

## East European Reflection Group (EE RG)

Identifying Cultural Actors of Change in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova

# Culture and Change in Moldova

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*“In practical and philosophical terms, we need a visa for Europe”  
Participant of the consultation meeting with Moldovan partners*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine have recently become direct neighbours of the European Union. Both Moldova and Ukraine have also become closer partners of the European Union through the European Neighbourhood Policy. Neighbourhood usually refers to people next-door, people we know, or could easily get to know. It implies interest, curiosity and solidarity in the other living close by. For the moment, the European Union’s “neighbourhood” is something of an abstract notion, lacking in substance. In order to avoid ending up “lost in translation”, it is necessary to question and some of the basic premises on which cultural and other forms of European cooperation are posited.

In an effort to create constructive dialogue with this little known neighbourhood, the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) are currently preparing a three-year partnership to support cultural agents of change in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. In the broad sense, this programme is to work with, and provide assistance to, initiatives and institutions that employ creative, artistic and cultural means to contribute to the process of constructive change in each of the three countries.

ECF and GMF have begun a process of reflection in order to understand the extent to which the culture sphere in each of the three countries under consideration can support change, defined here as processes and dynamics contributing to democratisation, Europeanization and modernisation in the three countries concerned. This reflection process attempts to assess needs and will use reported realities as the basis for discussing and developing proper cultural action and eventually new cultural instruments. Several principles guide this process of reflection.

**Contextualisation:** it is vital to differentiate the national and local conditions from immediately observable regional similarities. Countries of the region in focus face very different challenges and are differently accessible. Recommendations for concrete measures will have to sensitively consider contextual specificities on a case-by-case basis.

**Reflection-Action-Advocacy:** This process will combine a reflective phase, an action-oriented phase and an advocacy phase (overlapping to some extent). The exact content and shape regarding actions and advocacy will entirely depend on the outcomes of the reflection process but will address both EU countries and the countries in focus.

**Outstanding actors:** This process gathers outstanding individuals, representing institutions and organisations that are playing an important role in the areas of culture and change in the region. They are invited to participate in their individual capacity and they do not claim to represent their country of origin or any public authorities.

**Results:** This process is result-driven. It aims to deliver tangible results, including new means and instruments in support of cross-border and trans-national cultural cooperation in and with Eastern Europe. Several tools can be imagined (for example, capacity-building or mobility programmes, placement schemes, summer schools, Eastern Europe Fund, scholarship programmes) but the concrete outputs should be decided upon only after assessment and discussion of the concrete local needs and aspirations of local actors of change.

**Partnership:** This process seeks cooperation with other foundations and organisations that have working experience in the region so as to enhance the coherence, complementarity and

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<sup>1</sup> European Cultural Foundation and German Marshall Fund of the United States, East European Reflection Group (EE RG): Cultural Actors of Change in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, Project Description.

effectiveness of the initiative. It seeks to identify and involve artistic initiatives inside the European Union with the aim to increase knowledge and interest in the artistic and cultural scenes of the Eastern European neighbourhood.

**Impact:** This initiative seeks to create synergies with existing networks, programmes and policies currently in place to support cultural and other actors of change so as to bring in players from the Eastern European neighbourhood and further afield, open up debate, and raise the public awareness of the region in focus.

An initial mapping of the situation, problems and issues facing actors of the culture field has been undertaken for each of the three countries. This mapping aimed at identifying outstanding individuals who combine intellectual strength and practical activity to the benefit of positive change within the arts and culture fields, but who could impact other areas of society. This meant exploring ways that influential individuals and collectives created or significantly contributed to change. The mapping laid out the main features of the cultural policy systems in each country along with the main problems respondents considered essential to their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in underpinning processes of change in a constructive manner.

This initial mapping has been conducted using a specially developed questionnaire. It focused on the opinion of respondents concerning the prospects for actors of the culture sphere in each country to constructively support processes of change in favour of democratisation, Europeanization and modernisation. Target persons and institutions invited to answer the questionnaire were chosen on the basis of preparatory meetings in each of the countries – in Minsk, Belarus, in March 2007; in Kiev, Ukraine, in April 2007; and in Chisinau, Moldova, in May 2007. Secondary source materials, and in particular, the Compendium on Cultural Policies in Europe, were used as a documentary basis for the initial mapping.

The present report is a compilation of the answers received from targeted respondents, the results of desk research using publicly available secondary source material and information collected at the country consultation meetings. While it cannot be considered a representative survey and analysis due to the small number of respondents and the reliance on secondary source materials, the report does take stock of all major aspects of the socio-political situation in the country under consideration that are relevant for the development of the culture sphere. The country consultation meetings were the opportunity for in-depth discussion of the condition of the culture sphere, its potential for actively supporting change and concrete measures that might be taken by the partners involved in this process to support that potential and empower it. These meetings were held in June and July 2007 and brought together influential local actors and experts and to discuss the ideas presented in the individual country reports.

The reflection process shall be completed in September by a strategic workshop for the development of a 3-year plan to support cultural actors of change. The circle of partners will be enlarged to include other potential supporters of change through culture, especially also international donors involved in cultural activities in the three countries.

The expected results of the reflection process will be

- Facilitating networking and partnership building between individuals and organisations in the region, and of countries from the target region with EU countries;
- Triggering curiosity in the Eastern European region and introducing it to the mental map of cultural operators and artists in the west;
- Devising a policy orientation on the place of cultural cooperation in the European Neighbourhood Policy;
- Launching a concrete cooperation instrument tailored to the needs analysed in the course of the reflection process;
- Preparing a publication (on-line, and possibly off-line) and a public event in the Netherlands to publicise the results of the process;

- Contributing to ECF's diversity focus through supporting cultural actors of change in Eastern Europe (integration) and exploring the contribution of the Eastern European Diaspora to multiple European citizenship (migration).

## Background<sup>2</sup>

### Facts, Figures and History

The Republic of Moldova is a small, landlocked country located in South-East Europe, between Romania and Ukraine, between the Prut and Nistru rivers. It covers approximately 33.8 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of territory and has a population of 4,320,490 (estimation, July 2007)<sup>3</sup>. Its capital, Chisinau, is home to approximately 780,000 people.

Moldova is a parliamentary democracy with a president as its head of state and a Prime Minister as its head of government. The country is a member state of the United Nations, WTO, UNICEF, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) among other international organizations. The poorest country in Europe, Moldova became the first former Soviet state to elect a Communist as its president in 2001.

Moldova had a long and complex history of partition, occupation and annexation before becoming an independent nation state on 27 August 1991. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, its territory was controlled by the Ottoman Empire. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, substantial parts of its territory belonged to Romania but others, were subject to Habsburg rule. Following the Russian Revolution, the part under Habsburg rule (Bessarabia) proclaimed independence from Russia in 1918, and united with the Kingdom of Romania in the same year. The territory to the east of the Dniester river, known as Transnistria, did not join Romania and later formed the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1924-40).

On June 28, 1940, in accordance with the secret protocol of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact with Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union forced Romania to evacuate its administration from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and these territories were annexed. The southern and northern parts (which had significant Slavic and Turkic minorities) were transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. At the same time, Transnistria (where ethnic Romanians were the largest ethnic group), was added to the remaining territory to form the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, forming the territory within the borders of today's Republic of Moldova. Despite Romanian resistance and the brief re-establishment of Romanian administration with the help of Axis forces in 1941, the Soviet Union re-conquered and re-annexed the entire territory in August 1944.

Soviet rule brought about a harsh policy of de-nationalization and Russification, as well as the almost complete destruction of the local intelligentsia and the rich farming class. A large number of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians (Russian speaking) were settled in the new Soviet republic, especially in urban areas. Large numbers of ethnic Romanians were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan during the early years of Soviet rule. The Soviet government began a campaign to promote a new Moldovan ethnic identity, different from that of ethnic Romanians, asserting that Moldovan language was distinct from Romanian. Hence, Moldovan was to be written using the Cyrillic rather than the Latin alphabet, harking back to before 1860, when Moldovan had been

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<sup>2</sup> This section has been developed on the basis information contained in <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/md.html>, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldova>, Dura, George (Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels) and Popescu, Nicu (CEPS and Central European University, Budapest) for Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2006, Moldova and European Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, ENP Progress Report, Moldova, (COM (2006) 726 final), Brussels, 4 December, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/md.html>.

written using a variant of Cyrillic by some communities. This, and other deliberate policies, led to the rapid Russification of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic.

After the catastrophic famine of 1946-7, which caused the death of close to 300,000 citizens, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic industrialised rapidly, receiving substantial financial and technical support from the central authorities of the USSR. It developed into one of the important industrial centres of the USSR, and was an attractive location for specialists and technical experts to go to work, having a relatively high standard of living in comparison to other parts of the USSR.

In the late 1960s, some local intellectuals and students joined forces in a movement to promote Romanian culture. They demanded that the government end its discrimination against Romanian speakers in state administration and academia, as well as in media and social life. This movement was quickly suppressed by the KGB and the authorities were successful in keeping Romanian national sentiment under strict control using a combination of repression and bribery almost until the demise of the USSR. A strong dissident movement, as known from other parts of the Soviet Union or Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, never emerged in Moldova.

Moldova started to move towards independence as a result of Glasnost and Perestroika, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In August 1989 a language law was passed, adopting the Latin alphabet for Moldovan and declaring it the state language of the Moldovan SSR<sup>4</sup>. This was a significant moment for the rehabilitation of Romanian language culture as one of the most important markers of Moldovan national identity. Moldova declared its independence on 27 August 1991. Shortly thereafter, it became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States without joining its military cooperation. It was recognized by the United Nations as an independent state in early 1992.

In 1990, fearing the rise of Romanian nationalism and as a counter measure to the seeming inevitability of unification with Romania proper, Transnistria, whose population by then comprised a larger proportion of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians than other parts of Moldova, claimed independence from Moldova. The situation erupted into a brief armed conflict in 1992. Russian forces intervened backing the separatists and the self-proclaimed, but internationally unrecognised, Transnistrian Moldovan Republic exists to this day as a result of Russia's ongoing troop presence. The separatists' fear of unification with Romania was unfounded in the end. In a referendum in March 1994, the overwhelming majority of Moldovans voted for continued independence. Under the auspices of the OSCE, a multi-party negotiation process was established including relevant interested parties such as Russia, Ukraine, the European Union and the United States. To date it has not succeeded in regularising the situation of the region to the satisfaction of all parties in the conflict. The Transnistrian conflict, despite the fact that outright hostilities have long ceased, remains one of the major obstacles to Moldovan economic and political development and is one of the major contributing factors to the deterioration of the once relatively close relationship of Moldova with Russia.

