

# From a 'Liberation' to Another. The Bessarabian Writers During the First Year of Soviet Power (1940-1941): Integration Strategies and Forms of Exclusion

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## Abstract

The dual aim of this article is, on the one hand, to identify Bessarabian writers' individual and group rationale to stay in the territory occupied by the Soviet authorities after 28 June 1940 and, on the other hand, to analyse the institutional mechanisms set up by the Soviet authorities (namely the Moldovan Writers Union (MWU) and AgitProp) to integrate these writers into the Soviet cultural system. The three groups of Bessarabian writers remaining in the annexed territory (the 'regionalists' from *Viaţa Basarabiei* journal, the writers of Jewish origin and the formerly 'underground' (pro-Communist) activists) intersected and overlapped, since the writers' interests were often multiple. At the same time, the strategies implemented by the Soviet authorities to enrol Bessarabian writers into the Soviet institutional structures followed a binary and apparently contradictory rationale, of inclusion (of candidates deemed suitable for the aspiring status) and exclusion (of those who did not correspond to the criteria of political probity). Moldovan writers coming from the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) (the 'Transnistrians') had a crucial role in the integration and enrolment of Bessarabian writers into the MWU as mediators with the Soviet authorities (having had a longer 'length of service' in Soviet political and cultural affairs), as well as in the role of cultural and ideological 'tutors'. In response to these enrolment strategies operated by the MWU, Bessarabian writers adopted a zealous and emulative behaviour in order to ensure their successful integration. This behaviour laid the basis for duplicitous and somewhat dysfunctional interactions between writers, which would reach a paroxysm in the post-war 'Zhdanovist' campaign.

A few days after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union and the creation of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) in June 1940, several Bessarabian<sup>1</sup> writers – some of them well known in their home literary milieu – were rushing to put themselves in the service of the new regime with a surprising commitment for these formerly inveterate autonomists<sup>2</sup>. Their transformation

1 By „Bessarabian” writers I mean here the writers who, before the Soviet annexation, originated from and/or lived in the Romanian province of Bessarabia, which became, from June 1940 to June 1941, and after August 1944, the main part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR).

2 Many Bessarabian writers who collaborated with the new Soviet power after the overthrow of the Romanian administration in June 1940 had embraced in the 1930s a regionalist discourse, claiming an extended cultural autonomy. See in this respect

was amazing. There was a striking contrast between the often melancholic and gloomy character of their literary works, written under the influence of post-symbolist fashion, yet very influential in the late 30s, and the images of overflowing strength and optimism of the poetic productions penned by the same authors after 28 June 1940. This 'conversion' seems less paradoxical, however, if one reinstates it to its original social and political context. At that time, the question for Bessarabian writers was to stay (in Chişinău city, occupied by the Sovi-

Petru Negură, "The Romanian literature of Bessarabia: between national integration and the search for a regional identity", in *Nici eroi, nici trădători. Scriitorii moldoveni și puterea sovietică în epoca stalinistă*, Chişinău, Cartier, 2014 (this book is the translated and reedited version of the book *Ni héros, ni traîtres. Les écrivains moldaves face au pouvoir soviétique sous Staline*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009).

et authorities) or to leave (as refugees, beyond the Prut River). Most Bessarabian intellectuals preferred to leave their home province during the four days reserved for that purpose by the Soviet authorities<sup>3</sup>. Those who decided to stay, by virtue of a burdensome conjuncture, became, after the reinstatement of the Soviet regime in Bessarabia, subject to strong institutional pressure and were forced to choose between cooperation and withdrawal from the public scene.

In addition to direct political coercion exerted by Soviet police and security forces, the Bessarabian writers who remained in Chişinău were constrained to accept the symbolic authority of the Transnistrian writers, deemed to be experts of socialist culture<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the mere expression of a desire to collaborate with the Soviets was not sufficient for Bessarabian writers to be immediately and permanently integrated into the system. They had to prove their unconditional loyalty to the new regime. The first year after they expressed their adhesion to the Soviets in July 1940 proved to be the first stage in a long period of testing that the writers would continue to undergo in the years to come. Some were eliminated after the first year of service under the communist power. Three out of the fifteen Moldovan writers of Bessarabian origin were considered undesirable to the new political order and were thus deported

3 Cf. *infra*.

4 By 'Transnistrian writers' I mean the writers coming from the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), created in 1924 in the Transnistrian region (see the map) exclusively for political, namely irredentist (against Bessarabia) reasons, with the capital city in Balta, then in Tiraspol. Because of their lasting 'length of service' in the area of 'national-cultural building' and their confirmed loyalty to the Soviet power (they survived the 1937/38 purges), the 'Transnistrian' writers were assigned an institutional and moral superiority towards their Bessarabian fellows. See below in this article and, for more information on the subject: Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători...*, pp. 71-133.

three days after the outbreak of armed conflict between the USSR and Germany and its allies (including Romania). Wartime was also a period of testing for the Bessarabian writers, although not all of them were subjected to the same treatment. Following mobilisation, some were sent to the front as ordinary soldiers and most of them died there. Others fled to Central Asia and were later called to Moscow to work on the editorial staff of the Party's newspaper *Moldova socialistă* and the Chişinău radio station in evacuation, where they were entrusted with lifting the spirits of Moldovan soldiers and workers with mobilising poems, short prose, and reportages. The war became a training period for the new Soviet Moldovan writers during which the foundation for their future work was laid. Soviet Moldovan Literature remained deeply marked by a combative tone, mobilising imagery and a populist spirit, cultivated by those who had been writing and broadcasting during the "Great Patriotic War"<sup>5</sup>.

The most common approach to date employed by the majority of studies analysing the literature and literary environment of the MSSR is either strictly literary, generally focusing on allegedly valuable literary works (and overlooking or treating expeditiously and/or ironically any works that are not ascribed such a value)<sup>6</sup>, or preponderantly political, present-

5 See Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători...*, especially the third chapter „Marele Război pentru Apărarea Patriei: armistiţiul şi încercare pentru scriitori” [The Great Patriotic War: armistice and testing for writers’], pp. 157-172.

6 The masterful study of history of literature in Bessarabia by Mihai Cimpoi, *O istorie deschisă a literaturii române din Basarabia*, Chişinău, Arc, 1997, is emblematic in this respect. Alexandru Burlacu's studies (especially: *Critica în labirint*, Arc, Chişinău, 1997) focuses a little more thoroughly on the literature of the Stalinist era, but do not reinstate these works in the social and political context in which they were created.

ing Moldovan writers exclusively in terms of the state's repressive rationale and writers' alleged resistance to the Soviets<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, in other former Soviet republics (especially the 'Western' ones – Ukraine and the Baltic countries), local researchers have studied the relationship between writers (and intellectuals in general) and Soviet state power in 1940-41 and during the Soviet era as a whole mainly from the 'repression versus resistance' model<sup>8</sup>.

The studies which employed this antagonistic and Manichean model did not generally delve into the social dimension of the literary or intellectual environment. Moreover, very few of them have focused on the study of writers (or creative intellectuals)<sup>9</sup>. Even fewer have

7 See Alexandru Donos, *Scriitorii martiri*, Chişinău, Museum, 2000. Other works, although sometimes minutely documented, highlight the strictly functional and institutional aspect of the culture and literature during the Stalinist era. See Vasile Tăriţă, "Viata literară din R.S.S. Moldovenească în anii stalinismului târziu, 1948-1951", in *Arhivele Totalitarismului (Totalitarianism Archives)*, issue 34, 2013, pages: 48-56; Valentina Ursu, *Politica culturală în RSS Moldovenească, 1944-1956*, Chişinău, Pontos, 2013. The interval from 1940 to 1941 is, however, virtually overlooked in these studies.

