



ip Institut für
Europäische Politik



Strengthening Social Cohesion and a Common Identity in the Republic of Moldova

Key Issues and
Practical Recommendations

Chișinău,
January 2018



Federal Foreign Office



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite a centuries-long history of largely harmonious interethnic relations and lack of enmity among its ethnic and linguistic groups, the society in the Republic of Moldova is divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. A crisis of identity, lack of social cohesion and increasing identification with many compartmentalized identity groups is one of the most serious challenges that hampers Moldova's development and precludes its people from jointly advancing common interests, such as economic development and building a functional state that is responsive to its citizens.

Moldova does not have a clear definition of a titular nation or a "majority ethnicity" – Moldovan or Romanian - and this topic continues to stir up intemperate debates among both Moldova's elites and the public. Neither of these two identity discourses is likely to become dominant in the foreseeable future. "Ethnic minorities" in Moldova (Gagauz, Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians and others) do not regard themselves as "minorities", "diasporas", or the "remnants" of Moldova's Russian or Soviet past. They do not mainly identify themselves with "kin states"; rather, they see themselves as the people who have been living in Moldova for hundreds of years, have deep roots in the country and are therefore an integral part of the "nation".

Politicians from all sides of the political spectrum do not address the existing ambiguities; instead, they exploit latent misunderstandings, conflicting worldviews and divergent aspirations of different ethnic communities. The government's policy has so far been to avoid a clear, and uncomfortable, discussion or take action to address practical issues, which could improve the situation and lay the foundation for the emergence of a common identity of allcitizens of the Republic of Moldova.

Moldova's society is generally prepared for harmonious interethnic relations and for a gradual emergence of a common civic identity, thanks to a large level of interethnic tolerance and mutual acceptance at the grass-roots level. Yet, people remain divided and a certain potential for interethnic tensions exists due to the lack of knowledge about different ethnic communities, an intemperate political discourse which frequently portrays other ethnic groups as a threat, as well as the lack of effective practical policies to address main challenges.

This paper is an attempt to generate a constructive discussion about a possible integrationist model of society, which could emerge around a civic identity. A civic identity could coalesce around a state-building and institutional modernization program, which would increase loyalty to the state – the Republic of Moldova. This would limit the room for politicians to exploit identity-related dividing lines within society and increase Moldova's prospects to become a strong and stable democratic state.

INTRODUCTION

In its independent history, Moldova achieved some successes but was also confronted with far-reaching setbacks. One of the crucial issues which prevented progress is an identity crisis, manifested through cleavages within the majority ethnicity, as well as inability to successfully include Moldova's significant ethno-cultural minorities into mainstream processes. These communities went through a painful transition from an "elite" in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic to their current, and hotly contested, status of "national", or "ethnic minorities".

The inclusion of ethnic communities did not occupy a prominent place in academic and practical discussions or policy-making in the Republic of Moldova. Ethno-cultural communities (which in Moldova are often referred to as "Russian-speakers") point out a lack of government-sponsored language training programs, poor quality of language instruction in schools, underrepresentation in state institutions and political parties as well as divisive political and media discourses. A lack of focused and sustained government and civil society policies to address these issues undermines Moldova's efforts to create an inclusive society and leads to separation and isolation of society. "Identity entrepreneurs" use ethnic divisions to advance their political goals by stoking people's fears and feeding on their stereotypes. The emergence of a sense of "we, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova" becomes difficult and leaves the large intellectual potential of ethnic communities untapped, thus limiting Moldova's development.

Despite historically harmonious relations, after years of divisive politics and discourse, important segments of those belonging to ethnic minorities seem to be living in a parallel world, and the knowledge of

different ethnicities about each other remains limited. Media coverage is alarmist, with hate speech not uncommon.

A practical policy to support interethnic dialogue and harmony and resolve key practical issues will help Moldova to become a stronger, more united country, a home for all its citizens. Integration of ethnic communities is an important goal for any government. It is also one of the prerequisites for Moldova's peaceful and democratic development, which could strengthen societal resilience against external and internal challenges.

This paper has been elaborated in the framework of the project "Strengthening the national identity of the Republic of Moldova within the EU-Association process (MIDEU)", supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. The project brought together representatives of ethnic communities and public authorities in Moldova as well as national and international experts. This paper draws on the results and findings from project activities, such as Town Hall Meetings, Press Clubs, Conferences, a survey among participants of the events, in-depth discussions with key stakeholders in Moldova and representatives of the international community as well as an analysis of existing documents and strategies. It is an attempt to generate a discussion about a civic identity in Moldova, built around the concept of citizenship and state-building, and based on a historical experience of peaceful co-existence.

The paper identifies most pressing issues and formulates possible remedies to address them. A precondition for implementing these recommendations is building a consensus at the grass-roots level as well as creating solid advocacy channels between the government and civil society. These could become the building blocks of an integration strategy that would facilitate the integration of ethnic communities, reinforce their sense of belonging to the state and supplement limited capacities of state institutions to pursue effective civic integration policies.

1. ETHNO-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN MOLDOVA: HISTORICAL PER- SPECTIVE, CURRENT SITUATION

1.1. A HISTORY OF CHANGING BORDERS AND GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY

The Republic of Moldova is a country “sandwiched” between Romania and Ukraine. Historically, the territory of the country has been under the suzerainty of powerful regional players, most of the time the Ottoman Empire (15th-18th century), Russian Empire (1812-1918) and the Soviet Union (1940-1991). The historical principality of Moldova reached its height under Stefan cel Mare (1457-1504). In 1812 the Eastern part of the historical principality of Moldova (known as Bassarabia at the time which included present-day Moldova) was annexed by Russia. The Western part of the historical principality of Moldova, comprising about half of the territory and more than two thirds of the population, as well as historical capitals and key cultural centers, joined the neighboring principality of Wallachia to create, first, the common state of Joint Principalities of Moldova and Walachia in 1859, and then Romania in 1862. While the Western part of Moldova embarked on the process of forming the Romanian state and a Romanian national identity, Bassarabia as the province of the Russian Empire did not participate in this process.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, in January of 1918 Bassarabia declared its independence and united with Romania two months later. Historically, the Eastern part of present-day Moldova, known today as the Transnistrian region, was not part of medieval Moldova. It remained under Soviet control after the 1917 revolution (being separated from the rest of Moldova by the Dniester river). In

1924, a Moldovan Soviet Autonomous Socialist Republic was created there, largely in order to attract Bassarabia into the Soviet sphere of influence. In 1940, under the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Bassarabia became part of the Soviet Union. In 1941 it again became part of Romania. In 1944 it became part of the Soviet Union again, where it stayed until 1991.

Geopolitically, Moldova has been within the sphere of interests of many players. These geopolitical reshuffles created a range of fundamental identity benchmarks (self-identification, commitment to a set of views, values, historical experience and a sense of belonging to different ethnic communities) which solidified and around which the conflict would revolve after the country found itself at a crossroads following the collapse of the former Soviet Union¹.

1.2. ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF MOLDOVA

1.2.1 Historical trends

The presence of many ethnic and linguistic communities in Moldova has a long tradition and contributed to common spiritual and cultural heritage of the Moldovan people. Here, Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Jews, Roma and representatives of other ethnic groups have lived mostly peacefully. As a result, at the grass-roots level Moldova has been largely characterized by interethnic peace and understanding². This was very different from countries where fundamental ethnic differences persisted and where the elites tried to engineer ethnic harmony against the grain of the grass-roots level.

The ethnic composition of Moldova became what it is today following key historical events, which are hotly contested to the present day. After Bassarabia became part of the Russian Empire in 1812, the national composition of Bassarabia province started to change,

1 King, Charles. *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999, p. 80-95

2 However, latent inter-ethnic tensions erupted at the instigation of elites, as was the case with the pogroms in 1903 and the war in the Transnistrian region in 1992.

especially after the resettlement of tens of thousands of Bulgarians and Gagauz, and later Germans, Jews, Russians and Ukrainians.

After unification with Romania in 1918, a census conducted in 1930 showed that there were 2,853,200 people living in Bassarabia, including 1,610,800 Romanians/Moldovans (56.5%), 351,900 Russians (12.3%), 314,200 thousand Ukrainians (11.0%), 204,800 Jews (7.2%), 162,600 Bulgarians (5.7%), 98,100 Gagauz (3.4%), 81,100 Germans (2.8%) , 13,500 Roma (0.5%) and 8,100 Poles (0.3%).³

After the Second World War, from 1959 to 1989, the number of Moldovans in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic increased by 48%, the number of Ukrainians by 42%, of Gagauz by 58%, of Bulgarians by 42%, while the number of Russians registered a 191% increase (Table 1).

