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Moldova

Cultural opposition in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) shared a number of common patterns with other cases on the western periphery of the USSR. These commonalities derived from the earlier historical experience of those territories annexed by the Soviet state in 1939–40 and from the specificity of the respective nation-building projects. The degree, relative intensity, and concrete forms of cultural opposition in this region varied widely on a continuum ranging from strong oppositional movements (most notably in Lithuania and Western Ukraine) to rather weak manifestations of dissent (e.g., in Belarus). The prevailing view within the established historiography dealing with this phenomenon in Soviet Moldavia has been that open displays of cultural and political opposition were conspicuously absent in the MSSR, aside from several isolated cases of critical intellectuals who attempted to articulate an anti-regime message, mainly in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is undeniable that only a small minority of the population was directly involved in these types of activities. However, this seemingly clear-cut picture should be significantly revised and nuanced. In fact, the forms of cultural opposition in the MSSR were more varied and widespread than is commonly recognized. Among the scholarly works focusing on cultural and political dissent and opposition in Soviet Moldavia, one should especially emphasize the monographs, studies, and collections of documents produced in recent years by Igor Cașu,¹ Gheorghe E. Cojocaru,² Sergiu Musteață,³ Petru Negură,⁴ Valeriu Pasat,⁵ Elena Postică,⁶ and Mihai Tașcă.⁷ This growing historiography has benefited from the gradual opening of previously inaccessible archival collections and from an intensive and fruitful communication with their peers abroad.

Several main forms of cultural opposition have been identified in the former MSSR. The trajectory of cultural opposition in Soviet Moldavia suggests that the language of nationalism and national rights was the dominant form of challenging the legitimacy of the regime on the Soviet periphery. This was due to several factors. First, the interwar national discourse provided a pow-

1 Cașu, "Political Repressions in the Moldavian SSR After 1956"; Musteață and Cașu, eds., *Fără termen de prescripție*.

2 Bahnaru and Cojocaru, *Congresul al III-lea al Uniunii Scriitorilor din RSS Moldovenească*.

3 Musteață, *Basarabeanul bruiațat de KGB. La microfonul Europei Libere*.

4 Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*.

5 Pasat, *Православие в Молдавии: власть, церковь, верующие*.

6 Postică, *Cartea Memoriei*.

7 Tașcă, "Manifestări de rezistență antisovietică și anticomunistă în RSS Moldovenească."

erful alternative language that had the potential to undermine and question the ideological monopoly of the regime. Second, similarly to Western Ukraine or the Baltic states, ethnonational grievances were an effective strategy to address the reality of ethnic discrimination and asymmetrical power relations within Soviet society, which extensively used various politically innocuous forms of ethnicity to further the claims of national equality and harmony embodied in the official slogan of the “friendship of the peoples.” Therefore, any attacks on this basic tenet of Soviet policy were perceived as especially dangerous by the regime. “Local nationalism” became an increasingly frequent topic in the ideological campaigns waged by the party hierarchy from the early 1960s on. Third, the impact of the Khrushchev Thaw was crucial in weakening the party’s monopoly in the cultural sphere and in opening new opportunities for aspiring intellectuals on the local level. The most intensive phase of national-cultural opposition occurred in the second half of the 1960s and during the early 1970s. Aside from the broader context of 1968 and its aftermath, this surge in nationally oriented opposition discourses and practices should be also linked to the consolidation of local cultural institutions that allowed a certain degree of autonomy in the cultural field. Although this relative liberalization proved short-lived and was stifled by a decisive crackdown from above in the early 1970s, it established the basis of a powerful opposition discourse that reemerged during the late perestroika period. A second important form of cultural opposition focused on a more politically assertive agenda emphasizing human rights and political pluralism. Even more than the previously discussed national opposition, this challenge to the regime derived from external stimuli, such as the discursive shift connected to the Helsinki Accords and the prominence of the human rights rhetoric, as well as the alternative models provided by the Prague Spring in 1968 and Poland’s Solidarity in 1980–81. Although the impact of this form of locally articulated opposition was much smaller, several instances documented in the featured collections prove that it was far from absent. A third sphere where examples of broadly defined cultural opposition can be identified is religious dissent. This form of anti-regime practice was linked not so much with the official Orthodox Church (which was subject to several waves of persecution, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during Khrushchev’s anti-religious drive), but mostly with the non-conformist and openly dissident religious communities, such as neo-Protestant congregations (Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists), Jehovah’s Witnesses (particularly due to their missionary zeal, their radical rejection of the regime, and their connections to the West), and earlier local religious movements, such as the Inochentists.⁸ The Orthodox Church, while in a precarious position, did not provide any significant examples of anti-regime opposition until the perestroika period and entered a

