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HOLOCAUST MEMORY AND HOLOCAUST DENIAL IN POLAND AND MOLDOVA: A COMPARISON

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Executive Summary

After 1989, post-communist countries such as Poland and Moldova have been faced with the challenge of reinventing their national identity and rewriting their master narratives, shifting from a communist one to an ethnic-patriotic one. In this context, the fate of local Jews and the actions of Poles and Moldovans during the Holocaust have repeatedly proven difficult or even impossible to incorporate into the new national narrative. As a result, Holocaust denial in various forms initially gained ground in post-communist countries, since denying the Holocaust, or blaming it on someone else, even on the Jews themselves, was the easiest way to strengthen national identities. In later years, however, Polish and Moldovan paths towards re-definition of self have taken different paths. At least in part, this can be explained as a product of Poland's incorporation in the European unification project, while Moldova remains in limbo, both in terms of identity and politics – between the Soviet Union and Europe, between the past and the future.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the debate over Holocaust memory and its link to national identity in two post-communist countries, Poland and Moldova, after 1989. Although their historical, political and social contexts and other factors differ, both countries possess a similar, albeit not identical, communist legacy, and both countries had to accept 'inconvenient' truths, such as participation of members of one's own nation in the Holocaust, while building-rebuilding their new post-communist national identities during a period of social and political transformation. While in the West the issue of the Holocaust has been increasingly discussed since the 1970s, in Eastern Europe it became a new challenge after the fall of the communist

system. There, reexamining the past was accompanied by victimhood rivalries and Holocaust denial, which appeared in both Poland and Moldova.

There are several forms of Holocaust denial in Eastern Europe. Historian Michael Shafir defines three of them: “outright denial,” “deflective denial,” and “selective negation.”¹ While outright denial rejects the very historical veracity of the Holocaust, the phenomenon of deflective negation focuses on historical enemies or national minorities; deniers use the strategies of transferring the blame to others, as well as positive self-presentation, trivialization, and mitigation of the seriousness of the other’s negative behavior, and justification of the genocide. Holocaust deniers often transfer the blame to the Jews themselves by, for example, accusing them of being loyal to the communist regimes.² The most widespread type of Holocaust denial in Eastern Europe, however, is selective negation. It does “not deny the Holocaust as having taken place elsewhere, but excludes any participation by members of one's own nation or seriously minimizes it.”³

Deborah Lipstadt refers to “hardcore” and “softcore” Holocaust denial.⁴ Hardcore denial refutes the very existence of the Holocaust. Softcore denial includes all types of minimization and trivialization and is more difficult to recognize and counter. In order to understand how various types of Holocaust denial found roots in Poland and Moldova, it is necessary to examine their historical background and the way collective memory has been constructed in these countries.

Before the Second World War, Jews comprised a significant percentage of the populations in both Poland and Moldova. More than three million Jews lived in Poland before the Second World War, almost ten percent of the total population at that time, and in 1930 there were

¹ Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, (Jerusalem, 2004),p. 52.

² Ibid; Natalia Sineaeva-Pankowska, *How to Understand And Confront Holocaust Denial*, Thematic leaflet, United for Intercultural Action, Amsterdam, 2007, <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/archive/pages/thema02.htm>

³ Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, (Jerusalem, 2004),p. 52.

⁴ “Denying the deniers: Q & A with Deborah Lipstadt”, 2009 <http://www.jta.org/news/article/2009/04/19/1004269/denying-the-deniers-q-a-with-deborah-lipstadt>.

205,000 Jews (seven percent of total population) in Bessarabia (Moldova).⁵ The vast majority of these Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and today both countries have very small Jewish populations. According to the most recent census taken in 2004, the total number of Jews in Moldova is 3,509 out of total population of 3.5 million. Unofficial figures vary – up to 20,000 according to Jewish organizations.⁶ In the last census in Poland taken in 2011, 7,508 individuals declared that their first or second identity was Jewish, out of a total population of 38.5 million.⁷

Collective Memory

In Poland, collective memory of the Second World War encompasses a wide range of complex issues. In this context sociologist Joanna Michlic notes that among all the dark sides of Poland's past during the war years, Polish-Jewish relations seem to be the most difficult to process in 'working through' Polish collective memory.⁸ The image of the Poles as the main victims of Nazism is still deeply rooted and widespread in Polish national memory, and it continues to dominate Polish society. The Jews were not regarded as a group that suffered the most during the Second World War, and it is generally believed that a majority of Poles helped Jews during the war.

