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Moldova: The Holocaust as Political Pawn

The Awkward Treatment of Jewish Heritage

Moldova is having a hard time in finding an appropriate way to acknowledge the Jewish heritage of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria. It is even more difficult to enshrine the remembrance of the victims of the Shoah in the country's collective memory, as an analysis of school books shows. Commemoration of the Holocaust has become a political pawn in a dispute over history and the politics of identity. Politicians and historians are arguing over "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism". Behind this is a struggle over Moldova's political orientation. Reviving Jewish community life seems easier than working through the past and remembrance.

The Jewish community in Moldova goes back centuries. It has gone through phases of remarkable growth and phases of horrific destruction. This tiny patch of land, which is known today as the Republic of Moldova, has repeatedly changed hands during its history. Its inhabitants have been forced to meet the demands of various regimes, languages, and ideologies. Throughout the vicissitudes of history, several periods and events have left a deep mark on the collective memory of the Jews living in this territory: the tsarist period (remembered in particular for the infamous pogrom of 1903); the ambiguous and fragile position of the Jews in interwar Romania; the horror of the Holocaust; discrimination and emigration in the Soviet period after the Second World War; and, finally, the struggle to revive Jewish society in independent Moldova.

The post-Soviet period brought newly acquired freedoms and numerous challenges. In the early 1990s, a rebirth of Jewish public life took place. But at the same time, Jews saw a revival of an antisemitism rooted in the nationalism of the interwar period. Moldovan Jews also soon found themselves caught up in the ethno-political struggle between the Russian-speaking and the Romanian-speaking population. The country's first post-Soviet governments pledged to integrate the country's ethnic minorities, including Jews, into Moldovan society. However, during this period, leading members of the Jewish community complained that local authorities played down antisemitic incidents as "petty hooliganism" or "common vandalism". In addition, the government's repeated promises to support the revival of Jewish culture and to set aside buildings for synagogues were not kept – supposedly due to financial constraints.

The ethnic tensions of the 1990s – which escalated into a war in the break-away region of Transnistria – subsided over the course of the decade (albeit without bringing

a solution to the Transnistria conflict).¹ The social situation improved as well. Despite all of the problems that Moldova has faced, the Jewish community has developed into a vibrant society with close ties to Moldovan Jews living in Israel and the United States. At the same time, antisemitic incidents still take place, although there are at present no Moldovan political parties or periodicals that espouse antisemitic views.

History in the Struggle between Government and Intellectuals

Since the Communist Party came to power in 2001, greater emphasis has been put on legislation to protect minorities. The authorities have also paid much more attention to building monuments at sites where the Holocaust took place and to looking after the victims. With financial contributions from Jewish organizations and associations of Holocaust survivors as well as support from local administrations, monuments have been erected in Chişinău, Tighina, Orhei, Bălţi, Soroca, Tiraspol, and Rîbniţa. Nonetheless, the Holocaust, as an event that occurred on Moldovan soil, remains a controversial topic in Moldovan society. This is in essence the only issue where tensions between Jews and non-Jews surface.

Many historians debate whether the use of the term “Holocaust” is appropriate to describe the events that took place in Moldova under Romanian occupation (1941–1944). It is important to note that these historians do not deny the persecution of the Jews. However, they oppose the use of the term “Holocaust”, first, because the Holocaust, in their view, stands for the racial policies of the German National Socialists and their destruction of the Jews in gas chambers and crematoriums, and second, because they consider the repression of the Jews in Bessarabia not as the result of racial policy, but as a socially and politically motivated act of revenge caused by the collaboration of the Jews with the Bolsheviks.² Many experts reject these arguments as downplaying the Holocaust in Moldova, whereas others see them as outright denial of the Holocaust.

Under Soviet rule, the destruction of the Jews was one of the topics deliberately ignored by official historiography. The Soviet Union had the second largest prewar Jewish population in the world, and more than one quarter of the Jews killed in the Holocaust perished on Soviet territory.³ Nonetheless, the Soviet leadership decided not to consider the Holocaust a unique phenomenon, but to treat it as part of a broader campaign of murder against the “Soviet civilian population” (*sovetskoe grazhdanskoe naselenie*) or the “peaceful population” (*mirnoe naselenie*), which consisted of various nationalities.⁴ As a result, few Soviet authors wrote about the Nazis’ anti-Jewish

¹ On Transnistria, see Klemens Büscher, “Seperatismus in Transnistrien. Die PMR zwischen Rußland und Moldova”, *OSTEUROPA* 9/1996, pp. 860–875; Wim van Meurs, “Eingefrorene Konflikte. Wie weiter mit den Quasistaaten?” *Minderheiten in Osteuropa. Ansprüche, Rechte, Konflikte* [= *OSTEUROPA* 11/2007], pp. 111–120.