⁸ COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Gheorghe Zgherea Collection at SIS Archive Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: September 28, 2018.

mode of uneasy compromise with the authorities, especially from the late 1960s onwards. In contrast, the non-conformist religious communities were perceived as dangerous “sects” because of their external loyalties (in the case of the neo-Protestant cults and Jehovah’s Witnesses) or wholesale rejection of the Soviet regime in the case of the millenarian Inochentists. A fourth and much more elusive form of cultural opposition was connected to alternative subcultures and everyday forms of “subversive” lifestyles. In the case of the MSSR, this was obvious mainly in two guises: in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the emergence in urban areas of the *stiliagi* (the closest equivalent of the hippie way of life in the Soviet context, perceived as a protest movement against the establishment), and in the late 1960s, when the jazz and rock subcultures became a mass phenomenon and gave rise to previously unthinkable cultural experiments. The main protagonists of these alternative subcultures were young Moldavian first-generation urban intellectuals. These products of the Soviet version of social mobility did not openly rebel against the regime. They did however challenge the cultural practices imposed from above and ultimately created oppositional political languages, subverting the legitimacy of the Soviet system. To a certain extent, they illustrate Alexei Yurchak’s concept of “being inside-out (*vne*),”⁹ i.e., of articulating an alternative discourse inside the system, but at the same time creating spaces of alternative sociability outside the system. It should be noted that the dynamics of cultural opposition in the MSSR also can be traced through the responses of the regime, which reacted swiftly to any perceived danger. In the hierarchy of subversive activities constructed by the local party officials, ethnonational forms of protest were the most prominent, particularly during the surge of such manifestations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, instances of “culturally subversive practices” in spheres such as music or cinema were also closely monitored. Thus, official censorship was imposed on the local film industry and on “non-traditional” forms of musical expression around 1970, when some local cultural productions became unpalatable to the Moldavian party leadership.

It is hardly surprising that the local intellectuals were the most likely initiators and articulators of critical discourses which fall under the category of “cultural opposition.” Any direct continuity with the interwar intellectual tradition was rarely to be found, since the earlier elites were displaced, persecuted, or marginalized by the Soviet authorities. Although a person’s family background could (and sometimes did) provide the initial impetus for engaging in oppositional activities, more often than not the prominent figures associated with cultural opposition were products of the regime’s own version of upward social mobility. The examples of two individuals will help illustrate this point. Alexandru Șoltoianu was a prominent national activist and one of the main leaders of the nationally oriented opposition that emerged in the

9 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 126–57.

Moldavian SSR in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Together with the members of the Usatiuc–Ghimpu–Graur group, he is often singled out as one of the main ideologues and organizers of anti-Soviet resistance in this period.¹⁰ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Șoltoianu sought to create a nationalist underground organization, tentatively labeled National Rebirth of Moldavia (*Re-nașterea Națională a Moldovei*, RNM), with the hope of reaching a mass following of 250,000 members. The structure of this organization would have been based on a wide network of student associations, which should have acted as a legal façade for the movement's real aim, i.e., fighting for the MSSR's emancipation from "Russian" domination and its secession from the USSR. Șoltoianu's conversion to nationalism occurred during his studies at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO), in the late 1950s and early 1960s, due to the general context of Khrushchev's Thaw and the climate of openness and free discussion. Somewhat paradoxically, the relatively liberal Moscow intellectual milieu of that era acted as a catalyst for stimulating oppositional ideas and practices.