Like Poland, Moldova was ruled by communists in the decades following the Second World War; moreover, Moldova was an integral part of the Soviet Union, sharing the narrative of the Second World War and absorbing attitudes toward the Jewish tragedy that was common in all Soviet republics, a central feature of which was not to see Jews as a separate victim (nor the main victim).

⁵ "The Jews of Moldova", Clara Jignea, Yakov Kopansky, Semion Shoikhet, <http://www.rtrfoundation.org/webart/UK-arch-Ch10Kopansky.pdf>

⁶ "Evrei v Moldove: 500 let vmeste", *Press obozrenie*, 15 April 2011, <http://press.try.md/item.php?id=119758>; "Skol'ko nas", *Dorledor*, 15 April 2011, <http://www.dorledor.info/node/10079>.

⁷ Ludność. Stan i Struktura Demograficzna-społeczna. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań, Warszawa 2011, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD_ludnosc_stan_str_dem_spo_NSP2011.pdf.

⁸ Joanna Michlic, *Coming to Terms with the "Dark Past": The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 2002), p.3.

There was also a feature of wartime conditions that was specific to Moldova. During the war Moldova was occupied by the Romanian army of Ion Antonescu who was Hitler's ally, and the Romanian army was the main perpetrator of the Holocaust on what was then Romanian (but now Moldovan) territory. According to Vladimir Solonari, an American historian of Moldovan origin:

At least 130 thousand Jews from Transnistria were liquidated by the Romanians in 1941-1944, which brings the whole number of perished Jews to about 250 thousand. This makes Transnistria one of the worst sites of the Holocaust in the whole of Europe, and Romania the second only to Germany in terms of its "contribution" to that tragedy.⁹

Generally speaking, in the post-communist countries after 1989 everything that was forbidden for decades entered the public discourse. Michlic describes this phenomenon as "an explosion of different memories" after 1989.¹⁰ She divided the years that followed the fall of communism into two periods that underscore the differences between various countries in the region; the variances between Poland and Moldova are significant. In Poland, as well as in other post-communist countries, in the first phase, between 1989 and the mid-to-late 1990s, the focus can be characterized as "ethno-nationalistic," discussion dominated by a monolithic ethnic perspective of the world that excluded the memory of local Jews and other national and ethnic minorities.¹¹

During this period of unbridled nationalism, the 'center of gravity' for Holocaust deniers who faced increasing delegitimization in the West, shifted to Eastern Europe. Their writings began to be translated and published in Eastern Europe, and some even moved to live in Eastern Europe where they enjoyed an audience and esteem. One example is Swiss Holocaust denier Jürgen Graf who moved to Belarus and Russia. It was a period when one grand narrative was replaced by many different narratives, providing an opening not only for positive changes, but also for different kinds of historical denial. As Rafal Pankowski writes wryly, "in just five

⁹ Vladimir Solonari, "From Silence to Justification?: Moldovan Historians on the Holocaust of Bessarabian and Transnistrian Jews", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2002, p.435.

¹⁰ Joanna Michlic, "Przerwane milczenie. O pamięci Zagłady w postkomunistycznej Europie," (Znak: 2012), p.28.