² Gheorge Marinescu, “Afacerea ‘Holocaustul evreiesc în Moldova.’ Toate episoadele”, 16 June 2005, <www.mdn.md/historical.php?rubr=1243>.

³ Mordechai Altshuler, ed., *Distribution of the Jewish Population of the USSR, 1939* (Jerusalem 1993), p. 5; Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington 1997), p. 14.

⁴ The term was almost never used by Soviet historiography. The terms used were “annihilation”, “destruction”, or “mass murder”. All were used in reference to “Soviet civilian population” or “peaceful population”.

policy and the murder of large parts of the Jewish population.⁵ And, as consequence of this silence, a generation of Soviet citizens grew up knowing almost nothing about the Jewish catastrophe during the Second World War.⁶

Moldova is one of those territories Dîl along with Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states – where the Jewish population suffered most during the Axis occupation.⁷ Before the war, Jews accounted for 7.2 per cent of the population of Bessarabia, or 204,858 people.⁸ In Chişinău, the capital of Moldova, the percentage of Jews in 1930 reached 36.05 per cent of a total of 117,016 inhabitants.⁹ About half of Moldova's Jewish population perished during the war as a result of the Romanian authorities' policy to systematically destroy Jewish life in the territories under their control.¹⁰ Given these figures, one would think that the Holocaust would have left a deep mark on Moldovan society. One would also expect that once censorship ended this topic would have generated a great deal of interest among scholars and encouraged considerable academic research. However, very little has been done in the field of Holocaust Studies in Moldova.

During the 1990s, publications about the Holocaust were sponsored mainly by Jewish organizations.¹¹ None of these publications, however, attracted the attention of Moldovan historians, nor did they provoke general interest within society. The sole exception was an article by Izeaslav Levit on the Chişinău ghetto.¹² The only comprehensive work on the Shoah in Bessarabia to be published in Moldova is Sergiu Nazaria's 2005 monograph.¹³ This book was a success on several levels. It was encouraging that for the first

⁵ In 1946, Il'ia Erenburg and Vasilii Grossman published *Chernaia kniga o zlodeiskom povse-mestnom ubiistve evreev nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvachikami vo vremenno-okkupirovannykh raionakh Sovetskogo Soiuzia i v lageriakh unichtozheniia Pol'shi vo vremia voiny 1941–1945gg.*, but it was withdrawn from circulation in 1948, with most copies being subsequently destroyed. The most recent English edition is *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds. (Brunswick, NJ 2002). Evgenii Ievtushenko's poem "Babi Yar", Anatolii Rybakov's novel *Heavy Sand* and Anatolii Kuznetsov's "documentary novel" *Babii Iar* were dedicated to the fate of the Jews under German occupation.

⁶ Il'ia Al'tman, "Shoa: Gedenken verboten! Der weite Weg vom Sowjettabu zur Erinnerung", in *Kluffen der Erinnerung. Rußland und Deutschland 60 Jahre nach dem Krieg* [= OSTEU-ROPA 4–6/2005], pp. 149–164.

⁷ Naomi Kramer, Ronald Headland, *The Fallacy of Race and the Shoah* (Ottawa 1998).

⁸ Bessarabia is the historical name of the region between the rivers Dnestr and Prut as an integral part of Tsarist Russia (1812–1918) or Romania (1918–1940 and 1941–1944). The population figures are from Ezra Mendelson, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington 1983), p. 179, and the Romanian census from 29 December 1930, see Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populaţiei României din 29 decembrie 1930, Directorul recesământului general al populaţiei, 5*, Editura Institutului Central de Statistică (Bucharest 1940), p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178; *Enciclopedia României*, 2, p. 599.