8 Most research undertaken by local historians, on the subject of intellectuals in the countries and regions annexed by the USSR in 1939/1940, is deeply marked by the 'totalitarian' analysis model, according to which the intellectuals would have been 'subservient' by the new Soviet power or cruelly repressed. See in this respect, on the situation of intellectuals in Western Ukraine in 1939-1941: Semen Pidhainyi, *Ukrains'ka intelihentsiia na Solovkakh: spohady 1933-1941 rr.*, Ternopil', Dzhura, 1999, pp. 184-210; O.S. Rubl'ov, Iu.A. Cherchenko, *Stalinshchyna i dolia zakhidnoukrains'koi intelihentsii 20-50-ti roky XX st.*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1994, 3rd vol., pp. 19-41; U.O. Kurnosov, S.I. Bilokin, eds., *Narysy istorii ukrains'koi intelihentsii (persha polovyna XX st. (3 vol.))*, Kyiv : Instytut istorii Ukrainy AN Ukrainy, 1994.

9 See: David R. Marples, *Stalinism in Ukraine in the 1940s*, New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 24-26; Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1991, p. 155; Nelly Bekus, "Nationalism and socialism: "Phase

thoroughly studied, on the one hand, the writers' (and intellectuals') strategies<sup>10</sup> of self-positioning and integration into the institutions created and coordinated by the Soviet authorities and, on the other hand, the mechanisms of inclusion/ exclusion, implemented by the

D" in the Belarusian nation-building", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 38 (6) (2010), pp. 829-846; Vladimir I. Kuz'menko, "The Belarus' intelligentsia during the German-Fascist occupation (1941-44)", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 15(1) (2002), pp. 123-144; Anu Mai Koll (ed.), *The Baltic Countries Under Occupation. Soviet and Nazi Rule 1939-1991*, *Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis*, Studia Baltica Stockholmiensis, Stockholm University, 2003, pp. 121-139; Olaf Mertelsmann (ed.), *Central and Eastern European Media Under Dictatorial Rule and in the Early Cold War*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011; Sirje Olesk, "Writers' Collaboration with the Soviet Authorities, and the Dominant Literary Journal in the Estonian SSR in the 1940s and 1950s", pp. 171-172; Andrej Skolkay, "When Innocent Words were Sharp Swords: The Intellectual and Literary Press in the Early Years of Communism in Slovakia", pp. 183-196; Sirje Olesk, "On the Literary Life in the Soviet Estonia", *Colloquia* 17(9) (2006), pp. 122-134; Yoshie Mitsuyoshi, "Public Representations of Women in Western Ukraine under Late Stalinism: Magazines, Literature, and Memoirs", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, 54(1) (2006), pp. 20-36; Serhy Yekelchuk, "Diktat and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture: Staging Patriotic Historical Opera in Soviet Ukraine, 1936-1954", *Slavic Review*, 59(3) (Autumn, 2000), pp. 597-624; Tiit Kreegipuu and Epp Lauk, "The 1940 Soviet Coup-d'État in the Estonian Communist Press: Constructing History to Reshape Collective Memory", *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* (University of Westminster, London), 4(4) (2007), pp. 42-64; Vilius Ivanauskas, "'Engineers of the Human Spirit' During Late Socialism: The Lithuanian Union of Writers Between Soviet Duties and Local Interests", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66(4) (2014), pp. 645-665.

10 The use of the concept of strategy implies that the interaction between certain actors might be defined in terms of power relationship. I use here this term with a necessary theoretical and methodological caution, pointing to a – certainly uneven, but nevertheless mutual – power relationship between writers and the Soviet (power or cultural) institutions. See a summary critique of the term in David Knights and Glenn Morgan, "The Concept of Strategy in Sociology: A Note of Dissent", *Sociology*, 24 (3) (August 1990), pp. 475-483.

Soviets toward these people, in the context of how state-building was carried out by Soviet power in the newly annexed territory.

This study privileges a socio-historical approach to the literary environment in Chişinău between June 1940 and June 1941. A number of works of sociology and social history of literature serve as a frame of analysis, adjusted to the sociopolitical context of this article's specific object<sup>11</sup>.

One of the main hypotheses of this article is that, during the first year of Soviet administration (from June 1940 to June 1941), key patterns of interaction (collaboration, accommodation, and negotiation) were set up between Bessarabian writers (or 'creative intellectuals') and the Soviet state institutions, and, at an

11 See especially: Pierre Bourdieu, „Le champ littéraire”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, nr. 89, September 1991; Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1998. Several studies of social history of culture (and popular culture) provide a comparative basis and at the same time a frame of analysis for this research. See, among these, Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique*, Paris, Minuit, 1985; Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953*, Paris, Fayard, 1999; Regarding the history of literature in Quebec (where literature was longtime subordinated by the Catholic Church): Lise Gauvin și Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, *Trajectoires. Littérature et institutions au Québec et en Belgique francophone*, Montréal, 1993; Marie-Andrée Beaudet, *Langue et littérature au Québec. 1895-1914. L'impact de la situation linguistique sur la formation du champ littéraire*, Québec, L'Hexagone, 1996; Daniel Mativat, *Le métier d'écrivain au Québec (1840-1900). Pionniers, nègres ou épiciers littéraires?*, Montréal, Triptyque, 1996; Jacques Pelletier, *Le poids de l'histoire. Littérature, idéologies, société du Québec moderne*, Québec, Ed. Nuit blanche, 1995; On the literary institution in Communist Romania, see Lucia Dragomir, *L'Union des écrivains: une institution littéraire transnationale à l'Est*, Paris, Belin, 2007; Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilegiul literar. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc*, Cluj-Napoca, Cartea Cărții de Știință, 2009; Dan Lungu, *Construcția identității într-o societate totalitară. O cercetare sociologică asupra scriitorilor* (ediția a doua), Iași, Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, 2012; See also Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători* and Petru Negură, *Ni hēros, ni traîtres*.

other level, among the writers (intellectuals) themselves, either as groups or individuals. The year following the annexation of Bessarabia by the USSR in June 1940, and preceding the restoration of Romanian administration in this territory in June 1941, marked a turning point for Bessarabian writers (and intellectuals) in terms of and depending on their sociobiographical pathways, their social capital, and their previous relations with – or access to – political authority.

This analysis was performed based on the synthesis of a range of documentary sources: archival documents<sup>12</sup>, contemporary press (literary and general)<sup>13</sup>, autobiographical writings, and biographic interviews with writers<sup>14</sup>. Historical background: border changes and exodus of civilian population

Between 1940 and 1944, Bessarabia was the site of three successive shifts of political regimes. On 28 June 1940, following the Molo-

12 In this article, I mainly refer (explicitly or implicitly) to the documents consulted in the Archive of Social and Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova (AOSPRM), the Archive of the Moldavian Writers Union (AUSM), the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI), and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political Research (RGASPI).

13 For this study, I mostly quoted from the Party newspaper *Basarabia Sovietică* (June 1940 – December 1940), *Moldova socialistă* (December 1940 – June 1941), and *Octombrie*, the Moldavian Writers Union's review (from July 1940 to June 1941).

14 I interviewed the following writers and some of their relatives: Ihil Şraibman (1913-2005): 2004-01-19; Igor Creţu (born in 1922): 2004-04-02; Ariadna Şalari (born in 1923): 2003-08-25; 2003-09-10; Baca Deleanu (1924-2005): 2003-12-08; 2003-12-16; 2003-12-20; 2003-12-28; 2004-01-16; 2004-01-24; 2004-02-01; 2004-02-21; 2004-03-20; 2004-04-17; 2004-05-29; 2004-08-07; Alexei Marinat (1924-2009): 2003-12-08; 2003-12-16; Aureliu Busuioc (1928-2012): 23-12-2003; Vladimir Beşeleagă (born in 1931): 2005-09-28; Elena Curecheru-Vatamanu (born in 1940): 2002-07-25. I also consulted a number of unpublished personal biographic sources (thanks especially to Liviu Deleanu's home-museum and his wife Baca Deleanu, as well as to Ariadna Şalari).

to-Ribbentrop Pact signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on 23 August 1939, the USSR annexed Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. On the 22 June 1941, the Romanian army, in alliance with German troops, recovered the territory lost in 1940 and, in addition, seized Transnistria up to the Bug River. Finally, on 23 August 1944, the Soviet army resumed its position in the capital of Bessarabia and pushed the Romanian and German allied forces beyond Prut.

