

1991: A Chronology of Moldova's Independance

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the most important events of the year 1991 and their impact on the Moldovan society. The year 1991 proved to be crucial for the Soviet republics, including Moldova, and as a result of incremental democratic transformations and the collapse of the USSR, the Republic of Moldova became an independent state.

The year 1991 is, without a doubt, a year of crucial historical change for the Soviet space, due to the transformations of the 1980s which culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the appearance of new independent states. The events of 1991 can be considered consequences of what happened in 1989 in Central Europe and East Europe - events which changed the destiny of millions of people. Even if at the beginning there were no projects of breaking up the old Soviet societies, the events of 1989-1991 created the bases for democratic and modern societies to replace the totalitarian communist regimes. If the 1989 year is considered the *annus mirabilis* or the collapse of a utopia, then the year 1991 is the beginning of the post-Cold War era¹.

In the context of the collapse of Soviet Union, the year 1991 meant the beginning of a process of creating a democratic and independent state for Republic of Moldova. For a better understanding of the context of this historical event which occurred more than two decades ago,

we propose to analyse the most important events of 1991 which led to the destruction of the Soviet Union and the creation of new independent states. The goal of this paper is to discuss the main events of the year 1991 and their impact on Moldovan society.

In April 1985, after the Plenary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the concept of internal development and external politics of Soviet Union changed. The period between 1985 and 1989 is considered the beginning of the democratic movement in Moldova which was possible due to the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev – Perestroika and Glasnost. In 1989-1991, the Soviet Union was in a large political crisis, created by the movements of national emancipation in the republics. The majority of Soviet republics were fighting for their independence. On June 3rd, 1988 the Democratic Movement for Perestroika's Sustainability was created in the Soviet Union by some leading intellectuals.

In Soviet Moldova the „Alexe Mateevici” Cenacle, led by A. Şalaru, had an important role in the promotion of democratic ideas and national resurgence. One of the first meetings of the Cenacle took place on January 15, 1988 next to the monument of Mihai Eminescu on the Alley of Classics, in the Public Garden in Chişinău. In 1989 many public meetings (demonstrations and political rallies) were organised to stimulate the awakening of national consciousness of the citizens of the Moldovan

¹ See Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflecţii asupra revoluţiei din Europa*, Bucureşti, Humanistas, 1993; Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Revoluţie din 1989. Între trecut şi viitor*, Iaşi, Polirom 1999 (trans. Rom. De Dragoş and Cristina Petrescu); Sorin Antohi, Vladimir Tismăneanu (eds), *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*, Central European University Press, New York and Budapest, 2000 (Romanian version by Marilena Andrei, Elena Neculcea, Livia Szász, *De la utopie la istorie: Revoluţiile din 1989 şi urmările lor*, Bucureşti, Curtea Veche, 2006); Stelian Tănase, *Istoria căderii regimurilor comuniste. Miracolul revoluţiei*, 2nd edition, Bucureşti, Humanistas, 2009.

Socialist Soviet Republic (MSSR). On 25 February 1990, the election of the first Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (Supreme Soviet of the MSSR) in a democratic manner marked a further shift of the democratic movement and of nationalist claims towards the Moscow centre. It implied a challenge to the political monopoly of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM), facilitated the democratisation of Moldovan society². The socio-political events of 1990 lead to the creation of state bodies: Parliament, Government, the National Radio-Television Company, and the National News Agency „Moldpress,”. This process culminated in the declaration of sovereignty on 23 June 1990³.

2 The idea of abandoning the CPSU's monopoly on power had been launched in Moscow by Andrei Sakharov in May, 1989, at the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR. M. Gorbachev proposed revision of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution of 1977, which declared the leading role of the CPSU, at the CC Plenary of CPSU, on February 5-7, 1990. The proposed revision of Art. 6 was ratified on 14 March, 1990, at the Third Extraordinary Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR. In the new version, the art. 6 of the USSR Constitution read as follows: „The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, other political party, trade and youth unions, other public organizations and mass movements, are involved in formulating policy of the Soviet state, of the administration of public affairs and civil organizations, through their representatives in the Soviets of People's Deputies.” In Chișinău, the government of SSRM, due to approximation of its election to the Supreme Soviet of the SSRM, was forced to record the first four politico-cultural organizations yet on 26th of October, 1989: Popular Front of Moldova (leader I. Hadârcă) Movement Unit-Edinstvo (A. Lisețki), Gagauz hunk (S. Bulgac), Cultural-Social Association of Bulgarians „Vozrojdenie” (I. Zabunov). The first officially registered political party in the Republic of Moldova was the Social Democratic Party, created on 13th of May, 1990, which had originally three chairmen: Alexander Coșeleu Oazu Nantoi and John Haze. See Igor Cașu, Gorbaciov propunea anularea rolului conducător al PCUS în februarie 1990, <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/2299780.html> (Accessed on 09.02.2011).