¹⁰ In summer 1941, Romania took control of Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina, and Transnistria. The term Transnistria refers to the Romanian administration's designation for the territory between rivers Dnester and Southern Bug from 1941 to 1944. Today, most of this territory belongs to Ukraine. It is not to be confused with the breakaway region in the Republic of Moldova.

¹¹ Dov Doron, *Kishinevskoe getto – poslednii pogrom* (Chisinau 1993); Izeaslav Levit, *Pepel' proshlogo stuchit v nashi serdtsa* (Chisinau 1997); *idem*, "Poslednii Pogrom. Istoriia Kishinevskogo getto", in *idem*, *Kishinevskii pogrom 1903 goda* (Chisinau 1993).

¹² Levit, "Poslednii Pogrom".

¹³ Sergiu Nazaria, *Holocaust. File de istorie (pe teritoriul Moldovei și în regiunile limitrofe ale Ucrainei, 1941–1944)* (Chisinau 2005) and, in Russian, *Kholokost v Moldove* (Chisinau

time a Moldovan author, one who is not Jewish, wrote a comprehensive book about the Holocaust in Moldova and in doing so put into circulation archival materials and survivor testimonies that show the fate of the Jews in Bessarabia and Transnistria.

In addition to the debate over the historiography of the Holocaust, there is in Moldova a debate over the politics of history. The Communist government has given more attention to the Holocaust than any other previous government in Chişinău. This is in line with key elements of the Moldovan Communists' ideological platform, which contains, for one, a nationality policy that promotes minority rights and, for another, a commemoration policy that gives particular consideration to certain aspects of Soviet history such as the heroes and victims of the Second World War.

The Government Changes Course for Europe

In 2003, Moldova's Communist government undertook a spectacular turn to the West. Unsuccessful negotiations over the status of Transnistria led to a rapid deterioration of relations between Moldova and Russia. With that, the Moldovan Communist leadership made public its decision to break with its orientation towards Russia. Since then, it has been official Moldovan policy to seek integration in Western structures such as the European Union. The Moldovan government has shown more interest in co-operating with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United States, and it has signed an "Action Plan for Moldova" with the EU within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. For all these reasons, the Moldovan Communist leadership became more sensitive to Western values and to the treatment of the Holocaust.

Some officials even believed that the Holocaust could be instrumentalised in the debate with historians over Moldovan identity. Communist politicians were alarmed that history – and by extension historians – could have such a strong influence on how Moldova's citizens shape their national identity. The government therefore sought to stop any initiative or action that in its eyes promoted solidarity with a Romanian sense of identity. The government is most sensitive to the undercurrent of sympathy for the Romanians that many Moldovans feel (and that many historians cultivate) and to the Romanian government's view that there exist "two Romanian states".¹⁴ Instead, the government requires of its citizens a clear and unmistakable commitment to the Moldovan state. The government's decision to withdraw the course on *History of the Romanians* from school curricula and to introduce mandatory Russian language is revealing. Among the topoi used in this debate between the government and historians over history policy, the topic of the Holocaust proved quite useful, especially with regard to Europe.

2005). The unleashed a fierce debate in Moldova, see, for example, "Un istoric neagă că a scris 'Holocaustul în Basarabia'", *Timpul*, 29 April 2005; "Aparută recent cartea 'Holocaustul în Basarabia' este un eşec", *Flux*, 27 April 2005; Marinescu, *Afacerea 'Holocaustul evreiesc în Moldova'*.

¹⁴ On relations between Moldova and Romania, see Robert Weiner, "The Foreign Policy of the Voronin Administration", *Demokratizatsiia*, 12, 4 (Fall 2004), pp. 541–556.

After the Communist government came to power in 2001, it guaranteed instruction for Jews in Yiddish and Hebrew.¹⁵ In 2002, a resolution was passed making discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or language a punishable offence. In addition, President Vladimir Voronin occasionally condemned antisemitism in public. The law enforcement authorities also started to pay more attention to expressions of antisemitism. In 2003, a certain G. Drot'ev of Dubasari declared at a public meeting that non-Jewish pensioners had not received their pensions – they had in fact not been paid for several months – because “Jews and the Jewish authorities have pocketed everything and robbed the old people”.¹⁶ After protests from the Jewish community, the local prosecutor launched an investigation into the incident. It was decided that Drot'ev's actions were an attempt to incite ethnic hatred. Drot'ev was forced to apologize to the Jewish community.