¹¹ Ibid.

years ‘historical denial’ in Poland has come a long way, from a lunatic fringe to the right-wing academic establishment.”¹² The first revisionist articles appeared already in 1994 and 1995 in the extreme Right-wing magazine *Szczerbiec* (The Sword), the house organ of the National Revival of Poland, a group which claims to be the heir and successor of the inter-war violently antisemitic group *Szczerbiec*. The magazine, for example, republishes articles by David Irving and other internationally known Holocaust deniers, and maintains a strong connection with the U.S.-based Polish Historical Institute which was already engaged in denial of the pogrom in Kielce, for instance.¹³ Another example is Dariusz Ratajczak, a lecturer at the University of Opole. He became known after publishing his book *Dangerous Topics*, where he denied people had been killed with Zyklon B and claimed that Nazis did not have plans for the extermination of the Jews. Following the protests over his book, he was suspended from his university post and subsequently convicted in court.¹⁴

The second post-communist phase of public discourse spans the mid-to-late 1990s to the first years of the twenty-first century. Michlic defines this as a “pluralistic” and “civic” period when the Holocaust and other uncomfortable events in national memory have been incorporated into the national narrative. She notes that this was paralleled by growing cognizance that the past was more complex than the black-and-white discourse advanced by communist-dominated historiography.¹⁵

Between a Jewish Narrative and Remembering the Jews

In terms of “nostalgia for the multiethnic past” (as Joanna Michlic labels it) in general and in regard to attitudes towards the Jewish past in particular, Poland and Moldova are clearly not at the same stage of development. In this regard Poland has progressed much further than Moldova. Although there is only a tiny Jewish community in Poland, there are two major

¹² Rafal Pankowski, “From the Lunatic Fringe to Academia: Holocaust Denial in Poland” in *Holocaust Denial: The David Irving Trial and International Denial*, ed. Kate Tayler, (London, Searchlight Educational Trust: 2000),p.75.

¹³ Ibid, p.76.

¹⁴ Natalia Sineaeva-Pankowska, How to Understand And Confront Holocaust Denial, Thematic leaflet, United for Intercultural Action, Amsterdam, 2007, <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/archive/pages/thema02.htm>

¹⁵ Joanna Michlic, “Przerwane milczenie. O pamięci Zagłady w postkomunistycznej Europie,” (Znak: 2012), p.28-30.

Jewish magazines (*Midrasz* in Polish and *Słowo Żydowskie/Dos Jidysze Wort* in Polish/Yiddish); whose readership is mostly non-Jewish. In Warsaw, there is a Jewish theater with plays in Yiddish, an annual Jewish movie festival, and the city of Krakow hosts many events such as an annual Jewish culture festival. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which was officially opened in April 2013, also reflects trends in Poland. In short, the Poles today are increasingly taking an interest in Jewish culture.

In contrast, however, Moldova has yet to exhibit any similar growing interests in Jewish culture. Although the Jewish population has made a significant contribution to the country's economic and social development, the long history of Jewish life in Moldova is generally unknown to contemporary Moldovans. The absence of information about the Jewish past is accompanied by an unwillingness to include Jewish narratives such as the Holocaust into Moldova's national history. For the most part, the general popular is unaware of the fact that there was a ghetto in Chisinau. There is almost no trace left of the 366 synagogues that existed in Moldova before 1940 – 70 of which were in its capital Chisinau alone.

The public space reflects this disinterest in the Jewish perspective: There are two types of monuments in Moldova – Soviet ones that support the Soviet narrative of the Second World War, and pan-Romanian nationalistic ones. The Jewish narrative is absent from both. For example, in the heart of the former Chisinau ghetto area, there is a street named after an infamous Romanian nationalistic poet and minister who introduced antisemitic legislation in interwar Romania – Octavian Goga, who never even visited Moldova. There is a monument to the victims from the Chisinau ghetto where 9,000–12,000 Jews were corralled during the war, but the memorial was built in 1992 by the Association of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps in Moldova without any state support. Furthermore, its location is not in the center of the city, nor is it as prominent as other monuments, and for the most part, only the Jewish community is cognizant of its existence.