Table 1: Ethnic composition of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR):

Nationality	1959	1970	1979	1989
Moldovans	1,887,000	2,304,000	2,526,000	2,795,000
Ukrainians	421,000	507,000	561,000	600,000
Russians	293,000	414,000	506,000	562,000
Gagauz	96,000	125,000	138,000	153,000
Jews	95,000	98,000	80,000	66,000
Bulgarians	62,000	74,000	81,000	88,000
Roma	7,000	9,000	11,000	12,000
Belarusians	6,000	10,000	14,000	20,000

1.2.2 Current Situation

Today, according to the 2014 general census, Moldova's population is approximately 2.9 million⁴. Moldovans make up 75.1% of the total population. 7.0% self-identified as Romanians. Ukrainians account for

3 Lucian Boia. Romania. Borderland of Europe. Reaction Books, London, 2001, p. 21.

4 Statistica.md: <http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=479>

6.6%, Gagauz for 4.6 %, Russians for 4.1%, Bulgarians for 1.9%, Jews 0.11%, Roma 0.3% and other nationalities 0.5%, among them Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Germans, and Tatars⁵. Ethnic communities are not territorially divided and are interspersed across Moldova, except for the Gagauz people, who live in the South of Moldova. The data on Moldova does not include the Transnistrian region, over which fighting occurred in the early 1990s and which remains outside of the control of the central government⁶.

In today's Republic of Moldova, there is a strong intermix of two languages – the state language (Romanian/Moldovan) and Russian. Almost all citizens whose mother tongue is Romanian/Moldovan also speak fluently or at least understand the Russian language and are familiar with the Russian culture. Although the proportion of Russian speakers and ethnic minorities who speak Romanian is smaller than the number of Romanians/Moldovans who speak Russian, there is a large degree of openness towards learning the respective other language and culture.

1.3 DIVIDING LINES BETWEEN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The disintegration of the USSR was accompanied by a polarization of the population of the former Moldavian SSR on the basis of ethnolinguistic criteria. In the newly independent states (with the exception of

5 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova: Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova, May 12-25, 2014; <http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=en&idc=479>. The population census is one of the official sources of statistical data disaggregated by ethnicity. The 2014 population census was conducted with serious questions as to its organization and the quality of collected material. In addition, information on ethnic origin of individuals is contained in the State Population Register, but data collection in terms of ethnicity must be improved, taking into account the principle of self-identification. There are no other mechanisms for collecting statistical data on ethnic origin in the Republic of Moldova.

6 According to the population census in Transnistria, conducted in 2015, the region had 475,665 inhabitants – 31.9% Moldovans, 30.4% - Russians and 28% Ukrainians. The data are comparable with the numbers of 1995, when Moldovans accounted for 34.1%, Russians – 30.1% and Ukrainians – 28%. As in the case of right-bank Moldova, there are serious questions about the validity of the data, as the real rates of immigration have been much higher. Ref - Ria.ru, Transnistria's population declined by over 14% in 11 years, <https://ria.ru/world/20160513/1432571354.html>

the Russian Federation), Russian became a minority language. However, unlike in the Baltic States or in the Caucasus, in Moldova there was not only a split between minorities and the majority, but also a rift within the majority group between Moldovans and Romanians and between those calling the language Moldovan and those insisting the only correct name is Romanian. Since the national revival movement of the late '80s, the identity and language debate became dominated by two vocal and irreconcilable groups - "We are Romanians" vs "Moldovans are different from Romanians". Ethno-cultural communities traditionally sided with the "Moldovans" camp, fearing that "Romanian" identity is a step towards Moldova's unification with Romania. To this day, there is no consensus of mainstream identity in the Republic of Moldova - Moldovan or Romanian?

1.3.1 Moldovan vs Romanian and controversy over the state language

The first of these two groups - "We are Romanians" - insists that Moldova should develop as an ethnic state, based on the language of the majority ethnic group – Romanian - and with an understanding that the "Moldovan" nation is an artificial construct developed by the Soviet Union to justify, legitimize and maintain Moldova's separation from its true roots in Romania. According to this school of thought, all citizens of the Republic of Moldova who speak Romanian, irrespective of their self-identification, are Romanians.

Among the country's intellectual and political elites, this group has occupied a prominent position. During at least three periods of Moldova's contemporary history - 1989-1993, 1998-2001 and 2009-2017 - the exponents of this movement were part of governing coalitions, conditioning their support for governments' policies with the promotion of their stance in the area of language and identity. First of all, this related to the introduction and maintaining of the subjects "Romanian language and literature" and "History of Romanians" in schools and university curricula.

The second group - „Moldovenists” - trace their origins to the Soviet position which sought to highlight the differences between Moldovans

and Romanians, elevating Moldovans living in Soviet Moldova (and also in some regions of Soviet Ukraine) to a separate nation distinct from Romanians. The most evident element of these efforts was the decision to adopt a Cyrillic script for the Moldovan language, in defiance to the Romanic nature of the language that has Latin at its basis. This position was the only acceptable position during the Soviet Union until Gorbachev's perestroika movement.

Attempts to speak about the Romanian language and the brotherly nature of the Romanian/Moldovan speaking populations in Soviet Moldova and Romania were not only rejected, but considered criminal offences punishable by law. Those espousing and publicly expressing such views were not hired in important positions or barred from career promotions, and sometimes fired from their jobs and imprisoned on charges of nationalism and anti-Soviet propaganda.

To avoid repressions, most of those who disagreed with the official stance on the Soviet Moldovan identity preferred not to express their opinions on this subject publicly, beyond the circle of family and trusted friends. Until the late 1980s, there were no organized movements for Romanian language or identity, while sporadic attempts to promote these views were suppressed. It was only with the Perestroika movement that representatives of the local intelligentsia started to raise the issue of language - the need to make it an official language and adopt a Latin script. These efforts culminated on August 31, 1989, when the Parliament adopted the language law proclaiming the Moldovan language in Latin script as the state language of Soviet Moldova. August 31st became the National Language Day (later renamed the Romanian Language Day). Together with the adoption of the National Tricolor resembling the Romanian flag, these moves were seen as victories for the Romanian camp and a setback for „Moldovenists”.

In 2013, the Constitutional Court passed a decision according to which the 1991 Declaration of Independence of Moldova, which defines the language as Romanian, prevails over the text of the Constitution.⁷ This was met with protests from those who consider the language Moldo-

7 Decision no. 36 from 5 December 2013 of the Constitutional Court on the interpretation of article 13 para. (1) of the Constitution.

van and who argued the Constitution prevails over the Declaration of Independence.

The debate over the name of the state language leaves little room for compromise solutions. The pro-Romanian camp demands the replacement of the term “Moldovan language” with “Romanian language”. Those who vocally oppose this change insist on defending the “Moldovan language” and present it as a battle for Moldova’s survival as an independent state. According to the 2014 census, 23.3% call their native language Romanian, while 57% call it Moldovan. Representatives of ethno-cultural communities, irrespective of whether they speak the language or not, by and large prefer to colloquially refer to it as Moldovan.

1.3.2 The status of the Russian language

With respect to the Russian language, the 1989 Law on the functioning of languages on the territory of the Moldavian SSR recognized the status of the Russian language as a language of interethnic communication⁸. Russian de facto remained the second language in the country throughout the years of independence. About one-fifth of the population consider Russian to be their mother tongue. There is often a feeling that ethnic communities are bundled together as “Russian speakers” who do not necessarily keep to their ethnic traditions and language – Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian etc. All normative acts is-

8 Article 1 of this law stated: “The Russian language as a state language is used in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and, in connection with this, performs the function of the language of interethnic communication on the territory of the republic. The Moldavian SSR guarantees to all residents of the republic free instruction in the state language at the level necessary for the performance of official duties.” Indeed, at first, free courses on the study of the Moldovan language for public servants and enterprises were opened, but this gradually ended. In addition, the right of citizens to use the Russian language or another language of national minorities is prescribed in Article 13 of the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Moldova “The State Language, the Functioning of Other Languages,” which states: (2) The State recognizes and protects the right to preserve, develop and function Russian language and other languages used in the country. (3) The state shall promote the study of the languages of international communication. (4) The procedure for the functioning of languages on the territory of the Republic of Moldova shall be established by an organic law.

sued by central public authorities are translated into Russian⁹. Local authorities with a majority population of Russian, Ukrainian or Bulgarian residents can pass local acts in their language with subsequent translation into the state language.¹⁰ Courts use the state language as the main language. If the parties agree to the use of a different language, it can be used during proceedings.¹¹ However, this has become increasingly difficult, as access to court proceedings in languages other than the state language is limited. Citizens may use the Russian language for correspondence with local and central public administration¹² and may address petitions to public authorities in Russian. At parliamentary sessions, translation is provided for MPs who do not speak the state language. Draft laws are presented in both the state language and Russian. MPs who present draft laws in Russian or the state language have their drafts translated into the respective other language by the Parliament's Secretariat.¹³

1.3.3 Political polarization

Interethnic division is often used by politicians for election purposes. During election campaigns political parties often use different nostalgias and phobias, especially those inherited from the Soviet past. Some political parties insist on the idea that the Republic of Moldova is the "second Romanian state", that "we are all Romanians!" Others, on the contrary, pedal the topic of the Russian language, promising to give it the status of the second state language. In particular, it was one of the issues of the electoral campaign of PCRM (Communist Party) in 2001, which helped them to win the election, and of the PSRM (Social-

9 Article 10 of the Law no. 3465/1989 on the functioning of the languages spoken in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, article 1 of the Law no. 173/1994 on the publication and entry into force of official acts

10 Article 10 of the Law no. 3465/1989

11 Article 24 of the Civil Procedure Code no. 225/2003, article 16 of the Criminal Procedure Code no. 122/2003

12 Article 6 of the Law no. 3465/1989

13 Article 47 paras. (8,9) of the Law no. 797/1996 on the approval of the Regulations of the Parliament

ist Party), which helped them to gain the largest number of votes in a fragmented Parliament in 2014. This exploitation of linguistic identity and geopolitical themes for narrow party interests deepens the split and misunderstanding in society.

