

DISPUTES IN THE EAST. RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA, THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

Alias: Alexandru CAMBURU and Octavian POP

ABSTRACT

Throughout the article the relations between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are explored with an accent on how diverse factors have influenced their evolution. The analysis underlines the historical background of the region and how external entities, such as Russia and the Western Powers, influenced the current situation through years of direct and indirect involvement. Factors such as demographics and cultural similarities are also considered in order to create a more explicit view of the relations in the region, which are then closely investigated and the subjects that are thought to be "hot topics" are identified for further research. The main subjects are to be analyzed with particular consideration to how a lack of communication determined the accentuation of the disputes and how each state positioned itself in regard to the unfolding events. The article is based on extensive open-source research that is intended to capture as many views on the subjects pointed out as possible and is aimed to corroborate this data in order to create a clearer overview of this key region in Europe that has come to the attention of the whole world as recent events in Ukraine unfolded.

Keywords: Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, disputes, history.

1. Region Analysis: Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine

1.1. Historical Background

We will concentrate our attention on the events from the beginning of the 18th century up to modern days in order to better understand the implications of some actions that have changed the course of history.

The battle of Stănilești-Prut from 1711 marks the last major victory of a now decaying Ottoman Empire against the new emerging power of the region, Russia. The following decades are dominated by the continuous expansion of the latter, which will include Crimea, and the lands between the Bug and the Dniester. In 1806, the Turks attacked the Russians hoping to restore part of their territory. The lack of coordination and the technological disadvantage worked in the favor of the Slavs that occupied the city of Iași and soon after Bucharest establishing the front line on the Danube. In 1812, the Ottoman Empire agreed through the Treaty of Bucharest to the transition of Bessarabia under Tsarist control. The years that followed were marked by a vast process of colonizing alien populations in Bessarabia in order to dilute the Romanian majority. In 1829, the region of the Danube Delta was taken by the Russians, giving them control over the main commercial route in the region. After the Crimean War, Tsar Alexander the Second was forced to cede the before mentioned regions of Cahul, Bolgrad, and Ismail to the Ottomans (Bărbulescu et al., 2014).

In 1859, after intense international negotiations the two sister countries of Moldova and Wallachia united in one state, thus giving the start of the nation building process. In 1877, another Russo-Turkish war began, also known as the Romanian Independence War that ended in 1878 with the Treaty of Berlin, in which Russia and Romania, as the winners of the conflict, tried to achieve their regional objectives. Russia was given Dobrogea but forced the recognition of Romanian independence with a territorial change, from which the former would receive Dobrogea for the three provinces Cahul, Ismail, and Bolgrad (Bărbulescu et al., 2014).

The beginning of the First World War saw Romania as a neutral country that would join the Entente later during the conflict in 1916. The war would not go

as planned, Bucharest and a vast portion of the country falling under German, Bulgarian, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish control. Hopefully, the end of the war found Romania on the winning side, which would lead to the recognition of the new united territories such as Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania, by the Great Powers. The now united territory of Bukovina had an equally interesting history as Bessarabia, this land being under Austro-Hungarian control since 1774 after the Kuciuk-Kainargi Treaty (Bărbulescu et al., 2014).

The Interwar Period was marked by a rejuvenation of the Romanian spirit in the new territories, by ambitious infrastructure projects and a development of the educational, scientific, cultural, and economic fields. Despite being recognized by the major powers of the world, the newly added territories of Romania were still the subject of revisionist policies by the Soviet Union and Hungary, policies that would transform into military action in the summer of 1940, when Romania remained the last bastion of freedom in a Europe dominated by Hitler and Stalin. On the 26th of June, an ultimatum was issued to Romania by the Soviet Union, which threatened taking military action if the land east of the Prut river (Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia) was not to be ceded in four days. The Government in Bucharest complied with the requests and thus began an enormous exodus of Romanian ethnics from that region in fear of Bolshevik massacres and systematic deportation. The same year on the 30th of August, the Vienna Diktat stripped Romania of Northern Transylvania. This land was given to Hungary, panic broke out in the region due to numerous accounts of murder, torture and rape of Romanian nationals by the soldiers of Miklós Horthy. In this political context, the Romanian King, Charles the Second, was advised by General Ion Antonescu to abdicate. From that point on, the country would start its collaboration with the Axis Powers in the hope of regaining as much of its former territories as it could. On the 22nd of June 1941, the Romanian Army joined forces with the Wehrmacht in what was called the Crusade against Bolshevism. Romanians fought valiantly to liberate their brothers from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and carried on the offensive up to the gates of Stalingrad. The re-annexation of the two regions was short lived, in 1944 the Soviets recaptured them and after the 23rd of August 1944 coup the hope of keeping these lands was gone. Romania was forced after the war to pay reparations to the Soviet Union and also renounce the claims to Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Snake Island. Some attempts to regain the island were made

through diplomatic channels during the Ceaușescu era, but no significant achievements were made (Bărbulescu et al., 2014).

