

CULTURAL STEREOTYPES IN THE PRESS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: NATIONAL REALITIES AND EUROPEAN DESIRABILITY

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the ethnic and cultural stereotypes used in Moldova mass media regarding the Russian and European Union. The paper generalizes and classifies the problems and difficulties connected with nowadays interethnic and intercultural communication in Moldova Republic.

Keywords: *East European, Mass media, Interethnic Communications.*

The press has the role of monitoring and drawing attention on the risks of communication in society. The balance of the intercultural dialogue is a clue in the balance of the serious mishaps in communication. The press could bridge over or amplify the discrepancies in solving the intercultural communication problems. The democratic process in every country includes the analysis and knowledge of the role of mass media to inform the public and the way the communication is achieved. The press as well as the society goes through transition and transformation periods. The national theme is a problem in which politics and various interests, and mentalities are reflected. A brief analysis of the subject is just one side of the coin of the intercultural communication in a society in transition, like the one of the Republic of Moldova.

The main purpose of communication is the identification of the cultural-ethnic images from the mass media of the Republic of Moldova. Considering as a study material the articles from January 2013 to August 2013 in the papers "*The Time*", "*The Journal of Chisinau*", "*Literature and Art*", "*Grenada*", "*Puls*" we are going to undergo a content analysis, identifying articles (unity of analysis) in which the key words that appear are: Russia, Republic of Moldova, The European Union, mental images (unity of content),

whatever the type of communication (article, editorial, news, feature report, interview). The identification of terms was achieved using the content of the articles. In the 70's, the papers "*Pravda*" (translation "The Truth"), "*Izvestia*" (translation "The News"), and the republican papers used to mirror only in the superlative the interethnic relationships and realities from the USSR. The most frequent words were "mir" (Russian for "peace"), "drujba" (Russian for "friendship"), the energetic system and the gasoline conduct called "Brratsvo" (Russian for "brotherhood"). In the feature reports from the papers there were posted activities of the friendship groups of people, international meetings, lessons, exhibitions. Here are some samples of the statements frequently used in the papers at the time: "In the Republic many extensive social-political steps are taken which contribute to the great work of founding the unshaken friendship between the Moldovan people and the other peoples from the Soviet Country, especially the Russian people". In the papers of the time there is mentioned the solemn celebration of the anniversary of 160 years of the liberation of Basarabia from the yoke of the Turkish feudals and its union with Russia. The solemn materials are printed in capitals in the press. The title of the reports: "In the brotherly family of soviet people for the victory of communism".

Below there is a significant fragment, a speech of the prime secretary of the Communist Party of the RSS Moldova, Mr. I.I. Bodiul:

"The working people of the RSS Moldova entrust the dear Communist Party that they will be loyal to the holy flag of the Great October, the international proletariat and we will defend with

holiness the great friendship of the soviet people”.

The mass media system of the time was functioning according to a unique model, and its characteristics were the mobilization, indoctrination, propaganda and persuasion. The language was an instrument to maintain the totalitarian power and its main characteristic was the transformation in a system of ritual signs which replace the reality with a pseudo-reality.

The '90s of the last century have changed the outlook on the problems of the interethnic relations. On the pages of the papers *“Orizontul”* (Romanian for “Horizon”), *“Nistru”* and the republican papers there are published synthesis articles regarding the lack of schools with Romanian teaching language in the cities of the Republic of Moldova and the necessity of turning the Moldovan Language into the state language. The press of the time has contributed to the fulfillment of the objectives of the national movement and the obtaining of the political independence of the Republic of Moldova.

Starting with the year 2000, the theme of the articles changes. According to the analysis of M. Guzun, there were three major themes which were present in the press: the Moldovan thematic, the Romanian-Moldovan relationships and the national idea. The language of these themes is radically changed. The most significant examples are presented: *This “local patriotism” is sustained today with treachery by the ones who were stigmatizing it yesterday as nationalism, and which today consists of, as it is many times stated now, “our national Romanian specific”, from which we have to get rid of like of a curse* (Silviu Berejan *“The Unity of the Romanian People”*, *“Moldova Suverana”*, 21st of March, 2001).

