with dominant geopolitical narratives of different nation-states like Russia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania or even Turkey.

7. Conclusions

The debates around pro/anti-European and ambiguous loyalties in the Republic of Moldova are widespread these days in the country, as well as in the diaspora and internationally, testifying to the ample post-Soviet cleavages that run rampant in Moldovan society and beyond.

Our study captures the zeitgeist of such debates in a new context, marked by a decidedly pro-EU official governmental stance, influenced by a war of aggression on the borders of the Republic of Moldova involving one of the principal stakeholders in the matter of shaping identities within the country, i.e. the Russian Federation, and with considerable reforming pressure stemming from the EU itself and from Romania, as another key stakeholder in the process.

The study has investigated two factors, ethnic identification, and positioning towards international actors, through the lens of young people involved in the civil society, whose weight has gained more prominence of late. By utilising the inductive schemes of Pro-European, pro-Russian and ambivalent loyalties, we have been able to highlight the expectations and identity shifts in the country. As such, the liberal pro-Europeans of the Republic of Moldova are willing to establish a shared non-bipartisan political initiative, similar to the one undertaken by Romania throughout the process of joining the European Union. This is of interest because in the case of the latter, a country whose cultural and linguistic fabric stands out as similar to that of the Republic of Moldova, such a stance became the driving force behind the protracted, but ultimately successful, EU integration bid. Moldovans adopting a similar position for their country tackle one of the incontestable hurdles in the accession file, namely the separatist region of Transnistria. In so doing, they express their opposition to the federalisation of Transnistria and seek a comparable administrative status to that of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. To substitute distrust and multiple loyalties, the pro-Europeans envision a nationwide endeavour overseen by the principles of the rule of law, as a prerequisite for resolving the territorial hindrance that precludes the country from making swifter progress on the EU-bound path.

On the other hand, those with ambivalent loyalties advocate the abandonment of a pro-European trajectory as a result of the Soviet heritage and the Transnistrian file, therefore marking a stark form of political and social polarisation within the country. In addition, they highlight the

presence of the Russian minority in the Republic of Moldova, which continues to play a significant role in the process of reshaping identity and has the potential to harmonise conflicting narratives. In keeping with such views, they support the resolution of the Transnistrian issue by means of federalisation. This paints a divisive and unpredictable picture of the social fabric of the Republic of Moldova, with little precedent in the countries of the region that sought EU accession in previous decades, and with unforeseen consequences for the political future of this recently recognised EU candidate.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of the present study, stemming, *inter alia*, from the narrow access to first-hand, reliable information beyond the Dniestr River, as well as from the amount of content gathered through the sociological investigation performed. However, the geographical and social breadth of the targeted audience does provide significant trend indicators for the present situation within the borders of the country. It thus becomes of interest that future research should focus on the Moldovan diaspora as well, while looking at the Transnistrian file from a constructivist perspective, which is bound to provide more insights and foster more elaborate predictions on the evolution of the issue at hand.

Table 2| Respondents' profiles

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Residence	Profession	Civil Organization	Society
1.	N.P.	Woman	35	Chişinău	Pharmacist	Faith-based organization	
2.	O.B.	Man	29	Chişinău	Waiter	NGO for animal rights	
3.	F.J.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Student	Faith-based organization	
4.	D.E.	Man	31	Chişinău	Taxi driver	Sports club	
5.	A.L.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Student	NGO for children	
6.	P.N.	Man	35	Chişinău	Chef	Faith-based organization	
7.	R.U.	Man	32	Chişinău	Salesman	Sports club	
8.	C.I.	Woman	35	Chişinău	Cleaner	Faith-based organization	
9.	I.I.	Man	30	Chişinău	Doctor	Faith-based organization	
10.	J.N.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Journalist	Labour union	

11.	D.B	Man	22	Chişinău	Teacher	Professional organization and educational NGO
12.	I.I	Woman	29	Chişinău	Artist	NGO for art education
13.	M.N	Man	32	Tiraspol	Fireman	NGO for elderly
14.	D.F.	Woman	35	Tiraspol	Electrician	Labour union
15.	E.I.	Man	30	Tiraspol	Businessman	Faith-based organization
16.	A.V.	Man	22	Tiraspol	Unemployed	Sports club
17.	M.N.	Woman	19	Comrat	Secretary	NGO (unspecified)
18.	R.O.	Woman	35	Comrat	Accountant	Faith-based organization

Table 3 | Interview guide

Basic introductory questions

What is your age?

What does your organization do/What do you study?

What about your parents' family?

How many family members are working abroad?

Culture and politics

What do you think about politics in the Republic of Moldova?

What do you think about political culture in the Republic of Moldova?

Self-identification

For ethnicity, how do you feel yourself?

What makes you feel [ethnicity]?

What about language? Culture?

Majority-minority relations

Do you think that there are differences between [different groups] in [case]?

Do you feel near or far to the EU/Russia? How do you feel in that area?

What do you think about the relations between the EU/Russia and [fieldwork site]?

Kin-state policies

What do you think about the policies of the EU/Russia towards the Republic of Moldova?

Have you applied for the Romanian citizenship?/ Have you applied for the Russian citizenship?

When did you apply? When did you receive it?

Why did you apply for the Romanian citizenship?

Has the Romanian citizenship changed how you feel about the Republic of Moldova?

What can you do as a Romanian/Russian citizen?

Trust

Whom do you trust?

Describe the trust level you have in the family, public administration, and great powers.

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