The multi-faceted dividing lines exploited by politicians prevent a constructive dialogue on common goals and objectives for a Moldovan state. Instead of focusing on developing societal cohesion and integrating ethnic communities, improving the quality of teaching of the state language and developing allegiance to the country among its citizens, the focus of the debate in society is shifted to three polarizing issues – Romanian vs Moldovan language, Romanians vs Moldovans, history of Romania vs history of Moldova. These issues currently dominate the public debate.

1.4. LEGAL BASIS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

1.4.1 Normative and legal acts

Moldova has a rather developed legislative basis for interethnic relations and minority protection, but laws are not implemented to a sufficient degree. The preamble of the Constitution emphasizes "(...) the continuity of the Moldovan people statehood within the historical and ethnic framework of its growing as a nation" and the desire "to satisfy the interests of citizens of a different ethnic origin who alongside with the Moldovans constitute the people of the Republic of Moldova"¹⁴.

The Constitution recognizes the main elements of identity that the state must preserve: "The State recognises and guarantees all its citizens the right to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. " (Article 10, 2). These principles, stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, correspond to international and regional documents, including the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

14 Constitutional Court: Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, available at: http://www.constcourt.md/public/files/file/Actele%20Curtii/acte_en/MDA_Constitution_EN.pdf

Moldova is party to several conventions and treaties: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Articles 2 and 4); The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13); UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (Article 5); and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Moldova signed a number of bilateral treaties on friendship and cooperation with Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, which contain special provisions for the protection of the rights of national minorities. However, Moldova has not ratified the European Charter for Minority Languages.

In March 2017, the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee issued an opinion on Moldova's compliance with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities¹⁵. As noted by the Council of Europe, Moldova does not sufficiently fulfill its obligations to protect national minorities, in connection with which a number of problems remain unresolved. In the opinion of European observers, in Moldova there exists widespread stigmatization (hanging social labels) and stereotypes and, as a result, discrimination against national minorities persists, and persons belonging to national minorities are "marginalized (...), without being given adequate space to develop their own identities and positions."¹⁶

The national legal framework includes more than 30 legislative and governmental acts, the most important are the Law on the Functioning of Languages, the Law on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities and the Legal Status of Their Organizations, the National Concept for Cultural and Ethnic Relations, as well as the Law on Equality.

An important document is the **Strategy for the consolidation of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for 2017-2027**¹⁷. The

15 Council of Europe, Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Fourth Opinion on the Republic of Moldova - adopted on 25 May 2016, available at <https://rm.coe.int/16806f69e0>

16 Council of Europe, Fourth Opinion on the Republic of Moldova, p. 2, <https://rm.coe.int/16806f69e0>

17 Government Decision no. 1464 from 30.12.2016 on the approval of the Strategy

strategy is a political document which defines national mechanisms for strengthening citizenship in the Republic of Moldova, for enhancing the study of the state language by national minorities, including adults, for protecting minority languages, for increasing the participation of ethno-cultural communities in public life and for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. The strategy was developed with the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Despite the fact that this Strategy establishes goals and objectives for a long-term period (11 years), the mechanisms for its implementation and clear targets/guidelines/milestones/costing are lacking, which raises questions about its impact and the results it will produce. For the actions that are envisaged, the Strategy does not establish clear benchmarks, timeframes and monitoring mechanisms for regular evaluation and consistent implementation. The measures proposed in the strategy focus more on cultural, ethnographic actions, such as protection and preservation of culture, and programs which are designed to avoid interethnic tensions. The strategy fails to tackle problems, concerns and issues, such as integration of ethno-cultural communities, language learning, political and government representation, meaningful participation in decision-making. Effective programs and actions to construct a civic identity and to strengthen allegiance to the Moldovan state are not included either.

In support for the implementation of the Strategy for the consolidation of interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for 2017-2027, the Bureau for Inter-ethnic relations has developed an Action Plan for 2017-2020, which was approved by the Moldovan government on November 15, 2017. The Action Plan provides for a range of research and surveys to better understand the situation. It also includes measures to promote participation of citizens in government service, such as conducting analysis of existing situation and understanding the ratio of ethnic communities representation in government agencies and encouraging a more active dialogue between the government and

for the consolidation of interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for 2017-2027, available in Romanian at: <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=369024> (last accessed 6 November 2017)

civil society through national forums and participatory events. The plan includes the creation of ethno-barometer in Moldova to measure the involvement and participation of minorities, as well as some language training for civil servants, protecting the languages of ethnic communities and strengthening language diversity. One other area is promoting inter-cultural dialogue, trainings for mass media to develop products that better reflect ethnic issues. Other measures include information campaigns among citizens to increase the feeling of civil belonging to the state, lessen intolerance, xenophobia, ethnic stereotyping and inter-ethnic tensions.

On the positive side, the Action Plan specifies timeframes and indicators to measure implementation success. Furthermore, the Action Plan includes a variety of agencies in its work, including the Presidency, line ministries, the State Chancellery. The direction of the measures is quite useful but some of them are still rather vague and not planned with sufficient depth to open the way to credible implementation. For instance, the Bureau of Interethnic Relations remains the agency that bears the main responsibility for the implementation of more than 25 measures. Taking into consideration the limited capacities of the Bureau, as discussed below, timely implementation of all measures seems unlikely. Also, successful implementation will require considerable funding and resources, which are not available yet. The planned sources of funding through the state budget will likely fall short of requirements. The impact of the Action Plan is therefore hard to predict and its proper implementation will require coordination between state institutions, efficient planning and implementation, as well as financial resources. The Bureau would greatly benefit from support and help in implementing these measures properly and with sufficient depth.

1.4.2 Gagauz-Yeri autonomy

The resolution of nascent ethnic tensions in the southern part of Moldova, Gagauzia, in the early 1990s was hailed as one of the more successful examples of dispute resolution in South-Eastern Europe. The Gagauz autonomous unit, Gagauz-Yeri, was created in southern Moldova to safeguard the cultural, linguistic and local government rights

of the Gagauz people, an ethnic community with a distinct ethnic identity and a defined territory.

The example of Gagauzia is the only example in Moldova of a people who have territorial representation and an autonomous region. The case of Gagauzia is a special case which can't be applied elsewhere in Moldova, because other ethnic communities in Moldova are interspersed territorially with the majority ethnicity and do not have territorial boundaries.

The population of Gagauzia is 155,000, or about 4.5% of the total population of Moldova. In 1994, the Government of Moldova adopted a law on the special legal status of Gagauz Yeri, which provided for self-government and autonomous rights for the region. The Gagauzia Basic Law (Ulojenie) was passed in 1998. The Gagauz autonomy now has a parliament (35 members elected in single-member constituencies), a Governor (Bashkan, elected for a 4-year term) and an Executive (headed by the Bashkan). The autonomous region enjoys certain powers of local government and budget. However, the Gagauzia (Gagauz-Yeri) Act on the Special Legal Status of 1994 does not provide any specific provision for Gagauz' representation in the Moldovan Parliament. The documents that define the status of Gagauzia contain contradictions, which often lead to divergent interpretations, misunderstandings, internal struggles and disputes both within the autonomous region and between the central government and the autonomy. For several years, the Parliament of Moldova and the Gagauz People's Assembly have had a mechanism to clearly delineate the power of the autonomous region and resolve the underlying disputes, which largely seem related to the distribution of resources and budgetary powers.

1.4.3 Institutional framework

The Republic of Moldova has several institutions and public authorities that deal with the rights of national minorities. At the parliamentary level, the Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations addresses issues of protection and inclusion of national minorities. At the executive level, the Bureau for Interethnic Relations is responsible

for policy development, regulatory frameworks and the implementation of laws in this area. The Bureau is also in charge of supporting ethno-cultural organizations and promoting cooperation with and between government institutions to implement national policies and international commitments in the field of minorities' rights. The Bureau is also responsible for the protection of cultural and linguistic heritage of minorities, the teaching of the state language to ethno-cultural communities, promotion of tolerance, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, preventing and combating discrimination, support for inter-ethnic integration into political, cultural, social and economic life, as well as social cohesion programs.