3 See more details about the period between 1985-1991 in the next articles: S. Musteață, „Lecțiile independenței Republicii Moldova – tranziția de

The beginning of 1991 was dramatic in the Baltic republics where it took the form of a direct conflict between the local populations' wish for freedom, democracy and independence and attempts by the Soviet centre to maintain the existence of the Soviet state in a reshaped configuration. On 10 January 1991, Gorbachev addressed an ultimatum to the Supreme Soviet of Lithuania, asking for the „restoration of the Soviet constitution in the country and the revocation of the laws considered unconstitutional by the Soviet authorities.”⁴ In street fights between security forces and civilians in Vilnius on 11 - 13 January, 14 people were killed and around 600 were injured. A couple of days later, special forces killed four protesters in Riga. Great Britain was one of the first Western powers to disapprove of the military actions in Vilnius and Riga, openly demanding „reforms and not repressions” and blaming the Soviet leadership for attempts to conceal the events in Lithuania.⁵ The events in the Baltic republics lead to their secession from the Soviet Union: Lithuanian independence was declared on 11 March 1990, Latvia and Estonia declared theirs on 3 March 1991.

In contrast to Lithuania, Latvia, or Georgia, the MSSR did not see any confrontations which caused human casualties during this period. However, many street actions did take place in Chișinău between 1989 and 1991, resulting in arrests and clashes with

la totalitarism la democrație,” In: *Limba Română. Revistă de știință și cultură*, Anul XXI, nr. 3-6 (189-192), 2011, 361-372; S. Musteață, „Dilemele Republicii Moldova.” In: *Archiva Moldaviae*, IV, 2012, 103-124.

4 Moldova Suverană. Cotidian al Sovietului Suprem și al Guvernului RSS Moldova, 10 ianuarie 1991.

5 Great Britain disapproved the military actions ordered by the Soviet government in Vilnius and Riga, declaring that they sustain „reforms, not repressions” and condemned the Soviet leadership for trying to hide events in Lithuania.

the police. To mention just a few examples: On 12 March 1989, the tricolour flag was raised for the first time during a protest. The most active protesters were arrested. After the public's unsuccessful requests to liberate the arrested people, on 31 May 1989 a group of citizens began a first hunger strike in front of the Stefan the Great monument in protest against the detention.

On 28 June 1989, the first protest against the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia was held in Chişinău. Supporters of the Popular Front of Moldova (PFM) prevented a meeting of supporters of the „liberation of Bessarabia from Romanian landowners and its reunion with the Soviet homeland,” backed by the Communist authorities. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova condemned the actions of the PFM, categorising them as politically harmful.

The leaders of the Baltic republics, Georgia and Armenia renounced to organise a military parade on 7 November 1989, while the authorities in Chişinău decided to carry it out according to communist tradition. However, in the morning of 7 November, a group of approximately 100 people took candles in front of Soviet tanks preparing for the military parade. Once supporters of the PFM arrived at Victory Square, the leaders of Communist Party of Moldova left the central stage and the military parade was cancelled⁶.

During the next day some young people who tried to protest in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs against the actions of the militia on 7 November were arrested. This caused the spontaneous gathering of people in front of the Ministry chanting: „The imprisoned – released!”. The gathered people were attacked by the police and beaten with truncheons.

⁶ Gh.E. Cojocaru, 1989 la Est de Prut, Chişinău, Prut Internaţional, 2001, p. 188-189.