The Holocaust is still not part of official school education in Moldova, and it is rarely mentioned in history textbooks. As Diana Dumitru writes in her analysis of Moldovan history textbooks, only one universal history textbook by Sergiu Nazaria and Igor Casu published in

2002 introduces the term “Holocaust” to students.¹⁶ In a similar vein Dmitry Tartakovsky writes:

“In the history textbooks used by most public secondary school students in Moldova, titled *The History of the Romanians*, very little mention is made of the Holocaust. The texts note only that the Jews, who were accused of supporting the Bolshevik regime, were gathered into camps and ghettos. Romania’s Second World War past is generally described as one of victimization between Soviet oppression and German betrayal.”¹⁷

Michlic believes that Poland is in the last phase of the long-term post-communist period. In her opinion the second, “pluralistic,” phase has advanced to a high level of openness – epitomized by readiness to discuss Jedwabne, among other topics. In 1941, during the first days of Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union, in several small towns in the northeastern region of Poland, Jedwabne, several anti-Jewish pogroms were organized by Jewish inhabitants’ Polish neighbors, encouraged by Nazi propaganda. The fact that the pogroms were implemented by Poles was covered up for many years. In 2001 Polish-American historian Jan Tomas Gross published his book *Neighbours* in Polish and English in which the author presented his research about the massacre of 1,600 Jews and its Polish perpetrators. The publishing of Gross’s book sparked a heated debate about the role of local populations in the Holocaust. Since then, many other Polish historians such as Jan Grabowski, Alina Skibinska, Barbara Engelking, and a host of others have researched different aspects of the Holocaust, as well. The Jedwabne debates that are taking place in Poland show that in fact, as Joanna Michlic put it “a victim can be a cruel victimizer at the same time,”¹⁸ while “Poles were themselves victimized under both Soviet and German occupation.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Dumitru Dumitru, “V labirinte politizatsii”, *Холокост і сучасність. Студії в Україні і світі. № 1 (3) 2008*, http://www.holocaust.kiev.ua/news/jurnal_nodostup/Dumitru.pdf2011.

¹⁷ Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Conflicting Holocaust Narratives in Moldovan Nationalist Historical Discourse”, *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 38, No.2, p. 212.

¹⁸ Joanna Michlic, *Coming to Terms with the “Dark Past”: The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 2002), p.2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Yet, many other countries in the region are still in what Michlic characterizes as the first “ethno-nationalistic” phase, marked by serious difficulties initiating a public discourse about to the fate of the Jews. In Moldova, for instance, there is continued denial of the nation’s role in the Holocaust, where, as noted, two types of denial are prevalent: deflective and selective. In fact, Moldova’s problems are two-fold. First, there is an unwillingness to discuss Romanian responsibility for the extermination of the Jews, since the Romanians are considered “brothers” with whom the majority of Moldovans share an ethnic identity. This unwillingness is paradoxical, since the Romanians themselves have published the findings of research conducted elsewhere on the Holocaust in Romania, brought to the fore by the Elie Wiesel Commission. Secondly, there is complete silence and lack of knowledge of the local Moldovan population’s involvement in the Holocaust. Thus, in addition to the difficulties of acknowledging Romanian involvement, contemporary Moldovans still need to come to grips with local Moldovan culpability.

According to Vladimir Solonari, most post-Soviet Moldovan historians of the pan-Romanian school such as Anatol Petrencu copied the Romanian nationalist historiographical tradition. They attempted to shed all Soviet ideological motifs and turned instead toward the patriotic past. They look to Romania for the formation of a new national identity and national symbols, including Ion Antonescu, who for many, still remains a leading pan-Romanian icon of patriotism.²⁰

“Apologetics for Antonescu is an important part of the Second World War narrative from the contemporary pan-Romanian historical perspective,” writes historian Dmitry Tartakovsky.²¹ This patriotic past presents the Romanian nation as the victim of Bolshevism and the Jews as the main perpetrators – a typical mixture of deflective and selective negation. A central argument, one deeply rooted in pan-Romanian public discourse in Moldova, is the firm belief that the Jews were communists and welcomed the invading Red Army. In addition to this inverse victimhood narrative, the image of the Jews as communists and traitors is widespread in both Moldova and Romania. After Moldova gained independence, most leading local

²⁰Vladimir Solonari, "From Silence to Justification?: Moldovan Historians on the Holocaust of Bessarabian and Transnistrian Jews", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2002.