In April 2003, the government organized an official commemoration of the 1903 pogrom. The Moldovan president took part in the ceremony and inaugurated a monument to the pogrom's victims.¹⁷ An international conference on the pogrom was held by the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Moldova and the Institute of Interethnic Research of the Academy of Science of the Republic of Moldova. It was in this setting that the subject of the Holocaust was also broached.¹⁸ One of the speakers, Anatoly Podolsky of Ukraine, analysed the development of Holocaust research and how the Holocaust is taught in post-Soviet countries.¹⁹ He highlighted important successes in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. With regard to the situation in Moldova, however, Podolsky noted that classroom instructors “have just begun to touch on teaching this topic”.²⁰

One of the most remarkable acts of the government was the decision to turn over copies of all files related to the Holocaust held by the Information and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. In December 2003, the museum received copies of 61 files of investigations and court proceedings.²¹ No less important was President Voronin's November 2004 visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. The Yad Vashem Archive also received copies of the Information and Security Service files.

The Jewish community of Moldova has publicly endorsed the government's policy. During a meeting with President Voronin in 2004, leaders of the Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations told Voronin:

¹⁵ “Legea Republicii Moldova cu privire la drepturile persoanelor aparținând minorităților naționale și la statutul juridic al organizațiilor lor”, Nr. 382-XV, 19 July 2001.

¹⁶ The Steven Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, <www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2003-4/cis.html>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Kishinevskii pogrom 1903 goda: vzgliad cherez stoletie. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii* (Chisinau 2004).

¹⁹ Anatoly Podolsky, “The Teaching of the Holocaust in the Post-Soviet Area: Problems and Perspectives”, in *Kishinevskii pogrom 1903 goda* (Chisinau 1993).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 138. See also the contributions from Dmitrii El'iashevich and Anatolii Podol's'kyi in this volume, pp. 255–270 and pp. 271–278.

²¹ “Moldovan Security Service Passes Holocaust Documents to U.S. Ambassador”, in *moldova azi*, 26 December 2003; <www.azi.md/news?ID=27262>.

the Jews from Moldova understand and fully support your energetic actions aimed at re-establishing the integrity of the Moldovan state... in which there is no place for the manifestation of such condemnable tendencies such as separatism, aggressive nationalism, antisemitism, and xenophobia.²²

In a multi-national state, the Jewish leaders added, this was “the only just policy”. Given the government’s friendlier attitude, several Jewish organizations intensified their efforts to spread knowledge about the Holocaust in Moldova. The Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations in the Republic of Moldova and the Jewish Congress of Moldova launched an initiative to make the topic of the Holocaust a part of school curricula. In 2003, they held a series of seminars for middle school history teachers on the genocide against the Jews and Gypsies. The Ministry of Education of Moldova supported these actions and recommended that schools use the brochure “The Holocaust: Informational Materials for Teachers of History”, which was donated by the Jewish Congress of Moldova.²³

Difficult Terrain: History Class

The introduction of the Holocaust into history lessons at the secondary school level, however, has proven rather difficult. The teaching of history has become an explosive issue over the last two decades, creating more controversy and causing more tempers to flare than any other discipline. Moldova’s unresolved issue of identity has remained a Gordian knot. At the start of the 1990s, the pro-Romanian community of historians gained control of the discipline and implemented a curriculum that corresponded to their views. The Holocaust was not a part of that curriculum.

The majority of textbooks on contemporary Romanian history published in Chişinău since independence say nothing about the Holocaust in Romania.²⁴ Nicolae Enciu’s textbook *History of the Romanians*, published in 2005, is the only one that devotes any space to the topic.²⁵ However, it uses the words of another author. In a case study entitled “The administrative organization of Bessarabia and Transnistria during the Second World War”, the author inserts an excerpt from a book by Neagu Djuvara.²⁶ From this, pupils learn that – “in response to accusations that the Jews of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina had in general responded favourably to Soviet occupation,

²² Preşedintele Republicii Moldova: “În ajunul sărbătorii evreieşti ‘Rosh a-Shana’, Preşedintele Republicii Moldova Vladimir Voronin i-a primit pe reprezentanţii Asociaţiei organizaţiilor şi comunităţilor evreieşti din Republica Moldova şi ai Congresului evreiesc din Moldova, pe care i-a felicitat cu prilejul Anului nou 5765, conform calendarului evreiesc.” Press release, 15 September 2004; <www.prm.md/press.php>.