“It is regrettable that, being overwhelmed by the avalanche of electoral political-party problems, Mr. Adrian Nastase overlooks with provocative ease the fact that the Republic of Moldova is a sovereign and independent state.” (from the declaration of the Prime-Minister of the Republic of Moldova – Vasile Tarlev, *“Moldova Suverana”*, 29 January 2002).

The debates of these themes have continued in the next years as well. The problems of identity are analyzed in the paper *“The Time”*, but treated by specialists. O. Ticu for example is writing

about the imperialistic models of creation of fake identities. A part of the national press tried to fulfill a noble function of mobilization in the service of the national state. A specific characteristic of the press is the treating in contrast of the same event. Such examples are the tragic death of a young man from the Transnistrian Region, shot by the Russian peace forces and the wounded citizen at the Romanian border by a Romanian frontier officer.

“The criminal actions of the frontier police cannot be justified by anything”, the paper *“The Communist”* used to write regarding the accident from the Romanian-Moldovan frontier (20. 1. 2013). And when the young man from the Parata village (Transnistria region) was murdered the same paper was quoting: *“Let’s not resort to actions and declarations that could complicate the process of conflict solutions”*. On the Transnistrian incident the paper *“The Journal of Chisinau”* was writing *“Why did Russia shoot Vadim Pisari?”* (03/02/2013).

Another theme in the media is the historical theme. The writers in the newspapers of Romanian expression write about the approaches of the historical processes in the Russian press. So, for example, *“The Disappearance of the Moldova State”*, *“The year 1812, the anti-Romanian Hysteria and the Russian Language Press”* in the newspaper *“Timpul”* analyzes the approaches of the Chisinau historians regarding the history of Moldova. An article from Nicolae Negru: *In Russia there are reintroduced the imperialistic myths, which have as purpose the taking over of the former soviet republics*.

The Victory day, the 9th of May 2013, is an opportunity for several publicists from the Republic of Moldova.

“Last year, at the Brandenburg gate from Berlin, I saw a Russian with the chest full of medals as a winner over the Germans in the Second World War, who was singing, accompanied by a harmonica, “Katiusha”, “Siniplatocek” and who after each song didn’t forget to shout in Russian “Podaite, bogaradi, uceastnikuvoini” (“Please have mercy, in the name of God, on a war participant”). He was begging from the ones that had lost and they were giving him alms.

You are amazed to discover that the Berlin of today is speaking Russian: the Russians have invaded the capital of Germany. Some of them beg, but most of

them have bought houses, have companies and the publication "Russkaia Germania" ("Russian Germany") has a number of copies like "Pravda" from Moscow, thousands of printed copies.

If you see how the Germans live in Germany and how the Russians live in Russia, you realize that it was not the Germans who lost the war, but the Russians. And then you wonder: what is better, to win or to beg."

This is how the concert in the Great National Assembly Square is treated by the publicist and writer Ulius Popa:

"In the time of Putin, the patriotic Russian song has become an element of imperial politics. On the 9th of May, Kobzon came to Chisinau as a protagonist in a solemn concert. The Great National Assembly Square, to the understanding of the Russians, was the Red Square of the Moldovans. I have listened to his interview. The visible discrepancy between his voice qualities and his mental faculties. You would say that you're listening to a secretary of a soviet party, tired, old aged, wrinkled like Brejnev's chums, talking about a phantom friendship between our peoples. (A while ago, his mother, Ida, had the party card with number 2, the number one party card belonged to Brejnev).

He informed us that it is not Russia that needed Moldova, but Moldova needed Russia, in the variant of its present day synonym – The Frontier Union. No matter how many unions and federations there have been and there will be, they're still called the Russian Empire. The logic of Russia is weird: it doesn't love us, but it wants to be loved. To make it simple: if Kobzon doesn't want me, why would I want him?"