The Bureau is in charge of both policy development and implementation in the field of interethnic relations. The Bureau has modest human capacity (19 employees), and is responsible for implementing the entire Strategy (which includes around 30 measures). It has insufficient financial capacity to support activities organized jointly with ethno-cultural organizations.

The main platform used by the Bureau to maintain relations and consult ethnic communities is the Coordination Council for Ethno cultural Organizations. Currently, there are 93 ethno-cultural organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and the Ministry of Health, Social Protection and Family, as well as local public administration also play a role in the integration of ethnic communities. However, there is only one person dealing with the education of minorities in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. There is no dedicated staff responsible for working with ethno-cultural communities at the district level, and the task is usually performed by district Vice Presidents dealing with social affairs.

Policy development must be done in coordination between these agencies and other central public administration authorities, particularly the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for social issues. In reality, this coordination happens rarely, and actions remain largely symbolic (conferences, concerts), while policy development and implementation is uncoordinated and oftentimes inefficient.

Therefore, there is a gap between existing policy documents and institutional structures and real problems in the field of interethnic relations. Although a number of policy papers and legislation exists, the real issues are superficially reflected in policy documents and are not efficiently addressed in practice.

There is no wide-scale, constructive involvement of relevant government institutions, media channels, CSOs, and ethnic community organizations to address current problems and difficulties. Institutionally, it is done sporadically, on a case-by-case basis, while the Bureau for Interethnic Relations does not have the capacity to deal with the tasks that it is supposed to fulfil. Even if the Bureau had enough capacity, it would face difficulties fulfilling its task as this is a complex undertaking that requires wide-scale institutional involvement.

2. RETHINKING INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND IDENTITY IN MOLDOVA

Public discussions organized with members of ethnic communities within the framework of the MIDEU project revealed discrepancies between the stated goals of Moldova in terms of interethnic relations and the real situation. At the moment, we can witness multiple gaps between official policies, political narratives and the situation of ethnic communities. The events organized within the project revealed a situation that does not fit into standard patterns and provided a rather unexpected diagnosis of interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova.

2.1 SURVEY RESULTS AMONG EXPERTS AND PARTICIPANTS AT MIDEU TOWN HALL MEETINGS

In the framework of the 3 Town Hall Meetings in the regions (Comrat, Balti, Cahul), the project organizers distributed questionnaires on self-identification and values among participants. Survey participants were leaders of ethnic organizations, NGO activists, students, and people who have firsthand experience in dealing with ethnic relations at the grass-roots level.

It is important to mention that the survey is NOT a nationally sampled poll, so no statistical conclusions can be extrapolated to the national level. However, the results of the survey give a general overview of the respondents' perception of identity and core values.

83 persons participated in this survey. The demographic structure of the sample has a large gender bias – 63% of the interviewed are female and 37% are male. Also, 38% of those interviewed represent

ethnic minorities and the proportion of Moldovans/Romanians in the survey was 62%. It is important to mention that on the national sample the proportion of ethnic minorities is 20% and the proportion of Romanians/Moldovans is around 80%.

The data on respondents is provided below:

Chart 1: Profile of the respondents

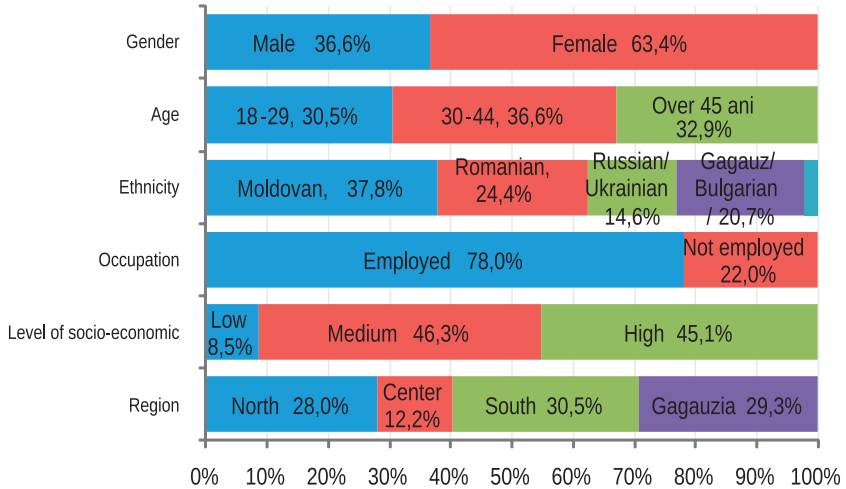
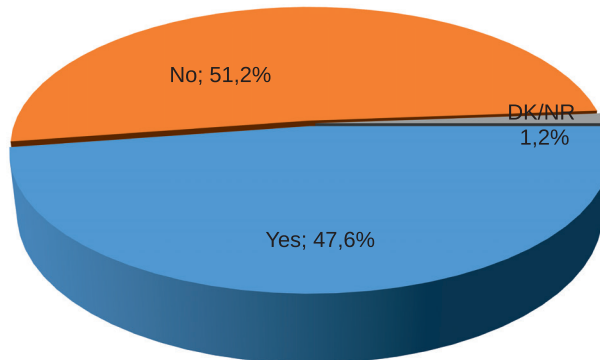
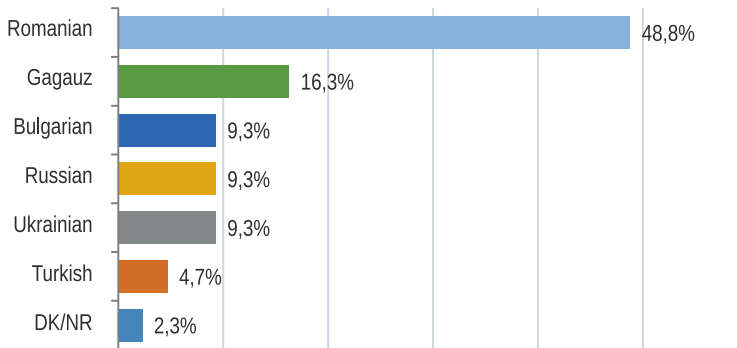


Chart 2: Do you consider yourself a Moldovan?



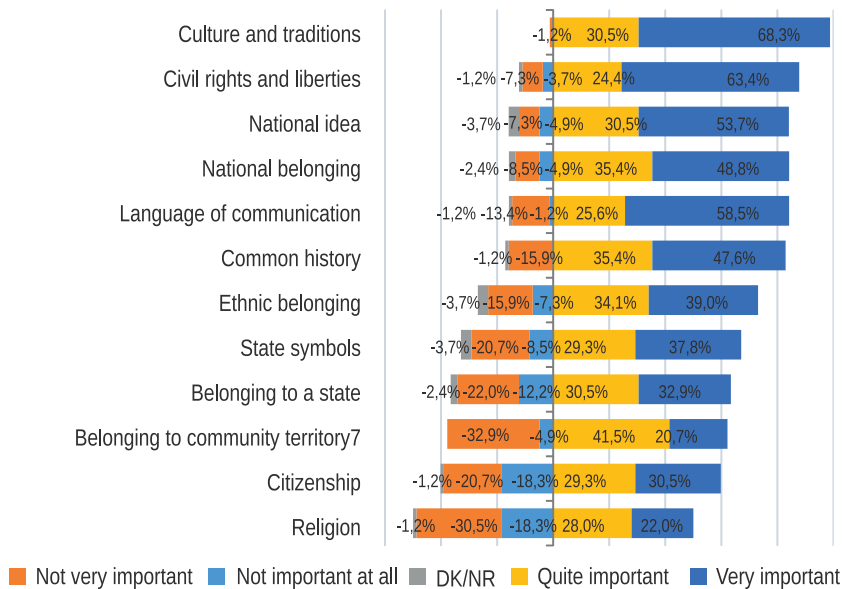
Regarding self-identity, 48% of the respondents said they consider themselves Moldovans and 51% said they do not consider themselves Moldovans.

Chart 3: If you do not consider yourself to be Moldovan, what is your identity?



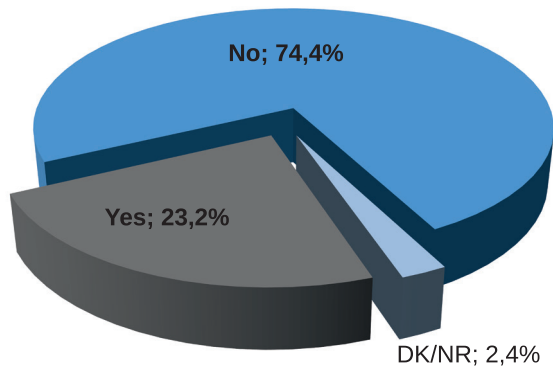
Almost half of those who do not consider themselves Moldovans consider themselves Romanians (49%). 16% of respondents identified themselves as Gagauz, while 9% each identified themselves as Bulgarians, Russians and Ukrainians. Nationwide, many Russian-speaking minorities often identify themselves as Russians.