At around 6 PM there were already around a thousand people in front of the Ministry building, blocking traffic on Chişinău's main street. Some two- to three hundred militias came out of the building to attack the crowd. A group of members of parliament came to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and proposed to Vladimir Voronin, then the Minister of Internal Affairs, to order the withdrawal of his troops. Given the pressure of the people outside the building, the arrested people were released. While the people were moving to Victory Square, blank bullets were shot from the Ministry building and bursts of automatic gunfire could be heard. This caused an escalation of violence with the protesters starting to throw rocks at the Interior Ministry building. At around 11 PM there were already some five to six thousand people on Victory Square demanding the resignation of the leading figures of the MSSR: S. Grosu, V. Pşenicinikov, I. Kalin, and V. Semenov.

As a result of the events of 7 and 10 November, the Central Committee of the CPM planned the prosecution and dissolution of the PFM but the authorities did not dare to implement this scenario. At a press conference on 12 November 1989, held by the Ministry of Internal Affairs it was revealed that on the night of 10th November ten military aircraft had landed at Chişinău Airport with more than 2,000 soldiers of the Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, under the command of general Lieutenant Vladimir Dubenjuk who said that the call came from the leaders of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic.

Although spirits were high in Moldova and especially in Chişinău, both, the political elites and the larger public moved with a great deal of caution. Between 1989 and 1991 the Moldovan national revival movement was growing



Photo 1. November 3, 1990, Parliament approves the new coat of arms (after Parlamentul independenței)

and had a direct impact on local society and the political class in Chișinău. Thus, on February 4th, 1991, Petru Lucinschi was forced to resign as first secretary of the Central Committee of the CPM and was substituted by Grigore Eremei.⁷ After the amendment of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution the role of the CPSU has steadily declined.⁸ The first alternative social and political organisations to the previously dominant Communist Party were registered in Chișinău in autumn 1989. The first officially registered political party of Moldova was the Social Democratic Party, created on 13th of May 1990. Even though the Marxist-Leninist

⁷ Iurie Gogu, *Istoria Românilor dintre Prut și Nistru. Commented chronology (1988-2010)*, Chișinău, 2010, msc.

⁸ In the new version, the 6th article reads as follows: „The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, other political parties, trade and youth unions, other public organisations and mass movements, are involved in formulating policy of the Soviet State, in the administration of public affairs and civil organisation through their representatives in the Soviets of People's Deputies.”

University of Chișinău was closed in June 1990 and ideological courses for party cadres were terminated, most universities were still teaching the history of the CPSU and scientific communism by the end of the academic year 1990-1991.

In 1990, several significant events happened in Chișinău: free elections to the Supreme Soviet of the MSSR, the adoption of a new flag and coat of arms, the change of name from the MSSR to the “Soviet Socialist Republic Moldova (SSRM)”, the creation of a commission for drafting the constitution, the declaration of sovereignty of June 23, 1990, Presidential elections, etc. On the one hand, there was a continuous process of democratisation of Moldovan society; on the other hand, Moscow encouraged separatism within Moldova which threatened to lead to the formation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Gagauzia and the Transnistrian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁹ At the request of the Chișinău authorities to take action against the separatist movements, the President of the USSR, M. Gorbachev, signed a decree on 22 December 1990 which guaranteed the integrity of the MSSR, but only as a part of the USSR. This document was more of a warning signal towards the nationalistic movements rather than an insurance of peace and integrity to the SSRM.

During 1990-1991, the Soviet central leadership tried to find different solutions to prevent the collapse of the USSR. In December 1990, during the IV Congress of Deputies of the USSR, the decision was made to hold a ref-

⁹ See: Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Separatismul în slujba Imperiului*, Chișinău, 2000. Members of the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR, natives from the districts from the left bank of Dniester, did not support national projects of adopting state symbols and on 12th of March 1991, Supreme Soviet in Tiraspol has banned the use of writing in Latin on the territory of Transnistria.



Photo 2. Protests against the USSR Referendum, Chişinău, March 17, 1991 (after *Parlamentul independenței*)

erendum on 17 March 1991 to ask the Soviet population on the issue of the preservation of the USSR. The SSRM and five other republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia and Armenia) refused to participate in the plebiscite, despite pressure from the central state organs. Meanwhile, the districts on the left bank of the Dniester River and some institutions on the right bank participated. In those republics which did participate in the referendum, the turnout was around 80%, of which 76% voted for keeping the USSR intact.¹⁰ The Referendum results, from one point of view, gave the Soviet authorities a legal support for maintaining the integrity of the USSR. But, from other point of view, encourage the tendency towards independence of some soviet republics. In this context, the putsch in August, 1991, despite its primary intention to stop the disintegration of the Soviet state, in finally facilitated the irreversible collapse of the USSR.