After the events in 1989, the fall of Ceaușescu regime, and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a new chapter was opened in regard to the relations between Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, a topic that we plan to explore in the following pages.

1.2. Ethnic Composition

As a consequence of the tumultuous history of Bessarabia and Bukovina, this land is home to many cultures and ethnicities. For this part of the study we will try to better understand the demographics of this region by analyzing the data gathered from the beginning of modernity up to date.

The Russian census of 1897 estimated the population of Romanians in Bessarabia at 47.6% of the total followed shortly by the Ukrainians at around 19.6% (Poștarencu, n.d.). The census organized by Romania in 1931 would show that from a total of approximately 2,9 million people, 56.2% were Romanians and 11.2% were Ukrainians (Poștarencu, n.d.). The census from the 31st of August 1940 revealed that after the Romania exodus the percentage of ethnics in Bessarabia was 48.7%, amounting to more than 1,9 million people (Poștarencu, n.d.). Ukrainians amounted to a little over 830 thousand or 21% and Russians counting up for more than 410 thousand representing 10.6% of the total population (Poștarencu, n.d.).

In 1989, the Moldovan population in the Moldovan SSR amounted to over 65% (2,8 million), the Ukrainians represented 13.9% (600 thousand) and Russians 13% (560 thousand). This percentages changed significantly over the years in 2014, the Moldovan population equaled 75% of the population with over 2 million people excluding the Romanians that were the biggest minority at 7% of total citizens, followed closely by the Ukrainians 6.57% and Russians at 4% (Biroul Național de Statistică, 2017).

The numbers presented above demonstrate that Bessarabia has always been inhabited by a majority composed of Romanians/ Moldovans that faced multiple attempts by the Russians and the Soviets to dilute their national identity and to change the ethnic composition of the region. Part of these measures influence also Ukraine, which in the latest statistics had a population of Romanians and Moldovans that amount to more than

400 thousand, being the second largest minority after the Russians. The past is still a big problem for the Republic of Moldova which has to deal with the consequences of Soviet deportation policies, mainly in the form of pro-Russian, anti-European inhabitants that cause turmoil, the case of Transnistria being eloquent in this context (Demografia Republicii Moldova, n.d.).

1.3. Relations Between the Three Nations

As a consequence of the complex demographics relations, the three states were dominated after the collapse of the USSR by a strong will to find common ground in order to improve the lives of the national minorities. The Soviet inheritance of Ukraine regarding its Romanian territories, Northern Bukovina, Southern Bessarabia and the Snake Island were hot points during the bilateral talks between the two nations. There was no will on the Ukrainian side to negotiate the return of these historical regions to Romania, continuing thus the policy of the USSR and further benefitting from the actions of a dictatorial regime. The Treaty signed on the 2nd of February 1997 tried to ensure the collaboration of the two nations on guarding the rights of the minorities, by enforcing a policy of symmetrical actions in regard to the concessions made towards the Romanian community in Ukraine and vice versa. As a result, the next year the decision to form the Joint Intergovernmental Commissions was made. Their activity was discussed during meetings in 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, and 2006 that took place in both countries, and plans to improve cooperation were drawn (Ambasada României în Ucraina, n.d.).

Far from the good intentions agreed upon in treaties, the dispute for the Snake Island was as mischievous as it could get. The talks that took place between 1998 and 2004 were meant to find a way to split in a correct manner the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that surrounded the island, but without any good will coming from the Ukrainian side, we sought justice at the International Justice Court in Geneva. The ineffective communication between the two sides degraded relations and reinforced the belief of the Romanians that Ukraine was no better than the former Soviet Union when talking about historical injustices. Tensions were eased over the time but the public opinion still remains divided on whether or not the actions of Ukraine were ethical and, in any way, justifiable (Pop, 2018).