Chart 4. Key factors in defining national identity



In the opinion of 99% of respondents (who claimed these factors are important and very important), culture and traditions are the key determinants in defining identity, followed by civil rights and liberties (88%). 84% think that identity is determined by a national idea, a sense of national belonging and the language. 83% emphasized common history and 73% ethnic belonging (more than 10% compared to the national level). This shows closeness in perceptions among ethnic communities. The most important factors (over 50%) are therefore (1) culture and traditions, (2) rights and freedoms, (3) the language; (4) the national idea (project).

Chart 5: Is being a citizen of Moldova the same as being a Moldovan?



Only 23% of respondents believe that *being a citizen of Moldova* is the same as *being a Moldovan*. Over three quarters of respondents said it was not the same.

Asked to give an explanation for this opinion, 16% of respondents said that many nationalities live in Moldova; 13% think that the citizen of a country can be of any nationality and 11% consider themselves citizens of Moldova but not Moldovans.

When abroad, 56% of those interviewed introduce themselves as Moldovans, by 7% more than at home. That difference in self-identification may be the case because inside of Moldova the representatives of eth-

nic communities contrast themselves against the Moldovan majority, while abroad they present themselves as Moldovans to 'contrast' with other nationalities.

Chart 6: Why ethnicity is not citizenship

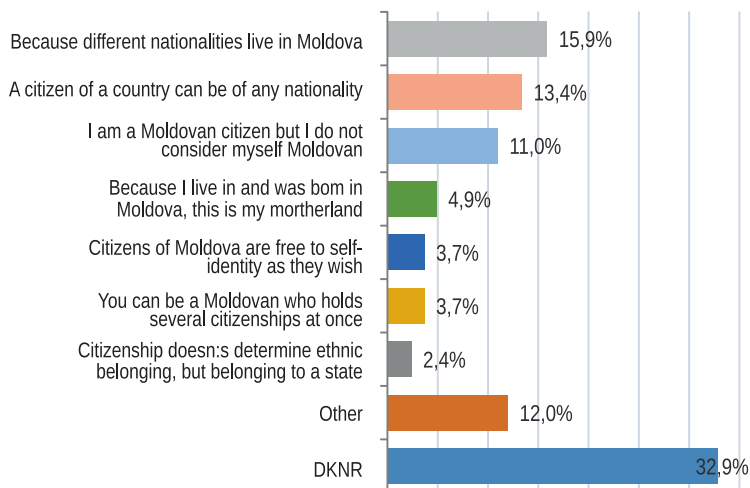
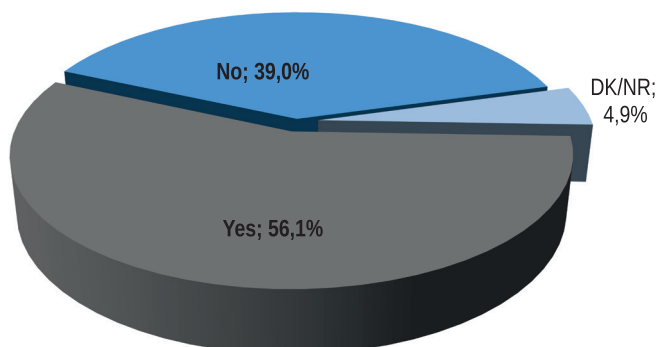


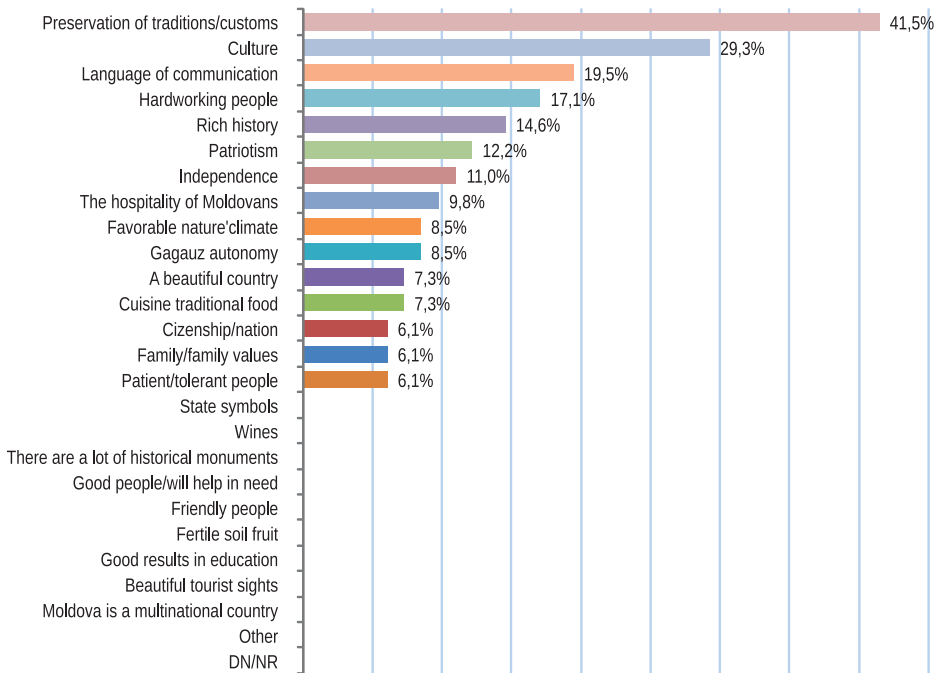
Chart 7: When abroad, do you present yourself as a Moldovan?



When asked about the things that make one proud as a Moldovan, among the most frequently mentioned issues were: preservation of traditions (41,5%), followed by culture (29,3%), language (19,5%), hard-

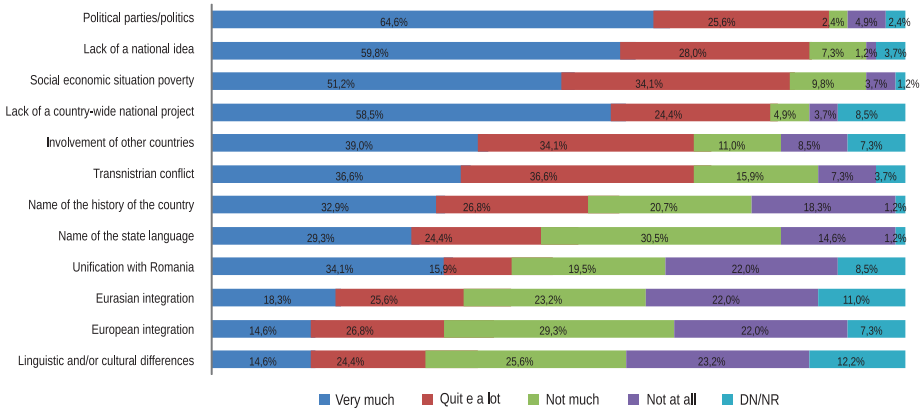
working people (17,1%), history (14,6%), patriotism (12,2%), the independence of the state (11%), hospitality (9,8%), nice nature and climate (8,5%), the Gagauz autonomy (8,5%), a nice country (7,3%), cuisine and good food (7,3%), citizenship and nation (6,1%), family and family values (6,1%), tolerant people (6,1%), state symbols (4,9%), wines (4,9%). Answers to this open question show that there is a common understanding among different ethnic communities when it comes to basic values and core features of the Republic of Moldova.

Chart 8. What makes you proud as a citizen of Moldova.



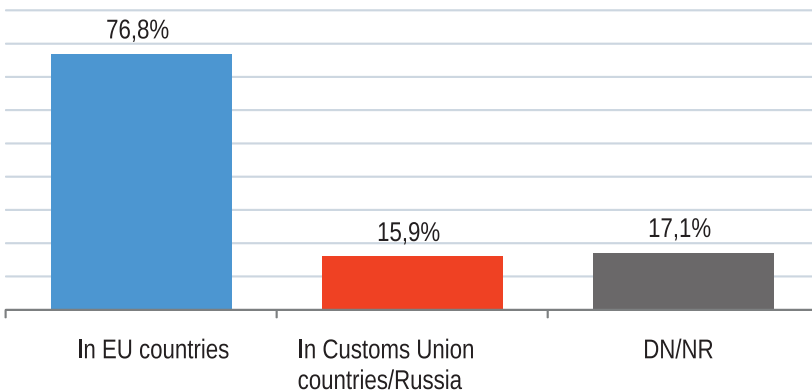
When asked about the main factors which negatively affect national unity, a majority of respondents mentioned political parties and their activity (almost 90% of respondents said it has a very large or large negative impact), poverty, lack of a national idea and involvement of other countries. The Transnistrian conflict is rather high up on the list as well (72% consider it as having a negative impact).