The same theme, different concept – the 9th of May

"The leader of the Communist Party, Mr. Vladimir Voronin, comes here in peace. He, during his presidency in 2004 made all the efforts to build this beautiful memorial, which offers an amazing panorama. The land around it is still packed with twisted iron. Icredibly, the Red Army was capable to force this way the abrupt banks of the river Nistru.

The Russian ambassador in the Republic of Moldova, Farid Mukhametshin talked about the common history of the two countries. "Russia and Moldova celebrate year after year and they will keep this way the basis of the mutual relations." – said Mukhametshin. The people that came to the Serpeni memorial during this holiday have attended the concert of the patriotic song. The guests have listened

to several folk groups and to the singers Geta Burlacu, Vitaly Mchunsky, Boris Koval, Marguerite Ivanush. The Bishop of Balti and Falesti held a memorial service in the honour of the heroes fallen on the territory of the Republic of Moldova."

The national reconstruction after years of vassality towards Moscow was a necessity of the press from our country. The papers have contributed in a critical way to turning to account these issues. Many publicists from RM through their polemics have supported the public in developing an ethnic culture, a national dignity, which was important after a long fight during the soviet period against the so-called nationalism.

The themes that regard the spiritual values are treated by the publicist Constantin Tănase:

"What can we, Moldovans, be proud of? Usually this question has a general answer: we are proud of the fact that we have "rich lands", that we are a "hard-working and peaceful people", that we have "a rich folklore"... We must specify though that the rich lands are not the result of our work, they are God's gift, and the issue of our hard work and peaceful character can be discussed. We are also proud of our "beautiful and sweet language", a fact about which we had better keep silent if we think of how we, Moldovans, speak the beautiful Romanian language...

I insist. When I speak about things we can be proud of, I think of the ones we have created with our mind and arms. Let's make a thinking (and memory) effort – which are those things? I want to point it out: I mean the Republic of Moldova, meaning the territory occupied by the Russians in 1812 and called Basarabia, the territory on which the soviet Russians have created "an independent (autonomous and united) republic". C. Tănase¹.

The press from Chisinau doesn't describe the identity problems of the common people. A few exceptions are the materials from the paper "Timpul": "The Iron Curtain over Nistru". The author speaks about the impossibility of buying papers from the Republic of Moldova in Tiraspol, Grigoriopol or Rabnita and we want free diffusion over the Vadullui Vodabridge.

WHERE? I will go to Russia, and there, I will not need Romanian. Some of the representatives of the national minorities from the Republic of Moldova refuse even until now to study and speak Romanian.

Others understood that in order to get a good job and integrate in the community they also need to know the language of the state they live in. They study it in schools and during the specialization courses and they say they do it as a sign of respect towards the majority of population.

The opinions of other young people are completely different. They admit that they don't know the Romanian language. And they don't even need it. "Romanian language is complicated for me, because my entire family speaks Russian. I will go to Russia and I will not need Romanian there. I have been studying Romanian since the first grade and I don't know it even now. I don't think I will ever know it, I don't need it" a young man told us." Timpul, 31 VII 2013.

Here we add that for a press which wishes to be impartial in the problem of the national facts it refers to, it is important to establish an agenda from top to bottom, the public being the one that has to play the active role and the mass media should focus more on the collection and dissemination of information, rather than on its interpretation. This is the European model of the press function.

The geopolitical theme is not neglected by the Chisinau press. Thus, for example, Vitalie Ciobanu (known writer) writes: The press is a sensitive subject also for the Vilnius Summit. Moldova hasn't signed anything with Brussels yet, there's talk about some agreements in November in Vilnius (and this only if we manage to maintain political stability), but the pro East trumpets have been mobilized, and they announce the imminence of a national disaster: small and without power as we are, we will "melt" in the European beliefs².

The author brings examples from present day political life of the state of Putin in which human rights are violated.