## **Politics**

During the first ten years of independence, Moldova was governed by coalitions of different parties led by former Communist apparatchiks turned democrats. In the 2001 elections, the Communist Party of Moldova won the majority of seats in the Parliament and appointed Vladimir Voronin as president. His first term in office was characterised by a foreign policy orientation towards Moscow and what has been termed by critics as a re-sovietisation of Moldova. But, in a dramatic U-turn, the 2005 elections saw Voronin and the Communist Party re-elected on a pro-European integration platform. After 2001, Moldova regularly affirmed its wish to join the European Union and despite full participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy, the government's critics claim that its commitment to European Union accession is largely declarative in nature and that measures are not being taken to ensure the speedy reforms

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<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldova> and <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/md.html>.

necessary to make membership in the near future realistic. The political sphere in Moldova is dominated by several specific issues, most notably the frozen Transnistrian conflict and Russia's influence over Moldova foreign and domestic policies. Commentators of the political situation in Moldova have remarked, not with little frustration, that the country's trade and foreign policies remain unstable and continue to vacillate between Russia, the EU and the United States, depending on who puts up the most pressure. Recent developments (Summer 2007), including Voronin's new "hard-line" in criticising Romania and other EU countries over their reaction to Moldova's difficult circumstances given drought, have led some commentators to question the commitment of the current government to European integration and democracy. It is noteworthy that many commentators also fear a resolution of the Transnistrian conflict on Putin's terms as a result of recent developments. Russia under President Putin has not hesitated to use a variety of economic foreign policy levers to influence domestic situations in the region. Moldova has not been spared. Russian troops remain stationed on the self-declared border of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, ostensibly keeping the peace, really guarding the status quo. Their presence and eventual withdrawal, as well as other support sent to the separatist region by Russia, are variably used in carrot and stick fashion to maintain Moldova within Russia's immediate sphere of influence and to limit the likelihood of its accession to both NATO and the European Union.<sup>5</sup>

Critics, inside and outside the country, accuse the incumbent government of having a poor democratic record. For example, elections in Moldova have regularly been marred by irregularities, including the arrest and harassment of opposition candidates, disruption of independent media and biased state media coverage of candidates favoured by the incumbent government. In 2002, protests against the government's attempts to reinstate the obligatory study of Russian and in defence of the common cultural identity that majority of Moldovans feel they share with neighbouring Romanians were censored by state media. In the same year, Teleradio-Moldova (TVM) journalists went on strike in solidarity with the political opposition in response to increasingly severe censorship. Several journalists and other staff members were subsequently dismissed. Despite the removal of Article 170 of the Penal Code (which states that defamation can be punished with up to five years imprisonment) in 2004, the media climate in Moldova has remained restrictive, according to the OSCE. The authorities have been criticized by the European Union, the United States, the OSCE and even Russia for what has been interpreted as a campaign to silence opposition within the country, including the highly mediated case of opposition politician Valeriu Pasat who was recently sentenced to ten years in a state penitentiary. More recently, around the 2007 local elections, the government was accused of "dirty tricks" although the elections could be generally characterised as free and fair.

*"Local elections 3-17 June (2007) took place with certain infringements. The most important deviations from democratic norms were the intimidation of electoral candidates, the absence of an independent public media, the usage of administrative resources by the holders of some official functions and non-observance of the secret vote".<sup>6</sup>*

The poor human rights record of the current Moldovan authorities has also been attested to by Freedom House's Nations in Transit Report for 2006. Moldova's score for democracy remained unchanged from that of the previous year at 4.96, interpreted as a visible lack of progress. It is also noteworthy that its score for independent media worsened.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, "Policies Promoted By Government Party Will Worsen Foreign Dependence" by Dumitru Minzarari, in Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 2 (July 2007), pp. 9-12.

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, "The Eroding of Government Party Increased in Local Elections from 2007" by Ion Marandici, Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 1 (June, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dura, George (Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels) and Popescu, Nicu (CEPS and Central European University, Budapest) for Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2006, Moldova.

## Economy

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe with GDP per capita of US \$2,500<sup>8</sup> in 2006. While it enjoys a favourable climate and quality farmland, it has no major mineral deposits and as a result, the economy remains largely dependent on agriculture. Society has remained quite rural, despite fast industrialisation during the Soviet period. According to the Human Development Report 2004, Moldova had GDP per capita of US \$381, which is 5.3 times lower than the world average. As an illustration of what this means, this is under the average of all regions in the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2004, approximately 40% of the population of Moldova was living under the absolute poverty line (US \$2.15 per day).

In Summer 2007, as a result of unprecedented temperatures across Europe, Moldova experienced drought. According to some sources, only 20% of agricultural land is covered by irrigation systems. Noteworthy is that with 54% of employment in Moldova currently being accounted for by the agricultural sector such external shocks can have serious and long term effects on the economy, weakening it even further. Some domestic commentators have pointed to the inadequate response of the government, indicating that the actions of the National Public Procurement Agency, which bought in only 3,400 tonnes of wheat instead of the nearly 30,000 tonnes that would be needed to meet the shortfall, were slow and token. They also warn that in the autumn of 2007 the country's food security will remain fragile.<sup>9</sup>

While GDP growth was steady at 6% every year from 2000 to 2005, this growth was fuelled by consumption by Moldovans who receive remittances from family members working abroad rather than by investment or output. It is estimated that almost 1 million Moldovan citizens work abroad, mostly in Portugal, France, Italy and other countries of the European Union or in Russia.

Moldova must import its entire energy supply and like many of its neighbours it is dependent on energy deliveries from Russia. In 2005, disputes with electricity concerns based in Transnistria and Gazprom over the price of gas delivered to Moldova from caused energy shortages and power cuts. Moldova's wine and agricultural products were traditionally exported to Russia. In 2006, Russia banned the importation of such goods from Moldova, claiming they did not meet international hygiene standards. This, combined with the doubling of the price of Russian gas, slowed GDP growth considerably. The economy remains vulnerable to higher fuel prices, poor weather, scepticism on the part of foreign investors and the effects of long term frozen conflict. Opinions are mixed concerning the outlook. Economic reform has been slowed by the political promises of the current government to maintain economic control and by endemic corruption. However, progress reports on the implementation of the ENP indicate that progress is being made in the eradication of corruption and that despite the slow pace of initial reforms, it seems to be picking up. Such optimistic indications notwithstanding the political vacillation of President Voronin between Moscow and Brussels remains an important factor influencing the speed of reform.

## Language and Identity

As mentioned above, Romanian became the official language of Moldova in 1989, rectifying what for many Moldovans was a gross injustice of Soviet oppression. Immediately following independence in 1991, Moldovan-Romanian nationalists established a movement aiming at the

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<sup>8</sup> At the time of writing (August 2007) the exchange rate for USD to the Euro was: 1.34 USD = 1 Euro, for USD to the local currency (Moldovan Leu – MDL) was 1 USD = 12.15 MDL and for the Euro to MDL was 1 Euro = 16.39 MDL (source: [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) 21 August 2007). Note that some of the economic data presented in this report is valid for years previous to 2007 and, therefore, currency equivalencies may not be completely accurate using these exchange rates.

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, "After Having Lost Power In the Majority Of District Councils, The Communists Look For Levers To Tighten Their Control Over The Moldovan Society" by Ion Marandici, Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 2 (July, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> This section has been elaborated in reference to Council of Europe/ERICarts, "Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe", 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007 and Ministry of Culture, Evaluation of Moldova, Cultural Policy.

reunification of Moldova with Romania. The perception that this unification was a real possibility and not just some far off pipedream was underscored by the fact that in the initial years of independence the national symbols of the Republic of Moldova were the same as those of Romania (e.g. the Romanian tricolour with a coat-of-arms and the Romanian national anthem). However, this enthusiasm for unification with Romania declined as Moldova grew into independent statehood. The Constitution adopted in 1994 refers to Moldovan language and not to Romanian. The national anthem was changed in 1996. In the same year, President Mircea Snegur's attempt to amend the Constitution to change the denomination of the official language to "Romanian" was dismissed by the Moldovan Parliament as promoting Romanian nationalism.

Most, although not all, linguists consider Moldovan to be a form of Daco-Romanian that is, to all intents and purposes, identical to standard Romanian. There is no particular linguistic difference between the Romanian spoken on the two sides of the Prut River, which divides Moldova from Romania. In formal (especially written) use, the languages are identical except for minor spelling differences (Moldovans write *î* in some situations where Romanians would use *â*, something that was quite common in former times in Romania). There is, however, some regional variation, as might be found within any linguistic territory, and the everyday speech and accent of areas such as Chisinau or Transnistria can be distinguished from those of Iasi, a city in Romania that was historically part of the former Principality of Moldavia. In general, the larger the Slavic-speaking population of a region, the greater the difference from standard Romanian. There are more differences between the colloquial spoken languages of Moldova and Romania, most significantly due to the influence of Russian in Moldova, a linguistic factor that was not present in Romania.

The status of Moldovan as a separate language is contested both in politics in Moldova and further afield. It is indicative that the 1989 language law recognizes a specific Moldovan Romanian language identity, as does the 1994 Constitution. Other legal texts do not make this difference and many among Moldova's educated intelligentsia feel uncomfortable with the revitalisation of the so-called "Soviet Moldovan Language Project". The situation is further complicated by the fact that in some state institutions and in public life more generally, some officials still use Russian as their exclusive language of communication, although it is not recognized as an official language. In Transnistria the Cyrillic script is used for writing Moldovan and both Russian and Ukrainian have the status of official languages.