Each time, the new authorities claimed to be 'liberators' of the Bessarabian population and labeled the previous regime as 'occupying' and 'oppressive'. The conflict with the 'occupation' regime was presented as a 'holy' or 'patriotic' war<sup>15</sup>. In the meantime, both 'liberation' by the Russians in 1940 and 1944, as well as by the Romanians in 1941 was welcomed by different groups of Bessarabians. In 1940, as in 1941 and 1944, the 'liberating' army found on-site supporters, bystanders, and opponents. If the former were willing to collaborate, the latter fled in disorder.

Between these two attitudes, enthusiastic or harshly negative, the largest – and least visible – part of Bessarabian society took a cautious position in the face of the new authorities. Some Bessarabians expected nothing good from the new administration, but they did not regret losing the old one either. Without necessarily being true opponents of the Romanian regime, they hoped that the Soviet Government would establish new, "more correct, more human" institutions, as stated by

15 The name assigned by Soviet ideologues to the Second World War was "The Great Patriotic War" (or in 'Moldovan' parlance: "The Great War for the Defense of the Homeland"). At the same time, the war with the Soviet Union regularly appeared in the Romanian official speeches and propaganda as a "Holy War".

one of the witnesses<sup>16</sup>. Others barely hid their hostility towards the victors, but they were so attached to their province (and to the non-material values that it implied) that they eventually complied with the imposed order, despite being conscious of the fact that the position they held under the former administration would be challenged. Finally, some representatives of the Slavic and Jewish minorities did not hide their joy at the retreat of Romanian troops and officials<sup>17</sup>. After the multiplication of anti-Semitic discourses and policies in the late 1930s, tolerated or even encouraged by the Romanian state, the Jewish population of Bessarabia perceived the arrival of the Red Army as a promise of a return to the security and legitimacy they lost under the Romanian administration.<sup>18</sup> One way or another, the power shifts always generated disappointment, especially among those segments of population which were more active and better integrated under the former regime, as they nourished new expectations, namely amongst those categories of people who were the least favoured by the previous authorities.

Thus, as the Red Army advanced into the ter-

16 This is particularly the case of Alexandru Usatiuc-Bulgăr that, trying to be a good citizen, first suffered persecution from the Romanian "Siguranța" (secret police), then the repression of the Soviet security forces. See Alexandru Usatiuc-Bulgăr, *Cu gândul la o lume între două lumi* [Thinking about a world between two worlds], vol. 1, Chișinău, Lyceum, 1999, p. 86.

17 See Ioan Scurtu, Gheorge I. Ioniță, Ștefania Dinu, "Ocuparea Basarabiei de către Armata Roșie. Statutul Basarabiei în cadrul Uniunii Sovietice" [The Occupation of Bessarabia by the Red Army. The status of Bessarabia in the frame of the Soviet Union], in Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Basarabiei. De la începuturi până în 1998* [History of Bessarabia. From origins to 1998], Bucharest, Semne, 1998, p. 215.

18 See, for example, the interviews that I conducted with two writers of Jewish origin: Ihil Șraibman (2004/01/19) and Baca Deleanu (Liviu Deleanu's spouse) 2003/12/28) in Chișinău.

ritory of Bessarabia and the Romanian army withdrew in the interval of four days reserved for that purpose, a growing number of officials, lawyers, teachers, doctors, etc. – who, according to some estimates, amounted to more than 10,000<sup>19</sup> – were hastily evacuated to provinces of the mainland ‘kingdom’. The exodus of the Bessarabian intelligentsia caused a chronic shortage of Romanian-speaking intellectuals and cadres in the system set up by the Soviets after 1940 and, therefore, led to the Russification of the MSSR’s intelligentsia and administration<sup>20</sup>. But the exodus was not unilateral. A large group of Bessarabians – composed especially of Jewish people and demobilised soldiers of the Romanian army – returned to their home province during the year following its annexation<sup>21</sup>. These ‘refugees’, as

19 Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor. Basarabia și Transnistria (1812-1993)* [History of Romanians. Bessarabia and Transnistria (1812-1993)], Chișinău, Universul, 1995, p. 319. The total number of Romanians leaving Bessarabia after June 28, 1940 is estimated at 300,000, according to Ioan Scurtu *et al.*, “Ocupația Basarabiei de Armata Roșie”, in Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Basarabiei*, p. 222. The evacuation of intellectuals is considered all the more imperative that most of them were members of the National Renaissance Front or even reserve officers of the Romanian army. The National Renaissance Front was created on the initiative of King Carol II on March 30, 1938, after the establishment of the royal dictatorship on February 20, 1938. See Ion Pavelescu, “Acțiunea militară pentru eliberarea Basarabiei. Reinstaurarea administrației românești” [Military action to liberate Bessarabia. Restoring the Romanian government], in Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Basarabiei*, *op. cit.*, p. 233 ; See also Nicolai Costenco, *Povestea vulturului. Memorii* [The Vulture’s Fairy Tale. Memoirs], Chișinău, Arc, 1998, p. 34.

20 Cf. Hélène Carrère D’Encausse, *L’Empire éclaté. La révolte des nations en URSS*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978, pp. 75-76, Alain Blum, *Naître, vivre et mourir en URSS*, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2004, p. 103 ; see also Iurii V. Arutiunian (éd.), *Opyt etnosotsiologicheskogo isledovaniia obraza zhizni (po materialam Moldavskoi SSR)* [Essai of Ethno-sociological Research of Life Styles (on the Material of Moldavian SSR)], Moscow, Nauka, 1980, pp. 177-179; Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor*, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

21 Between 1940 and 1941, the number of

well as those Bessarabians who did not leave the territories occupied by Soviets, were often categorised by their Romanian colleagues and superiors as traitors and deemed to be prone to ‘Bolshevism’<sup>22</sup>. Many of them would later be charged on this account by the gendarmerie and the secret police after the restoration of the Romanian Government in June 1941<sup>23</sup>.

At the same time, the Bessarabians who served in Romanian public institutions and remained in the province or returned to Bessarabia after June 28, 1940 were treated with suspicion by the Soviet officials. Many Bessarabian intellectuals were marginalised, when they were not outright condemned for their service under the previous authorities. Even members of the Romanian Communist Party, despite campaigning actively during the 1930s to instigate the ‘socialist revolution’ in Romania and supporting the unification of Bessarabia with the Soviet Union, were not automatically transferred to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and therefore were not recognised as full-fledged communists<sup>24</sup>. To supplement the need for administrative staff, nearly 5,000 Russian and Ukrainian Communists were invited, temporarily or permanently, to serve in the MSSR, in addition to 4,300 members of the local Communist Party coming from the former MASSR<sup>25</sup>. This ‘new generation’ of cadres, recruited after the 1937-

‘repatriated’ (returning in Bessarabia) Bessarabians dates, according to sources, between 125,000 (Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor*, p. 319) and 165,000 (before October 9, 1940), according to Ioan Scurtu *et al.*, *op. cit.*, in Ioan Scurtu (ed.), *Istoria Basarabiei*, p. 221.

22 Ludmila Vnorovschi, *Amintirile unei basarabence (Povestea vietii mele)* [Memories of a Bessarabian (The story of my life)], Chișinău, Cartdidact, 2003, pp. 92, 94.

23 Alexandru Usatiuc-Bulgăr, *Cu gândul la o lume...*, p. 168.

24 Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor...*, p. 320.

25 Anton Moraru, *idem*, p. 330.

1938 purges, was assigned to accomplish the Sovietisation of Bessarabia and other territories annexed in 1940<sup>26</sup>.

#### WHY DID SOME Bessarabian WRITERS CHOOSE TO STAY, AND OTHERS TO LEAVE?

Five days after 28 June 1940, when the Red Army entered into the capital of Bessarabia, the Bessarabian writers who chose to remain in the occupied territory and had thus proved their willingness to cooperate with the Soviets attended a meeting with former MASSR writers and a few Ukrainian men of letters. A local correspondent of the Party newspaper remarked, in a slightly affected tone, that “for them [Bessarabian writers] it is probably the first opportunity to meet each other beyond any nationality distinction”<sup>27</sup>. The assessment is not fully accurate, as several Bessarabian writers of different ethnic origin had previously been part of the same literary groups. It is true, however, that some Bessarabian writers did not know each other before that gathering in Chişinău. They came from different literary groups that communicated little, either because they lived in different cities, such as Chişinău and Bucharest, or because they did not share the same aesthetic or ideological be-

26 About the formation of the post-World War II Soviet *nomenklatura*, see Moshe Lewin, “Rebuilding the Soviet Nomenklatura, 1945-1948”, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 44, No. 2/3, “Les pratiques administratives en Union soviétique, 1920-1960” (Apr. - Sep., 2003), p. 225; This ‘new generation’ of party cadres proceeded to the Sovietization of the Baltic States. See Arvydas Anusauskas, « La composition et les méthodes secrètes des organes de sécurité soviétiques en Lituanie, 1940-1953 », *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 42/2-4, 2001, p. 323; See also Olaf Mertelsmann (ed.), *The Sovietization of the Baltic States, 1940-1956*, Tartu, 2003.