On the other hand, relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova were dominated by mutual respect and collaboration. Our country was the first one to recognize the Moldovan independence from the Soviet Union and established a firm cooperation in the economic, political, and strategic fields. Romania alongside other countries tried to solve the conflict in Transnistria before getting out of hand and provided crucial support for the fight against the establishment of a pro-Russian government in Chișinău. Since then, Romania has embarked alongside the Republic of Moldova on a path towards European integration of the latter, the strategic benefits of such an action being obvious. Both NATO and the European Union encouraged the bilateral relations of the two countries with the hope of securing the eastern flank against Russian aggression and also reinforcing the eastern border of Europe. In this regard, starting with 2014 the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) and its educational branch, the National Institute for Intelligence and Security (INSI), started a reforming process that includes a more tight collaboration with European partners, the most important of these being the one with the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), and its educational branch that worked on bringing the Moldovan Intelligence Community to European standards and helping it get rid of Soviet reminiscences (Cosma, 2019).

Collaboration between the two nations also includes the actions taken by the Romanian Education Ministry to facilitate the access of Moldovan ethnics into state schools, high-schools and universities. As for recent events, Romania has been a firm supporter of the Republic of Moldova joining the European Union, and vowed during the talks in Warsaw and the visit of President Maia Sandu to Bucharest in February 2023 to support its sister country regardless of the international situation (Președintele României, 2023).

2. Disputes in the Region

2.1. The Snake Island Dispute

It is without any doubt that the dispute with Ukraine in regard to the Snake Island changed the way Romanians see their eastern neighbor. Considering historical realities and ethnical characteristics we can agree on the right of Romania to claim the Snake Island. We need to condemn the way in which the Soviets imposed the occupation of Romanian territories after the

Second World War and understand that their claims were never based on historical arguments, but only on their imperialist and expansionist attitude. Bearing in mind these aspects, we may start dissecting the Snake Island dispute in order to better understand how this event influenced the two nations and also how external players were involved.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022, the importance of this so-called island, which in terms of geographical accuracy is to be considered a rock, has been stressed out repeatedly. With a strategic position close to the Romanian city-port of Sulina and implicitly to the mouth of the Danube, this rock can provide the perfect platform for supervising the naval traffic in the area. Also situated close to the main navigation routes that link Ukrainian ports of Odessa and Kherson to the Bosphorus straight its economic importance is obvious. The rock is situated on top of an important oil and gas reservoir, which adds even more economic advantages to owning it. Its military and strategic importance as a stable platform on which surface-to-air (SAM) and anti-ship missiles (AShM) could be placed should not be forgotten (Colibășanu et al., 2022).

Keeping in mind these aspects, we may understand why Romania and Ukraine sought to claim as much of this advantage as they could. Historically, the island belonged to the one who owned the Danube Delta, and thus it was ruled by Romania up until the end of the Second World War, when the Soviet Union forcefully annexed it due to its importance. Throughout the communist era, the Romanian Government tried to take back this land by diplomatic means, but without any success. After the dissolution of the USSR, talks have been held with Ukraine in order to settle the dispute, but no breakthrough was made. Up to 34 rounds of negotiations occurred but the Ukrainian representatives did not agree with the principles stipulated in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In this context, Romania had to resort to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a solution, thus through its representative, Bogdan Aurescu, Romanian Foreign Minister, signed the Referral Request for the initiation of the process at the ICJ on the 13th of September 2004. What we must keep in mind is that the disputed area was represented not only by the rock, but also and more importantly by the continental shelf associated to it, which measured approximately 12,000 square kilometers. Brought into the Court's attention was that the so-called Snake Island is in fact a rock after the stipulations of the Law of the Sea which states



that "Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf" (Article 121, paragraph 3). In response to these claims, the Ukrainian Government started building projects on the island, thus being erected a hotel and an ATM that were later invoked in order to claim that the rock could sustain economic and human life. Despite their efforts, after close to five years, on the 3rd of February 2009, the Court ruled that Romania should receive 9,700 square kilometers of the disputed area and Ukraine 2,300 square kilometers, still the Snake Island was left under the authority of Kyiv and its status as an island was confirmed and thus a 12 nautical miles perimeter around it was transformed into territorial waters (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, n.d.).

The verdict, even though not a total victory for Romania, was well received by the media and the population, who felt confident that at least after more than 50 years from the abusive annexation of the island to the Soviet Union some steps were taken in order to deliver justice.

2.2. Russian Influence in the Region

From historical times, the region of the Black Sea has been a battleground between Russia and the other riparian countries, being an essential part of the Tsarist and then Soviet plans of expansion. Considering that Russia does not dispose of a natural warm water port, the authorities in Moscow have always been on the look for new ways to achieve a way to move their fleet into the planetary ocean. A key element in this strife for dominance was the control over the mouth of the Danube, putting the Russians on a collision course with Romania. During Soviet times, the ability granted by the possession of the Snake Island to supervise this water way gave Moscow some control over the region but after 1991, the situation has deteriorated from this perspective, thus the strategists in Moscow drew new plans to exercise power in the region.