Another prominent anti-regime dissident is Mihai Moroșanu. Moroșanu's case is different from Șoltoianu's in several respects, embodying another generic type of dissent in the MSSR. Moroșanu, a student during his active phase of protest in the early and mid-1960s, was socially marginalized (due to a physical disability), with the roots of his discontent deriving from his experience as a deportee to Siberia. The main difference, however, is linked to the individual and self-contained nature of his opposition activities. Organized oppositional groups (exemplified by the Usatiuc–Ghimpu–Graur, Alexandru Șoltoianu, or Nicolae Dragoș Collections)¹¹ were the exception rather than the rule in the MSSR. In most cases, discontent toward the regime was expressed through individual acts of defiance, which were both more easily identified and neutralized by the secret police apparatus. Moroșanu's example is one of the most articulate attempts to construct a nationally inspired alternative to the official discourse, not least through the skillful manipulation of Soviet legislation and its loopholes. Moroșanu's relative success in upholding his personal views, despite regime persecution, also highlights the limits of such forms of dissent, which had a rather narrow social impact.

However, alongside these typical instances of (quasi-)intellectual opposition, the Moldavian collections also uncovered a number of cases which could be defined as alternative forms of "opposition from below," at the grassroots

10 See the chapter on national movements in this handbook.

11 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Usatiuc-Ghimpu-Graur Collection (National Patriotic Front) at National Archive of Moldova", by Cristina Petrescu and Andrei Cusco, 2018. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/4453; COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Alexandru Șoltoianu Collection at National Archive of Moldova", by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/2773; COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Nicolae Dragoș Collection at National Archive Moldova", by Cristina Petrescu and Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/29670

level, whose protagonists were persons unlikely to be considered sources of dissent. Figures such as Gheorghe Muruziuc,¹² Zaharia Doncev, or Arsenie Platon fall under this category of anti-regime activists of working-class or peasant background. Although discontent toward the regime was generally triggered in such instances by material circumstances or a generalized feeling of social inequity, the articulation of such protests was not fundamentally different from the sophisticated forms preferred by their more educated counterparts, frequently drawing on similar sources. The artistic or literary milieus, exemplified by the professional associations of writers and filmmakers, while providing the symbolic capital and institutional cohesion necessary for cultural production, were also spaces of profound ambiguity. They oscillated between tendencies toward internal autonomy and creative freedom and the heavy and constraining pressures of the regime, constantly negotiating the extent and limits of their leverage in the cultural sphere. Their role as potential hotbeds of cultural opposition became visible only at certain crucial moments marked by the relative weakening of party control (such as the mid-1950s and mid- to late 1960s).

The dynamic of cultural opposition in the MSSR was linked closely to the evolution of the Soviet regime on the periphery. During the first decade following the restoration of Soviet rule (1944–53), the opposition to the Soviet state was mostly expressed through small-scale armed resistance, following a pattern familiar from other western Soviet republics. This phase of open insurgence was followed by a marked shift in the forms of anti-regime dissent and official repression after Stalin's death. The origins of the cultural opposition in the context of the MSSR date from the mid-1950s. In fact, immediately after 1953, important changes in the cultural sphere were apparent. Prominent members of the republic's intelligentsia successfully advocated the rehabilitation of the classics of Romanian literature and their mass publication. Moreover, the new orthography for the "Moldavian" language, definitively consecrated by the linguistic reform of 1957, restored the Romanian standard in all but name, preserving the Cyrillic script as the only visible difference between the written language in Romania and Soviet Moldavia. This rehabilitation of the Romanian cultural canon and literary heritage, mostly due to the lobbying of a group of prominent writers with impeccable communist credentials, who had been educated in the interwar period and possessed an undeniable prestige in terms of "symbolic capital," prepared the ground for further battles on the "cultural front" and for a radicalization of cultural opposition in the mid-1960s. The significance of the relative liberalization of the regime during the Khrushchev Thaw is fundamental in explaining this shift. The cracks in the apparently monolithic Soviet system became increasingly visible in 1955–56, when the return of former deportees, coupled with Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress and the impact of the Hungar-