27 (Signed: Corespondentul RATAU), „Întîlnirea dintre scriitorii sovietici și scriitorii de la Chişinău” [The meeting between the Soviet writers and the writers from Chişinău], MS, July 9, 1940, p. 1.

liefs, or because did not even write in the same language (some of them wrote their works in Hebrew or Yiddish).

The reasons which led them to stay in (or come to) Bessarabia after the Soviet occupation vary depending on group membership, or even from one case to another. Some writers, namely the “Regionalists” from *Viața Basarabiei* [Bessarabia’s Life] journal, chose to remain by virtue of a special bond with their province, which they had been cultivating for years<sup>28</sup>. Writers of ‘alien’ ethnic origin (primarily Jews) were willing to cooperate with the Bolshevik regime especially because in Romania they were subjected to more and more chicanery and persecution from (or with agreement of) the state. Finally, for another category of Bessarabian writers, the adhesion to the Soviet regime was the culmination of their whole previous political activity, conducted under the Romanian administration in the frame of an allegedly clandestine organisation, subordinated, in the final instance, to the Communist International. Certainly, these categories of writers are not strictly defined. For example, a Bessarabian writer of Jewish origin could cultivate a particular penchant for avant-garde aesthetics and simultaneously share regionalist and/or socialist convictions. Thus, the writers who decided not to flee to Romania did not all follow the same rationale, often having several reasons for their decision.

#### THE REGIONALISTS

The largest group of Bessarabian writers who responded to the Party’s call immediately after 28 June 1940 was comprised of former contributors to the literary journal of the 30s

28 About the regionalism of the writers from *Viața Basarabiei* journal, see Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători...*, pp. 36-48.

Viața Basarabiei, based in Chișinău. Enrolment under the banner of the Communist Party required a difficult compromise in their case. They remained in occupied Bessarabia not so much because of their affection towards the Soviet regime, but rather due to their attachment (supported by ideological beliefs) to their region and their contempt for the Romanian government. The former leader of the regionalist writers, Nicolai Costenco, who in 1940 was the editor of *Viața Basarabiei* and the general secretary of the Society of Bessarabian Writers, was the one who set the tone. It appears that, while Pan. Halippa<sup>29</sup> was leaving to refuge, he told him: “I cannot leave my Bessarabia.” Several writers from this group – Vasile Luțcan, Teodor Nencev, Bogdan Istru, and George Meniuc – were all close friends of Nicolai Costenco and his former colleagues as authors at *Viața Basarabiei*. He exerted a significant influence over them by virtue of his leading position. Some shared socialist views, but these were not strong enough to be considered a significant factor for their alignment with the Soviet regime.

Thus, for Petre Ștefănuță and Mihail Curicheru, two other former authors of *Viața Basarabiei*, their willingness to enter into the service

of Soviet power seemed to be determined by less obvious reasons, if one refers to their previous position. The compromise they did was significant, given that they were the most moderate members of the regionalist group; in the late 1930s they even signed a series of articles in favour of the nationality policy promoted by the Romanian state at that time. Finally, their speeches before 1940 betrayed no sympathy for leftist ideologies. Personal reasons are most likely to explain the apparent inconsistency of their decision to cooperate with the new government<sup>30</sup>. But once integrated into the system, they successfully coped with the new requirements. They were admitted to the Moldavian Writers Union, published their works in the *Octombrie* journal and worked in different cultural and educational institutions of the MSSR.

In June 1941, the enrolment of most of the former editors of *Viața Basarabiei* was regarded as suspicious by Agitprop and NKVD officers who assuming that the past of these writers might conceal evidence of anti-Soviet activities. Three writers of this group – N. Costen-

29 Pan Halippa (commonly called Pan. Halippa) was a very influential personality in culture but also in politics of Bessarabia during 1917-1944. He was co-chair of the National Peasant Party and minister in several governments between 1918 and 1934. He was also president of the People's University in Chisinau and director of *Viața Basarabiei* journal. See about Halippa in Pantelimon Halippa, *Publicistică* [Journalistic writings], with an introduction and biographic presentation of Pan. Halippa by Iurie Colesnic, Chișinău, Museum, 2001; Pan. Halippa, „Povestea vieții mele” [The Story of my Life], in *Patrimoniul*, history review, Chișinău, 1991, nr. 1, pp. 4-40; Iurie Colesnic, „Pantelimon Halippa”, in *Basarabia necunoscută* [Bessarabia Unknown], vol. 1, Chișinău, Museum, 1993, p. 66. See also Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*, op. cit., pp. 53-60.

30 This fact was also evoked by Elena Vatamanu-Curecheru (Mihail Curicheru's daughter), born two days before the arrival of the Soviets on June 28, 1940. Interview with Elena Vatamanu-Curecheru, July 2002.

co<sup>31</sup>, M. Curicheru<sup>32</sup> and P. Ștefănuță<sup>33</sup> – were arrested and deported a few days before and after the commencement of the war between the Axis powers and the Soviet Union. Three other former ‘regionalists’, Alexandru Robot (Rotmann), V. Luțcan and T. Nencev, were sent to the front. Of the latter, V. Luțcan, who fled to Romania after June 1941, was the only survivor. Finally, only two writers of the group of *Viața Basarabiei* (B. Istru and G. Meniuc) managed to elude the vigilance of the security forces (and their Transnistrian colleagues), probably because they were the youngest and had had the least political involvement during the Romanian administration period. However, they would be charged later, in the so-called “Zhdanovist” period<sup>34</sup>, for their involvement

31 About the deportation and detention of Nicolai Costenco, see Alexander Donos, „Poet care a fost închis pe toată viața” [The poet who was jailed for life] in Alexandru Donos, *Scritori martiri* [Writers martyrs], Chișinău, Ed. Museum, 2000, pp. 17-23 (a chapter developed based on the writer’s NKVD / MVD / KGB file, consulted at the Information and Security Service Archive (ASIS), Chișinău).

32 About the deportation and detention of Mihail Curicheru, see Alexandru Donos, „Un talent nimicit în floarea vârstei” [A talent destroyed in his prime], in Alexandru Donos, *Scritori martiri*, op. cit., pp. 24-35; See also, Igor Cașu, „Arhivele comunismului: Destinul tragic al scriitorului basarabean Mihail Curicheru, mort în gulag” [Archives of communism: the tragic fate of Bessarabian writer Mihail Curicheru, dead in Gulag], in *Adevărul* newspaper (Moldova), November 29, 2013 (these articles were performed based on the writer’s NKVD/MVD/KGB file, consulted at ASIS, Chișinău).

33 About the deportation and detention of Petre Ștefănuță, see Alexandru Donos, „Ultimele pagini ale folcloristului Petre Ștefănuță” [Last pages of the folklorist Petre Ștefănuță], in Alexandru Donos, *Scritori martiri*, op. cit., pp. 36-46 (a chapter developed based on the writer’s NKVD / MVD / KGB file, consulted at ASIS, Chișinău).

34 The “Zhdanovism” (from Andrei Zhdanov, Politburo member of the CPSU Central Committee, responsible for culture) is a campaign aiming at enrolling the creative intelligentsia, but also of taking control over the territories annexed in 1940 and recovered in 1944. See Nicolas Werth,

in what had been the most important literary journal of interwar Bessarabia, itself considered sufficient evidence of ‘nationalism’ and ‘bourgeois decadence’.