The SSRM began to gradually manifest itself as an autonomous political entity both na-

¹⁰ See more details related to the referendum in I. Caşu's intervention at Radio Free Europe on 17.03.2011 – SSRM and the referendum regarding the maintenance of the USSR on 17 March 1991, <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/2341090.html> (Last time accessed on 05.08.2011).

tionally and internationally¹¹. Between 11 and 17 February 1991, Mircea Snegur carried out his first official visit as Moldovan president to Bucharest, Romania. The visit to Romania was undertaken in the context of a vibrant national movement and as a consequence of the Moldovan leadership's intention of establishing close cultural, academic and political relations with Romania, – relations which were previously very much restricted and controlled by the Soviet authorities between 1944 and 1991. A month later, on 25 March 1991, A. Năstase, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Nicolae Țău, the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed the Protocol on the Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the SSRM and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the first document signed together by ministers of the two countries¹². During 1991, there were other important meetings between Chişinău and Bucharest, such as the meeting between the Presidents Mircea Snegur and Ion Iliescu in Bucharest, the visit of the Romanian Prime Minister Petre Roman, etc. A number of documents on cooperation in various areas, primarily in the fields of culture and education, were signed during these encounters. The first results of this increased collaboration did not take long to materialize: in July 1991, 170 teachers from Moldova went on a two week visit to Romania, and in autumn of the same year another group of Moldovan students went to study in Romania.¹³ On 24 June 24 1991, the Romanian par-

¹¹ In this order is also included the Decision no. 530-XII of the Supreme Soviet of SSRM from 5 March 1991, which has stopped the incorporation of youth into the ranks of the Soviet army and decided that all citizens of SSRM will do military service only on the territory of Moldova.

¹² Iurie Gogu, *Istoria Românilor dintre Prut şi Nistru. Commented chronology (1988-2010)*, Chişinău, 2010, msc.

¹³ In 1990, for the first time the Romanian



Photo 3. Protests condemning the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Chișinău, June 1990 (after Parlamentul independenței)

liament declared the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939 to be void. Three days later, on the occasion of the commemoration of 51 years since the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia, two members of the Foreign Policy Committee of the US Senate - Republican Senators Jesse Helms (North Carolina) and Larry Prester (South Dakota) - presented a draft resolution for the self-determination of Bessarabia Northern Bucovina and their reunification with Romania to the US Congress.¹⁴ Between 26 and 28 June, 1991, the International Conference on the „Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its Consequences for Bessarabia,” was held under the auspices of the Moldovan parliament. The participants from 16 countries concluded that „The pact and its secret additional protocol are void *ab initio* and their consequences must be eliminated.”¹⁵ On 27 March 1991, the union of government awarded scholarships for 1125 students, the majority of them from the Republic of Moldova, including 87 children from Bucovina, 43 children from Odessa Region.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences for Bessarabia. The statement presented by Alexandru Moșanu, President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 26th of June, 1991, In: M. Cernencu, A. Petrencu, I. Șîșcanu, *Crestomație*

Bessarabia and Romania of 1918 was celebrated in Chișinău the first time since 1944. Although the issue of reunification of Bessarabia with Romania was widely discussed by the public, the political leaders of that period – Ion Iliescu, Mircea Snegur, Petru Lucinschi, and Petre Roman – claimed that the issue was not discussed at any of their official meetings.¹⁶ The Russian-speaking population of Moldova, including the Gagauz minority reacted antagonistically to these changes. The official pro-Romanian discourse and changes of the status of the Romanian language, which now became official, as well as the implementation of a “history of Romanians” in the schools and universities of Moldova became a scarecrow for the Russian-speaking population. This further exacerbated existing tensions in society, especially in the separatist regions of Gagauzia and Transnistria. Following the adoption of the Romanian tricolour as the national flag of Moldova (with an added symbol in the middle) and the new coat of arm (which got rid of the old Soviet elements and integrated elements common to the Romanian culture and history) by the parliament of the Republic of Moldova (which was the official name of the country as per a decision of the Supreme Soviet on 23 May 1991), the deputies from the left bank of Dniester refused to participate

la istoria românilor, 1917-1992, Chișinău, Universitat, 1993, pp. 249-273; Declarația de la Chișinău a Conferinței Internaționale „Pactul Ribbentrop-Molotov și consecințele sale pentru Basarabia”, 26-28 iunie 1991. In: M. Cernencu, A. Petrencu, I. Șîșcanu, *Crestomație la istoria românilor, 1917-1992*, Chișinău, Universitat, 1993, p. 274. Vezi detalii la Igor Cașu, „Pactul Ribbentrop-Molotov și consecințele lui pentru Basarabia” (26-28 iunie 1991). *Europa Liberă*, 28.06.2011: <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/24248708.html> (Last time accessed on 05.08.2011).