12 See the chapter on national movements in this handbook.

ian Revolution, led to a questioning of the party's ideological monopoly and the regime's ability to live up to its aim of total societal control. The repressive apparatus also went through a crisis during the events of 1956, limiting the effectiveness of its surveillance. Although the party's control was reasserted toward the end of 1956, the Thaw had long-lasting consequences in the cultural sphere. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the first upsurge in anti-regime activities, mostly at the individual level. However, certain more ambitious attempts to oppose the regime, such as those of Nicolae Dragoș and his small group, active between 1962 and 1964, can be identified. Dragoș's project of "democratic socialism" challenged the system from within and was thus perceived as particularly dangerous by the Soviet authorities. The small network around Dragoș used a "creative" reinterpretation of Marxism-Leninism to undermine the ideological and intellectual domination of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), despite their limited stated aim to merely "reform" the system. Intellectually, their views had a striking similarity to the dissident "revisionist Marxist" movements emerging at that time in the Soviet Bloc.

The apex of the cultural opposition in the MSSR was reached during a relatively short period spanning the mid-1960s to early 1970s (roughly between 1965 and 1972). It was during this time that the nationally oriented oppositional discourse, epitomized by the National Patriotic Front and other unrelated individual acts of defiance, was at its height. Also, the literary and artistic environment articulated open and occasionally radical criticism of the regime's policies. The most well-known event in the cultural sphere was the Third Congress of the Moldavian Writers' Union, held in October 1965. To the obvious surprise of the authorities, during this event the writers raised a number of politically sensitive issues, such as the reintroduction of the Latin alphabet for standard "Moldovan," education in Romanian at all levels, and party interference in literary matters.¹³ The reaction of the authorities was hostile and swift. Both at the congress itself and afterwards, the party leadership was alarmed and outraged by what they perceived as "nationalist" opinions articulated by some of the participants. The local party under first secretary Ivan Bodiul started a relentless campaign against all forms of "local nationalism," which was waged with increasing vigor throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Another disturbing development for the regime was the proliferation of "unhealthy Western influences" in the musical sphere, represented by the enthusiastic reaction to the *Noroc* musical band, performing in a style derived from an explosive mixture of jazz, rock, and beat elements. This musical experimentation lasted from 1966 until the fall of 1970, when it was abruptly ended by the authorities. Similar "unhealthy" tendencies were apparent in the local film industry, provoking a sharp rebuke from the party leadership in the early 1970s. These cases of dissent in the cultural field coin-

13 Bahnaru and Jococaru, *Congresul al III-lea al Uniunii Scriitorilor din RSS Moldovenească*.

cided with the activity of the only well-structured oppositional organization in the MSSR in the post-Stalinist period, that of the National Patriotic Front, led by Alexandru Usatiuc and Gheorghe Ghimpu, which coalesced around a radical message of national opposition. This organization was active from 1969 till late 1971 and was directly linked to the post-1968 context. The authorities were quick to perceive the danger represented by this group and accordingly intensified their fight with “local nationalism.” By 1972, the repressive apparatus succeeded in suppressing most open expressions of opposition and dissent in the MSSR.

The period post 1972 and until 1986 is usually seen as a low point of opposition activities in the MSSR, with very few cases of open anti-regime protest. The situation changed dramatically during the perestroika period, especially from 1987 onward. The gradual increase of discontent and public protest was triggered by the fundamental shifts in central policies, heralded by *glasnost*. Similarly to other Soviet republics, the intellectuals were at the forefront of this new wave of oppositional activity, couched mostly in ethnocultural terms, with a strong tendency to advocate for civil liberties and environmental protection measures. The widely used concept of “resistance through culture”—referring to alleged tacit forms of dissidence by the literary intelligentsia—has been retrospectively applied to the entire communist period and is a misleading label for purported anti-regime activities linked to cultural opposition.¹⁴ In fact, just as in the Romanian context, from which it was borrowed by Moldovan historians and intellectuals in the 1990s, this notion was a *post factum* invention¹⁵ meant to justify the passive attitude (and even instances of open collaboration) of the MSSR intellectuals toward the regime. It is thus essentially inapplicable before the later stages of the perestroika. However, the central role of writers and other creative intellectuals during the era of “national awakening” (1988–) was undeniable. In this period, the “language of the nation” rose to prominence and dominated public discourse up to the collapse of the USSR.