### THE JEWS

Writers of Jewish origin who remained in Bessarabia after June 1940 or who returned immediately after that did not form a coherent group<sup>35</sup>, as was the case for the writers of *Viața Basarabiei*. Coming from different milieus – literary avant-garde, socialist circles or Yiddish language writers – some of them became aware of their ‘Jewish’ identity only once it was assigned as a stigma as a result of anti-Semitic stereotypes or special ‘nationality policies’ promoted by the Romanian authorities in the late ‘30s or, worse, during the pogroms triggered in Romania after the annexation of Bessarabia<sup>36</sup>. Each writer of ‘Jewish’ origin had

*Histoire de l’Union soviétique de Lénine à Staline, 1917-1953*, Paris, PUF, 1995; About the Zhdanovism in the Soviet literature: Michel Aucouturier, *Le réalisme socialiste*, Paris, P.U.F., 1998. About the Zhdanovist campaign in MSSR, see Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*, pp. 179-215. Here are two documents in which Meniuc (and, implicitly, Istru) were criticized for ‘nationalism’, in “Statement to the attention of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Moldova, Agitation and Propaganda Department, the Secretary of the CC, Comrade Taranov S.V. from the writer Meniuc, G. N.”, AOSPRM, fund 51, inventory 3, file 248, p. 13; I. Canna, D. Tkaci, G. Zilberman, “Report on the literary almanac *Octombrie*, issues 1-2, to the attention of CC of the CPM, from September 4, 1946, AOSPRM, fund 51, inventory 4, file 312, p. 169-172.

35 It is about Ihil Șraibman, Moise Altman, Rahmil Portnoi, Iacob Iachir, Iacob Sternberg, David Vetrov (Pihman), Liviu Deleanu (Lipa Cligman), to whom we could add Alexandru Robot (Alter Rotmann), whom we placed in the group from *Viața Basarabiei*.

36 See about the Iași pogrom from June 27-29, 1941: Adrian Cioflâncă, „Pogromul de la Iași” [The Iași Pogrom]: <http://www.pogromuldelaiasi.ro/ce-s-a-intamplat-in-iunie-1941/> (accessed on June 2014). See also the website <http://www.pogromuldelaiasi.ro/>, containing substantial and

his own pathway and specific position in the Romanian literary environment before June 1940. Most of them were not in Bessarabia when the Soviet regime was established, and some were not even born there and had not previously lived in the region, as was the case for Liviu Deleanu (Lipa Cligman)<sup>37</sup> who was originally from Iași.

Before 1940, most of these writers sympathised with some elements of leftist ideology. However, few of them were ardent followers of communism; at least, few of them would be ready to leave their social environment and, often, their place of residence in exchange for uncertain conditions, for the sake of their ideological views. In fact, the writers of Jewish origin that gathered in Chișinău after 28 June 1940 were far from being representative of the majority of Jewish people of letters from Bessarabia and even less from Romania at that time<sup>38</sup>. However, in the years 1940-1941, they

revealing studies, documents and testimonies about what was qualified as “The Iași Pogrom”. See also the forthcoming study by Adrian Cioflâncă. About this pogrom and the operation of deportation and liquidation of Jews (Holocaust) in Romania (Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria), see the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania [President: Elie Wiesel; Editors: Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihail E. Ionescu], *Raport final*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2004; About the Holocaust in Bessarabia and Transnistria, and the involvement of local population, see Diana Dumitru, Carter Johnson, „Constructing Interethnic Conflict and Cooperation: Why Some People Harmed and Others Helped Jews during the Romanian Holocaust”, *World Politics*, Vol. 63, no. 1 (January 2011), p.1-42; see also Diana Dumitru’s forthcoming book on the subject.

<sup>37</sup> Born in Iași in 1911, Liviu Deleanu was a well-known poet in certain milieus of leftist, literary avant-garde, from Iași and Bucharest. For more biographical information, see Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*, pp. 223-229.

<sup>38</sup> As confessed by Ihil Șraibman, a Bessarabian writer of Jewish origin, derived from Yiddish literary environment in Bucharest. See the interview with Ihil Șraibman (January 19, 2004). About the writers of Jewish origin in the Interwar Romania, see: *Contribuția scriitorilor evrei la literatura*

constituted half of the writers in the MSSR (of about 20 writers who became members of the Moldovan Writers’ Union in 1941). The MSSR attracted them less as a result of its political regime (of which most of those writers had a rather contradictory picture, given Romanian anti-Soviet propaganda of the time), but rather because of the refuge they expected to find in the USSR from the discriminatory treatment to which they had been subjected in Romania, especially during the late 1930s.

In Romanian Bessarabia, the grievances of ethnic minorities were also exploited by the Komintern and Soviet intelligence services to spread the seed of irredentism throughout the province<sup>39</sup>. After 28 June 1940, the resentment of the Bessarabian intellectuals of Jewish origin toward the Romanian administration continued to be used by Soviet ideologues in order to build a Moldovan identity separate from the Romanian one. Intellectuals of Jewish origin enjoyed a somewhat privileged position under the Soviet regime, especially

*română* [Jewish writers’ contribution to Romanian literature], The “Viața Românească” Cahiers, Writers Union of Romania, nr. 2, 2001. About the writers of Jewish origin of the Romanian avant-garde movement in the late 30s and 40s, see Irina Livezeanu, „From Dada to Gaga’: The Peripatetic Romanian Avant-Garde Confronts Communism”, in Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu (coord.), *Littératures et pouvoir symbolique*, Bucharest, Ed. Paralela 45, 2005, pp. 239-253.

<sup>39</sup> See Charles King, *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală* [original title: *The Moldovans. Russia, România, and the Politics of Culture*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 2000], Chișinău, Arc, 2002, p. 44. See also „July 8, 1924, [Moscow], Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the thirty-fifth World Congress of the Communist International, devoted to the national question” (title translated); “8 July 1924, [Moscow] Excerpt from the Fifth Congress resolution of the World Communist International about national problems in the Central Europe and Balkans”, in Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Cominternul și originile „moldovenismului”* [Komintern and the origins of Moldovanism ], Chișinău, Ed. Civitas, 2009, pp. 122-136.

during the years 1940-1945. The Presidium of the MWU - in August 1940 consisting solely of Bessarabian and Transnistrian writers of Jewish origin - even decided to create a Jewish department and to edit a new literary journal in Yiddish<sup>40</sup>, though the decision remained a dead letter. The Communist Party's goodwill towards the Jews did not last long. After the war, the alliance between the Bessarabian Jewish representatives and the Soviet authorities lost its strategic importance. Not only that, but Jews started to be perceived as a growing threat to the integrity of the Soviet regime, as they were suspected to be organised in a more cohesive community and claimed a specific legitimacy as the victims par excellence of Nazism and the Antonescu regime<sup>41</sup>. In the second half of the '40s, Jewish origin became an identity element most likely to discredit a Bessarabian writer, diminishing his/her chances of success, especially when associated with a 'Romanian' origin.

In order to disguise their Jewish origin, a number of Bessarabian and Transnistrian writers adopted literary pseudonyms that sounded more 'native', thus following a twofold – literary and Bolshevik – tradition of mystery and secrecy. In a letter to the Transnistrian writer Leonid Cornfeld, shortly before his death in November 1957, the writer E. Bucov reminded his correspondent about his decision to take an alias:

"Then, at Soroca [in 1944, after returning from refuge in Moldova], you asked me: "What

would you say if I retouch a bit my literary name?" You had, of course, good reasons for that, I mean patriotic reasons. So I answered: "Once the great Ulyanov did not hesitate to do it..."<sup>42</sup>

#### THE 'UNDERGROUND ACTIVISTS'

To this category only two Bessarabian writers may be assigned: Emilian Bucov and, after the war began, Andrei Lupan. Their 'underground' political activity under the Romanian administration conferred them a certain amount of legitimacy and quickly propelled them upwards in the hierarchy of the Writers' Union and even towards the leadership of the Republic. Unlike other factors of success at that moment which quickly lost their validity, as, for example, regionalism or Jewish identity, the allegedly 'underground' political activity under the previous authorities turned into a growing capital.