¹⁶ These statements were made in recent interviews conducted by the author with the nominees (April-May 2011).

in sessions of the legislature in Chişinău.¹⁷ In the context of the changes in the Baltic states and the developments in Moldova described above, the PFM demanded on its meeting on 10 May 1991 that the parliament¹⁸ adopt a declaration of independence, new laws related to citizenship, privatisation, the creation of a National Bank, the freedom to political parties, freedom of the press, a new currency and the nationalisation of the wealth of the CPM as well as the Land Code. The implementation of these measures was delayed by several factors, including discussions on the resignation of prime minister Mircea Druc. On 21 May 1991, the political party representing the Popular Front of Moldova in parliament submitted a protest signed by 70 deputies to express their disapproval of the procedure of Government formation as proposed by President Mircea Snegur. Mircea Snegur, in turn, blamed the PFM for destabilising the social and political situation in the country. In protest, the PFM party left the plenary meeting and refused to return to plenary meetings as long as president Snegur was not proposing a declaration of independence to parliament. PFM members chanting the anthem „Deşteaptă-te, române!” (Wake up, Romanian!), headed to the National Square, where incidents took place between demonstrators and the police.

On 22 May 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the SSRM discussed the dismissal of Druc’s Gov-

ernment. The debates started with a statement by President Mircea Snegur related to the events of 21 May. President Snegur subjected the parliamentary fraction of the PFM, as well as writers, the popular movement and democratic organisations to vehement criticism, accusing them of causing the events on 21 May. Snegur urged parliament to adopt a law which would allow the population of the country to choose the president of the SSRM. Moldova’s Supreme Soviet adopted a bill indicating that the prime minister’s status was equal to the status of an ordinary member of the government (such as a minister or a general director of a department) and the dismissal of the prime minister therefore only required 50% of the votes plus one. In the ballot, 207 out of 218 valid votes were cast in favor of dismissing Prime Minister Mircea Druc, with only 11 deputies voting against it. The PFM faction drafted a complaint which was signed by 60 deputies and was addressed to the chairperson of the Supreme Soviet. There were clashes between police forces concentrated around the office of the Supreme Soviet and civilians. The conflict inside the Supreme Soviet continued the next day as well when the Agrarians’ fraction proposed a draft declaration of independence of the republic and the PFM fraction presented its complaint concerning the unconstitutional removal of prime minister Druc.¹⁹ The PFM’s positions were criticised by a number of Moldova’s key opinion leaders. Some of them formed the Moldovan Democratic Forum (MDF) on 13 July 1991 as an alternative to PFM and CPM. The MDF founders began an initiative to reconcile the Moldovan society and stop the ongoing ethnic confrontations.²⁰

¹⁷ On 27 April 1990, the Law on the state flag (the tricolour – blue, yellow and red) was adopted – a fact which on the one hand represented the success of the national movement, but which was, on the other hand, a challenging step for the separatist movements in Comrat and Tiraspol. For some members from Transnistria this was the last meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the SSRM that they attended, such as in the case of Smirnov. The SSRM’s coat of arm was adopted on 3 November 1990.

¹⁸ The first Parliament of the of Moldova (1990-1994) had 380 deputies, elected nominally according to the constituencies.

¹⁹ Iurie Gogu, *Istoria Românilor dintre Prut şi Nistru. Commented chronology (1988-2010)*, Chişinău, 2010, msc.