The definition of what constitutes an ethnic group continues to be the subject of some discussion in Moldova. As mentioned above, the issue of the "true" linguistic and cultural identity of the Moldovans is politically controversial. The distinction between Moldovans and Romanians is both unclear and disputed. Some argue that Moldovans constitute an ethnic group separate from the Romanian ethnos. Others claim that Moldovans in both Romania and Moldova form a subgroup of the Romanian ethnos, similar to Transylvanians, Oltenians and other groups. The 2004 census indicated, however, that while Moldovans and Romanians are the largest ethnic groups in Moldova, the ethnic composition of the population is more diverse. Moldova is also home to historical and newer national minorities such as, among others, Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzians and Bulgarians and several religious groups, not only Christian.

## **Culture**

Against this backdrop of contested cultural identities, state-building and political controversy, it is possible to discern three related but distinct phases of development of culture in Moldova, taking into account the changing relationship between culture producers, central authorities and audiences during the country's recent history.



## **a/ Soviet Socialist Realism**

During the Soviet Period all cultural activities were subordinated to the direct supervision of the Communist Party. Intellectual circles, the media and academia were both subject to strict surveillance and heavily infiltrated by the secret services. Censorship was both ruthless and efficient. Thus, literary “collaborationism” with the authorities both diversified its forms and generalized its impact, reaching enormous proportions and becoming almost ubiquitous. A socialist realist “Soviet Moldovan” literature was manufactured during this time, as were other culture surrogates. “Soviet Moldovan” literature and other culture forms dependent on the use of language were characterised by the use of Russian or the promotion of the “Moldovan language” in its Russified form. The use of Romanian language was actively discouraged. The principles of Soviet Socialist Realism, including the glorification of the Party and Soviet world view and the clear use of culture for the purpose of ideological indoctrination, defined subject matter and in some cases even form. According to our respondents, the relationship of the public to this kind of cultural production was purely formal, consumption for the sake of peace and quiet, rather than even for the sake of entertainment.

The state authorities used a variety of methods to keep the culture sector under control. The most notorious approaches included more or less subtle forms of bribery and coercion. Privileges were granted to the loyal and many talented literary figures had to grapple with compromising their artistic integrity in order to be allowed to continue to produce. There was little intellectual resistance of the nature of the dissidence witnessed in other countries within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Loyalty to the regime was a true “way of life” for many. It was the only imaginable way of life. This, to an extent, explains the absence of samizdat in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as the lack of an underground culture. When the situation for cultural actors finally began to open up a little in the late 1980s, there were almost no “in drawer” manuscripts to publish, a situation that contrasted with other Soviet Republics at the time.

## **b/ Romantic Nationalism and State Building**

The period of initial democratisation that took place during the early 1990s, witnessed the rise to prominence of a constituency of intellectuals, particularly in the field of literature, who proclaimed the unity of Romanian culture, whether located in Romania proper or in independent Moldova. These writers assumed the role of nation-builders for those among the Moldovan population who felt strongly about their Romanian cultural identity (certainly a majority, but a smaller majority than in previous centuries). Their romantic-patriotic poetry and other writings were inspired by Romanian national myths and they became popular with the wider Romanian reading public in Moldova in the early years of independence.

At the same time, Moldova was already a sovereign nation state. Several generations of Russification meant that a significant proportion Moldovan citizens do not speak Romanian at all, even if they consider themselves Moldovan as anyone else. Their Moldovan identity is not so much bound to one language or another, but rather to their common sense of citizenship, their sense of national independence and their sense of belonging to the place where they have lived for as long as they can remember. Many of these people also come from other national (minority) groups (Ukrainians, Bulgarians, etc). This along with the outbreak of the Transnistria conflict has contributed to a cultural polarisation of Moldova.

At this time, the reform agenda and pro-reform civil society were largely identified with Romanian language cultural groups and intellectuals, although not exclusively. Their pro-European stance contrasted with the Eastward and Russia orientation of government and other influential cultural actors in Moldova (e.g. the entertainment business). There was heated debate in the early years of independence about whether Moldova should unite with Romania, Moldovan citizens confirmed their wish to remain independent in a referendum in 1994.

## **c/ Post-Socialism**

Today, some 15 years into the political and economic transition, independent actors of culture complain that the reformist impulse to reconstruct Moldovan society has dissipated and that their contribution to such a project is no longer welcome. The re-election of the Communist Party in 2003 has brought disappointment to many in Moldova, especially among the reform intellectuals that espouse Romanian speaking culture. With the clear preference of this government for a “Moldovan” national identity, that some people fear includes the rehabilitation of the Soviet Moldovan language project, these complain of a net dis-improvement in freedom of expression and a covert re-introduction of censorship in state media. Some even complain of the re-establishment of “black-lists” of intellectuals, no longer “welcome” in state broadcasting. They fear the government’s erstwhile relationship with Russia and bemoan the seemingly declarative nature of Moldova’s relationship with the European Union, despite the full integration of Moldova in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the strong role the EU has attempted to take in efforts to solve the Transnistrian conflict. For its part, the government considers the resistance of some in the Romanian speaking cultural community to their cultural policy approach as worrisome evidence of Romanian state interference in Moldovan state business. Clearly, those who would like to be more active in the promotion of Moldovan culture, whether contemporary or more traditional, suffer the somewhat ignominious fate of feeling like they are being used as instruments of the unresolved identity politics of the Moldovan transition.

### **3/ Contemporary Cultural Policy and Trends<sup>10</sup>**

#### **Sources of Cultural Policy**

The main legal documents regulating the provision and priorities of cultural policy in the Republic of Moldova include

- the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova adopted in 1994;
- the Law on Culture adopted on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1999;
- the National Programme on the “Development and Protection of Culture and the Arts” adopted first for 1997-8 and extended to 2000-5.

The National programme on the “Development and Protection of Culture and the Arts” (1997-8, extended to 2000-5) defines culture as a

*“system of values that form national identity”.*

The Law on Culture of 1999 defines national culture as

*“all forms of thinking, feeling and action in the material and spiritual spheres of society and the enhancement thereof”*

In addition, the Constitution and several legal acts (including international conventions) protect the cultural rights of minority communities in Moldova, including guaranteeing them the possibility to be educated through their mother tongue.

#### **Public Policy Objectives and Responsibilities**

The main objectives of national cultural policy are to preserve and protect the Moldovan cultural heritage while maintaining the institutional framework for cultural development.

Specifically, this means that national cultural policy aims to:

- preserve cultural heritage as an ethical-moral cohesive factor in society;
- provide support for different forms and styles of artistic creation and cultural actions;
- ensure unrestricted access to national and international cultural values;
- support citizens' self-organisation and cultural initiatives;
- maintain an accurate inventory of the most valuable cultural heritage assets;
- consolidate technical and material resources of the main cultural institutions;
- facilitate concerted action and co-operation between decision makers, artists' unions and associations by creating joint cultural assistance and development programmes;
- establish the legal and organisational framework for cultural heritage protection;
- ensure the appropriate operation of artistic and cultural institutions;
- provide for a high media profile for Moldovan culture abroad through increased international collaboration;
- promote new technologies.

Despite the fact that the "Long-term strategy for Economic Development and Poverty Alleviation" launched in 2003 foresees a key role for cultural tourism in national economic development, an important chapter on culture was excluded from the strategy in 2004. According to the Compendium on Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, this chapter could have revitalised the cultural policy making field by giving new impetus for the development of adequate programmes for the promotion of art and culture. Hence, with the exception of cultural tourism, culture is not seen as a key element in the social and economic development of Moldova.

In Moldova, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is responsible for cultural policy at central government level.

The main tasks of the Ministry include

- to promote national and universal human values through art and culture;
- to provide the best possible conditions for preserving, enhancing and promoting national cultural heritage;
- to develop a publishing policy;
- to develop the optimum legislative and regulatory framework for the dissemination of national culture;
- to ensure conditions which allow for artistic freedom;
- to appreciate artists' contribution to the development of national culture;
- to present indigenous art works and productions at home and abroad;
- to develop cultural tourism by promoting the cultural and natural heritage of the Republic of Moldova; preserve natural environment and landscapes, urban and rural architectural complexes and reservations, archaeological complexes and sites, other monuments and places that have a national or international value from the historical, artistic or scientific point of view;
- to promote cultural tourism as an integral part of the government's programmes of social and economic development.

The Ministry is responsible for policy making, the identification of priorities, the disbursement of the resources required for their implementation and for the implementation of the state programmes established for the protection and development of culture in Moldova. The Department for "Inter-Ethnic Relations" and two of its sub-departments are responsible for the specialised policies put in place to cater for relations between different cultural groups inside Moldova and for supporting individuals of Moldovan origin in other countries.

At the local level there are 32 district offices, the department of culture of the Municipality of Chisinau and the Municipal Directorate for Culture in Balti that are co-responsible for managing local cultural institutions.

Their tasks include

- ensuring conditions necessary for the development of folk art and traditional handicrafts, as well as for entertainment and other cultural activities;
- carrying out programmes on conservation and promotion of culture and art in the districts / municipalities by organising various cultural events: festivals, competitions, activities aimed at conserving and promoting folk art, reviews of amateur groups, fine arts and handcraft exhibitions;
- submitting to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the district / municipal council an annual report on its activity and on the operation of the institution under their control.

Further, the local cultural infrastructure includes 1227 Houses of Culture, 1380 public libraries, 110 schools (of art, fine art and music) and 80 museums.

### **Investments and Priorities**

Public investments in culture remain very small, certainly too small to be able to accommodate serious development and innovation. According to public information, expenditure on culture within the consolidated state budget was 0.82% in 2005 or a total sum of 251.1 million MDL. To this one must add the extra-budgetary income generated for the state cultural budget to fill the gap in its resources through alternative financing activities on the part of cultural institutions (for example, through the hiring out of premises, teaching in secondary schools, reviews of artistic works and films and contract based research projects). In 2005 that extra-budgetary income came to approximately 18 million MDL. In 2004 (last available figures) culture expenditure per capita was 70.1 MDL or 0.08% of GDP.<sup>11</sup> One of our respondents estimated that in 2007, state culture expenditure will come to approximately 6 million euros and the majority of this budget will be spent on salaries for state “cultural workers” and on the purchase of culture works by the Ministry of Culture. Participants of recent roundtables on cultural policy in Moldova, organised by the Soros Foundation Moldova and the European Cultural Foundation, estimated the public expenditure on culture amounts to a per capita outlay of 5 MDL per person per year.<sup>12</sup> It is striking that at current exchange rates (August 2007) this represents about 30 euro cents.