Chart 9: Factors which affect national unity



A slight majority considers history (60%) and language (54%) to have a negative impact, but at the same time a significant share of respondents think that history (39%) and the name of the language (44%) do not negatively affect the country's unity. Almost half of respondents cite unification with Romania as a factor, while the other half think it is not a factor at all. EU integration and linguistic and cultural differences have the least perception as dividing factors.

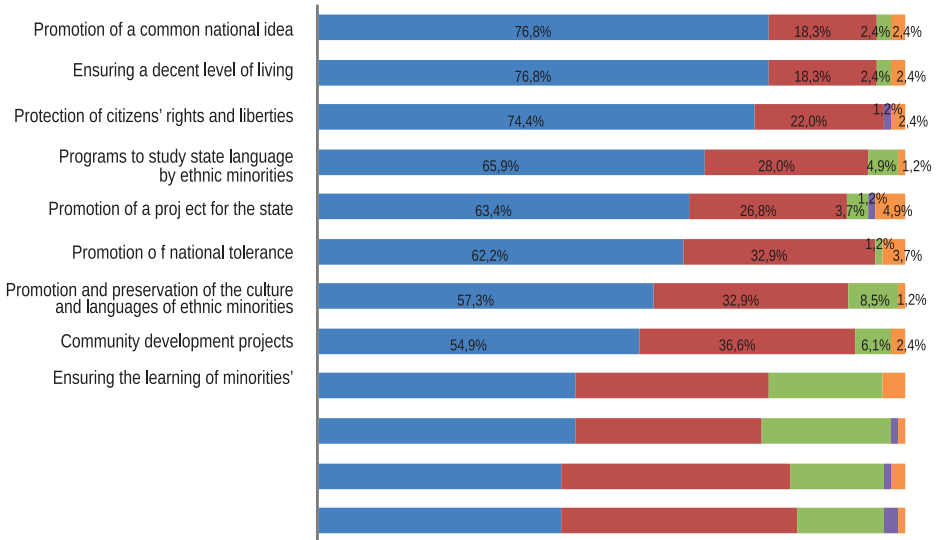
Chart 10. Where are ethnic minority rights better protected?



Only one out of six respondents thinks that the rights of ethnic minorities are better protected in Russia. Over ¾ of those polled said that

the rights of ethnic minorities are better protected in the EU. That also indicates that people have a good knowledge about ethnic minority rights in Europe and value the opportunities that it offers.

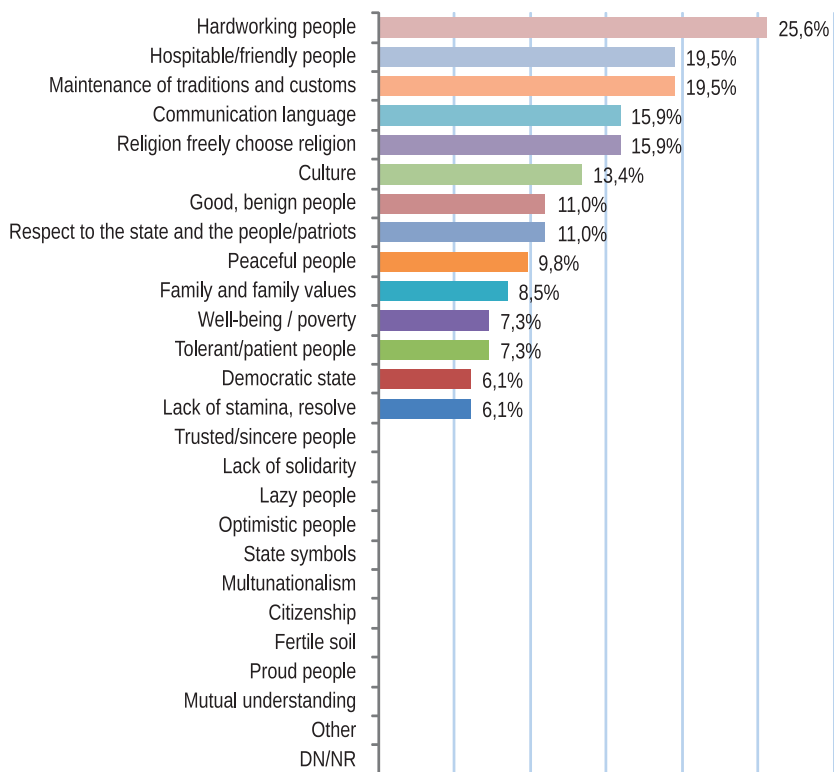
Chart 11. What actions should the government take to enhance national unity?



Among the actions that the government could take to consolidate national unity, 77% cited promotion of a national idea and ensuring citizens' wellbeing, 74% cited defending citizens' rights and freedoms; 66% mentioned programs for minorities to study the state language; 63% argued the government should promote a state-wide project; 62% cited national tolerance programs and 57% said the government should promote and preserve the culture and languages of the minorities.

Asked to name key values and characteristics of the Moldovan people, a high number of respondents cited the willingness to work hard – 25,6%, friendship, openness and hospitality – 19,5%, respect for traditions – 19,5%, respect for language – 15,9% and respect for religion - 15,9%.

Chart 12. Values and characteristics of the Moldovan people:



After answering all questions, the number of those who identify themselves as Moldovans increased by 10% from before the survey, to a total of 56%. This shows that there is fertile ground for dialogue and for building a united country immune to hate speech and over-politicized narratives on ethnic minorities.

2.2 RECONCEPTUALIZING THE “INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES”

Analyzing Moldova's experience in interethnic integration, relevant studies in the field, as well as roundtables within the project, the conclusion is that grass-roots NGOs, community organizations and the government need to pragmatically rethink policies in the field of interethnic relations. The very formulation of the problem as the

“integration of national minorities” is perhaps misplaced in Moldova’s realities, distorts the nature of the real problem Moldova is facing, and needs to be re-conceptualized. Most experts and the public participating in interviews, tTwn Hall Meetings and roundtables within the project advanced the idea that it would be more effective to use the notion of integrating “ethno-cultural communities”, instead of “national minorities”.

Some of the key arguments are:

1. **Trying to build a common identity** around ethnic self-identification of the majority population is a wrong lead. This is the case because the “titular nation” or the “majority ethnicity” is divided into “Moldovan” and “Romanian” identities. Those who identify themselves as Romanians argue that the Moldovan identity is a Soviet invention, and that the real identity is Romanian. Those who consider themselves Moldovan emphasize the opposite – that a separate Moldovan nation emerged over the past several centuries, that it has a distinct identity, which is neither Russian nor Romanian, that it has a set of recognizable identity benchmarks, symbols, and historical narratives.

Neither one nor the other position is likely to become a dominant view in Moldova in the foreseeable future. Even the fiercest critics of Romanian identity will not deny its legitimacy. In other words, a classic integrationist approach, where all other ethnicities would be integrated around the majority titular nation, or a majority ethnicity, is not likely in Moldova, and can’t serve as a starting point for building a unifying identity. This is the case because it would inevitably lead either to the need to integrate the so-called “Romanian minority”, along with other minorities, into the majority “Moldovan” identity. Any attempt, whether academic or legal, to use the term ethnic minority in relation to Romanian Moldovans will inevitably lead to escalation of tensions in society and cannot become a tool for harmonizing interethnic relations in the country. The other option for an “ethnic identity” would be to integrate all ethnicities, including Moldovans, into a potential Romanian

ethnic majority that would extend beyond the borders of the Republic of Moldova. Either of these two options is not feasible.

2. **Attempts to apply the notion** of a “national minority” to Moldovan Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz and Bulgarians provoke exactly the same kind of negative reaction. Non-majority ethnic communities (Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, etc) do not see themselves as “diasporas”, or “situational minorities” associated with any past Russian or Soviet “civilizational” practice of “denationalizing” Moldova, and also do not see themselves as any kind of direct “agents” of influence from their “kin” states - Russia, Ukraine or Bulgaria. To the contrary, as a rule, they emphasize the length of their stay in Moldova (“for centuries”), their roots in the country, their belonging to the founding nation¹⁸. They consider themselves an integral part of Moldova’s society. Against this background it could be concluded that the concept of “integration of national minorities” is seen as problematic and counter-productive by ethno-cultural communities themselves.
3. **There is a high level of peaceful coexistence** and tolerance of all ethnic segments of Moldova in the widest - cultural – sense of modern Moldovan statehood. Everyday peaceful relations at the grass-roots level could provide the foundation for a common identity of all citizens of Moldova, and could act as a bulwark against attempts by politicians to use ethnicity and language as divisive factors. The titular population (Moldovan-Romanian) mostly views other ethnic segments as a natural, rooted component of the local ethnic landscape and not as “aliens” who have been resettled to Moldova from elsewhere to change the ethnic composition of the titular nation.