At a closer glance, genuine 'underground' activity in the literary circles of the 1930s was rather rare. The writers to whom it was ascribed had studied in Romanian universities: E. Bucov at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, and A. Lupan at the Faculty of Agriculture in the Chişinău branch of the University of Iaşi. During that period, they published poems under pseudonyms in some leftist newspapers, while Bucov even published a book of poetry on social topics. Both joined Communist youth organisations and, in 1936, A. Lupan became a member of the Romanian Communist Party. Within these political organisations, the prospective writers exercised the illegal activities which they would later on come to emphasise; spreading leaflets with

40 Mark Faverin, „Reuniunea scriitorilor din Basarabia” [The Bessarabian writers' gathering], *Basarabia sovietică*, August 27, 1940, p. 1.

41 As well as it happened in the center of URSS, see Laurent Rucker, *Staline, Israël et les Juifs*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2001; see also Laurent Rucker, „La Jdanovschchina: une campagne antisemite?” and Laurent Rucker, „Pourquoi Staline liquida le Comité antifasciste juif?”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1995.

42 Letter of E. Bucov to L. Corneanu (Cornfeld) of 14 November 1957, at the Moldovan Writers Union Archives – National Museum of Romanian Literature “Mihail Kogălniceanu” (AUSM), “Manuscripts” fund, file 9436, p. 2.

revolutionary content and organising student associations advocating in favour of social justice and against fascism.

Despite the general trend of the Soviet regime to marginalise former Romanian Communist Party activists<sup>43</sup>, these 'underground' writers rapidly gained the confidence of the MSSR Party leaders and managed to maintain it. During the war, they showed perfect loyalty to the Soviet government. In 1945, they already had a great deal of influence on party leaders, especially regarding issues concerning national and cultural policy.

#### FORMS OF ENROLMENT OF BESSARABIAN WRITERS AFTER 28 JUNE 1940

The Bessarabian writers demonstrated an exceptional ability to adjust to new circumstances. Already a few days after the establishment of the Soviet regime (which, to recall, surprised the majority of the Bessarabian population), the local people of letters began to work actively in the official newspaper of the Moldovan Republic and in the Writers' Union's journal. Despite remarkable efforts and achievements, the work of these writers in the new conditions was not without risks. With a rich experience of socialist culture, the 'Transnistrian' writers (from the former MASSR) had the task to teach the Bessarabians the basics of communist doctrine, to initiate them in the principles of Socialist Realism and to warn them against the dangers of political negligence. Each week, meetings of Bessarabian and Soviet writers were held in the presence of an audience of amateurs and with the mandatory participation of at least one state representative. These peculiar 'literary soirees' became the framework of a one-way exchange from 'tutors' to 'novices'.

<sup>43</sup> See, among other sources, Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor...*, p. 320.

The newcomers learned the new 'political language'<sup>44</sup> and acquired the first rules of behaviour within the institution which had taken them in, along with its subsequent (formal and informal) hierarchical relations. Finally, these meetings allowed Bessarabians to implement the acquired knowledge and skills and the better 'educated' to distinguish themselves in front of their 'tutors' and new authorities.

#### RE-EDUCATION AND SELF-EDUCATION

The first lesson that Bessarabians learned from their new 'teachers' was to assume their utter ignorance regarding socialist culture. Some newcomers tried to pose as 'revolutionary' writers. But their claim was immediately crushed by the more experienced writers who exhorted them to 'ease [their] soul' by undergoing self-criticism, to condemn the Romanian 'bourgeois regime' while highlighting the negative influence that it had exerted on writers in general and on each of them in particular. The dialectic of criticism vs. self-criticism<sup>45</sup> was put into motion to such a degree that the tutors' intervention was no longer necessary to ensure its smooth operation. In this regard, at one of the first meetings, Nicolai Costenco made the mistake of stating that the writer's vocation

<sup>44</sup> After Nicolas Werth, the 'political language' was a task to which the Party candidates were subjected by the established Party members. See Nicolas Werth, *Être communiste sous Staline*, Paris, Gallimard / Juillard, 1981, p. 153. This expression is partly synonymous with that of 'speaking Bolshevik' by Stephen Kotkin, designating „learning the mores and rituals of the Soviet workplace, the rules of meetings, and the public language of newspapers”. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 81. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. The Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 198.

<sup>45</sup> See John Arch Getty, „Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee”.

was not to involve himself in politics, but perhaps to participate in a certain cultural policy. It caused the immediate critical reaction of one of the 'underground' writers, Andrei Lupan: "The writer cannot be apolitical", he said. "He shall not close himself in his office, but must go with an open heart among the people."<sup>46</sup> The former member of the Romanian Communist Party touched a key issue of Soviet writers' ethics. The subject was immediately picked up and developed by the Ukrainian writers who were attending the meeting. The Bessarabian writers were invited to learn their civic mission – to be "a transmission belt" between the party and the people, between the new government and the Bessarabian population.

According to an article in the local Party newspaper, on 15 September 1940, after two and a half months of training, the Bessarabian writers, assisted by their Transnistrian 'tutors', launched themselves into "literary-cultural work among the workers of Bessarabia"<sup>47</sup>. Gathered in the meeting hall of Printing House Nr. 1 in Chişinău, they gave speeches about the 'sad fate' of Bessarabian writers under the bourgeois regime and on their mission in the Soviet homeland. They read poems about the Soviet youth, about the war heroes in Spain and about Stalin. According to the correspondent, "listeners rewarded the writers with prolonged applause"<sup>48</sup>. By June 1941, Moldovan writers (from Bessarabia and Transnistria) organised literary evenings in over 40 enterprises and kolkhozes of the Republic<sup>49</sup>. In No-

46 (Signed: F.), „Acasă la scriitorii basarabeni” [At home to the Bessarabian writers], *Basarabia sovietică*, July 5, 1940, p. 3.

47 (Signed: S. Br.), „Scriitorii în întreprinderi” [The writers in factories], *Basarabia sovietică*, September 18, 1940, p. 3.

48 *Idem.*

49 Lev Barschi, „Literatura moldovenească după un an” [The Moldovan literature after one year], MS, June 8, 1941, p. 3.

vember 1940, Moldovan writers participated in the election campaign along with 36,000 agitators<sup>50</sup>, urging the Moldovans to vote for the "bloc of communists and independents"<sup>51</sup>. For the Bessarabian writers, it was the first opportunity to attend a mass propaganda campaign. Subsequently, the participation in cultural, political or agricultural campaigns became a common practice performed by Soviet Moldovan writers.

These 'literary and cultural' manifestations, regularly organised for workers in Moldovan towns and villages, were critical for the formation of the Bessarabian writers. They provided an opportunity to test their first attempts at 'socialist' literature in front of their target audience. At the same time, the literary soirees helped to educate the audience and to familiarise it with a new type of culture. Finally, meetings with the mass audiences were a further opportunity for writers to gather new material about the everyday life of Moldovan workers – the main subject and target audience of their works.

#### INTEGRATION

The integration of the Bessarabian writers into the literary institutions of the Moldovan Republic developed in several stages. First, they were invited to work as journalists at the official newspaper *Moldova socialistă* and its provisional branch, written in Latin characters, *Basarabia sovietică*, as well as to collaborate with the Moldovan Writers Union's journal *Octombrie*. Subsequently, Bessarabian writers were employed as editors and translators in various cultural institutions: theatres, Philharmonics, or the State Committee for

50 See Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor*, op. cit., p. 333.

51 (Anonymous), „Reuniunea intelectualilor din oraşul Chişinău” [The intellectuals' meeting in Chişinău], MS, November 29, 1940, p. 1.

Repertoires (Repertkom). They engaged with the Transnistrian writers in various activities of public interest. Beginning with the spring of 1941, most of them signed contracts with the MSSR State Publishing House, editing volumes of prose or poetry. But their recognition as full-fledged Soviet writers occurred only after a year of activity on the cultural and political 'front', with their formal admission to the Soviet Moldovan Writers Union.