²³ Council of Europe, Second Report Submitted by Moldova Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 14 May 2004.

²⁴ Nicolae Enciu, *Istoria românilor. Epoca contemporană. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a* (Chisinau 2001); Ioan Scurtu, Ion Şişcanu, Marian Curculescu, Constantin Dincă, Aurel Constantin Soare, *Istoria românilor. Epoca contemporană. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a* (Chisinau 2001); Boris Vizer, Tatiana Nagnibeda-Tverdohleb, *Istoria românilor. Epoca contemporană. Manual pentru clasa a IX-a* (Chisinau 2003).

²⁵ Enciu, *Istoria românilor*.

²⁶ Neagu Djuvara, *O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri* (Bucharest 2002).

and that criminal acts had been committed against the Romanian Army” – Marshal Ion Antonescu decided to deport the entire Jewish population of those regions to Transnistria. The deportees are said to have been sent to a deserted area that was “a war zone”: “[T]he brutal actions of the German Army being known, a definitive analysis of the number of missing and dead is to a certain extent impossible.”²⁷ On the basis of this information, pupils would have to end up believing that the death of the Jews occurred as a result of military operations or the “brutal actions of the German Army”. Nothing is said about the massacres of Jews organised by the Romanian Army in Bessarabia, Transnistria, or Bucovina, nor is a number of victims provided. Enciu’s own commentary goes on to say:

[T]he alliance with Hitler’s Germany in 1941 forced the Romanian military authorities to participate in the deportation of Jews from Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina to Transnistria. Many of them were killed, an act later called the holocaust [sic].²⁸

Another textbook – also called *History of the Romanians*, but published by an author’s collective under Ioan Scurtu – touches the subject in only two sentences:

The Antonescu regime implemented an antisemitic policy aimed in particular at the Bessarabian Jews, who were accused of being Communists. Pogroms took place in Iași and Odessa. The number of dead and missing Jews reached approximately 124,000.²⁹

The text makes no reference to the fact that the Antonescu regime pursued the same “antisemitic policy” in Bucovina and Transnistria. It is also unclear who exactly organized the pogroms.³⁰ Furthermore, the figure of 124,000 is far lower than the estimates given in the literature, namely, 250,000–410,000.³¹ After this book appeared, the Romanian Holocaust Commission published its own findings. According to these figures, 280,000–380,000 Jews died in the Romanian Holocaust.³²

Boris Vizer and Tatiana Nagnibeda-Tverdohleb’s textbook on the contemporary history of the Romanians also completely ignores the Holocaust. In the chapter “Romanian Civil Administration in Bessarabia and Transnistria”, they write:

The administration attempted to change the ethnic make-up of those villages where other languages were spoken (Russian, Ukrainian) by deporting their inhabitants to the Caucasus and resettling in those villages Romanians who had been forced by the Tsarist regime to leave Bessarabia in search of better living conditions.³³

²⁷ Enciu, *Istoria romanilor*, p. 107.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Scurtu, et al., *Istoria românilor*, p. 83.

³⁰ The murder of 19,000 of Odessa’s Jews by the Romanian Army was not a pogrom but a systematically organized killing operation. For a detailed discussion, see Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944. A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* (Iași, Oxford, Portland 1998).

³¹ Radu Ioanid, “The Antonescu Era”, in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry* (New York 1994), p. 164; Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941–1942. The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, 1 (Tel Aviv 2003), p. 531.

³² Comisia internațională pentru studierea Holocaustului în România, Raport final, p. 178.

³³ Vizer and Nagnibeda-Tverdohleb, *Istoria românilor*, p. 51.

The authors do not say a single word about the fact that the Jews were deported by the very same Romanian administration. And these measures certainly had no less of an impact in changing the ethnic make-up of the population in the regions indicated.