The Russian minority fearing annexation by Bucharest in 1990 in the context of the measures taken by the Popular Front to establish the Romanian language as the state one, proclaimed a break-off republic east of the Dniester on the 2nd of September 1990 (Pop, 2018). Tensions rose between the two nations during the months that followed that ultimately led to the formation of a paramilitary force called the Dniester Guard. Shortly

after the Moldova broke away from the USSR taking with it all territories of the former Moldovan SSR, the Transnistrians tried to re-join it sparking the conflict between Chişinău and Tiraspol. A campaign to force the Romanians out of the region was in full swing, achieving its objective with one notable exception, Dubasari. On the 1st of March 1992, armed Cossacks attacked the Police station in this city taking hostage the personnel and forcing the other Romanians in Dubasari to leave for Coşari. During the following days, the Transnistrian forces destroyed bridges over the Dniester and launched multiple attacks on the Romanian enclave, the images of violence publicized in Chişinău enraged the Moldovan population. Action was taken by Romanian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, and Russian representatives in order to calm the situation, thus being signed a ceasefire on the 24th of March (Bărbulescu et al., 2014). Despite the efforts made to settle the dispute east of the Dniester military actions continued, with Moldovan forces preparing to take over Tighina, a city close to the capital of the breakoff republic. In this context, the Russians, seeing the ammunition stored in the city of Cobasna from the Soviet era being put in danger by the advancing Moldovan troops, reorganized the remaining 1,400 troops guarding the area of the 14th Army, followed by the ultimatum given by their commander, Yury Netkachev, to the Moldovan troops in Tighina to retreat. On April the 6th, the authorities in Chişinău reacted to end the conflict in order to prevent the 14th Army from acting against their forces. Mircea Snegur, the president of the Republic of Moldova, tried to gather support from the UN, but with no success, thus being forced to negotiate with the Russians that imposed a 1,500 contingent of Russian troops being stationed in Transnistria and total autonomy for the region, which Chişinău had to accept. The war ended with a ceasefire agreement in Moscow on the 21st of June 1992. The frozen conflict remained a tool in the hands of Moscow that did not hesitate to use it in order to blackmail the authorities in Chişinău to forsaken plans to re-join Romania or to turn its policy firmly to the west (Warographics, n.d.).

The legacy of this conflict remains until this day, the Russian troops stationed in Transnistria represent a danger to the stability in the region. A simple look on the map shows that Tiraspol in only 100 kilometers from Odessa, 160 kilometers from the mouth of the Danube, 60 kilometers from Chişinău. The threat was reactivated, in the winter of 2022 to 2023, when Moscow targeted the Republic of Moldova with a disinformation campaign that aimed to reignite conflict between the majority and

the Russian minority of this country. Tiraspol even organized a military exercise that mobilized a large amount of its forces starting March the 1st and lasting for three months, in which the recruits were given clothing, food, and the equivalent of 300 euros in local currency. These operations could be qualified as part of a larger Psychological Operation (PSYOP) that are aimed at destabilizing the Government in Chişinău as it takes more serious action to join the European Union and it strengthens ties to Bucharest (Zmucilă, 2018).

2.3. EU Involvement in the Region

The region context gave a very clear warning to the Republic of Moldova to be more involved on the international stage, starting with the European Union. The very unfortunate situation in Transnistria and the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 were the ultimate ones in order for the Moldovans to send their accession to the European Union, on the 3rd of March 2022.

In June, the same year, Moldova was given the status of candidate state to join the EU, but the negotiations for the proper join cannot be started until the fall of 2023. Even though it is not on the list of members, the country has connections with the Union. In 2020, when the Coronavirus Pandemic hit, Moldova was added to a list that benefited from the help of EU to improve their pandemic situation because of their number of cases on 100,000 people, on a period of 14 days.

This was not the only time Moldova was helped; in 2021, the European Union reaffirmed their support towards the country, especially the financial support for the macroeconomic stabilization program, giving around 145 million euros in that specific area. From October 2021 till the end of 2022, the EU continued to help them, giving 1,1 billion euros towards the country.

The officials of the Union are clearly supporting Moldova, the president of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, stating that Moldova has the right to be a member of the European Union and the EU reaffirms its strong support for that (Parlamentul European, 2023). In order to be accepted, it was given a series of changes that need to take place, the efforts to reform the justice system and the fight against corruption would be two of the most imperative ones.