The Bessarabian writers were admitted to the MSU in small groups. The reception of the first group took place in late March of 1941, after which other candidates were admitted gradually every two weeks until early June. It seems that the admission was made selectively following a pre-defined list, according to the applicants' merits (at least that was the impression of some candidates<sup>52</sup>). The first on the list was Emilian Bucov, the 'underground activist' writer who would become president of MWU three years later. Afterwards, the order of admission seems arbitrary. Nicolai Costenco, number two on the alleged list (Costenco boasted later that he was admitted second after Bucov<sup>53</sup>), was in reality one of the least favoured candidates and was deported within two weeks. Despite the rivalry present at that moment, the admission of Bessarabian writers to the MWU was seen as paramount recognition by them. Membership in the MWU was all the more prestigious as it implied automatic acceptance in the Soviet Writers Union (based

52 This impression is deduced from the interview that I conducted with the writer Ihil Şraibman, who was received in the MWU in late May 1941, and Nicolai Costenco's autobiographical writings. See the interview with Ihil Şraibman (19/01/2004); Nicolai Costenco, *Povestea vulturului*, pp. 22, 218; Nicolai Costenco, *Din bezna temniței... Scriitori din Gulag*, Chişinău, Arc, 2004, pp. 9, 18. These sources gave me many precious details about the applicants' admission in the MWU.

53 Nicolai Costenco, *Scriitori din Gulag*, op. cit., p. 18.

in Moscow), to which the MWU belonged.

The admission meetings, held in the presence of professional and amateur writers, followed a predetermined plan. A reporter – usually a writer or a critic who was not part of the candidates, nor the chair – presented a detailed analysis of the candidate's literary work. Several writers who participated at the meeting expressed their (almost always favourable) position on the subject. Then, the presidium, made up exclusively of Transnistrian writers, invited the candidate to present his autobiography. The questions from presidium, based on the exposition, were simple, even formal, and were not intended to embarrass the candidate. Finally, the presidium voted on the writer's application and, after unanimous agreement, announced the decision that seemed predetermined: admission.

The admission procedure proved to be easier than the candidates had hoped. They had expected the procedure to involve rigorous screening and selection, but in fact the admission itself seemed to be a mere formality. Having so quickly obtained the coveted status, they tended to underestimate the 'tests' to which they had been subjected during the previous year and above all those which they would be facing later.

#### EMULATION

The most difficult challenges that the newcomers had to face between June 1940 and June 1941 did not come directly from the agents of power, but from the Bessarabian writers themselves as a result of the pressure from a context in which zeal and ideological emulation were perceived as determinants for successful integration<sup>54</sup>. Driven by the desire

54 This 'proactive' – and the least anomic – behavior was noted by some social historians of Stalinism, especially during the purges. See, for

to assert themselves vis-à-vis their Transnistrian 'tutors' and governors, they used various strategies and emphasised their alleged merits with a view to ingratiate themselves and, at the same time, to reduce the chances of their competitors, who were, in fact, their peers.

It should be recalled that the three groups of Bessarabian writers who met in Chişinău in late June 1940 – 'regionalists', 'Jews', and 'underground activists' – each had specific social capital. The group of writers from Viaţa Basarabiei was the largest and most united, yet it was not the strongest. Its cohesion facilitated the pro-Soviet conversion of its members, but it did not at all represent an attractive ideology for the builders of socialist society. Thus, N. Costenco, the leader of the younger generation of Bessarabian writers – and recognised as such at the institutional level by the Romanian authorities – tried to reassert his former status after 28 June 1940 by imposing his authority over his companions and even the writers of the MASSR. However, his attempt to regain power (at least symbolically) dragged on. His 'charisma' proved obsolete in the new circumstances. "Soon, I realised that working with the Soviets was not so simple if you claim your superiority and bourgeois aristocracy"<sup>55</sup> – he explained later, ironically explaining his own experience as a demoted leader. Even his close friends ended up distancing themselves from their former comrade and leader. The advantage of the other two groups of Bessarabian writers came precisely from the fact that they were not structured around a 'charismatic leader' and therefore could more easily adhere – as groups or

example, John Arch Getty, „Party and Purge in Smolensk: 1933-1937”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring, 1983), pp. 60-79 and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 194-217.

<sup>55</sup> Nicolai Costenco, *Povestea vulturului*, p. 22.

individually – to an external authority.

After the fall from grace of the 'regionalists', the Bessarabian writers' main interest was to highlight the 'revolutionary' character of their activity under the previous authorities. The 'underground activists' enjoyed a distinct advantage over other aspirants to the position of former 'opponents', but their legitimacy was limited by the Transnistrians' undisputed prestige.

#### ELIMINATION

The stages of integration strategies imposed on Bessarabian writers by the MWU (rehabilitation, inclusion and emulation) sometimes led to explicit failure: exclusion. This might have been a 'solution' to 'recalcitrant' writers when all forms of integration proved ineffective. Such a case is represented by Nicolai Costenco who repeatedly manifested a recalcitrant character towards the 'tutors' and even towards some government representatives. The question one may pose is why to admit a writer into this prestigious literary institution of the Soviet Union and to then get rid of him a few days later. This form of exclusion seems to contradict the objectives of the Writers' Union.

In the MWU of that period, two views on the management of literary affairs met and sometimes collided: the literary logic - which corresponded to the main occupation of the institution - and the state's reasoning. The Writers' Union's leadership generally sought to integrate writers, regardless of group membership, in order to foster fruitful literary creation according to the institution's aesthetic and ideological orientation. At the same time, the Party and security forces had to ensure that citizens (in this case, the writers) respected the laws and the state's interests, deviation from

which was subject to the threat of exclusion<sup>56</sup>. On 13 June 1941, one week before the start of the war between the Axis powers and the USSR, the two concepts clashed again. When the MWU received instructions from the secret police to unmask the 'enemies of the people' hidden inside the institution, this triggered a whole mechanism of purges (developed in the USSR in the 1930s), comprising sessions of criticism and self-criticism, of denunciation and self-defense. The writers N. Costenco, M. Curicheru and P. Ștefănuță were most exposed to attack by their colleagues because of their recent behaviour and especially in view of their past activity.

The outbreak of the war allowed the possibility of applying an indirect form of exclusion. Writers who were deemed useless, or inconvenient to the MWU or the state's interests were mobilised and sent to the front as ordinary soldiers, while others were generally exempted from military service, or went to the front as officers. This was the case for several Transnistrian writers.

#### THE TRANSNISTRIAN LEADERS

The Transnistrian writers who settled in Chișinău after 28 June 1940 were vested with

56 This apparent contradiction in the 'personnel management' would come, in the interpretation of the historian Terry Martin, from the tasks assigned to different Soviet institutions, on the one hand representing the 'soft-line' (culture, education, medicine, social services, etc.), on the other hand, the repressive institutions, responsible for the 'hard-line' of the Bolshevik policy. Cf. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire, Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca & Londra, Cornell University Press, 2001, especially: pp. 21-23; Terry Martin, „The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing”, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (December 1998), pp. 813-861; Terry Martin, „Interpreting the New Archival Signals: Nationalities Policy and the Nature of the Soviet Bureaucracy”, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Jun., 1999), pp. 113-124, p. 114.

the role of 'tutors' for their new Bessarabian colleagues, by virtue of their 'experience' in Socialist Realism and their supposed loyalty to the Soviet government and the Communist Party<sup>57</sup>. Like the Bessarabians, but without any freedom of choice, the Transnistrians had undergone a rigorous selection before coming to Chișinău. Those Transnistrian writers who arrived in Chișinău in 1940 were the survivors and at the same time the beneficiaries of the 'great purges' of 1937-38. In 1940, the Transnistrians were as few as the Bessarabians – not more than 15 people. Like the Bessarabian writers, they did not constitute a homogeneous group, being divided into two factions, broadly according to their 'age group.' Less numerous, the 'older ones' – Ion Canna and Leonid Cornfeld – were undeniably the most prominent figures of Transnistrian literature. Their 'age' is, of course, relative. I. Canna was 38 years old, whereas L. Cornfeld had just turned 31 in 1940. Instead, they had the reputation of founding the Moldavian Soviet Republic and, in the case of I. Canna, participating in the Civil War. The 'Great Purge' not only spared the youngest (the so-called *vydvizhentsy* – the 'promoted')<sup>58</sup>, but even favoured them, since they were the ones who took over the administration of the MWU and the *Octombrie* journal after the "cadres' bleeding"<sup>59</sup> occurred in 1937-38. Less gifted in terms of cultural capital than

57 In this respect, the situation is similar in other republics recently incorporated into the Soviet Union. Thus, in Estonia, local intellectuals (generally local cadres), the so-called 'revolutionaries' were dominated and guided by so-called 'immigrants.' See Elena Zubkova, "L'Affaire estonienne" dans le contexte de la soviétisation des pays baltes. 1949-1953", *Communisme*, No 70/71, Paris, L'Âge d'homme, 2002, pp. 187.