World history textbooks also fail to mention the Holocaust implemented by the Romanian government during the Second World War. However, some efforts are made to address the destruction of the Jews. For example, Anatol Petrencu and Maia Dobzeu mention German racial policy and the fact that “the Nazis created an entire chain of death camps”. The authors point out the “death camps in Treblinka, Bełżec, Sobibór, Vilnius, Kaunas, Minsk, etc.”³⁴ But Moldovan children do not learn that there were death camps in Transnistria, in the villages Bohdanivka (Bogdanovka), Akmechetka, and Obodivka (Obodovka), where tens of thousands of Jews were killed by the Romanian administration.³⁵

Igor Cașu and Sergiu Nazaria’s textbook on contemporary world history offers the most detailed information on Nazi Germany’s crimes.³⁶ This is one of only two textbooks published in Moldova that actually uses the term “Holocaust”. Meanwhile, a more recent history textbook of 20th-century world history by Anatol Petrencu and Ioan Chiper says nothing about the Holocaust or the fate of the Jews during the Second World War.³⁷ Nicolae Enciu and Tatiana Mistreanu, in their recent textbook of contemporary world history, mention the legal and economic restrictions imposed on Jews in Germany in late 1930s. Additional information on the Nazi regime’s persecution of the Jews is summed up under the rubric “Chronology,” which contains an outline of the evolution of the Holocaust from racial laws to the “Final Solution”.³⁸

How is this clear disregard for the Romanian Holocaust on the part of Moldovan historians to be explained? The answer is that history became an arena in the dispute between intellectuals (especially historians and linguists) and the Communist government over the definition of Moldovan national identity. The historians pulled together all the evidence they could to support their view of national identity based on a Romanian heritage. Meanwhile, the Communist administration did everything it could to advance the idea of a distinct Moldovan identity separate from that of the Romanians.³⁹

The Ministry of Education has made several attempts to control and revise history education, but it has encountered fierce resistance from the historians and their partisans. This animosity has led to an extreme politicisation of historiography and history education. Schools became the epicentre of this conflict.⁴⁰ The Communist government has

³⁴ Anatol Petrencu, *Istorie universală contemporană (1914–2000). Manual pentru clasa a IX-a* (Chisinau 2000); Anatol Petrencu, Maia Dobzeu, *Istoria universală. Epoca contemporană. Material didactic. Clasa a IX-a* (Chisinau 2004), p. 41.

³⁵ On these camps, see Dennis Deletant, “Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942–1944”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18, 1 (2004), pp. 1–24.

³⁶ Igor Cașu and Sergiu Nazaria, *Istoria universală contemporană (1918–2002). Manual pentru clasa IX* (Chisinau 2002), p. 59.

³⁷ Anatol Petrencu, Ioan Chiper, *Istoria universală. Epoca contemporană* (Chisinau 2006).

³⁸ Nicolae Enciu, Tatiana Mistreanu, *Istorie universală. Epoca contemporană. Clasa a XII-a* (Chisinau 2006); *ibid.*, p. 116; *ibid.*, p. 120, 126.

³⁹ A systematic analyses of the textbooks is available in Stefan Ihrig, *Wer sind die Moldawier? Rumänismus versus Moldowanismus in Historiographie und Schulbüchern der Republik Moldova 1991–2006* (Stuttgart 2008).

⁴⁰ Elizabeth A. Anderson, “Don’t Falsify Our History! Moldovan Teacher and Student Reaction to State Proposed History Courses”, *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of*

sought to emphasize the Holocaust, because it casts the Romanian regime in a negative light, while historians have tried to minimize it for precisely the same reason.

Suppression of the Past – and a Silver Lining

In March 2006, a five-day workshop for future Moldovan teachers took place on “The Education of Tolerance and Democratic Citizenship through History”.⁴¹ The group was made up of well-trained high school history teachers from Moldova. The author of this article participated as an instructor and had the task of discussing the subject of the Holocaust in the context of teaching tolerance and democratic citizenship. The intense reaction of the participants corresponded largely with the debate among Moldovan academics.