According to the information available publicly and to some recent cultural policy activities (analyses, roundtables), the main priority of the Moldovan cultural policy is to preserve the cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova that is under threat.<sup>13</sup> This specifically means that those cultural heritages considered most needy of maintenance or renovation receive a large part of the state budget for culture. The Directorates for Cultural Heritage and of the Arts are responsible for managing Moldova’s cultural heritage. This includes tasks such as the registration, conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage such as historical remains, architectural sites, national movable and immovable cultural heritage and the maintenance of archives and registers related to the protection of monuments.<sup>14</sup> A state-run fund has been set up to cover the cost of these cultural heritage protection activities. It supplements its income through a variety of commercial activities linked to the exploitation of cultural heritage. This author was not able to find any information concerning the scale of investment that this fund and its additional financing mechanisms are able to achieve.

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<sup>11</sup> Council of Europe/ERICarts, “Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe”, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Soros Foundation, Moldova and European Cultural Foundation, Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability, draft report of five roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture and the arts in 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Council of Europe/ERICarts, “Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe”, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007, p. 27 and Soros Foundation, Moldova and European Cultural Foundation, Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability, draft report of five roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture and the arts in 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Council of Europe, p. 19.

In addition, a large part of the state budget for culture is spent on keeping the system ticking over. For the purposes of comparison, some figures are useful. The average wage of people who work in the fields of culture, education or medicine is estimated at MDL 992.4. According to a recent report the average salary of a professor at the Academy of Music is just 780 MDL per month.<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that average monthly salary overall is MDL 1318.7, the minimum wage is MDL 766.1 and the minimum consumption basket is just over MDL 1700. Despite these clearly depressed wages, the cost of maintaining the culture related civil service in employment is a huge burden on the state finances.

In 2005, the government announced the “Programme on the government’s activities for 2005 to 2009” under the title: “Modernisation of the Country – Welfare of the People”.

This framework programme foresees the following governmental priorities in the field of culture:

- supporting diversity of form and genres of artistic creation and cultural activities;
- developing the art education sector;
- supporting the state cultural institutions and non-governmental organisations;
- promoting Moldovan culture abroad, within the framework of programmes of exchange and cooperation with other countries.

Unfortunately, this author was not able to find any conclusive information to indicate that the above priorities are being resourced or implemented by state institutions responsible for culture or having other primary responsibilities (for example, it is unclear from the information available publicly what role the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Moldovan diplomatic missions play in the promotion of Moldovan culture abroad). Anecdotal evidence from the consultation meeting with Moldovan cultural partners indicates that these priorities are weakly covered by public spending in the cultural sphere.<sup>16</sup>

Priority is given to the most immediate concern of securing cultural heritage sites and ensuring the maintenance of heritage properties. Clearly, this is an expensive undertaking, which eats up the meagre funds available for state culture policy implementation. This focus is hardly surprising given the clear priority the Moldovan authorities give to the development of cultural tourism. It is understood as a cornerstone of the future economic development strategy of the Republic of Moldova. It is not clear the extent to which the programme of economic development foresees significant investments to stimulate cultural tourism, despite the fact that it is a priority. It is clear that investment to secure the architectural heritage of the country is necessary but not sufficient for encouraging international tourists to make Moldova their chosen holiday destination. It will also be important to develop the service culture, modern and attractive tourism sites and adequate infrastructure to accommodate tourists from other countries in a manner they will enjoy and remember. There may, of course, be significant potential in the local and Diaspora market. With so many Moldovans living abroad and a small but growing middle class working in the capital, it is likely that there will be growing demand from locals for tourism opportunities. However, this will also demand investment, and it is difficult to assess the extent to which funds would be available.

According to the Compendium on Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe profile for Moldova in 2007, cultural industries such as cinema, publishing, television and radio, have received significant attention from government since 2004. This has included the provision of significantly increased subsidies. For example, cinema funding was increased from 200,000 MDL in 2002 to nearly 2 million MDL in 2005). It is noteworthy, however, that the government has directed this funding exclusively at film productions under its own control. In TV and radio broadcasting, independent municipal media outlets like *Euro TV* and radio *Antena C* were closed down for political reasons. It is also noteworthy that there is no definition of cultural industries in

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<sup>15</sup> Soros Foundation, Moldova and European Cultural Foundation, *Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability*, draft report of five roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture and the arts in 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Consultation meeting with cultural actors in Chisinau, Moldova, 3 July, 2007.

the legislation governing culture in Moldova. According to the results of the roundtables within the Soros Foundation / European Cultural Foundation Project entitled “Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability”, cultural industries are weakly articulated and in the international sense of the term, are hardly developed in Moldova, even if within the culture sphere itself television, radio, the production and distribution of films, publishing, advertising, folk handicrafts and show business are understood as forming cultural industries and some young and dynamic cultural managers are active in these industries.<sup>17</sup>

It is noteworthy that in relation to public priorities in the field of culture some of our more critical respondents believe the incumbent government of Moldova considers culture only in terms of its instrumental value for the furtherance of its state building project, one that is based on the fundamental value of Moldova’s relationship with Russia and which aims at marginalising the “true” Romanian cultural identity of Moldova. They see the periodical, but very well financed, government-organised Slavic cultural festivals as part of a programme to re-Russify Moldova. According to our respondents, examples of the kind of cultural event and activities that the government puts priority on include the promotion of Moldovan wine, the constant broadcasting of folk music on state television and the continued celebration of World War II Victory Day on May 9<sup>th</sup> in Soviet style with concerts of Soviet military music. Independent cultural production and creativity or innovation receive little or no support from central government. Our respondents claim that the current government supports only those who enter into a clientelistic relationship with it, offering sponsorship and notoriety to those who “tow the party-line”. In their estimation, the government uses culture for the purpose of state propaganda, instrumentalizing the continued frozen conflict in Transnistria as evidence of the Romanian “threat” on their doorstep and explaining away the lack of progress in economic reform and democratisation on interference by foreign powers. They see the attitude of the government to culture as seriously damaging to Moldova’s chances to take its rightful place among the community of European nations and to realise its European identity.

Our questionnaire and other background information consulted<sup>18</sup> revealed very little concrete information about private investments in culture in Moldova. Our respondents were not able to estimate the extent of financial investments made by private actors in the culture sphere, although some mentioned that some sponsorship (even if very little) is available for culture projects from the business community inside the country. But, some clear indications of the climate for private investment in culture are apparent. The general economic situation of the country plays an important role in this relation. The poorest country in Europe, most ordinary Moldovans simply cannot afford to pay for culture, so artists and other culture producers are not able to finance their production or innovation on the basis of income generated by their cultural products. According to our respondents, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to access funds for cultural projects from the local business community. In their estimation, a further problem is that many successful business people with means at their disposal are from the Russian speaking community or, indeed, are Russian (this is especially the case for the Moldovan media industry) and they display no interest in funding Romanian speaking cultural development. Moldova does not yet attract a large community of foreign investors. The few that are active in Moldova are not encouraged to sponsor culture because they receive no tax advantage. In fact, according to our respondents adequate legislation on sponsoring is for the moment not in place in Moldova.

## **Actors**

Two main groups of actors are discernable in the contemporary Moldovan cultural environment: the state and the independent or alternative cultural sphere. As described in some detail in a previous section, the category of state actors includes both central government, in the person of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and local administrations, have responsibilities for cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Soros Foundation, Moldova and European Cultural Foundation, *Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability*, draft report of five roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture and the arts in 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Soros Foundation, Moldova and European Cultural Foundation, *Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability*, draft report of five roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture and the arts in 2007.

policy development and implementation. Having said this, and as will be discussed at a later stage, it seems that despite early moves towards decentralisation, central government has recently tended towards the re-absorption of decentralised functions.

Our respondents clearly identify independent (in other words, non-governmental) actors to have made the more significant contribution to the development of the cultural sphere in Moldova, even though the state, and its main agency in this field, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is clearly the actor that sets public policy priorities.

Several private publishing houses are considered leaders in the independent culture sector. These are *Cartier*, *Arv*, *Stiinta*, *Litera*, and *Gunivas*. They emerged at the end of the 1990s and are run by Moldovan businessmen familiar with and favourably disposed toward Romanian language culture. They support Moldovan Romanian language authors. Nevertheless, evidence from the consultation meeting points to the unfortunate fact that in order to function under the conditions of the market economy, the majority of their published materials have to be exported to Romania because there is not enough demand for it in Moldova proper. The Centre for Contemporary Art (KSAK)<sup>19</sup> provides support to the contemporary visual arts sector in Moldova, through international contacts, training and the possibility to participate in international collaboration projects. The *OWH Studio*, is a non-governmental initiative that has organised an international independent documentary film festival, called *CRONOGRAF*, since 2000. In addition to receiving international entrants to the festival, the jury also includes international film critics. The Ethno-Jazz Band, *Trigon*, organizes an annual Ethno-Jazz festival that brings together many high quality participants. The participants of the consultation meeting referred to two further festivals as important in the development of the cultural sphere since Moldovan independence, these being the Festival of Contemporary Music and the Festival of Contemporary Dance, both organised by non-governmental organisations.<sup>20</sup> Further, in the fields of contemporary visual arts, the organisations *Ars d'Or* and *Aorta* were mentioned as influential for their avant gardist approach to contemporary culture. Finally, the position of the various Artists Unions (for example, Writers Union) is important to mention. On the one hand, they are influential and even powerful having a long past, many influential members (even if retired) and state guaranteed advantages. On the other hand, they are often among the least receptive to reform due to the possibility they may lose financial and social advantages.