²⁰ See details in Igor Caşu, “Forumul Democratic din Moldova – alternativă la comunişti

After long debates, at the end of May 1991 Valeriu Muravschi (28 May 1991 – 1 July 1992) was appointed prime minister. The new government, in addition to political disasters, had to deal with a natural one as well since in early July about 90 villages had been inundated. In early July 1991, the Parliament of Moldova also adopted some laws aimed at edifying Moldovan statehood. These included a law regulating the privatisation process which, on the one hand, created new opportunities, but, on the other hand, disappointed the majority of the local population since they could not recover the property which had previously been nationalised by the Soviet authorities. Also included was a law on citizenship which granted citizenship of the Republic of Moldova to all citizens who lived in Moldova until 23 June 1990. This law was considered one of the most flexible of its kind among the former Soviet republics, especially in comparison with the Baltic States where a whole set rigor had to be completed before being granted citizenship²¹. By mid-1991, the external role and position of the USSR decreased significantly. On 1st of July 1991, the Warsaw Treaty Organization dissolved. Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia agreed with the Soviet Union on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from their territories. Since then, a number of Eastern European countries have declared their intention of integration into NATO's structures.

și frontişti (13 iulie 1991).” In: Europa Liberă, 13.07.2011: <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/24263996.html> (accessed on 05.08.2011).

²¹ Legea cetăţeniei Republicii Moldova. <http://lex.justice.md/md/311522/> (accessed on 01.10.2014).

THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Between 18-21 August 1991, a coup d'état was attempted by a conservative group with the intent of preventing the collapse of the USSR. It was called the anti-Gorbachev coup. On 18th August, 1991, Gennadi Yanayev, Vice-President of the USSR, signed a decree granted him the duties of the President of the USSR as of August 19th, 1991:

In connection with the inability for health reasons by Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev to perform his duties as USSR President, I have assumed the duties of USSR President from August 19, 1991 on the basis of article 127 Kul of the USSR constitution²².

On the same day, the Soviet leadership as represented by Gennadi Yanayev, Valentin Pavlov and Oleg Baklanov declared the state of emergency in the USSR and created the State Committee on the State of Emergency (SCSE of USSR):

“We declare:

1) That, in accordance with Article 127.3 of the USSR Constitution and Article 2 of the USSR law ‘On the Legal Conditions Applying in a State of Emergency’, and striving to fulfil the demands of broad strata of the population concerning the need to take very decisive measures to prevent society from sliding towards a national catastrophe and to safeguard legality and order, a state of emergency is introduced in certain localities of the USSR for a period of six months, beginning at 4 a.m. Moscow time on 19 August 1991.

2) That it is established that the USSR Constitution and USSR laws have uncondi-

²² TASS, Decree by Soviet Vice President, retrieved 22.11.2014 from <http://rainbow.chard.org/2011/12/23/tass-coverage-of-the-attempted-coup-in-ussr-19th-august-1991/>. (editor's addition)

tional supremacy throughout the USSR.

3) That, to administer the country and provide effective implementation of the conditions applying in a state of emergency a State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR (USSR SCSE) is formed, with the following members: O.D. Baklanov, First Vice-Chairman of the USSR Defence Council; V.A. Kryuchkov, Chairman of the USSR Committee for State Security (KGB); V.S. Pavlov, Prime Minister of the USSR; B.K. Pugo, USSR Minister of Internal Affairs; V.A. Starodubtsev, Chairman of the USSR Peasants' Union; A.I. Tizyakov, President of the Association of State Enterprises and Industrial, Construction, Transportation and Communications Facilities; T.T. Yazov, USSR Minister of Defence; and G.I. Yanaev, acting President of the USSR.

4) That unswerving fulfilment of decisions of the USSR State Committee for the State of Emergency is mandatory for all bodies of power and administration, officials and citizens throughout the USSR."²³

During the days when the coup was in progress, the situation in Chişinău was full of anxiety, but relatively stable. The leadership of the republic managed to keep tensions under control. On 20 August 1991, the Moldovan Public Television and Radio buildings were taken under guard by people who were in support of democracy (and opposed to the coup) and the president issued a decree on the establishment of the Supreme Security Council of the Republic of Moldova. On the next day, 21 August 1991, the Moldovan Parliament adopted an official declaration condemning the actions of the Moscow coup, calling them „a serious crime against the sovereignty of the republics, which can cause enormous harm to the population.” In the statement, the Moldovan legislators urged soldiers and officers of Soviet Army not to take part in actions which

would contravene the Constitution and not to forget the need to respect the human rights of the population as well as the lawful authorities of the state. The citizens of the Republic of Moldova were called to reject the path of violence and dictatorship, and to exercise civil disobedience in the case that state power was usurped²⁴.