The polemic continues in Moldavschie vedomosti, where an inversion of accents takes place. There isn't written anything about the Russian phobia throughout our elite, but it is an irrational feeling and it is the main reason for the so-called fighters for the European integrity of Moldova. Whatever expects us in Europe, and it doesn't matter if it is waiting for us there, the important thing is to hang on to EU, in a way to anchor on to the EU. Just not to be under Russia.

The Russian image in Moldova is created in complex terms and differs from paper to paper. Timpul writes: *"The Republic of Moldova is full of Russian agents. In Chisinau Russia is present everywhere: in the air, water, press, street, in palaces and cottages"*, says the editorialist C. Tanase.

The author informs on the fact that the Chisinau government doesn't protect the national security: *"The leaders of the alliance are so obsessed with the fight for power that they don't even notice that while they are trashing each other, Moldova is becoming again a Russian gubernia."* comments the author. He remembers in this context the recent declaration of the Russian foreign affairs minister Serghei Lavrov who stated that Transnistria will not adhere to NATO, threatening with the radical change of the Transnistrian Issue. Tanase remarks the fact that no official reaction followed from Chisinau.

The Pro-eastern propagandists who invade our talk shows speak to us about our "common orthodox identity", but they are not saying anything about the lack of civic rights in Russia, about the justice simulacrum under Putin's regime. They don't talk, for example, about the tragedy of the advocate Magnitski, who tried to signal the Russian authorities a huge fraud from the public wealth made by the high placed dignitaries and died in prison as a result of his torture – a case of international resonance. We don't hear from the "missionaries" of the Euro-Asian Union anything about the escape of the intellectuals persecuted by Putin. Kasparov, the well-known economist, Gureev, but the famous journalist Pozner, the one that tried to obtain a privileged treatment against a more reasonable attitude towards Kremlin was writing recently on his blog that he is tired of sharing his home with "monkeys" (he was referring to the wave of xenophobia and intolerance, encouraged by the authorities) and that he was considering leaving Russia as well. We never find out anything from the propaganda about the reprisals towards Navalnii. This leader of Russian opposition and known fighter against corruption was arrested right in the court room in Kirov, where he was charged with assumed economic unlawfulness. The judges condemned him to five years of prison but he was released the second day after some spontaneous protests in Moscow which gathered 20 thousand people. It is not known how much time Navalnii will remain free and whether he will be allowed to take part in the elections after he

has been elected as a candidate for the Moscow city hall. I think that when they weigh their options, our politicians, the ones who made it in business (and most of them would prefer not to be asked how they earned their millions) should think of the fate of the generations of tomorrow, their children who will inherit them. Because you gather wealth and fill your bank accounts and build houses and buy expensive cars in vain if some dictator can confiscate them, suspicious that you do not show enough loyalty. You will live in fear and you will have to sleep with the refugee bag by the bed like the people hunted by NKVD used to do it in the 50s. We know that economically we are tied to Russia, like the slave is tied to the wall, but not everything is about markets for Russians and methane gas, there's also talk about... values. We have to choose between two worlds, two civilizations: one that offers the nation development, perspective and equal chances as individuals, and another in which the citizen is subject to "high state interest".

Three million Moldovans ruled by a Russian. Until when?(Vox Report, September 8, 2013, about the visit of the Kiril Patriarch in Moldova.

What positions does Russia take in different world classifications? The Russian web site with Social-Economic profile exrus.eu makes public a list of ratings which shocks.

1st place in the world as mortality rate. During the last 8 years the Russian population has decreased by 2.2 million, reaching 142,905,200 people. 800 thousand people die daily.

1st place in Europe as suicide rate among children and teenagers, and 6th place in the world as suicide cases of adults.

1st place in the world according to divorce rate.

1st place in the world according to the number of abandoned children.

1st place in the world according to the number of teenagers who die as a result of cardio-vascular accidents.

1st place in the world according to the number of oncologic diseases.

In the papers of Chisinau, the cultural images are present from the political angle. Russia is treated as an uneducated state, aggressive and intolerant.