The Soros Foundation in Moldova is credited with having supported an impressive number of cultural actors and creators, including many well known writers, visual artists, theatre companies and musicians. Many conferences, symposia and creative workshops were made possible by its funding. Moldovan artists and performers have also had the opportunity to travel abroad and perform or exhibit with their support. In the opinion of one our respondents, the Soros Foundation in Moldova has acted as a kind of life support system for those artists and culture producers who were not supported by the government for political reasons, allowing several creative intellectuals in opposition to the government to continue to produce. The Soros Foundation is in the process of exiting the culture sphere in Moldova, as it has already done in some other countries of the region, and the amount of support available for culture oriented projects has already been reduced significantly. According to one respondent, no other comparably open and effective support mechanism for the independent culture sector has emerged yet. Nevertheless, they have several important and ongoing projects in the field of culture, including the above mentioned Soros Foundation / European Cultural Foundation Project entitled “Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability” which aims to build the capacity of the cultural community across the non-governmental – government divide in Moldova for cultural policy making at national and local levels.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Originally established with generous financing from the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) and independent since 2000 ([www.art.md](http://www.art.md)).

<sup>20</sup> Days of New Music Festival, managed by Gennadie Chiobanu composer, Head of Moldovan Union of Composers and the Association of Contemporary Dance Moldova on an annual basis (<http://www.addm-contemporary.com/eng/ev.htm>) respectively.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on this pilot project consult the Soros Foundation Moldova website: <http://www.soros.md/programs/arts/en.html>.

Romanian cultural institutions, including the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR), the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations and the Department for Relations with the Diaspora Romanians (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), are also very active in supporting cultural projects in Moldova. These institutions provide significant funding for the development and dissemination of Romanian language cultural production. According to one respondent, the ICR covers the quasi-totality of the cost of publishing six Romanian-language cultural publications, including *Contrafort*, *Sud-Est Cultural*, *Semn* [Sign], *Destin Romanesc* [Romanian Destiny], *Clipa Siderala* [The Astral Moment], and *Limba Romana* [Romanian Language]. It also finances fellowships, research projects, publishing the work of Moldovan authors, summer courses for high-school teachers from Moldova, exhibitions of Moldovan visual artists among others. The Romanian cultural institutions active in Moldova provide financial assistance to the written press as well as to various local cultural initiatives. Nevertheless, this kind of support for the cultural sphere is not without its difficulties. In the first place, accessing such funding is excessively bureaucratic and can have counter productive effects for the functioning of its Moldovan beneficiaries. In the second place, such institutions are not very interested in the development of other forms of Moldovan culture than that representing the Romanian speaking community. Finally, the government has a tendency to treat support from the Romanian state for Romanian speaking cultural production as interference in the domestic politics of the Republic of Moldova.

Our respondents and the participants of the consultation meeting with Moldovan partners specifically mentioned the following cultural actors and initiatives as significant in cultural innovation and development in Moldova:

- The Moldovan PEN Club
- The newspaper, *Jurnal de Chisinau*
- The “Eugene Ionesco” Theatre
- The Laboratory of Theatrical Research
- Theatre (drama) critics and authors (including the following art directors and authors of dramatic texts, Mihai Fusu, Constantin Cheianu, Nicolae Negru, Val Butnaru, Angelina Rosca, Irina Nechit, Dumitru Crudu, Mircea V. Ciobanu)
- The Center for Contemporary Art (KSAK)
- Art critics including Constantin Ciobanu, Vladimir Bulat, Dorina Bohantov
- The *Oberlist* Association (an information portal for contemporary Moldovan art and culture)
- *OWH Studio* (organizer of the International Documentary Film Festival “
- *CRONOGRAF*, directed by Viorel Margineanu
- *MoldFilm*
- The Ethno-Jazz band *Trigon*, directed by Anatol Stefanet.
- *Papyrus Studio* (Visual arts)
- The Festival of Contemporary Music
- The Festival of Contemporary Dance (organised by the Association of Contemporary Dance of Moldova)
- NGO *Ars d’Or* (training of cultural managers)
- The Union of Writers
- The Academy of Arts
- The Moldovan Philharmonic
- Mihai Sleahitichi, Professor of Political Science at the University of Balti and at the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM).

These, among others, can be considered to form the “independent” cultural scene in Moldova, although the distinction between independent and state cultural actors is sometimes blurred by the fact that some artists and artistic formations are funded partially or fully by the state but nevertheless maintain an “independent stance” in artistic, aesthetic and philosophical terms. In principle, the reverse cannot be said to be true, as most cultural actors that put their art at the service of the state do receive financial incentives for this. As will be discussed further in this report, the issue of state interference in cultural affairs, the instrumentalisation of culture for the



purposes of propaganda and clientelistic relationships between the cultural sphere and the state are important challenges for the culture sphere and its ability to be a progressive agent of change in Moldova.

Nevertheless, there are some cultural actors who could be characterised as forming an “alternative” culture, including some of the above. This sector does not receive a significant or even its deserved share of attention, especially not from the state audio-visual media, which constitutes a significant weakness given that these remain the most important channel of communication with the wider Moldovan public. According to our respondents and the participants of the consultation meeting, and depending on the genre or field, the cultural production of alternative cultural formations can be intellectually and creatively superior, but is not promoted. Considered to be an elite “niche” culture, reserved for a few high-brow intellectuals by the majority of the culture consuming public and the state authorities, this small cultural community is also excluded from any form of decision making on cultural policy. One of our respondents characterised the relationship between the public authorities responsible for culture and the independent culture sector as “parallel worlds”. The alternative sector might occasionally contact the authorities with proposals for projects, but they will not receive their due attention unless the proposing organisation has the ear of the ruling political elite. This has led to a certain resignation on the part of alternative cultural actors, who basically feel that there is little or no point in entering into communication with the state authorities. As a result, they exist in a kind of “splendid isolation” of marginalised creative superiority, not relying on the state for any support, using international sources to survive and go on producing and taking their motivation to continue from the positive feedback they receive from their peers and foreign critics. While this is by no means an uncommon situation in other countries of Eastern Europe or even further afield, it could hardly be characterised as either healthy or functional.

## **The Content of Contemporary Cultural Production in Moldova**

### **Issues and Themes**

In relation to the content of cultural production, the participants of the consultation meeting candidly referred to their inspiration as being intimately related to the social and political reality of Moldova today. To a certain extent, and for some parts of the cultural community, this reality has resulted in a precarious existential situation for contemporary artists, whether that be because of the economic conditions under which they have to function or whether it be because they are politically marginalised by the government.

Hence, contemporary culture is quite preoccupied with certain existential issues. Participants of the consultation meeting referred to the main concern of contemporary cultural production in terms of “existential transition”. While the political and economic transition has largely been achieved, and even if democratic consolidation has not been completed in Moldova, the psychological, emotional and social transitions that individuals and communities are required to make to function under the new system and conditions are still in process. Artistic expression, therefore, can focus on issues as diverse as values (European, democratic, universal), identity (national, cultural, state, political) or more practical issues of survival under the conditions of transition (aesthetic, physical). Recurrent themes of contemporary cultural production in various genres can, therefore, be grouped into several broad categories, as follows:

#### ***Democracy***

According to the participants of the consultation meeting in Chisinau, many writers are returning to themes that were important in literature and the cultural sphere more broadly before the transition as a result of the change of political climate that the return to power of the Communist Party has brought about. Hence, issues of freedom in the broadest sense, the idea of the state as a construction, issues of transparency and state propaganda have returned to the literary agenda.

#### ***Europe***

The recent accession of Romania to the European Union, bringing Moldova to the very border of the EU to Moldova, has rekindled interest among cultural producers in notions of Europe,

European identity and the place of Moldova in Europe. This has also been fuelled by the slightly higher level of interest shown by the EU towards the situation of Moldova and the peculiar problems of its transition including the Transnistrian question. Issues of Europe, European identity and Moldova's place in that, even of Moldova-centrism, as mentioned by some participants of the consultation meeting are particularly visible in the fields of visual arts, theatre and music. A further issue of interest is the idea of "integration" – integration into political and social processes in Europe, but also cultural integration. Participants of the consultation meeting speculated that this interest is borne of the insecurity many Moldovans feel in relation to their identity. While discourse about the Moldovan ethnos and state are controversial, Europe might be slightly more straightforward.

### *History*

Recently, cultural producers have become more interested in the Moldova's Soviet past, in exploring and attempting to understand its tragedies and accomplishments. In particular, Moldovan artists are attempting to confront and understand the Gulag and its relevance for contemporary Moldovan society. Several artists have begun to explore so-called "Bessarabian" history to understand its influence on contemporary Moldovan development. Participants of the consultation meeting considered this interest in history, recent or more distant, as a clear side-effect of what they called the "crisis of memory" currently plaguing Moldova. In their opinion, it is difficult to construct the present without a good understanding of the past.

### *Globalisation*

Several contemporary cultural producers have taken an interest in question and issues raised by the ongoing process of globalisation. Some have attempted to explore the possible "threats" that it might pose to a society like Moldova's. Others have tried to understand the Globalisation in more positive terms, considering profound philosophical issues such as the meaning of universal values, the value of human life, the fragile relationship between ecology and technical progress, the social dimension of development, issues of justice and mutually respectful social relations between people of diverse backgrounds. One very practical and for Moldova socially relevant example of this is the issue of emigration, which has especially taken the interest of Moldovan contemporary playwrights. With approximately 1 million Moldovans working abroad and many more wishing to leave to seek better opportunities, hardly a single Moldovan family is not directly affected by this phenomenon, one which is necessarily changing Moldovan society.

Participants of the consultation meeting mentioned the following as exemplary of contemporary cultural production on the above issues:

- "Fuck You Europe", (play) by Nicolleta Iasinenco (about Communism from the perspective of an adolescent);
- "People of no-one", (play) by Dumitru Crudu;
- "Pyhromania", (literature) by Oleg Panfil;
- "Bosnia Blues", (poetry, about Balkan realities viewed from the perspective of Moldova);
- "Sdobzhe Zdup", Band producing music and video clips;
- The short comic documentary films by Igor Kobielsky
- The sculpture and other visual art production of Stefan Rusu.

### *Trends*

On the basis of the information provided by our respondents and the consultation meeting, it has been possible to identify three main trends in contemporary culture in Moldova at present.