²¹ Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Conflicting Holocaust Narratives in Moldovan Nationalist Historical Discourse”, *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 38, No.2, p. 220.

historians such as Anatol Petrencu, Veceaslav Stavila, Anatolie Moraru, and many others adopted a pan-Romanian identity and immediately began to focus on these motifs in their writings. Alleged Jewish disloyalty to the Romanian state and their loyalty to the Soviets were emphasized in their work.²²

A blatant example of this trend is the French writer of Moldovan descent Paul Goma. In 2002, he published a book, *Saptamana Rosie* (Red Week), which focuses on the Soviet occupation and accuses the Jewish population of aiding and abetting the occupation. The book is an example of deflective Holocaust denial, as it blames the Jews themselves for the Holocaust by accusing them of supporting the Bolshevik regime. The theses presented in the book were greeted enthusiastically by Right-wing pro-Romanian politicians, media and members of the intelligentsia. In Moldova the work was republished by one of the largest Right-wing newspapers *Timpul* (Time) – a media channel known for its nationalistic pro-Romanian stance which has close ties to the Romanian government. Then in 2005, Goma’s work was republished and distributed among some schools in Moldova by a Right-wing politician. At the same time, the book was harshly criticized by the Jewish community, other minorities, politicians on the Left and Center-Left, and a very small group of Moldovan intellectuals, for instance Viorel Mihail and his weekly *Saptamana*. As Dmitry Tartakovsky stresses, for the sake of a national myth grounded in a Romanian victimization narrative, pan-Romanian historians “de-emphasize and rationalize the Holocaust.” Simultaneously they stress the communist repressive past while seeking “to recover the interwar years as a ‘Golden Age’ of Romanian national freedom and greatness to which Moldova and Moldovans clearly belong,” Tartakovsky argues.²³

The interwar period is quite important for the general understanding of pan-Romanian nationalism today. As Dmitry Tartakovsky writes,

“Perspectives that challenge this nationalist paradigm, such as that interwar Romania was a problematic era marked by growing antisemitism, national chauvinism, violence, corruption, economic mismanagement, and destruction of civil liberties, are

²² Ibid.

²³ Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Conflicting Holocaust Narratives in Moldovan Nationalist Historical Discourse”, *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 38, No.2, p. 221.

not welcome by many historians seeking to construct a patriotically usable past. Contradicting narratives are actively silenced by patriotic historiography in Moldova.”²⁴

It is not surprising that most of Bessarabian inhabitants, not only minorities, including Jews, were against the Romanization policy and many, indeed, supported the Red Army. Michlic points out that the myth of “Judeo-communism” appeared in all Eastern European states after the collapse of communism – the Baltic states, Hungary, Romania, Poland, and Ukraine. Up until today, it has been a central component in the ideology of many Right-wing politicians, journalists and historians.²⁵ Its main objective is to justify crimes against Jews during the Holocaust and afterward, and play down their scope, while strengthening or amplifying the nation’s martyrdom during the war and under communism. It can be called a deflective denial, where the guilt is transferred to Jews themselves. It seems that the myth of “Judeo-communism” is widespread in both Poland and Moldova and is still a driving force behind contemporary antisemitism.

The Jedwabne debate is a reflection of the process of democratization in Poland. Since Gross's book was published, and an earlier documentary by Agnieszka Arnold under the same title was aired on Polish television, the debate about Polish-Jewish relations in the context of the Holocaust has been reactivated. It was originally initiated by Jan Blonski in 1987, in an essay he penned entitled “Poor Poles look at the ghetto,” published in the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. To a certain extent the general atmosphere was compared by some to the situation in Germany after publication in 1996 of Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*²⁶ (which argued that ordinary Germans participated in the Holocaust willingly for antisemitic reasons grounded in German national identity).²⁷

²⁴ Ibid, p.211.

²⁵ Joanna Michlic (2012), “Przerwane milczenie. O pamięci Zagłady w postkomunistycznej Europie”, *Znak*, 2012, p.28.

²⁶ Laurence Weinbaum, *The Struggle for Memory in Poland: Auschwitz, Jedwabne and Beyond* (Jerusalem: WJC Policy Study: 2004), p. 7.