As for the neighbor of Moldova, Ukraine, things are a bit more complicated. Since the invasion of Russia

in February 2022, the country made a significant amount of processes in order to be accepted in the European Union and speed up this process.

The official accession letter to EU was written on the 28th of February 2022, by the president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and was also asked for the "immediate acceptance" because of the situation that the country was in. On the 1st of March, the presidents of 8 member states - Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland - supported a shorter acceptance process (Aderarea Ucrainei la Uniunea Europeană, n.d.).

This will not be a simple thing to do because the country has a lot of areas to improve in order to meet the standards of the European Union. Before the war, Ukraine was not even close to thinking of joining the Union. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine between 2014 and 2019, Pavlo Klimkin, stated that Ukraine did not accomplish any of the criteria in order to be accepted, because it did not have a stable democracy, the rule of law and a market economy with full rights (Consulatul general al României la Bologna, n.d.).

On the 8th of April 2022, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, after her visit in Bucha, met Zelenskyy in Kyiv and presented the legislative questionnaire in order to start the request for Ukraine to join the EU. This questionnaire was answered in two parts, the first on the 17th of April and the second one on the 9th of May.

On the 23rd of June 2022, the European Council gave Ukraine the status of candidate state to join the EU. A historical moment later took place on the 1st of July, when the EU flag was brought in the Verkhovna Rada and will forever be hoisted in the Ukrainian Parliament.

3. Analysis of Current Issues

3.1. Romanian Language Schools in Ukraine

In recent years, there have been multiple occasions on which the situation of minorities in Ukraine was debated. Even though their rights are guaranteed by Article 11 of the Constitution, which specifies that "the State promotes the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, its historical consciousness, traditions and culture, and also the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all

indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine” (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996), some laws that are meant to strengthen the state language have made it difficult for the minorities to express themselves in their mother tongue.

For historical context, we must know that during the period in which Ukraine was part of the USSR, all forms of education were accessible only in Russian. After 1991, Ukraine has entered a new age of independence and thus started the fight to distance itself from its Soviet history. A state language was adopted and a slow reforming process began in order to reshape the educational system. After the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the authorities in Kyiv started a process of fast reformation of minority laws which involve their right to broadcast on National Television and their right to education in their mother tongue (Pora, 2023). We must take into consideration also that the Romanian minority is the second largest in Ukraine at over 400 thousand people after the Russian one that counts over 17% of the total population of this country. The Romanian minority is unfortunately divided into Romanians and Moldovans by a wrong linguistic approach that dates back to Soviet times when in order to further dilute the national identity of the former Romanian provinces of Bessarabia, and Northern Bukovina the Moldavian Language was created. This situation diminishes the importance of the Romanian minority in Ukraine (Pop, 2018).

Romania and Ukraine signed on the 2nd of February 1997 a treaty that aims to establish strong bilateral relations based on the need to protect national minorities in both states (Portal legislativ, n.d.). Article 13, point 5, states that both states need to create similar educational conditions for their respective minorities. Regardless of this treaty, the 2017 Law on education states under Article 7, Point 1, that national minorities will be guaranteed the right of education in their mother tongue only for pre-school and primary school. This is not the case in Romania, where under Law number 1 of 2011, Article 45, Point 1 minorities are guaranteed access to education in their mother tongue for all studies up to pre-university ones, Ukrainians having 90 educational state institutions where they can study under these conditions (Council of Europe, 2017).

Even though Kyiv says that the Education Law from 2017 is not intended to strip minorities of their rights but to establish Ukrainian as the dominant educational language, the Venice Commission underlines some aspects lawmakers should address, one of the most important being “to ensure that the implementation of the

Law does not endanger the preservation of the minorities’ cultural heritage and the continuity of minority language education in traditional schools” (Council of Europe, 2017).

3.2. The Linguistic Dispute

For the past three decades, there has been a huge dispute on the subject of the lawful language of the Republic of Moldova. The Constitution, under Article 13, stipulates that the state language was Moldovan, until the 13th of March 2023 (Curtea Constituțională a Republicii Moldova, n.d.).

The law to change that was passed by the Parliament with 58 votes by the pro-European deputies, initiating several protests from the pro-Russian deputies, who were in total disagreement and rising placards with the phrases: “The state is sovereign, the Solidarity and Action Party (PAS) is tyrant”. Unfortunately, this was the second lecture in which the law was passed because, in the first one, on the 2nd of March, the vote ended with physical altercations between the socialist-Communist side and the Solidarity and Action Party members that resulted in blocking the legislative stand for several minutes. They also accused PAS of breaking the Constitution, based on their intent to change the status-quo in regard to the state language (Euronews, 2023).