#### Moldovan identity and / or Europe

As described in some detail above, Moldovan society can be considered quite divided when it comes to the issue of national identity. Those who espouse Romanian language culture as the basis of Moldovan identity feel their cultural heritage is threatened by what are seen as attempts to re-Russify Moldova and to rehabilitate the "Moldovan language project" that was one of the cornerstones of the Soviet approach to Moldovan national identity. The consultation meeting confirmed that the identity issue appears as an explicit theme in the cultural production of

contemporary cultural producers (whichever the genre), even if different artists deal with it in a variety of ways that are not necessarily consensual. The issue has been at the root of disagreements and disputes between members of the culture producing community and it is one of the foremost culture related debates appearing in the public sphere. As such it deserves some further attention, even if it remains to be understood fully to which extent this problem is considered existential and essential by the majority of Moldovans. When asked by the chair of the consultation meeting whether they consider themselves “Balkan” the participants of the consultation meeting responded that such geo-political constructions may be variably used, depending on the need and objective.

On the one hand, Moldova proclaims its aspiration to full European Union integration. Our respondents very clearly see themselves as “Europeans” and as the promoters of “European values” through their work as independent culture producers. They consider their work as a contribution to the modernisation and Europeanization of the country. Somewhat paradoxically, however, many of those who clearly espouse this European orientation also understand Moldovan identity and culture in static and relatively exclusive terms, almost as a set of cultural traits that a person must possess in order to be considered Moldovan. So, the idea of a Moldovan identity, based on an inclusive state citizenship that takes into account the dynamism of cultural affiliations, both as a reality of the modern world and as a de facto reality in Moldova, and which can be discerned in some aspects of the European integration project (for example, in the field of cultural co-operation) does not yet appear to be developed among the various sections of the cultural community in Moldova.

This identity paradox is clearly exacerbated by two “facts on the ground” of the Moldovan reality as a country in Europe. The first is that since Romania became a member of the European Union, a certain kind of two tier citizenship has been created (advertently or inadvertently remains something of a question). Approximately, half a million Moldovan citizens also hold Romanian citizenship. Up to several hundred thousand further Moldovan citizens would potentially be eligible to receive a Romanian passport. Those concerned benefit from all the privileges of European Union citizenship, including relative freedom of movement for work, education or leisure and the right to participate in the public and political life of the European Union, rights denied their compatriots who do not qualify for a Romanian passport. Certainly linked to the above development, but not exclusively, is that approximately one million Moldovan citizens live abroad, most commonly in several countries of the European Union, the United States or Russia. These work, live and usually raise families outside Moldova and as a result of the fact that their economic chances are better than in Moldova, they tend to settle if they have permission to do so. The extent to which this Diaspora considers itself as a discreet group, identifiable by its Moldovanness is not clear from the responses to our questionnaire. It is, therefore, speculative but for this author highly plausible, that membership of the Moldovan Diaspora does not resonate as a primary marker of their identity over, for example, the desire to integrate and be accepted in the new country of residence. The extent of their ongoing contact with the “home country” will most often be determined by whether they still have family in Moldova and whether they are responsible for financially supporting that part of the family.

#### Resistance to state control and interference

In the opinion of our respondents and several external sources,<sup>22</sup> state control over independent cultural processes is increasing and has become more intrusive. This can only be considered a step backwards for the consolidation of democracy in Moldova and the modernisation of society. As outlined above, media freedoms have been increasingly curtailed and independent and critical journalistic opinion is increasingly censored. The consultation meeting confirmed that issues of democracy, including explorations of themes like freedom, are treated explicitly in contemporary cultural production. And the respondents to the questionnaire were very concerned about the increasingly monopolistic attitude of the authorities. Nevertheless, this author does not have a clear picture of the extent of self-censorship for the sake of professional advancement in the cultural community, which is usually a fairly good indicator for the extent of repression in the

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<sup>22</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 1 (June, 2007) and Number 2 (July 2007).

system. The participants of the consultation meeting referred to the phenomenon as existent, but to understand the extent to which it is widespread would require much deeper enquiry.

While it is the firm belief of this author and the participants of the consultation meeting that culture is a policy domain that should remain the responsibility of public authorities, interference by central government in the freedom of expression of the artistic community is problematic, especially if that interference has ideological motivations and undertones. Few would espouse the purist view that culture should be invested in purely for culture's sake, but neither should it be the instrument those who have power to stay in power. In addition, the politicisation of the debate over cultural identity in Moldova is seen as having become something of an excuse for the authorities not to undertake the reforms that would be necessary to ensure the free development of culture, especially the production of the independent sector. The quasi exclusion of the independent cultural sector from cultural policy making at central level can be understood as an indication of the fact that in Moldova participative policy making remains to be developed rather than a reality. The consultation meeting provided evidence that the cultural community is motivated to co-operate across clear divides of a cultural and political nature in resistance to the authoritarian tendencies of the government as concerns freedom of cultural and media expression, but that it feels weak and disempowered.

#### Cultural conflict – traditionalism vs. post-modernism

The consultation meeting revealed that cultural conflict, in other words, the confrontation of traditional with post-modern cultural mores and aesthetics, is an important theme for contemporary culture producers. Examples brought to the consultation meeting from the visual arts, especially photography, demonstrate a complex treatment of everyday life experiences of the Moldovan reality. In this respect, the modern rural experience and the post-Soviet urban living environment have become important themes. Such themes are treated in a variety of ways, some with the simple objective to neutrally document, others with a strong and confrontational need to question and reflect. From an aesthetic point of view, this means that contemporary cultural production can be quite aggressive – in its imagery and in its message. Its post-modern take on “traditional” themes has a certain ironic tone to it. It holds the kind of “stock” traditionalism and stylised folksy products that are often portrayed as the “culture” of Moldova to account and poses the question – is this really what our culture is about? And, if so, what does that mean? This is by no means an exclusively Moldovan phenomenon. The same has been observed, even if with different implications, in the other two countries under consideration (Belarus and Ukraine) and even further afield in the so-called “New Europe”.

#### **The condition of culture in Moldova**

The deepening economic crisis that Moldova is experiencing, coupled with the authoritarian and exclusive tendencies of the incumbent government, has created a less than ideal environment for the development of contemporary culture. The independent culture sector is chronically underfunded, surviving on their own resources and grants made by foreign institutions that are increasingly exiting the region and the culture field. It is noteworthy that certain categories of cultural producer have no specific legal status and, therefore, social protection in case of unemployment or inactivity.<sup>23</sup> It is, therefore, something of a brave decision to choose to enter the artistic world on a professional basis. Independent culture, especially the area of contemporary and experimental arts, are largely viewed as an elite project. In their own opinion, independent culture actors are marginalised. They accuse the government of excluding them from policy making and of sneaky tactics for isolating them from the wider cultural consumption community. Our respondents point out that these cultural actors, especially if they are from the Romanian language community, are better known outside of Moldova, and especially in Romania, than inside.

With its minor budget allocations and ageing infrastructure, the public culture sector is in dire need of reform and investment. Consequently, only the most urgent tasks receive priority, with state resources mostly being allocated for the maintenance and renovation of cultural heritage sites and making sure that salaries, however meagre, continue to be paid. While the principles of the Council of Europe are reproduced in the main sources of cultural policy of the Republic of

Moldova, the objectives of the state cultural policy have not been effectively reached to date due to the lack of specific, well designed and realistic programmes. While the process of decentralisation began in 1991, in practise, the management of both funds and cultural activities has changed very little since independence, the main reason being the lack of knowledge and experience among local authorities to set up their own budgets, a situation which continues to persist. The redistribution of financial responsibilities for culture has proved to be one of the most difficult challenges facing reformers in the culture sector. With the administrative reform of 2003, local districts and their local cultural institutions were re-incorporated into a re-centralised system and have since been subject to greater interventionism on the part of both central and district governments.<sup>24</sup> Many actors in the independent cultural sector feel this is a further indication of the authoritarian and controlling tendencies of the government. Cultural tourism is a clear priority for the government, but before it can become a money-spinner for the public sector, significantly more and better investment are required. From the information publicly available, it is not clear to this author how the authorities imagine to develop cultural tourism. Moldova certainly has an interesting cultural and unspoiled natural heritage and many spots of cultural importance, but the capacity of the industry to attract tourists from abroad to partake of these, given the general lack of tourism infrastructure outside of Chisinau, the expense and difficulty of getting to Moldova from the near abroad and its peripheral location in Europe, is highly questionable. Even for the local tourist market to develop, significant investment will be necessary. It is also questionable whether the main priority of a state cultural policy should be the development of the tourism industry rather than the promotion of cultural innovation and development.

The largest part of the Moldovan public is unable to pay to consume culture and, therefore, lacks the luxury of choosing the culture it would like to enjoy. Our respondents point out that many members of the public feel alienated from the “official” cultural offer. This also means that cultural industries are slow to develop and for the moment remain badly understood and economically non-viable. The government has been active in subsidising cultural industries such as cinema, publishing, television and radio, but this funding was directed at creating products in line with the state positions on a variety of issues and, therefore, did not offer equal opportunities to all cultural producers active in those fields.<sup>25</sup> Investments from abroad have allowed some projects and innovations to take place, but even the highest profile among them suffer from the lack of sustainable and institutional funding which is characteristic of the culture sphere in Moldova and also the civic sector more broadly. Compounding the problems of external funding dependency is the fact that inside Moldova there is no culture of philanthropy to speak of, applying equally to the culture sphere as to others. Very few business figures consider culture to be an important investment and as they receive little or no advantage for sponsoring culture in terms of tax breaks or other advantages they are not incentivised to do so. Cultural managers are few in Moldova and the profession of cultural management is not well developed, lacking professional development opportunities. Despite the fact that several opportunities to gain education as a cultural manager exist, there is little opportunity for those who engage in such education to have a career in the profession of their choice. There are some prominent managers working in the entertainment industry, of which several of the better known ones are from the Russian speaking community or from Russia proper. These tend to market mass entertainment products to the Moldovan public.