²⁷ It was already after the first wave of debates took part in West Germany known as “The Historikerstreit” (the historians’ dispute) in the end of 1980s. In the core of the debate was a conflict between such right-wing historians as Ernest Nolte who equalized the Nazi and the Soviet regimes and left-wing intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas who insisted that by equalizing both regimes Nolte wants to trivialize the Nazi regime and the

Although the Polish debates were more intense, nobody questions the German role in the Holocaust in these debates.²⁸ The Polish version of Gross's *Neighbours*, which was published in 2000 by the Pogranicze (Borderland) Foundation, provoked the same kind of broad debates sparked by its English-language version, published by Princeton University Press in 2001. As soon as it touched the national identity of Poles, the reaction was immediate. The work not only concerned how Poles perceived themselves, but also the representation and reputation of Poland abroad. Nevertheless, the inconvenient truths about Polish behavior toward the Jews during the Holocaust were accepted – relatively-speaking, including on an official political level – as illustrated by the apologies of president Alexander Kwasniewski made during the 60th anniversary commemorating the Jedwabne pogrom, and were later reiterated in 2011 by the presiding president Bronislaw Komorowski.²⁹ Intellectual circles, which included the leading dailies *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, accepted Gross's book and expressed the view that such research was necessary to gain a more complex picture of the war, after decades of silence and stifling the debate.

Such reactions demonstrate that Polish elites are capable of accepting their country's difficult past, and the role of elites in raising such issues should not be underestimated. They can play both a positive and a negative role. Moldova, however, has not advanced much in this direction since 1989, perhaps a reflection of the weakness of the Moldovan intellectual and political elites, arguably with the exception of former president Vladimir Voronin. The 2007 report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that the Commission had “learn[ed] that the President of the Republic has participated in several events commemorating the victims of the Holocaust in Moldova and has condemned

Holocaust. The public opinion was more on a side of Habermas and his supporters by the end of these debates which lasted for some years 1986-1989. Today Deborah Lipstadt often refers to Ernest Nolte's position as an example of Holocaust trivialization or soft core denial.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹“Komorowski: Jeszcze raz proszę o przebaczenie”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 July 2011, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9921194,Komorowski__Jeszcze_raz_prosze_o_przebaczenie.html.

antisemitism at such occasions.”³⁰ While this is a step in the right direction, it does not reflect popular attitudes or any general trend in Moldova.

Additional Remarks and Conclusion

For both Poland and Moldova, the Holocaust is closely linked to their national identity, and with the fall of communism in 1989, both countries have undergone a process of reconstructing their national identities, shifting from a communist to a patriotic-ethnic narrative. As Annamaria Orla-Bukowska writes, post-communist countries needed to “re-activate their identities”.³¹ The communist state has been replaced by the nation and this, she writes, gives people “stability and togetherness”.³² The current stage of the debate about the Second World War and Polish-Jewish relations in this context, says Orla-Bukowska, have created a situation whereby Poles must “question and deconstruct” their post-communist national identity. The main challenge for them is to incorporate the Jewish minority’s memory narratives into their inclusive identity.³³ Certainly the process of accepting awkward-problematic narratives is not easy, but as Vladimir Solonari says in the context of Moldova “without coming to grips with [the Holocaust], Moldovans will never be able to construct their multidimensional democratic identity.”³⁴ The same can be said to hold true for Poles, as well.

Poland witnessed different historical periods when its territories were divided, occupied, and belonged to different empires. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska writes that as a consequence “...Polish identity in the nineteenth century developed along ethno-cultural and blood lines instead of along civic and territorial lines. Instead of separation of church and state, religion was the sole consistent carrier of the national ethos for the divided people, who thereafter

³⁰ Third report on Moldova, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2007, http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country_approach/moldova/Moldova%20Third%20report.pdf.