Thus, the most frequent stereotypes regarding Russia are: absence of democracy, tendency towards political imperialism and reconquering

of the former soviet republics, the presence and the large power of the secret services, low living conditions and wealth, exaggerated alcohol consumption, a country which fights against western values, a country where the idea of civilized life is absent.

Another type of reality interpretation is offered by the communist and Russian expression press. In the Russian speaking press Romania is diabolized. Here are some examples:

"The Romanian president visited Moldova to threat with occidental weapons." Moldovan communists criticize Basescu: he gives directives to the Chisinau government.

The party contests the agreement of military cooperation with Romania, the communists celebrate "the liberation of Moldova from the Romanian occupation". Voronin "Romanian language never existed; Romanians took over the Moldovan language".

In the Russian press the process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova and the negotiations regarding the Association Agreement for the Free Commerce Zone of the EU, the participation to the program FP7 and the liberalization of the visa regime in EU is deliberately highjacked, which is in agreement with the Russian plans of sabotaging the process of European integration of Moldova, even though this fact was not openly declared.

The themes more present are "the EU is corrupt", "the EU is weak", "external politics of the EU is at fault", "the EU is divided", "the EU is poor". During 2013 there have also been alternative themes such as: "EU will never accept the integration of the Republic of Moldova", "the EU is not attractive for the population of Moldova", "the EU cannot solve the Transnistrian conflict", "the EU products lack quality", "the EU will not accept Ukraine's integration" and "the EU is not attractive for the Ukrainian population". There takes place the defragmentation of the EU image, especially through the analysis and opinion articles in which we identify stereotypical formulations either through interviews with Communist officials or through analysis made by politicians and opinion leaders.

In conclusion, we can state that the EU has a rather negative presence in mass media as a

result of a consistent number of articles according to the "anti-european themes", reaching a number of 7 to 10 (7 articles agree with anti-european themes out of 10). What needs to be highlighted is the volume of articles dedicated to the European Union. Even though the EU is a constant presence in the press, it doesn't enjoy a positive image. The content analysis related to the quantitative and qualitative dimension of the text information. There can be noticed rather frequent articles which remind of the Eurozone weakness: "The Eurozone could disintegrate as well and the Ruble zone from CSI in the beginning of the '90 if the ECB does not reestablish the discipline and does not limit the national banks' right to issue the euro." The external politics of the EU is also to blame. In general, the image of the EU is that of a weak institution, inefficient and divided, which has its own economic interests in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

Another theme in the communist papers is the EU's inability to solve the Transnistrian conflict. Transnistria has already established multilateral connections with the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and other ex-soviet states. This is one of the reasons why the external politics is oriented towards the Euro-Asia. "Chisinau is openly oriented towards the EU, but the statement of the Western partners that without Transnistria (or at least without the final solution of the conflict) the Republic of Moldova has nothing to do in the EU, is assumed by the officials from Chisinau. Unlike Tiraspol, which considers the Russian project of integration into EuroAsia as national politics, Chisinau will not turn away from its path not now and not ever." (Nika Press, 2013)

There are also many articles regarding the lack of technical abilities of the EU to solve the "frozen" Transnistrian conflict: "The fourth round of negotiations regarding the settlement of the moldo-transnistrian conflict in the format 5+2 after one year break hasn't brought anything sensational. Thus, the insistence of the Moldovan parties regarding the discussions in Vienna, concerning the problems in the area, and first of all, the future status of Transnistria have failed from the very beginning".

Another theme to be taken into consideration is the one of the lack of perspective for the

adherence of the Republic of Moldova to the EU, thus "in order to reach the European Union you must have a certain level of development, which is difficult. The European Union is an elite club and there are enough members which need economic assistance. There you have to meet certain standards and not be labeled as a pariah. In the Border Union you are accepted the way you are with all your vices and sins, like the wandering son, in spite of the politic mafia, corruption, inflation and other shortcomings". In each one of these sources there is a share of neutral references towards the EU (about 50 percent from the whole). Still, this doesn't change the tendency to criticize Europe from the side of the Russian expression press. To this, there is added a number of articles with skeptical references regarding the activity of the Republic of Moldova for the EU on one hand, and the attractiveness of the EU for the population of the Republic of Moldova, on the other hand. The same message we can encounter in Ukraine, where many opinion polls are taken out of context and reinterpreted, polls regarding the euro-skepticism, the optimism of the people of the two states.