The majority of participants refused to treat the topic of the Holocaust in school. In an anonymous survey, they repeated the clichés disseminated by Moldova’s mass media, while others revealed thoughts they did not feel comfortable expressing openly. Many offered ethnocentric arguments. A typical response was:

[The Holocaust] is not a tragic page for the Romanian people. We had our own moments, such as the deportations or organized famine, which is related to our history. The Holocaust should be studied by the people that experienced it.⁴²

Another comment blamed the Jews for the Holocaust: “How is it possible to explain the aggression [of the Jews] toward the Romanian Army during its withdrawal in 1940? One harvests what one sows.”⁴³ Others expressed concern that the future generation of Romanians, or Moldovans, could be blamed for the Holocaust: “It could provoke hatred against the Romanians [Moldovans].” Some worried that open anti-semitism could erupt in Moldovan society if the Holocaust were studied in the classroom: “In many cases, it [Holocaust instruction] will cultivate not sympathy and compassion towards the Jews, but the opposite.” In one instance, a person rejected the topic of the Holocaust as “a problem that came from abroad”.⁴⁴

Only few members of the group accepted the idea of the Holocaust as a useful topic in history lessons, although they had reservations. They referred to the age and emotion-

Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations, I: Europe (Poznań 2005); Elizabeth A. Anderson, “Backwards, Forwards, or Both? Moldovan Teachers’ Relationship to the State and the Nation”, *European Education*, 37, 3 (2005), pp. 53–67; Vladimir Solonari, “Narrative, Identity, State: History Teaching in Moldova”, *East European Politics and Society*, 16, 2 (2002), pp. 414–445.

⁴¹ S. Musteata, ed., *Educația toleranței și cetățeniei democratice prin intermediul istoriei. Pachet educațional* (Chisinau 2006).

⁴² The survey was taken in the form of written submissions. The materials are in the author’s possession.

⁴³ Archive of the author.

⁴⁴ This is also what Moldovan historians argue when explaining why they do not support their Romanian colleagues’ position regarding the Holocaust. They usually argue that Romanian historians – under pressure from international and European organizations – have taken a certain position that runs contrary to their true convictions. This idea is also propagated by former Romanian dissident Paul Goma, see Paul Goma, *Săptămîna roșie 28 iunie-3 iulie 1940 sau Basarabia și evreii* (Chisinau 2003). He praises the attitude of Bessarabian historians as exemplary, idem, “A fi basarabean”, *România liberă*, 17 November 2005.

al stability of their pupils, the ethnic make-up of classes, the level of preparedness of teachers, equal treatment of various victim groups (i.e. not only the Jews).

Although most of the workshop participants agreed that the topic of the Holocaust in Moldova is extremely politicized, a majority remained firmly convinced that studying and discussing the Holocaust in Bessarabia, Bucovina, and Transnistria in the classroom would inevitably do a favour to the ruling Communist government and would prejudice the “national cause” for the worse. Instead of thinking of ways to depoliticize the issue, they preferred to avoid it altogether.

In recent years, the situation has improved. In October 2006, Chişinău hosted an international conference called “The Fate of the Jews of Bessarabia, Bucovina, and Transnistria in 1940–1944”. The conference was organized under the auspices of the Ion Creanga State Pedagogical University, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., and the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. Because Sergiu Nazaria’s book and the debate over it were still on people’s minds, and because this was the first academic conference on Holocaust to be held in Moldova, there was considerable public interest. There was controversy and criticism, but nobody tried to deny the Holocaust in the Romanian-administered territories. The copious amounts of photographs and documents presented by conference speakers made that simply impossible.

No less important was the June 2008 visit to Israel by Olga Goncearova, general director of the Department of Interethnic Relations within the government of Moldova. She concluded an agreement with Israeli officials by which Moldovan history teachers, starting in the summer of 2009, would visit Yad Vashem for training on how to teach the history of the Holocaust.⁴⁵

Moldova’s once vibrant Jewish community was decimated during the Holocaust and then further reduced by emigration in the years that followed. Today, the Jews of Moldova have had more success in reviving their community than in bringing Jewish history into their country’s school curricula. Moldovan society is prepared to give equal freedom and rights to its Jews, but it is not prepared to provide any space for assessing the Shoah in history textbooks and public discourse.

The politicization of history and the existence of competing victim groups in Moldovan society make it difficult to find a proper place for the Holocaust within the history of Moldova and the collective memory of Moldovan society. This situation is likely to persist for some time. It is difficult to foresee an alternative development.

⁴⁵ “Profesorii de istorie din Moldova vor efectua stagii la Ierusalim privind predarea Holocaustului”, Agenţia Informaţională de Stat Moldpres, 8 July 2008.