³¹ Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, “New threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland” in R.N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner, C. Fugo (ed.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, (Durham-London: 2006), p.201.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vladimir Solonari, “From Silence to Justification?: Moldovan Historians on the Holocaust of Bessarabian and Transnistrian Jews”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2002, p.436.

fought with the church against the state.”³⁵ In this context, the designation “Poles” includes only Catholic ethnic Poles and the perception of the Holocaust can be seen through this prism. As Rafal Pankowski writes, in Poland “the nationalist principle has expressed itself most often in the form of ethno-nationalism, where ethnic bonds of shared ancestry take priority over civic affiliations. The civic nationalism of Józef Piłsudski was, arguably, an exception to this rule [...] any broader popular awareness of that multi-cultural aspect of the Polish national tradition is largely a thing of the past.”³⁶

In Moldova, the essential elements of the national identity are more elusive. Dmitry Tartakovsky writes that identity is “for many Moldovans today a subject of tangled debate to a greater extent than for most other peoples of Eastern and Central Europe.”³⁷ Charles King goes so far as to claim that Moldova is the only European country where the key existence of a separate identity is still questioned.³⁸ In fact, in Moldova there are several models of interacting and sometimes competing identities, and there is a strong division in approaches and understanding of the Holocaust in this context. Among the identity models there are three main (ideal) types – pan-Romanian, pan-Soviet and the Moldovenist identity.³⁹ The pan-Romanian version of the national identity is strongest in the academic and educational realm, therefore it is the main narrative in discussion about the Holocaust in Moldova. The subject “History of Romanians” – that is, the history of an ethnic group, was introduced into Moldovan school and universities in the early 1990s. An attempt of a later Left-wing government to change the focus of the curriculum to teach the history of the country – that is, the history of Moldova, was unsuccessful, although according to a recent opinion, 64 percent

³⁵ Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, “New threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland” in R.N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner, C. Fugo (ed.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, (Durham-London: 2006), p.179.

³⁶ Rafal Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*, (Routledge: 2011), p.3.

³⁷ Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Conflicting Holocaust Narratives in Moldovan Nationalist Historical Discourse,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 38, No.2, p.212.

³⁸ Charles King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, (Hoover Institution Press: 2000), p.229.

³⁹ Natalia Sineaeva-Pankowska, “Multiple Identities as a Basis for Construction of (Post)Modern Moldovan Identity”, in J.Burbick, W.Glass (ed.), *Beyond Imagined Uniqueness. Nationalisms in Contemporary Perspective*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2010),p.269.

of Moldovans think that the correct coursework in schools should be the history of Moldova, compared to only 15 percent who support studying the history of Romanians.⁴⁰

The pan-Romanian narrative clashes with Soviet and Moldovan narratives which are less influential than the pan-Romanian one. Nonetheless, Soviet identity is still strong in Moldova and with regards to the Holocaust it has more adherents among minorities. The Victory memorial and Jassy-Kishinev operation are very significant points of reference for minorities, but also for the majority of ethnic Moldovans. The annual Victory Day on 9 May is still an important holiday, although it is not celebrated on the same scale as in the Soviet era. From the perspective of pan-Romanian identity, Moldova was the victim of the Nazis and the Soviets during the Second World War. Here Antonescu is the main hero, while Jews are considered as the primary allies of the Bolsheviks. The last narrative in some ways is similar to the Polish one, which also presents Poland as a victim of two totalitarian regimes. In both the Polish and Moldovan cases, identification as victim is strong, however in the case of Moldova there is also a tendency to justify the actions of the pro-Nazi war criminal Antonescu. Interestingly enough, all these tendencies and different narratives somehow coexist in Moldova.

A common European identity is another factor influencing Holocaust debates. Poland became a member of the European Union in 2005, and since the Holocaust is part of European memory and identity, the strengthening of ties with Europe has made Poland more open to debate and reflection on the nation's own role during the Holocaust – more than Moldova, which is not a member of the European Union. Since Moldovan identity is still in the process of crystallizing itself, it is more difficult for the country to accept its tragic past and allow minority narratives as a part of the Moldovan collective memory. Should Moldova also join the European Union in the future, the same forces that encourage openness and inclusiveness and complexity can enhance the possibilities that minority narratives will grow and gain legitimacy as part of the national narrative, opening the door for Moldova as well to embark on reworking the nation's past with a critical eye.

⁴⁰ Barometer of Public Opinion issued by the Institute for Public Policy in Moldova, April 2012, <http://www.ipp.md/lib.php?l=en&idc=156>.

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