58 Most of them, as Petrea Cruceniuc, were born on the eve of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

59 An expression used for this purpose by Moshe Lewin in *Le Siècle soviétique*, Paris, Fayard, 2003, p. 145.

the 'older ones' and their Bessarabian fellows, the 'younger' writers asserted themselves by virtue of their enthusiasm and the confidence they had earned after the 1937 purges. However, there is an element in the young generation's careers that brought them on a par with the 'older ones' and the Bessarabian 'newcomers': they were not communists, despite being the Party's favourites. After the collective persecution experienced by the communists in 1937, these Komsomol writers appeared as a reserve team from which the Party would recruit its prospective members. Indeed, the hard work and courage they showed during the 'Great Patriotic War' would reward them after 1945 with the Communist Party membership card.

'Young' and 'old', the Transnistrian writers devoted their energy to implementing the Party's exhortation to train and guide the Bessarabian 'newcomers'. Despite a certain reluctance manifested by some 'tutored ones' vis-à-vis their 'tutors', the collaboration between Transnistrians and Bessarabians progressed in the right direction. The purge that started in June 1941 in the Writers' Union and throughout the country hindered the smooth running of that collaboration and reminded the Transnistrians of their recent experience: the 1937 purges, in which they had faced the Bessarabians<sup>60</sup> as their potential enemies.

The Bessarabian writers accepted a subordinate position vis-à-vis the Transnistrian writers, as was required by the Soviet power. They posed as exemplary 'disciples' and developed a contagious competition among

60 In the purges of 1937-38, the most repressed cadres and intellectuals were of Bessarabian origin, arrived in the USSR in the 1920s and settled in the MASSR on the party line. See more on this issue in Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*, „De la 'formarea cadrelor' la 'marile epurări'” [From 'cadres formation' to the 'great purges'], pp. 120-132.

themselves for a higher appreciation by their more favoured peers and in order to increase their chances of being recognised as fully-fledged Soviet writers. They assimilated the new 'creative method' without reservations, renouncing their claims to being the literary avant-garde which had distinguished them in the interwar period from the older generation. However, they could not give up two elements of the cultural capital inherited from the previous authorities: Romanian classical literature and Romanian as literary language which they had learned from childhood on.

The Bessarabian writers' admission into the MWU, which signalled the confidence that they enjoyed from the Party, gave them formally equal status with the Transnistrian writers. The position they adopted on the issue of the 'Moldovan' standard literary language enjoyed more credibility among the decision makers. On June 8, 1941, a few days after the last Bessarabian candidate was admitted into the MWU, the Moldovan government adopted a linguistic reform, which was the result of a compromise, following negotiation between the Bessarabian writers' position and the principles defended by the Transnistrian writers, as well as the Moldovan leaders themselves – a reform which recognised a 'Moldovan' language that was very close to the Romanian literary language<sup>61</sup>. However, the reform was only a provisional victory won by the Bessarabian writers. The discussions were soon resumed during refuge in Moscow. By the late 1950s, the linguistic issue, as well as the classic literary heritage, would be a permanent point of contention in the balance of power between the two factions of the MWU, the Bessarabians and the Transnistrians.

61 (Anonymous), „Noua ortografie a limbii moldovenești” [The new orthography of the Moldovan language], *MS*, June 8, 1941, p. 1.

On June 19, 1941, three days before the war, the Ministry of Education organised a literary soiree dedicated to the great 'Moldovan poet' Mihai Eminescu, with the participation of writers, the prime minister, and other officials<sup>62</sup>. It was supposed to be part of a series of cultural events aimed at popularising Moldovan literary classics among Moldovans. But the war interrupted the initiative, and also continued to pose an obstacle for continuing such a series of gatherings after the restoration of peace. Romania's involvement in World War Two in alliance with Nazi Germany would be used by the opponents of the 'Romanisation drive' of the Moldovan language and literary heritage as an argument to defend their localist and pro-Russian position.

#### CONCLUSION

In this article, I tried to analyse how the Bessarabian writers' integration was conducted into the literary and cultural institutions of Soviet Moldova, namely the Moldovan Writers Union, from June 1940 (the annexation of Bessarabia by USSR) until June 1941, when the territory was retaken by the Romanian army in alliance with the German army. I examined two perspectives and two different logics of this process. On the one hand, I outlined the Bessarabian writers' position depending on their group affiliation, on their social and symbolic capital and on their motivations in relation to Soviet power and its cultural institutions. On the other hand, I tried to reconstruct the rationale of the Soviet authorities in their – sometimes contradictory – actions in enrolling (or sometimes marginalising) these writers who were freshly torn from the Bessarabian and Romanian literary milieu.

<sup>62</sup> (Anonymous), „O lecție despre Mihai Eminescu” [A lecture about Mihai Eminescu], *MS*, June 28, 1941, p. 1.

After 28 June 1940, the three groups that constituted the 'Bessarabian' faction of the Moldovan Writers Union (i.e. 'regionalists', 'Jews' and 'underground activists') did not represent fixed and definitive categories. The main feature which defined them all was the kind of motivation that urged everyone to cooperate with the occupation regime (in this case, the Soviets), depending on their own biographic background and cultural capital. The three categories intersected and overlapped, since the writers often had a number of competing interests. Beyond these writers' biographic particularities, certain common features determined their predisposition to seek a compromise with the Soviets and a *modus vivendi* with the Moldovan Soviet writers (the 'Transnistrians'). In 1940, they were all young and belonged to diverse – and often uncertain – ethnic origins, sharing sometimes a certain type of regionalist position in relation to the Romanian administration, albeit for different reasons. Finally, most of them had populist and/or socialist beliefs. Yet, due to their Bessarabian origin and Romanian education they were distinct from the faction of Transnistrian writers when they became part of the MWU.

The strategies aimed at integrating the Bessarabian writers into Soviet institutional structures followed a binary – and apparently contradictory – rationale, of inclusion (of candidates deemed suitable for the aspiring status) and exclusion (of those who would not correspond to the criteria of political probity advanced by the Soviet authorities). One of the psychosocial effects of these two poles of the enrolment strategy implemented by the MWU (and other state-sponsored institutions) was the zealous behaviour and ideological emulation that writers adopted in order to ensure their successful integration. This be-

haviour laid the basis for duplicitous and somewhat dysfunctional interactions between writers, which would reach a paroxysm in the post-war 'Zhdanovist' campaign<sup>63</sup>.

Moldovan writers coming from the MASSR (the 'Transnistrians') had a crucial role in the integration and enrolment of the Bessarabian writers into the MWU, as mediators vis-à-vis the Soviet authorities (many were Party members, had administrative positions in various official cultural institutions and had 'length of service' in political and cultural affairs), as well as in their function as cultural and ideological 'tutors'. However, they were less endowed in terms of knowledge of the Romanian literary language (officially called 'Moldovan') and of the 'Moldovan' literary heritage (which was already claimed as Romanian in Romania), which placed them in an inferior position in relation to their Bessarabian fellows. These cultural differences would tilt the postwar balance of power between them, allowing the group of Bessarabian writers to the benefit of their cultural capital in a symbolic and institutional battle which the 'Bessarabians' were to eventually win. This decisive – yet, never final – victory was to tilt the linguistic and cultural policy during the 1950s in the Moldavian SSR towards a 'latent Romanization'<sup>64</sup> of literary language and literary heritage. In this way, the issue of language and cultural heritage actually reverted to the fragile compromise reached in May-June 1941 in the cultural and literary sphere of the MSSR before the withdrawal of Soviet power from the territory of Bessarabia

63 See more about the Moldovan writers' environment in the 'Zhdanovist' era, in Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători...*, p. 179-214.

64 According to the expression of Charles King, in *The Moldovans...*; this thesis was verified and corroborated with a body of documents, in Petru Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători...*, chapter 4, especially: pp. 274-299.

and Transnistria to the benefit of the Romanian and German authorities.

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