The law also includes renaming the National Holiday “Our Language”, as stated in the Parliament decision and Labor Code, into “The Romanian Language”. At origin, the language spoken in the Republic of Moldova and the one spoken in Romania are not different at all, although there are some Russian influences in the language used by the Moldovans and also in the pronunciation department. These Russian influences date back to 1812, when the region, then named Bessarabia, was annexed by the Russian Empire (Michael, n.d.).

In a timeframe of 30 days from the date when the law was passed, the authorities have to implement all of the aspects written in the new document. Also, in this period the phrases “official language”, “our language”, “state language”, “mother tongue” have to be renamed to “Romanian Language”. This situation sparked outrage in Moscow that commented on the subject by addressing the comment of Bogdan Aurescu that qualified in a totally correct historic approach the Moldovan language as a Soviet creation meant to divide the Romanians on the two

sides of the Prut river, Maria Zakharova compares the diplomat to so-called Moldovan language and describes him as an “artificial construct” (Dumitrescu, 2023).

A long story fought for the Romanian language to be recognized in the Republic of Moldova ended in one of the best ways possible with the fully recognition and implementation of the language in all fields of activity, being stated as the national language in the Constitution (Călugăreanu, 2023).

3.3. Bystroye Canal

An international dispute that has captured the attention of the international community has the Bystroye Canal (Canal) at its center. Recently, the discussions about this Canal restarted because of the initiative of the Ukrainian Government to enable navigation of this route to larger ships, a consequence of the fact that the Russians blocked their ports with access to the Black Sea (Dinu, 2023).

The Bystroye Canal dispute has its origins back in 2004, when between Ukraine and Romania relations started in order to transform the route for the sea vessels transit. Ukraine wanted to act and deepen the Canal which led to the response of the Romanian authorities. Their project included a considerable dredging of the part that is entirely on the Ukrainian side, the construction of a protective embankment and another dredging work on the Chilia Canal, which is the border between the two states (G4 Media, 2023).

In 2006, the project was abandoned because of the intervention of international forums that agreed on the negative effects it has on the environment, especially on the Danube Delta. After the investigations, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River found out that the Ukrainian project was breaking the international laws for the protection of the Danube, mainly the natural habitat of the aquatic animals. Having all of that, the works on the Canal recommenced years later and they were even more ambitious, Ukraine stating that the Canal was to be deepened from 3,9 to 6,5 meters (Păvălașc, 2023).

The extension of alternative routes in the Danube is crucial for them after Russia blocked the Ukrainian ports at the Black Sea when they invaded the country in February 2022. Bogdan Aurescu signed a deal with Ukraine in July 2022 in which it is stated that merchant ships can use the Bystroye and Chilia Canals for the

transit of cereals from the country. This deal was a life saver for the war affected Ukrainian economy and helped the worldwide products supply. Despite these efforts, the Kyiv Government is on the look for new routes in order to reduce the impact of Russian aggression on their economy (Dumitrescu, 2023).

The Ukrainian Infrastructure Ministry made a report some years ago in which they concluded that, as the traffic on the Bystroye Canal increases, the traffic on Sulina decreases. In 2021, the Sulina Canal produced for Romania, only from navigation taxes, 65,090 RON and recording a number of 1,823 ships that had transited this route (Administrația fluvială a Dunării de Jos Galați, 2022). A decrease in these figures would automatically imply that the economic evolution of the region will stagnate and thus the maintenance of these routes will be executed with money from the state budget. Here intervenes the economical dispute between the two countries that has been exploited by the Russians which, from the Ukrainian point of view, launched a media campaign that aims to diminish public support for the actions of the Kyiv Government on the Canal. Even though Romania loses a significant amount of financial resources and its influence in the region is diminished, the Bucharest authorities seem to put this matter aside and continue to give Ukraine a free hand in this topic.

4. Conclusions

In order to conclude this inquiry into the relations between Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, we must reaffirm that in this equation there are not only three players but far more, such as the Russian Federation, the European Union, and the United States. Intercultural communication between these three main players must be constant in order to achieve all their main goals in the region and depending on the quality of the dialogue and on how honest its stability and prosperity could be achieved. Leaders and their state apparatus must understand the historical background of each country and adapt policies accordingly in order not to create tensions that will play right into the interest of those who plan to create instability in this region.