In the Russian language press words like *eurobeasts*, *fiasco*, *bluff* are again and again used. The accidents that take place in Romania are described in detail. The massive media presence of Russia is obvious and it shapes the politic mentality of the population and its options. Our examples prove that the press is a platform of communication for the ethnic groups with politic purposes: The Communist, Pulse, Grenada. At the moment an informational war is taking place, in which the Russian press attacks are harder and more argued, compared to the Romanian press where the stress is more sentimental and lyrical. Of course the press doesn't contribute to the harmonization of the inter-ethnic relations and the creation of cultural stereotypes which would improve the state of communication from the Republic of Moldova. The citizenship spirit, trust, understanding and tolerance are civic values necessary for democracy and the press that contributes to the promotion of these elements is a positive factor in the evolution of the social progress. The mass media which serves the

geo-politic interests of Russia, the case of certain publications from the Republic of Moldova, reports the facts in a dogmatic and party-principled manner. The opinion exchange is often insulting and intolerant.

The Mass media has transmitted to the mass images, information and slogans to develop the national dignity- the papers: *Literature and Art*, *Journal of Chisinau*, *Time*, and in other cases to create negative images regarding other states. Still, debates regarding the inter-ethnic theme express a multitude of approaches. This multitude is politically motivated and it is treated as a result of cultural traditions of the ethnic groups and various social groups' interests. Points of view are often absolutely opposite, but they are a reflection of the society, of the polarization and the symbolic representations specific to the groups of the Republic of Moldova.

The press has reflected the way of thinking and feeling, has mirrored the obscure instincts as well and non-understandable tendencies. Characteristic to the press is the "we versus them" mentality, cynicism and cruelty. The ethnic particularities have become more relevant, because they are the result of suspicion and fear. Realizing that the societies change, Karl Erik Rosengren stated that mass media either mirrors the society and becomes the agent of social change, affects the world and is affected by society, or doesn't affect society at all. Our mass media has urged the society.

The mass media in the Republic of Moldova is partisan, the media elites are integrated in the politic elites. The journalistic ethics is not respected. Readers don't really find pluralistic debates in the papers, as these usually defend one idea. The press is clearly split in two camps: the press which supports the national idea and the European one and the press which represents dominantly the idea of a union with Russia. The messages from the press are not balanced and are often transmitted in the favor or against the opponents.

Another conclusion is the one relating to the analysis of the press which is in a competition for attention, feelings and minds of the citizens and the national vibe is the most sensitive one you can play with, that is why it becomes first

line when a major politic issue appears, like the Euro-integration.

For the press of Moldova the balanced analysis and complete information, in a correct and truthful manner obtained from a source which is non-distorted by the judgement and opinions of the journalists is not a function. Demagogy, bias and even hate is present in the information, articles and opinions (see articles from the publication Grenada).

The media cannot play an active role in society because the majority of the citizens lack the possibility to participate in the life of society; they lack time, energy, interest, don't trust the government, don't have visions and are often intolerant with different opinions. The western mass media approaches the phenomenon from the factual point of view. The Moldovan press is just a channel of mediation of the political elites that speak to the public. In democracy, the mass media agenda has to combine itself and inter-relate with the public agenda, what the public wants and perceives and believes, and the politic agenda which is implemented by the ones in power or what is established by the ones who want to be in power in order to form the society agenda. We lack this phenomenon.

The mass media has contributed to the opinion forming process, sometimes shaped the public opinion but it has not contributed to an efficient inter-cultural dialogue

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