Simultaneously, on 21 August 1991 the parliament of Moldova adopted a decision regarding the coup in the Soviet Union, recognising that Gorbachev was illegally removed as President of the USSR, by a group of political adventurers with reactionary orientation. In the same context, Moldova proposed that at the forthcoming session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the deputies should demand the resignation of Anatoli Lukyanov, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for his role in the events of 18 - 19 August 1991. The same decision required the republican and local authorities of the state administration to conduct their activities strictly in accordance with the laws of the republic. It further asked the Committee for State Security, the Ministry for Internal Affairs and the prosecutor of the Republic of Moldova, to work in agreement with the local self-governance authorities in order to establish who implemented the illegal decisions of the so-called „State Committee for State of Emergency of the USSR” or helped their implementation and to hold them accountable according to the law²⁵. On 22 August 1991, Gorbachev returned to Moscow after three days of house arrest in his residence in Crimea, and on 25 August he resigned from his position as general sec-

²³ Statement by the Soviet Leadership, in: Richard Sakwa: *The Rise and Fall of The Soviet Union*. Routledge 2005, p. 461.

²⁴ The declaration of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, on 21 August, 1991. In: *Sfatul Țării*, 22 August 1991.

²⁵ Decision on the situation in the Republic of Moldova about the coup in the USSR. In: *Moldova Suverană*, 22 August 1991.

retary of the CPSU. This signified the fall of the Soviet single party system. On 23 August 1991, the Presidium of the Moldovan Parliament passed a law to stop the activity of the Communist Party of Moldova: it „prohibited activities of the Moldovan Communist Party throughout the country and nationalised the entire wealth of the CPM.”²⁶ On the same day, Mircea Snegur, the President of the Republic of Moldova, requested through an official telegram the aid of Gorbachev, the Defence Minister and President of the USSR, and of Boris Yeltsin, President of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), on the issue of actions taken by the separatist leaders of the self-proclaimed Pridnestrovian and Gagauz republics (Smirnov, Ryleakov, Pologov, Topal, Chindighelean etc.) and on the support they received from I. Morozov, chief commander of the Odessa Military Region. The telegram stated that the Moldovan separatist leaders officially supported the coup of August 1991, and that they were therefore to be considered a criminal committee which continued to act in the spirit of the “State Committee for State of Emergency” with support of troops from the Odessa Military Region. Snegur asked the address ants to order the command of the Odessa Military Region to cease support of these ‘state criminals’.²⁷

The coup d’état in Moscow was the last attempt of a group of high-ranking Soviet officers (especially from the security and defence departments) to maintain the USSR. The reaction of most republics was radically opposed

to the coup. The events in Moscow described above were followed by a wave of declarations of independence by the remaining union republics: 24 August - Ukraine, 27 August - Moldova, 31 August - Uzbekistan and Kirghizia (Kyrgyzstan’s time), 9 September - Tajikistan, 18 October - Azerbaijan etc. The last declaration of independence was made by Kazakhstan on 16 December, 1991.

On 27 August 1991, the parliament of Moldova adopted the declaration of independence and the national anthem „Deșteaptă-te, române” (Wake up, Romanian):

“The Republic of Moldova is a sovereign, independent and democratic state, free to decide its present and future, without any external interference, keeping with the ideals and aspirations of the people within its historical and ethnic area of its national making.”²⁸

With the adoption of the declaration of independence the Republic of Moldova became a subject of international law and requested to be admitted to the UN and OSCE, as full member to these organisations. Moldova also declared its willingness to join the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter for a New Europe. On 3 September 1991 the official borders of the Republic of Moldova were established and a decree was signed on the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Moldova’s territory. At the time of the declaration of independence Moldova covered an area of 33,700 square km, had a population of 4,366,300 inhabitants, of which about 53% were living in rural areas, while the republic was organised in 40 districts. At the end of 1991, according to the UN Human Development Report, Moldova was ranked 64th most developed in the world.

Romania was the first country to recognise the

26 Decision regarding the Communist Party in the Republic of Moldova, no. 683-XII din 23.08.1991. In: Sfatul Țării, 24 august 1991.