REFERENCES:

- Aderarea Ucrainei la Uniunea Europeană. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aderarea_Ucrainei_la_Uniunea_European%C4%83
- Administrația fluvială a Dunării de Jos Galați. (2022, July 22). *Raport de activitate pe anul 2021*. https://afdj.ro/sites/default/files/raportul_de_activitate_pe_anul_2021.pdf
- Ambasada României în Ucraina. (n.d.). *Comunitatea românească*. <https://kiev.mae.ro/node/286>
- Ambasada Ucrainei în România. (2017, December 12). *Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the Opinion of the Venice Commission on the Law on Education* <https://romania.mfa.gov.ua/ro/news/8252-zajavazmzs-ukrajini-stosovno-visnovkiv-venecianskykoji-komisiji-shhodo-zakonu-ukrajini-pro-osvitu>
- Bărbulescu, M., Deletant, D., Hitchins, K., Papacostea, Ș., Teodor, P. (2014). *Istoria României*. Corint.
- Biroul Național de Statistică. (2017). *Republica Moldova. Recensământul populației și al locuințelor 2014*. <https://recensamant.statistica.md/>
- Călugăreanu, V. (2023, January 25). Frica de război, instrumental Rusiei în R. Moldova. DW. Chișinău. <https://www.dw.com/ro/frica-de-r%C4%83zboi-instrumentul-prin-care-rusia-crede-c%C4%83-poate-cumin%C8%9Bi-conducerea-moldovei/a-64513606>
- Călugăreanu, V. (2023, February 8). Moldova exploatează la maximum șansa aderării la UE. DW. Chișinău. <https://www.dw.com/ro/moldova-exploateaz%C4%83-la-maximum-%C8%99ansa-ader%C4%83rii-la-ue/a-64648035>
- Călugăreanu, V. (2023). Limba română este, oficial, limbă de stat în R. Moldova. DW. <https://www.dw.com/ro/limba-rom%C3%A2n%C4%83-este-oficial-limb%C4%83-de-stat-%C3%AEn-republica-moldova/a-65015935>
- Colibășanu, A., Crowther, G.A., Hickman, J., Scutaru, G. (2022). The strategic importance of Snake Island. New Strategy Center. CEPA. <http://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/The-Strategic-Importance-of-Snake-Island-NSC-CEPA-STUDY.pdf>
- Constitution of Ukraine. (1996, June 28) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/44a280124.pdf>
- Constitutional Court of Ukraine. (n.d.). *Threat to the Ukrainian Language is equal to threat to the national Security of Ukraine* <https://ccu.gov.ua/en/novina/constitutional-court-ukraine-threat-ukrainian-language-equal-threat-national-security-ukraine>
- Consulatul general al României la Bologna. (n.d.). *Legea educației din Ucraina – o temă sensibilă; Klimkin: Nimeni nu vrea să închidă nicio școală*. <https://bologna.mae.ro/romania-news/7531>.
- Cosma, I., (2019). Securitatea Republicii Moldova. Adaptarea instituțională. <https://intelligence.sri.ro/securitatea-republicii-moldova-adaptarea-institutionala/>
- Council of Europe. (2017, December 11) *European Commission for Democracy through law (Venice Commission) Ukraine*. Strasbourg. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)030-e)
- Demografia Republicii Moldova. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia* https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demografia_Republicii_Moldova
- Dinu, M. (2023, February 16) Povestea canalului Bîstroe. De ce este important pentru Ucraina și de ce România se opune. *Adevărul*. <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/evenimente/povestea-canalului-bistroe-de-ce-este-important-2242921.html>
- Dumitrescu, R., (2023, March 22) Russian spokesperson lashes out at Romanian foreign minister over “Moldovan language”. *Romania-Insider*. <https://www.romania-insider.com/russian-spokeperson-romanian-foreign-minister-moldovan-language>
- Education in Ukraine. (2022, March). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Ukraine
- Hungary. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2019). Explanation on the law of Ukraine ”On ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language”. <https://hungary.mfa.gov.ua/news/72567-explanation-onthe-law-of-ukraine-on-ensuring-the-functioning-of-the-ukrainian-language-as-the-state-language>
- Fati, S. (2023). Vin vremuri mai bune pentru românii din Ucraina. Dar nu acum. <https://www.dw.com/ro/vor-veni-vremuri-mai-bune-pentru-rom%C3%A2nii-din-ucraina-dar-nu-acum/a-64280943>
- G4 media. (2023, March 10). Financial Times: Disputa dintre România și Ucraina pe canalul Bîstroe stârnește propaganda rusă G4Media. <https://www.g4media.ro/financial-times-disputa-dintre-romania-si-ucraina-pe-canalul-bistroe-starneste-propaganda-rusa.html>