The polarisation of the cultural community into mass entertainment vs. high-brow culture and the simplistic association of each pole with one side of the language identity divide is a further obstacle to the sustainable development of the culture sphere, with the ongoing and highly divisive controversy over the status of the Moldovan language as Romanian or as a separate language taking its toll. With specific constituencies in the independent or cultural scene being identified with the Romanian language community and the state or official culture being identified with the supporters of Moldovan statehood including a specific Moldovan language identity a certain kind of paralysis has entered the cultural community. Each side of the debate

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<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe/ERICarts, “Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe”, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

accuses the other of some form of subversion and it appears that cooperation across the divide is lacking. Nevertheless, it would be misguided to see this issue in purely black and white terms. As became clear in the course of the consultation meeting, the alternative cultural community is more diverse than one might imagine and includes groups and individuals from the ethnic Russian community and or that speak Russian as well as Romanian and who do not conceptualise their Moldovan identity exclusively in language terms. These are rather marginalised by the fact that they espouse contemporary culture than by the fact of which language they speak or work in.

Respondents to the questionnaire were particularly critical concerning the situation of the audiovisual sector and media freedom. On the one hand, they complain that Romanian language provision is inadequate, with insufficient airtime being dedicated to Romanian language programming. They also complain about the quality of the little programming there is, especially on the state media channels. There are few political talk-shows or debate programmes in Moldovan broadcasting media. These institutions, however, possess the most extensive broadcasting coverage on Moldova's territory, including the rural regions. As testified by the Nations in Transit Report for 2006, the legislative provisions for regulation of TV and Radio broadcasting have improved. But, our respondents claim and evidence from documentary sources suggests that the improved rules have not been implemented.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, members of the independent cultural community maintain that the media environment has become more oppressive and that a climate of fear prevents many people with alternative opinions from taking a critical position in public.<sup>27</sup> According to one respondent, this has turned the Moldovan public into a "culturally disabled" community that has a very low, almost non-existent, level of civic and political culture.

It is noteworthy that in this relation, some of our respondents were particularly critical of what they interpreted as an increasing colonisation of the state-run broadcasting media environment by Russian-language programming as well as the fact that many private-run broadcasting media are owned by Russian concerns. For some in the Romanian speaking community, this is seen as a deliberate policy of re-Russification on the part of the government. Others interpret this more as an indication of a kind of cultural inertia that has set into the Moldovan culture consuming community. They seem satisfied enough with Russian language mass entertainment and are not necessarily inclined to demand cultural production of a higher quality or of a more innovative nature. When raised at the consultation meeting with Moldovan partners, however, this issue was subject of some disagreement.

Nevertheless, our respondents acknowledge the huge opportunity that the Internet and new information and communication technologies represent for the sustainable development of the culture sector. The various new information technologies currently widely in use by younger people, even in countries like Moldova where access to technology is not guaranteed due to socio-economic conditions, have had an inherently democratising effect on society. This is by no means a phenomenon exclusive to the Moldovan reality. Internet and new information technologies are a viable and popular alternative to state run media which, to the extent that they are under state control (which is reported as becoming increasingly strict), might not be trusted by young people to be presenting the "whole picture".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dura, George (Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels) and Popescu, Nicu (CEPS and Central European University, Budapest) for Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2006, Moldova.

<sup>27</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, "After Having Lost Power In the Majority Of District Councils, The Communists Look For Levers To Tighten Their Control Over The Moldovan Society" by Ion Marandici, Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 2 (July, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, "After Having Lost Power In the Majority Of District Councils, The Communists Look For Levers To Tighten Their Control Over The Moldovan Society" by Ion Marandici, Political and Security State Watch: Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova, Number 2 (July, 2007), pp. 2-5. <sup>29</sup> Dura, George (Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels) and Popescu, Nicu (CEPS and Central European University, Budapest) for Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2006, Moldova, p. 1.

At the same time, our respondents point to a discernable evolution in the taste and cultural knowledge of the culture consuming public. They demonstrate a growing interest in contemporary cultural products when they have access to them. In this relation, it is noteworthy that Moldova's social and economic development is increasingly influenced by the fact that a significant proportion of Moldovans hold Romanian (and therefore, European Union) citizenships. This creates a situation, whereby, a significant proportion of the population have the opportunity to travel without restriction to work and study abroad and for tourism. These Moldovans come into contact with cultural influences they would not necessarily have access to at home. In addition, the Moldovan Diaspora is extensive and spread out. They not only contribute to the economic development of the country, they influence their families at home with alternative perspectives on socio-cultural issues, including on the issue of identity.

At the same time, rural communities in Moldova have little or no access to speak of to cultural products, contemporary or otherwise. Small towns and villages that once had a fairly well developed cultural infrastructure, usually in the form of a *dom kultura* or house of culture and public libraries, have seen that infrastructure fall into severe disrepair due to neglect and lack of investment and cultural industries that were privatised (such as cinemas) close due to economic non-viability. Clearly, the maintenance of a network of 1200 such culture houses for a population of just over 4 million is quite a challenge. Many cultural institutions that played an important role in the development of community relations have been closed down because it was not possible to support their existence under the new conditions of the market economy. Culture consumption as much as production has, therefore, become concentrated in the capital Chisinau, with people living in rural areas and small towns cut off from any form of cultural life, remaining un-exposed to new trends in cultural production. They are, thereby, not in a position to develop an interest in contemporary culture. In the cultural community this problem is considered with increasing alarm and concern, as demonstrated by the fact that it was raised again and again at the consultation meeting.

Further complicating this picture is that many talented young Moldovans from different branches of culture feel they simply have to leave the country in order to pursue their studies and careers. This has created a situation whereby the most talented young artists are studying and creating in Romania and in other countries of the European Union or the in United States. The others, those who cannot access the scholarships or who are not lucky enough to be discovered by a talent scout, are left behind to consider a career in culture without financial reward and international, or even national, recognition or whether to change career path and go into business. Those who leave are not well disposed to the idea of coming back to Moldova after their studies or once their careers have taken off. They fear (and not without reason) that they will not be able to attain their cultural potential under the financial and political conditions that currently reign. Some of our respondents, therefore, describe the current situation of culture as one of provincialism, inertia and indifference.

The difficulties of the cultural sphere notwithstanding, the years since independence have seen the emergence of a new generation of intellectuals in both the visual and literary arts and in contemporary culture inside Moldova. These cultural innovators are developing their cultural products in line with global developments and trends in cultural production. They manage to continue to produce despite a clearly inadequate and non-sustainable resource base and the restrictive conditions of a non-consolidated democracy that continues to tend towards non-consolidated authoritarianism. While Moldova has certainly made progress towards meeting its commitments under the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially as regards the problem of corruption, the consolidation of Moldova's democracy is far from achieved and for the moment, European conditionality does not seem to have made significant inroads into the habits of a Soviet lifetime in the culture field. It is noteworthy that there is almost no mention of culture made in ENP implementation progress reports.<sup>29</sup>

### **Culture and Change in Moldova**

Assessing the extent to which independent cultural actors are in a position to serve change, defined as processes of democratisation, modernisation and Europeanization, which is

necessarily a long term process, is a complicated task. Without a doubt, and as will become clear from the further considerations in this report, the independent culture sector and especially alternative contemporary cultural formations, perform several extremely important functions for society, thereby, encouraging change.

According to the respondents to the questionnaire and the participants of the consultation meeting it is possible to observe seven such functions, each of which receive a little more attention in the following sections.

#### *Creation and re-creation of a public sphere*

In the political climate that reigns in Moldova currently, one that is increasingly characterized by state control over media, the independent cultural sector plays an important role in creating and re-creating a functioning, open and transparent public sphere, in which those citizens that wish to have a role, have the opportunity to participate. This is an ongoing process of communication, with the public (no matter how small the audience) through which critical debate on the socio-political realities of the country is opened up. The example the issue of contemporary migration was raised at the consultation meeting. It has become not only a subject of debate in journalism but also through theatre and the visual arts. Noteworthy in this respect is the concern that cultural actors demonstrate for the development of communication through culture with rural and peripheral areas of the country, even if to date the problem of the cultural isolation of the country beyond the capital has not been solved. This is an inherent contribution to the democratization of society and certainly cannot be completely ignored by government.

#### *Communication with authorities*

With their critical, yet constructive approach, to working with members of the state and local authorities, members of the independent sector contribute to building bridges between governmental and non-governmental partners and to the overall mediation of interests in the society. Clearly, in this respect, the openness of the governmental authorities to cooperation is essential and sometimes it is lacking, as testified to during the consultation meeting and in the responses to the questionnaire. Nevertheless, when this is possible, it constitutes an important contribution to the democratisation of social relations.

#### *Identity formation*

In exploring issues of history, ethnic origin, geo-political orientation and other existential issues through art and cultural production, the cultural community is contributing to the ongoing process of identity formation in Moldova. In so doing in a variety of forms and using a variety of entry points, the cultural community supports the development of an open, dynamic and variable – a post-modern – understanding of cultural belonging, one which is close to that espoused in the context of European integration and that takes into account the multitude of ways that an individual and a society as the sum of its individuals and communities would like to identify themselves. Nevertheless, in Moldova, ideas about belated nationhood abound, including in the cultural community and with them highly static understandings of Moldovan culture. The fact that the debate takes place, though, contributes to the continued acceptance of a diversity of approaches to the issue of cultural identity. This is an inherently modernizing factor.

#### *Education*

The independent culture sector offers both civic and professional educational opportunities to members of the community. On the one hand, professionals in the field of culture may benefit from training, capacity building, further professional development or simply the opportunity to keep up to date with latest trends in contemporary culture through activities organised by organisations within the community and from abroad. In addition, the sector offers a variety of civic educational opportunities to members of the public, notably, to young people and children, through cultural activities that focus on socio-political issues of relevance to the development of the society. Europe was given as an example of the themes that are treated in this manner. This is an important contribution to raising the level of civic awareness of the citizens of Moldova from an early age.



### *Community development*

The cultural community is naturally predisposed to non-governmental organising. In so doing, and as an important sector within civil society, it contributes to the improvement of social relations. On the one hand it provides often atomised urban citizens with the chance to participate in forms of collective action which are not necessarily political, but nevertheless, create opportunities for persons with a variety of opinions to discuss issues of importance to them as individuals and to the communities they consider themselves part of and to get in touch with civil society organisations. On the other hand, it provides opportunities for communities who usually do not have the opportunity to meeting to get to know each other (different ethnic, religious, political, geographical groups). It is noteworthy that the cultural community is quite concerned about demise of the “culture houses”, which especially in small towns and villages, were a cultural and community focal point. They point out that the rehabilitation of the culture houses with a revised and modernised mission would provide an important impetus to improving the quality of life of rural and peripheral communities. To this end, the cultural community could be an instrumental partner.