Types of Collections in Moldova

The variety of cultural opposition in the MSSR is reflected in the typology of materials covering the Moldovan case. The main types of featured collections fall under the following categories:

1) One can classify collections based on archival files that focus on various individual and collective forms of “anti-Soviet” resistance and opposition. The peculiar feature of these collections, stored in the main Moldovan repositories (the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova, the Archive of

¹⁴ Țurcanu, *Istoria românilor*, 725–26.

¹⁵ Petrescu, “The Resistance that Wasn’t.”

Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova, and the Archive of the Intelligence and Security Service), is their emphasis on open acts of defiance against the regime. Therefore, most of them resulted from secret police (KGB) investigations carried out after the arrest of the protagonists. Although this kind of evidence is crucial due to the richness of information and the coherence of the narrative structure, its inherent bias should be taken into account, especially when the written materials cannot be corroborated with the direct testimonies of the participants. These types of collections include both articulate forms of opposition coming from intellectual circles and various cases of “opposition from below.” The most relevant examples within the former subcategory include the Usatiuc–Ghimpu–Graur, Alexandru Șoltoianu, and Nicolae Dragoș Collections, which discuss the most important “anti-Soviet” groups emerging in the MSSR in the 1960s and early 1970s. In the latter subcategory, I would highlight the cases of Gheorghe Muruziuc,¹⁶ Arsenie Platon,¹⁷ and Zaharia Doncev,¹⁸ which focus on individual displays of anti-regime protest expressed by people from a peasant or working-class environment.

2) One can also identify archival collections focusing on institutions or professional associations (mainly from the Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova), which allow for a diachronic perspective on the dynamics and evolution of the relations between these associations and the Soviet state and party apparatus. The emerging picture of opposition, tacit subversion, and compliance is rather complex, emphasizing the shifting strategies of their members and the changes in the balance of power within and outside these institutions from the early 1950s to the late 1980s. The collections focusing on the Moldavian Writers’ Union (MWU)¹⁹ and the Moldavian Union of Cinematographers (MUC)²⁰ are especially relevant in this regard. Thus, the MWU Collection materials draw on several Party meetings, writers’ congresses, and national conferences which discussed significant issues related to the local cultural heritage, the “language question,” and the relations between the literary milieu and the Soviet regime.

3) There are also private collections that belong either directly to protagonists and initiators of anti-regime activities (e.g., Mihai Moroșanu, also see above) or to researchers dealing with the subject of anti-Soviet resistance and

16 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Gheorghe Muruziuc Collection at SIS Archive Moldova”, by Cristina Petrescu and Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/23399

17 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Arsenie Platon Collection at SIS Archive Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, 2018. Accessed: September 28, 2018.

18 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Zaharia Doncev Collection at SIS Archive Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/5772

19 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Moldavian Writers’ Union (MWU). Fond P-2955 at AOSPR Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: September 28, 2018.

20 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Moldavian Union of Cinematographers (MUC), Fond P-2773 at AOSPR Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: September 28, 2018.

opposition in the MSSR. The two subcategories highlight different perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon of cultural opposition, but also serve as complementary examples of a more personal attitude. For instance, Moroșanu's collection²¹ reflecting the experience of one of the few authentic dissident figures in the Moldovan context consists of personal files, interviews, photos, and judicial materials, and spans a longer period, from the early 1960s to the early 1990s. By contrast, Petru Negură's²² and Igor Cașu's private collections²³ reflect their authors' scholarly preoccupations and feature both otherwise inaccessible archival documents and oral interviews conducted with prominent figures of the cultural opposition active during the Soviet period. It should be noted that these examples do not entirely compensate for the relative scarcity of meaningful private collections in the Moldovan case. This is due, on the one hand, to the small number of people who had preserved their personal archives and related materials documenting their anti-regime attitudes and, on the other, to the reluctance of many protagonists to talk about their earlier experience.