- Guvernul Republicii Moldova. (2021, July 1). Ministerul Afacerilor Externe și Integrării Europene al Republicii Moldova. *Republica Moldova a fost inclusă de către uniunea Europeană în lista revizuită a țărilor terțe pentru cetățenii cărora se recomandă eliminarea restricțiilor de călătorie*. <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/republica-moldova-fost-inclusa-de-catre-uniunea-europeana-lista-revizuita-tarilor-terte>
- Curtea Constituțională a Republicii Moldova. (n.d.). *Hotărârea nr. 36 din 05.12.2013 privind interpretarea articolului 13 alin. (1) din Constituție în corelație cu Preambulul Constituției și Declarația de Independență a Republicii Moldova* <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?l=ro&tip=hotariri&docid=476>
- Law on education. (2017). https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/law-education#_Toc493603844
- Euronews. (2023). Limba română devine limbă oficială în Republica Moldova. *Vot final în Parlamentul de la Chișinău*. <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/vot-final-in-parlamentul-de-la-chisinau-limba-romana-va-inlocui-limba-moldoveneas>
- Michael. (n.d.). Care e diferența între limba română în Republica Moldova și România? <https://languagetsar.com/care-e-diferenta-intre-limba-romana-in-republica-moldova-si-romania/>
- Ministerul Afacerilor Externe. (n.d.). *Prezentarea Cazului Delimitarea Maritimă în Marea Neagră (România c. Ucraina)*. <https://www.mae.ro/node/24347>
- Ministerul Afacerilor Externe. (n.d.). *Republica Moldova*. <https://www.mae.ro/node/1676>
- Parlamentul European. (2023, April 25). *Cum sprijină UE Ucraina în 2023*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/headlines/world/20230126STO69603/cum-sprijina-ue-ucraina-in-2023>
- Parlamentul European. (2022, May 5). *PE: UE trebuie să acorde Republicii Moldova statutul de țară candidată la aderare* <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20220429IPR28232/pe-ue-trebuie-sa-acorde-republicii-moldova-statutul-de-tara-candidata>
- Păvălașc, M. (2023, February 18). Ce face Ucraina pe brațul Bâstroe? Confuzie și reacții acide la București pe tema adâncirii canalului din Delta Dunării. *Europa Liberă*. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/cana-bastroe/32277173.html>
- Pop, I.A. (2018). *Istoria ilustrată a romanilor pentru tineri*. Litera
- Pora, A. (2023). Ucraina și legea minorităților: nemulțumiri în vreme de război. *Expert: Nu românii sunt în vizor, ci minoritatea rusă*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/romania.europalibera.org/amp/ucraina-minoritati-nemulsumiri-razboi-rusa-/32211076.html>
- Portal legislativ. (n.d.). *Tratat din 2 februarie 1997 cu privire la relațiile de bună vecinătate și cooperare dintre România și Ucraina* <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/50921>
- Poștarencu, D. (n.d.). Românii din Basarabia și Bucovina de Nord, înglobați cu forța în URSS. *Historia*. <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/romanii-din-basarabia-si-bucovina-de-nord-567380.html>
- Președintele României. (2023) *Declarații de presă comune susținute de Președintele României, Klaus Iohannis, cu Președintele Republicii Moldova, Maia Sandu, 23 februarie 2023* <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratii-de-presa/declaratiiile-de-presa-comune-sustinute-de-presedintele-romaniei-klaus-iohannis-cu-presedintele-republicii-moldova-maia-sandu1677158028>
- Euractiv. (2023, February 21). *Rezoluție pentru începerea negocierilor de aderare la UE ale R. Moldovei și Ucrainei în 2023* <https://www.euractiv.ro/eu-elections-2019/rezolutie-pentru-inceperea-negocierilor-de-aderare-la-ue-ale-r.-moldovei-si-ucrainei-in-2023-32787>
- Zmucilă, I (2018). Conflictul din Transnistria, *Dacoromânia*, nr. 91. Alba Iulia https://www.dacoromania-alba.ro/nr91/conflictul_transnistria.html
- Warographics. (n.d.). *Transnistria War: Moldova's Pro-Soviet Insurgency* [video] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWH1aTjoS7U>
- Wesel, B. (2022, June 18) UE nu este capabilă de extindere deocamdată. DW. <https://www.dw.com/ro/opinie-da-ucrainei-dar-ue-nu-este-capabil%C4%83-de-extindere-deocamdat%C4%83/a-62178229>