18 For example, the young Gagauz referred to Stefan cel Mare and other key historical figures when speaking about Moldova, ref. Академия Наук Молдовы, Институт Культурного Наследия, И.И. Кауненко, Н.Г. Каунова, Н.В. Иванова, Идентичность в системе этнопсихологического и этнологического знания в Республике Молдова, Кишинев, 2015

Geopolitical preferences of the titular population (the European Union vs the Russian-led Customs Union) are also distributed almost equally. The titular population sees fluency in the state language by non-native speakers as a very high manifestation of goodwill. From the other end, it is confirmed that poor knowledge of Romanian is not due to “ethnic resistance”, as is frequently portrayed, but rather due to the lack of viable strategies to promote language learning among communities through academic and lifelong learning programs. This fact also denotes the openness of ethno-cultural communities to Romanian language learning projects. This is a starting point for ethnic communities to come to terms with the lost role and importance of the Russian language and make transition to new realities.

4. **As our analysis and polls show**, Moldova's historical narrative (Stefan cel Mare, “Great principality of Moldova” from the Middle Ages), positive emotional involvement in local symbolic geography (Codri, Old Orhei, Soroca, Chisinau - “flower of stone”), ethnographic, musical culture and the cuisine of Moldova are all integral components of the worldview of these ethnic communities. These cultural identity markers are as deeply ingrained in the self-identification and worldview of ethnic communities as they are in the worldview of the majority.
5. **All ethnic communities** share similar basic ideas about what could form the basis of societal unity in the Republic of Moldova – culture and traditions, civil rights and liberties, and, crucially, promotion of a development project for the country. Surprisingly, the majority does not consider history and the name of the language to have a negative impact on the country's unity. There is an un-explored field of projects but also of policies in the field of interethnic relations that could move the interethnic relations from the area of pressures and speculations to a new area, that of active citizenship and the spirit of community membership. Moldova is itself a best-case practice of living together, of preservation of culture and language,

of ethnically mixed communities. All these examples stay at the level of community and are rarely brought to the national level as good practices that need to be parts of national policies or projects for reintegration of ethnic communities.

6. Self-identification as “Moldovans” occurs more at the level of citizenship. The majority of respondents consider themselves Moldovan citizens, thus emphasizing citizenship, its civic aspects, and even the fact that they pride themselves on being Moldovan citizens. Most experts who took part in discussions recognized that it would be much more effective to use the concept of mutual consolidation of all ethno-cultural communities and talk about the protection of their rights and freedoms, as a more precise definition of the essence of the problem and a more correct ground for setting appropriate goals and objectives.

7. The contradictions in Moldova's society in interethnic relations are due to opportunistic geopolitical provocations from Moldova's elites and political parties, rather than something that is rooted in the Moldovan society itself. While Moldova's society has good starting conditions for mutual integration of ethno-cultural communities, political elites stoke fears and divisions in society, promoting their vested interests and preventing progress.

The current attitude of political parties in this area avoids an honest discussions and clear policies on this issue, and sometimes demonstrates extreme forms of politicization of identity. Endless political talks and campaigns about history and language impede the consolidation of social relations and tolerance among the various ethno-cultural communities. Traditions, diversity, the feeling of belonging to the community are all elements of interethnic cohesion specific to all cultures, including the majority ethnicity. The political agenda is often abundant in narratives about different identities: the name of the language, influence of Russia, geopolitics and ethnic identity. It is much more efficient to set a proper agenda for public discussions, models of interethnic tolerance, integra-

tion, mechanism in ensuring inclusive education and models to counter discrimination.

- 8. Active expert and political assistance** of the European Union to ethno-cultural communities of Moldova in creating a unified state is in demand. Moreover, it is precisely in this area that a supportive position of the EU, as well as of pan-European structures such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, could yield positive responses and appreciation from non-titular populations, who perceive and value European practices in the field of interethnic relations as a more secure and stable guarantee of their rights than any other frameworks. This was most clearly manifested when discussing the Strategy for the Integration of National Minorities, the Fourth Opinion on Moldova by the Advisory Committee on the FCNM, as well as the report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

3. KEY CHALLENGES

In order to increase social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova and build a strong and united state, which would include all ethnic communities, the key challenges to be addressed are:

1. Need for a strategic framework

Discrepancies between government policies and actions and the expectations of ethno-cultural communities and organizations have been noted as one of the concerns. Although Moldova has an institutional framework, a specialized agency in the field of interethnic relations and a complex legal framework, they do not address challenges in the field of interethnic relations and do not contribute to the forming of a common civic identity. Public consultations, conferences and roundtables are organized on a regular basis, but policies and actions initiated at the government level do not meet the expectations of ethno-cultural communities.

The institutional framework for anti-discrimination remains weak. Moldova has an equality body and anti-discrimination legislation but they are not effective mechanisms as they do not seem to address the key issues, monitor political or media discourse or flag discrimination and inflammatory language.

The current policy framework is not fully consistent with some key international documents to which Moldova is a party. Policies do not reflect the provisions of international documents such as the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities (Conclusion 4 with reference to the Republic of Moldova (2016)). Most policy documents in the field of interethnic relations target cultural heritage and the maintenance of traditions but are very weak

or inconsistent in terms of assuring the right to education, language training or facilitating representation of ethnic communities in public administration. Actual policies do not offer enough operational tools to counter discriminatory practice or hate speech.¹⁹

2. Failure of education policies

The use of educational tools and the education system to strengthen relationships between ethno-cultural communities has been a latent failure²⁰. Some participants spoke about a true "identity chaos", both at the level of the majority of society (language, identity, etc.) and concerning the identity of ethno-cultural communities (forgetting one's own language in favor of the language of interethnic communication, politicizing ethnic identity). For example, the Gagauz autonomy, created to maintain and preserve the Gagauz culture, functions mostly in Russian in its public administration, its school and university system.

Following the analysis of the interviews carried out during the project events, there is insufficient knowledge among ethnic communities about each other, but also insufficient education on their own culture and traditions. It is important to note that educational programs are largely managed by community-based organizations, which denotes the desire of communities to participate in new, dynamic, interactive and depoliticized cultural educational programs.

History is taught in all schools using the same textbooks and curricula. Issues of non-majority ethnic communities are not addressed in

19 The Ministry of Justice along with the OHCHR office in Moldova developed in 2015 a draft law on the amendment of the Criminal Code and Misdemeanors Code which complements the two pieces of codified legislation with crimes and misdemeanors committed based on reasons of prejudice, contempt or hate, the draft Law developed by the MoJ may be consulted here in Romanian: http://www.justice.gov.md/public/files/transparența_in_procesul_decizional/coordonare/2015/noiembrie2015/Proiect_de_Lege_hate_crime_actuala.pdf

20 According to the Ministry of Education, there are 1,363 schools in the country, including: 1,088 Romanian language and 262 minority schools - 259 (Russian); 2 (Ukrainian); 1 (Bulgarian). There are no schools teaching in the Gagauz language. In 1,088 schools Russian is taught, Gagauz in 48 schools, Ukrainian in 46 schools and Bulgarian in 28 schools.

textbooks. Educational policies overall do not promote the study of common history, intercultural dialogue and the idea of a shared society where people have multi-layered identities.

3. Failures of language policies

Poor knowledge of the state language is a major obstacle for upward social mobility in Moldova for graduates of Russian-language schools, especially in terms of government positions. Policies to help ethnic communities better learn and communicate in the state language have been a failure. Ethnic communities perceive their insufficient proficiency in the state language as a gap that needs to be addressed, and very few of them continue to see the Russian language as somehow superior, which would give them any potential advantages or a sense of pride. Representatives of ethnic communities who know the state language do not hesitate to point this out or to mention that they are proud of it.

Most representatives of ethno-cultural communities want to know and speak the language of the country, and they clearly see and recognize the limits of educational programs in this respect. This is true both for school education and for adult education.

Since 2011, the Ministry of Education has implemented a pilot project “Educational integration of students who speak other languages by expanding the number of study subjects studied in Romanian”. Within this project, 8 subjects in 32 schools with minority language teaching are taught in the state language. More than 3000 students are the beneficiaries of this project. This project is an example of practical policy which could help address one of the key issues. However, it was not implemented on the national level.

In 2015, the Government approved the National Program to improve the quality of learning of Romanian language in educational institutions with languages of national minorities (2016-2020). The budget for three years – 2016, 2017 and 2018 - was just 1.7 million MDL. The actions which should have been realized based on the National Program were achieved only in part.

A nationwide educational policy to promote the study of the state language and to attract ethnic communities to work in the public sector could tap into their creative energy to promote Moldova's development.

4. Insufficient representation and participation of ethnic communities

Legislation does not provide specific conditions for the promotion of representatives of ethno-cultural communities in government institutions or politics. According to current regulations, vacancies in government institutions are filled in through competition and there are no proportional representation mechanisms for ethno-cultural communities who speak the state language. There are no stimulating elements for representatives of ethno-cultural communities.

There are no official statistics on the employment of minorities in government institutions. Unofficially it is admitted that the number of representatives of ethno-cultural communities in government institutions is insignificant. From this point of view, it is considered that official data on modest representation in state institutions could lead to criticism of government policy on the integration of ethno-cultural communities.