The rest of the Moldovan collections cover two forms of cultural opposition that are fundamental for understanding the full picture of the anti-regime activities in the MSSR. The first area is touched upon by the collection dealing with the *Noroc* musical band. It focuses on more elusive forms of everyday resistance and alternative lifestyles during the late Soviet period, with a peculiar emphasis on the musical sphere, which was especially difficult to control from the authorities' point of view and provided a meaningful space for forms of self-expression frowned upon or officially disapproved by the regime. The second field of interest concerns religious dissent and opposition to the Soviet system. Such examples could be found mainly within minority non-conformist religious communities (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses and the Inochentist movement) because the official church entered a phase of de facto collaboration with the authorities after the mid-1960s. Despite the limited societal impact of most manifestations of cultural opposition, the Moldovan collections attest to their diversity (especially during the 1960s and 1970s) and allow the recovery of certain forgotten acts of defiance, frequently initiated "from below."

Most Moldovan collections are owned by public institutions (archives and museums), reflecting the relative scarcity of significant private holdings, as noted above. Although these institutions claim to provide unlimited access to their collections, the specific policy of different public owners varies according to the type of material and their institutional affiliation. For example, the access to the files stored in the Archive of Social-Political Organizations of

21 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Mihai Moroșanu Private Collection", by Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/16768.

22 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Petru Negură Private Collection", by Cristina Petrescu and Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/3315.

23 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Igor Cașu Private Collection", by Cristina Petrescu and Andrei Cusco, 2017. Accessed: October 02, 2018, doi: 10.24389/2632.

the Republic of Moldova (AOSPRM) is completely free and open, allowing for unrestricted research of the materials concerning the activity of the local party organizations and professional associations. Another positive example in this regard is the permanent exhibition on the communist period hosted by the National Museum of History, which features a representative selection of textual evidence and artifacts pertaining to the Soviet era, including a wide array of samples relating to the phenomenon of cultural opposition. By contrast, due to its institutional specificity, the Archive of the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service (SIS Archive) has a stricter policy regarding public access that requires a prolonged bureaucratic procedure and is subject to the approval of the agency's director. Although in principle the archival files relating to cultural opposition and KGB surveillance can be consulted by interested researchers, access remains difficult. The SIS Archive holds the most comprehensive and representative sample of archival evidence relevant for the topic of anti-Soviet opposition. Therefore, full public access to this category of files would be essential. Initially, access to these materials became possible only because of the Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Communist Regime in the Republic of Moldova, which functioned during 2010 and was granted unlimited access to all institutional archives. And yet, despite certain recent efforts, the overall situation has not fundamentally improved. Most public operators, such as archives and museums, are reluctant to provide relevant financial data and other types of information viewed as sensitive. According to Moldovan laws, this type of information is considered classified and can only be disclosed under certain specific circumstances, such as a court decision or official inquiry. These difficulties could be overcome only through private interviews with certain stakeholders. The private collections are especially valuable due to the alternative data (published and oral interviews, visual materials, fragments from the contemporary press, a variety of personal archives) that provide a different perspective from the official point of view prevailing in the archival files.

The size of the collections varies widely, reflecting differences in the provenance and intensity of oppositional activities. The largest examples in the Moldovan case are the Usatiuc–Ghimpu–Graur and the Nicolae Dragoș Collections. The former contains eleven volumes of archival files from the repository of the former KGB (currently preserved in the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova). The main types of documents within the collection consist of trial records (interrogations of the accused and of relevant witnesses), official reports, other categories of judicial files, and documents produced by the members of the organization prior to their arrest (memorandums, reports, letters, correspondence, private notes, etc.). The files also include a number of photos, mostly private ones, of the defendants in various contexts or official photos taken during their arrest. The Dragoș Collection, which includes essentially similar content, consists of seven large volumes reflecting this opposition group's activities. The typical size of an archival-based collec-