27 Telegram to USSR President, tov. Gorbachev M.S. Copy: Ministry of Defence of USSR. Copy: President of RSFSR, tov. Yeltsin B.N., Chișinău, 23 august 1991, M.I. Snegur, President of the Republic of Moldova.

28 <http://www.presedinte.md/eng/declaration> (accessed 01.10.2014).

independence of the Republic of Moldova on 3 September 1991. This event has been interpreted in a number of ways: some considered this act to be a gesture of friendship and good neighbourhood, others considered it a gesture of Romania's renunciation of the idea of reuniting with Bessarabia, a territory which had been seized by force by the USSR in 1940. The Russian Federation recognised the independence of the Republic of Moldova in December 1991. In August 1991, diplomatic relations between Romania and Moldova were established, including exchange of ambassadors. At first, there was a Moldovan consulate based in Iași, and on 24th January 1992 the Moldovan Embassy in Bucharest was opened.

On 8 December 1991, the first presidential elections were held in Moldova. They were attended by 92% of the electorate, of which 67.49% voted for Mircea Snegur who became the first President of the Republic of Moldova elected via universal suffrage. The same day, the Presidents of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine - Boris Yeltsin, Stanislav Shushkevich and, Leonid-. Kravchuk, respectively - signed an agreement establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at Belovezhskaya Pushcha and proclaimed the cessation of the USSR. In this context, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR.

After the events of August 1991, most of the world believed that the collapse of the Soviet Union meant a departure from the totalitarian past for the former Soviet territories, but the reality proved to be different for most of the former Soviet republics. The initiative of the three Presidents at Belovezhskaya Pushcha, was formalised on 21 December 1991 in Alma-Ata with a declaration, a protocol and a convention on the establishment of the CIS. Besides Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, eight other states which had gained their independence



Photo 4. Protests against the creation of the CIS, Chișinău, December 21, 1991 (after *Parlamentul independenței*)

joined the new organisation, the purpose of which was to maintain economic ties between the former Soviet republics and to further cooperation between them. Mircea Snegur, the President of the Republic of Moldova, signed the country's accession. The leaders of the three initial members decided to keep a form of cooperation under the umbrella of an interstate structure, via which Russia tried to retain its hegemonic position as would become apparent in the following years. Multiple attempts to strengthen the CIS resulted in failure. Thus, in the context of the political situation in Eastern Europe, the CIS is a compromised and largely ineffective organisation. Officially, the Soviet Union ceased to exist on 31 December 1991. Since then more than two decades have passed, but the question posed the sociologist Dan Dungaci remains current for the Moldovan society: „You can take the Republic of Moldova out of the USSR, but how you pull out the USSR out of the Republic of Moldova?”²⁹ Today, Moldova is facing a number of problems that have their origins in the communist totalitarian regime and that are not easy to overcome.

²⁹ The newspaper „Timpul”, 4 June 2010, <http://www.timpul.md/articol/poti-scoate-rm-din-urss-dar-cum-scoti-urss-din-rm-11664.html> (Last time accessed on 26.06.2011).

Among these problems, there are identity issues, nostalgia for the USSR, improper promotion of economic and legal reforms, the legal relationship with separatist regions, dependence on the Russian energy market³⁰. In sum, we can conclude that the year 1991 was the common starting point of independence for most of Soviet Union republics. However, the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime proved to be different for each post-Soviet state. In general, for most post-Soviet citizens, the fall of the Soviet system was the beginning of a big step backwards in all senses: lower living standards and a more limited system of social protection, less access to quality education, public services and other public resources. At the same time, the level of suicides in ex-Soviet states increased sharply³¹. All these tremendous difficulties and the disappointment with the performances of the first democratically elected governments may explain the contemporary phenomenon of nostalgia for the Soviet regime³².

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³⁰ For more details, see the following paper: S. Musteată, The Republic of Moldova between its Soviet legacy and State building. In: S. Musteată (ed.), *Two Decades of Development in Post-Soviet States: Successes and Failures*, Colectia Academica, 232, Iași, Institutul European, 2014, 227-255.

³¹ D. Lester, Suicide and homicide after the fall of communist regimes. In: *Eur Psychiatry* 13, 1998, 98-100.

³² Maya Nadkarni, Olga Shevchenko. The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices. In: *Ab Imperio* 2, 2004, 482-518. Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille, *Post-communist Nostalgia*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2010.