The legal and institutional framework should provide not only for the representation of and consultation with ethnic communities but to ensure their input into and real influence on the decision-making process.

5. Lack of media policies that support mutual understanding

Media has a great influence in the sense that it can promote communication of tolerance and understanding in society, or can encourage divisive and inflammatory rhetoric, where other identities are portrayed as a threat. Inflammatory political and societal rhetoric has recently become more frequent in public and TV discourse, while proper media monitoring is lacking.

Despite proliferating discriminatory political narratives, government institutions don't address that and do not seek, together with ethnic communities, an appropriate classification and answer to these problems. Meetings with ethnic communities organized by the government largely ignore these issues, and discussions focus on the preservation of cultural heritage.

Existing policies do not meet the dynamics of changing social relationships and the influence of the new media. Discriminatory speech increasingly penetrates social networks. For example, recently there have been very intense offensive discussions and campaigns on Facebook related to the claim of the Gagauz for more autonomy in accordance with the 1994 law. At the beginning it was just a discussion about the opportunity to change legislation, but later both sides of the problem started to promote aggressive messages, inciting to hate and bigotry. There is no policy or strategy to condemn or stop such incidents in the social media.

Reducing intolerance and hate speech in mass media and social networks, as well as promoting a range of cultural awareness programs, would therefore be an important aspect in the effort of reducing divisive discourses.

4. FROM ETHNIC TO CIVIC IDENTITY

The analysis of the current situation, discussions with representatives of ethnic communities, as well as the survey have shown that in the search for a common identity in the Republic of Moldova a conceptualization of a new approach and a program for interethnic relations focused on citizenship and a “civic identity” might be promising.

A civic identity is based on the concept of citizenship, which ensures the rights and opportunities for all citizens. In Moldova, it could center around the historical experience of peaceful co-existence and the core idea of Moldova’s state-building and institutional modernization program. Moldova’s European choice, strong relations with Moldova’s neighbors, including Romania, Ukraine and Russia and, crucially, the functionality of Moldova’s institutions, respect for human rights, better quality of life and economic opportunities, which would work in the interests of all citizens, are possible pillars of a “civic identity” shared by all citizens of Moldova.

As the term “Moldovan” is discredited for important political stakeholders and activists, the notion “Moldovan civic identity” should perhaps be avoided, and the concept of the **“civic identity of the Republic of Moldova”** should be promoted instead. This civic identification could ensure loyalty from all ethnic communities to the state and create bonds between different ethnicities.

Importantly, the program should include all ethno-cultural communities without exception, and promote their interaction in an open-minded setting with the majority ethnicity (majority titular nation). The emphasis on younger age category should lead to positive, long-lasting effects as opposed to practices promoted over the last 26 years.

As intense communication with ethnic communities throughout the project shows, policies to promote a common civic identity could be based on the following principles:

- many people in Moldova have developed a defensive reaction to any attempts to touch upon their identity. Policies should respect the principle of not pressuring people to give up their identity and to adopt another one, but to have them feel safe in their respective identity and develop a civic identity at the same time. Different linguistic identities and ethnic self-identification can be accommodated within the common civic identity of the citizens of Moldova;
- education should lay the basis for civic identity, carefully describe complex and sensitive episodes from the country's past and develop a core of ideas that could unite society;
- a serious debate on the promotion of civic identity must come in parallel with a serious effort to expose and counter attempts of various political actors to play the "identity card". Political elites often use the ethnic card either to hide their failures in other areas or to mobilize their core electorate. The "ethnic card" proved to be the easiest way to mobilize voters. It works particularly well in the atmosphere of fear, so some political forces that rely on such tactics are directly interested in exacerbating the threats and demonizing the other side. Exposing and countering these efforts could contribute to the creation of a sense of "us" - "sense of togetherness, solidarity and mutual trust";
- It is important to depoliticize linguistic policies. The language should not be used as a political argument. Building Moldova's civic identity should not come from the politicians, but from the grass-roots community level, respectable civil society activists and organizations that would be trusted by representatives of competing views;
- constructing a civic identity of Moldova is a longer term process, which can only be advanced through continuity and commitment from each incoming government;

- diversity should not be seen as a liability and vulnerability, but rather can be transformed in a factor of strength and to the country's competitive advantage;
- successful cases of representatives of ethnic groups learning the Romanian language and occupying important decision-making positions to promote Moldova's national interests must be showcased.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- Moldova's society remains divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. Lack of cogent policies to open social doors to representatives of ethno-cultural communities impedes social mobility for ethnic minorities; as a result, Moldova misses out on development opportunities because of their untapped potential;
- Moldova's elites exploit and deepen the divide and frequently portray other ethnic groups as a threat;
- Ethnic contradictions are not rooted in Moldova's society itself. At the grass-roots level, Moldova's society has been characterized by largely harmonious interethnic relations;
- Moldova does not have a clear definition of a titular nation or a "majority ethnicity" – Moldovan or Romanian - and its several iterations continue to stir up intemperate debates among both Moldova's elites and the public. A clear "dominance" of a majority ethnicity – Romanian or Moldovan - is not feasible. Therefore, uniting the country cannot be based on ethnicity.
- "Ethnic minorities" in Moldova (the Gagauz, the Ukrainians, the Russians, the Bulgarians, etc) do not regard themselves as "minorities"; they do not promote the interest of "kin states". They see themselves as an integral and historically rooted part of Moldova as an independent state and often perceive the term "minorities" as exclusive.
- Different linguistic identities and ethnic self-identification could coexist under the umbrella of a common civic identity of the citi-

zens of Moldova. A common civic identity as citizens of Moldova with equal rights and opportunities could be a way forward.

- Moldova's society is prepared for a concept of civic identity. There is a common foundation among different ethnic communities when it comes to basic values and features of the Republic of Moldova. All ethnic communities share similar basic ideas about what could define a common civic identity of the Republic of Moldova – culture and traditions, civil rights and liberties, and, crucially, promotion of a credible development project for the country;
- Moldova has an institutional and legislative framework for integration of ethnic communities; however, it is not always effectively implemented, which leaves large gaps. Problems accumulate and are not addressed. A large gap exists between policy documents and real problems in the field of interethnic relations. Coherent and sustained strategy to address the key issues has been lacking;
- Educational and language policies have not been effective in integrating ethnic communities into mainstream social, political and economic life;
- Active expert and political assistance of the European Union to protect the rights of ethno-cultural communities of Moldova is appreciated by non-titular population, who see the EU as the most credible framework to protect their rights;

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pragmatically rethink policies in the field of interethnic relations - from integration of national minorities, which provokes resentment, to a less controversial and more inclusive policy of integration of ethno-cultural communities and the protection of their rights and freedoms;
- The Moldovan government and ethnic communities should take a proactive approach to implement international obligations and domestic regulations, cover the gaps in the existing legal-institutional framework and design the necessary measures to reduce them;
- Facilitate and promote integration of persons belonging to ethno-cultural communities in the social, administrative, cultural, political and economic life of the Republic of Moldova. The legal and institutional framework should provide not only for the representation of and consultation with ethnic communities but to ensure their input into and real influence on the decision-making process.
- Ensure that the resources allocated for the national integration strategy are sufficient and that its implementation is assessed through transparent monitoring mechanisms.
- Elaborate and put into effect a country-wide program to study the state language as a key prerequisite for enhancing minorities' access to government positions and seek support of international partners for a program of this magnitude;
- Create a deeper and more interested partnership among organizations and structures of ethno-cultural communities, the majority population and the government in order to jointly promote, through legislative and executive channels, concrete measures to integrate ethnic communities and address the most pressing issues;
- Promote education campaigns on ethnic and cultural diversity in Moldova. Look into a possibility of introducing a course on

„the history and culture of ethnic communities in Moldova” in high schools and university curricula. The course could demonstrate cultural and linguistic diversity of Moldova over the centuries and help support interethnic solidarity and mutual openness. The course would complement existing history courses and could be prepared and advocated by experts and leaders of all ethno-cultural communities, through wide public and grass-roots consultations.

- Build consensus among all ethnic communities - minorities and the majority - that several school subjects in Russian language schools could be taught in the state language, in order to equip graduates with functional knowledge of the state language after graduation. After grade 4, introduce in Russian language schools a Romanian literature course, taught by native speakers and involving extensive reading and essay writing. This would help students to master the language at a sufficient functional degree.
- Combat hate speech in media and social networks, encourage youth movements against the language of hate and confrontation. Conduct seminars for young people on the language of hate and confrontation and establish monitoring of mass media and social networks.
- Create a regular series of thematic TV spots about each ethnic community for younger target audience, in order for different ethnicities to “rediscover” each other, reduce stereotypes and increase mutual respect between ethnic groups.
- Provide specialized training to law students in the protection of minority rights and anti-discrimination under the general umbrella of Ethnic Communities Ombudsmen.