tion is several hundred pages, i.e., one or two volumes of investigative material. On the other hand, private collections, if more diverse in their contents, are typically smaller in size. Thus, the Mihai Moroşanu Private Collection features several types of documentary materials (including archival documents, a number of interviews, and newspaper articles from the protagonist's personal archive). Besides these two "extremes," the Moldovan case also includes more eclectic institutional collections of an intermediary size. The geographical distribution of these collections is uneven, reflecting the centralized character of most institutions involved in their preservation, as well as the disproportionate concentration of the open manifestations of cultural opposition in the capital. Aside from Chişinău, another important territorial focus of anti-regime activities centered on the second-largest city of the republic, Bălţi, situated in the northern part of the MSSR (a fact confirmed by the Gheorghe Muruziuc and Arsenie Platon Collections). Although the protagonists of the collections hailed from all over the MSSR (and beyond), they overwhelmingly operated in the capital. The number of users of the collections depends on the open access provided by the responsible institutions or on the willingness of private collectors to share their materials with a wider public. Those in the latter category are generally open to making their collections available to interested audiences. However, the primary beneficiaries of the collections are specialized researchers and academics, due to the absence of a developed memorial infrastructure in the Republic of Moldova. Since there are no official statistics on visitors to these institutions, it is difficult to estimate their scope. It is likely that in the case of private collections, the usual number does not exceed several people a year, while the archival collections are typically consulted by several dozen people per year. This lack of impact has only partially been compensated for by the National Museum of History exhibition, open to a potentially much more diverse audience. However, no systematic efforts at memorializing anti-regime opposition during the Soviet era have been undertaken on the official level after 1991. This reflects the general lack of public interest regarding this subject during the post-independence period.

Despite certain consistent efforts toward the de-communization of the public sphere undertaken by the first Moldovan governments during 1991–93, no coherent policy aimed at recuperating the memory and wider legacy of cultural dissent was pursued. Although some initial legal redress for the victims of Soviet-era "repressions" was undertaken during the early 1990s, when the interest for reclaiming the "suppressed" memory of the communist regime was high on the public agenda, no consequential political action followed. Political stakeholders were either avoiding "sensitive issues" due to their association with the former regime or citing low public interest to justify their reluctance to effectively engage with the communist past. The political stalemate was matched by a clear lack of interest and apathy of the public. For example, demand for open access to the files of the secret police was almost non-existent, aside from the occasional private initiatives and the low-intensi-

ty lobbying promoted by victims' groups (such as the Association of Former Political Deportees) or professional associations (notably, the National Association of Historians). This lack of public interest was matched by the one-sidedness displayed by most of the relevant historiography, which focused disproportionately on more extreme cases of Soviet repression (collectivization, mass deportations, etc.) or active resistance (armed insurgency). Even undeniable milestones in the Moldovan historiography of the communist period (such as the collection *Cartea Memoriei* (The book of memory),²⁴ published in the late 1990s and early 2000s in order to inventory, catalogue, and record the names of the victims of the Soviet regime) mostly dealt with the active phase of armed resistance. The editors of this collection aimed at a thorough coverage of the whole Soviet period (up to the late 1980s). The smaller proportion of the post-Stalinist victims in this catalogue is a consequence of the decrease in the scale of mass violent repressions after 1953 and cannot be interpreted as an editorial failure. However, this fact cannot entirely justify the lack of interest in the post-1953 period displayed by the Moldovan historiography as a whole, at least up to the early 2000s. This situation was complicated even further by the slow process of the opening of the local archives, particularly specialized repositories holding some of the most extensive materials dealing with cultural opposition activities (e.g., the former KGB Archive, transferred in 1992 under the jurisdiction of the reformed Intelligence and Security Service/SIS or the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Even the first in-depth studies of the narrowly defined cultural sphere (i.e., the literary and artistic field) and its relations with the regime, including open articulation of criticism and (quasi-)dissident positions, date to the early 2000s.²⁵ Furthermore, only certain cases of the relatively few high-profile dissidents (such as Mihai Moroșanu and the Usatiuc–Ghimpu–Graur group) were extensively covered in the media and thus received public attention. Moroșanu, for example, became a symbolic figure for his uncompromising and constant resistance to the Soviet regime. In the early 1990s, he was very active in the media and was also directly engaged in politics. He became less visible in the public sphere in the late 1990s, but remained closely involved in public initiatives concerned with preserving the memory of Soviet repressive policies. However, these few cases from that period only highlight the relative neglect of cultural opposition and its protagonists by professional historians and political stakeholders alike.

A new and radically different phase in the history of the collections dealing with cultural opposition was inaugurated by the creation of the Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Totalitarian Communist Regime in the Republic of Moldova. This institution was established by presidential decree in January 2010, following a previous election victory of a coalition op-

²⁴ Postică, *Cartea Memoriei*.

²⁵ E.g., Negură, *Nici eroi, nici trădători*.

posed to the formerly dominant Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM). The decree strongly emphasized the need to establish “the truth concerning the totalitarian Communist regime” and to inform the public “objectively and multilaterally” about its essence. The institution was conceived as a “truth commission,” but its relationship to the state authorities was loosely defined: the decree stated only that “the ministries and the other central and local administrative authorities will provide the Commission with all necessary assistance.” The Commission’s mandate was limited to “truth revelation.” The new institution had the following goals: “to study the documents and materials concerning the activity of the main institutions involved in the establishment and perpetuation of the Communist totalitarian regime” while assessing its atrocities and human rights abuses; “to inform the public, periodically, on its activity” and results; to draft “a study, a collection of documents, and an analytical report regarding the historical and political-legal evaluation of the Communist totalitarian regime”; to submit “recommendations” to the President of the Republic by 1 June 2010. The Commission was supposed to formulate policy proposals that would eventually lead to political and legal consequences, but was not granted any effective instruments to promote their enforcement. From the outset, this institution was mired in controversy due to its unmistakably political nature and was accused of being merely a tool for the governing coalition meant to discredit its political opponents. However, despite its many shortcomings, this institution succeeded in achieving one major goal: the gradual broadening of access to previously unavailable archival files (including those of the secret police). Its members benefited from some government assistance (e.g., through the special committee on declassifying official documents), and they were granted access to previously restricted departmental archives (e.g., the Archive of the Ministry for Internal Affairs, the Archive of the Prosecutor General’s Office, and the former NKVD/KGB Archive, now hosted by the Intelligence and Security Service/SIS). Access to the relevant documentary collections of the specialized historical archives significantly improved. A second dimension of the Commission’s activity concerned the organization of public events for the dissemination of its findings. Several symposia and scholarly conferences were organized (with the participation of international experts). One of the major decisions of the Commission concerned the transfer of the most prominent collections relating to cultural opposition from institutional archives (mainly the SIS repository) to the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova (ANRM). The transfer process started in March 2011 and is basically complete at this point. It should have resulted in free public access to these materials. Yet, only the case of the Nicolae Dragoș, Collection is a positive example in this regard. In 2012, the collection files were transferred to the ANRM. The protagonist, Nicolae Dragoș was personally present on this occasion and received a scanned copy of a part of his file. However, regarding other collections, the ANRM has been slow in granting the public full access to these

materials, invoking issues related to insufficient storage capacity and lack of staff to properly catalogue the information. Moreover, some relevant collections have not been transferred up to this point. Another major consequence of the Commission's activity was the revision of the school curriculum and the introduction of classes devoted to opposition and dissent during the communist period. Thus, in 2013, new history textbooks for the twelfth grade were published that included some new documentary evidence uncovered by the Commission. They feature a special topic on *Resistance under Communism*, which refers to the postwar armed resistance, but also to post-1953 "cultural resistance" (specifically, to the cases of Muruziuc, Moroșanu, Usatiuc, Ghimpu, Șoltoianu, and others).²⁶ However, after the brief upsurge of interest in the communist past in 2010 and 2011 (mainly due to reasons of political expediency), this topic again disappeared from public view, despite the efforts of professional historians who attempted to preserve public concern for the Soviet past during the following years. The gradual dwindling of this subject in the public sphere coincided with the curtailing of the freedom of the press after 2014. A relevant example is the closing down of the weekly column dedicated to the "Archives of Communism" (*Arhivele Comunismului*) in the *Adevărul Moldova* newspaper. During the previous five years, this column had brought to light many cases of cultural opposition typical for the Soviet period, featuring articles by several professional historians (mainly Mihai Tașcă and Igor Cașu). One of the main reasons for this situation is the total disinterest of the political stakeholders, who, aside from occasional opportunities to exploit the subject for instrumental purposes, are reluctant to seriously engage with the communist legacy.

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