### *Conflict transformation*

Moldova, as others in the post-Soviet region, has not escaped civil conflict. The de-facto frozen nature of the Transnistrian conflict is an ongoing obstacle to Moldova’s further political, economic and social development. The need for a political process, and the fact that culture are used as a justification of violent conflict on a regular basis, cultural activities have been proven in other contexts, most notably in the former-Yugoslavia and in the Caucasus, to be effective in re-establishing trust between groups in conflict, whatever the nature of the conflict and whatever its underlying reasons. This is particularly true of those cultural activities that focus on involving young people and children who are more inclined towards reconciliation than adults. The extent to which reconciliation processes involving the cultural community are currently up and running or possible, precisely because of the lack of movement on a political solution, is of course difficult to assess. Nevertheless, the cultural community is well placed and has relevant experience and know-how to have a positive influence. It remains to be seen if the political actors responsible for both the conflict and its resolution will allow the cultural community adequate space to place a constructive role.

### *Leisure and entertainment*

It should not be forgotten that participation in culture is also motivating for its entertainment value. Life in Moldova for the majority of the citizens is often difficult and complicated. Ordinary people also simply enjoy engaging in cultural activities because it provides them with an alternative experience to their daily routines of making a living and providing for their families. At the same time, there may even be residual educational effects from hedonistically conceptualised cultural activities. In providing entertainment and leisure through culture, the cultural community is making an important contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens of Moldova. Given that ordinary people often do not have a lot of spare money or time for engaging in leisure, they appreciate activities which do not require significant investments on their part in terms of time or money. This also has an educational function for the artistic community, in which the “art for art’s sake” attitude was not uncommon.

Nevertheless, weakness in practise (in other words, in actually bringing about long term change, most notably in the very local culture sphere, is obvious). To this author the problem appears to be structural, demonstrated by the ever weak communication that independent cultural producers have with ordinary people. On the one hand, the counter-culture remains an elite project. Few are involved, few are interested and there is the ever problematic issue of access to larger audiences. Resource penury and growing restrictions in access to mass media imposed by the state make the access problem very difficult to overcome. But, at the same time, and as demonstrated by the consultation meeting, many of the most active contemporary culture producers, by force of being ignored by the state and the graft of survival, have retreated into a kind of splendid isolationism. This author could even go so far as to say that many have resigned themselves to being big fish in very small ponds. Being influential and acclaimed among those other culture producers that are part of the independent cultural scene will have to be satisfaction enough. Change is, therefore, possible and even takes place quite dynamically among the so-

called “initiated”. But, it never reaches the ears or eyes of the broader culture consuming public and government officials can remain happily secure in ignorance that breeds inertia.

One of the factors underlying and reinforcing this state of affairs is the lack of agreement and consensus on what needs to be changed among those actively involved in the independent sector. A good example of this is how different personalities within the sector view the role of the state, something that seems to this author to be a fundamental point of disagreement. The spectrum of opinion is broad, ranging from “we don’t need the state at all!” to “the regulation of communication channels between the public and cultural producers is an inherent function of public policy”. All such opinions could be considered valid. Whether or not the community agrees on the role of the state is rather less important than whether or not the community agrees on its own role. If that role is agreed as trying to influence the state, planning concerted action on a common objective will be possible, something that is clearly only embryonic in Moldova at this point. Holding the state to account for its shortcomings is one of the most important functions of a civil society and in a cultural policy context such as that of Moldova the saying “United we stand, divided we fall” could not be truer.

Nevertheless, the Moldovan cultural producers involved in this process of reflection seem to be quite aware of the need to communicate with a broader audience and to interest wider sections of the culture consuming public in their work. They even have an analysis of why certain figures from the independent culture sector have more visibility and credibility in the eyes of the public than others. When asked to identify the five most influential figures of the cultural sphere in Moldova (i.e. cultural actors of change), names were given without hesitation, and when asked by these were influential the meeting was told unequivocally that their individual characteristics include having personality, charisma, leadership and a brand. They are further influential because of their professionalism in their specific field, the excellent quality of their artistic production, their long standing experience, their pro-European outlook and, importantly, because of their consistent and clear espousal of the reform agenda – change, improvement, reform. Their ethical stance seems to count.

It is clear to this author that the cultural community in Moldova is as much in a state of transition as the state itself. This has important implications for its capacity to fulfil the important functions, which under ideal circumstances it has the potential to, as outlined above. In the opinion of the participants of the consultation meeting, it is important to recognise that transition has transformed the culture sphere from a highly politicised but generally adequately resourced sector of government action into a poorly resourced market driven but marginal sector of public policy. At the same time as learning to cope with this transformation, the cultural community had to come to grips with its function as a watchdog of government action. In the process, the government has been able to gain control of several important functions which it now uses relatively indiscriminately for the purposes of extending its power. This is a process that the relatively weak civil society and even weaker resourced cultural community has had significant difficulty to resist. In other words and in the words of one of the participants of the consultation meeting, the cultural community, comprising artists, intellectuals and cultural operators, were frankly not ready for the change represented by the transition. In many ways they are still trying to catch up. But, in embracing the positive functions they have the potential to fulfil for society and in providing an alternative view on the nature of reality to that offered by the state and the market, they are making an important step in the direction of being a constructive force for change in their society in transition.

### **The Presence and Role of International Actors**

As described in more detail above, it seems that the international institutions that are most active in the culture sphere in Moldova are the Romanian state institutions and, in particular, the Romanian Cultural Institute, which provides financial and moral support for a large share of the Romanian language general and culture specific press being published in Moldova. Unlike in other countries of the region (e.g. Ukraine), it seems the cultural institutes of other countries (for example, the United Kingdom, Germany or Spain) are not active in Moldova. The exception seems to be the Alliance Française, whose activity is rather strictly circumscribed to French

language teaching and the promotion of French culture, although participants of the consultation meeting did mention that it sometimes funds projects. Independent cultural sector projects are often financed by international foundations or sponsors based abroad. As mentioned above, the Soros Foundation Moldova was extremely influential in the culture sphere in Moldova (through its various cultural programme directions, including capacity building and training and through the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Art (KSAK)). But, like the Soros Foundation, international funders are tending to exit the sphere and increasingly even the country. This has the potential to have dramatic consequences for the already under-funded independent culture sector, especially given that domestic sources of funding are so limited and government agencies have been noted for taking a clientelistic approach to who they will or will not support.

Nevertheless, the participants of the consultation meeting indicated that they receive funding on a project by project basis from the following sources abroad or international sources with a presence in Moldova, among others:

- Soros Foundation Moldova
- Alliance Française, France
- Kulturstiftung des Bundes, Germany
- European Cultural Fund
- Institute for Foreign Relations, Germany
- Bockmann Foundation, the Netherlands
- KulturKontakt, Austria
- The Merck Foundation
- The Caucasus Foundation

It was also mentioned that some donors, which do not cover cultural explicitly, such as USAID, will nevertheless fund projects which combine culture and social issues or objectives. The example of socio-therapy through art or theatre was given. Finally, some of the participants of the consultation meeting mentioned that they have been the beneficiaries of individual philanthropy from abroad, although admittedly this makes up only a small proportion of their project funding.

Despite improved contacts with the European Union as a result of membership in the European Neighbourhood Policy, resulting in fewer restrictions on Moldovans in terms of their possibilities for participation in European forums, but paradoxically greater restrictions in terms of the new visa regime to which they are subject, cultural actors feel that the European Union and its presence in the country is not as active as it might have been or should be in the development of the local culture sphere. In fact, our respondents indicate that they are rather disappointed that the culture sphere has not benefited from the increased interest in Moldova demonstrated by the EU. Admittedly, the fact that culture and social issues are rather weakly articulated in the ENP might go some way to explaining the distanced approach of the EU. Nevertheless, culture actors feel that more could be done, especially as contemporary culture inherently tends to support European integration and the promotion of European values through its work.

Our respondents complain that contacts between Moldovan artists and actors of the cultural sphere and their international counterparts remain sporadic and occasional. One respondent even went so far as to describe them as “accidental”. They rightfully observe that Moldovan cultural production is little known in other European countries and is only occasionally to be found at the more important international cultural forums (even if some artists have some renommé). This is certainly the case for literature and the written word. It could also be said to be the case for music and the visual arts, although some efforts have been made by the Centre for Contemporary Art (KSAK) to create some more attention for Moldovan contemporary art (painting, etc) through a number of good quality exhibitions and the publishing of catalogues of Moldovan art for consumption abroad. Noteworthy is that our respondents also complain that the better quality cultural production is also not well known in Moldova.

Noteworthy projects that have attempted to promote Moldovan culture abroad with the support of international partners have included exhibitions of Moldovan artists in Europe and the United

States, including Ion Severin, Ala Rusu, and Pavel Braila. The “Eugene Ionesco” Theatre from Chisinau has had the opportunity to tour abroad on a regular basis. It also organises the “Eugene Ionesco Biennial”, a theatre and drama event, with significant international participation. Further, several anthologies of the work of young Moldovan authors have been published in France, Italy and the United States. The authors from Moldova that are most often translated into foreign languages include Vasile Garnet, Vitalie Ciobanu, Emil Galaicu-Paun, Tamara Caraus, Ghenadie Nicu, Nicolae Leahu, Leo Butnaru, Iulian Ciocan, Dumitru Crudu and Constantin Cheianu. Some Moldovan artists based in Russia or Romania have also achieved notoriety on the international scene. Even so, respondents and participants of the consultation meeting agreed that émigré cultural actors were not particularly active or important to local contemporary cultural development.

## **Perspectives and Opportunities for Change through Culture in Moldova**

### *Measures*

Several key problems affecting cultural actors of change (in terms of their potential and effectiveness in promoting change) were identified based on the responses to the questionnaire and the consultation meeting in Chisinau. These can be grouped in two main categories, as follows

### **Conditions**

- politicisation of a few “culture issues”, especially language, for the purposes of conflicting identity formation and state building projects and opportunistic instrumentalisation, thereof, by a variety of more or less politicised actors;
- lack of available public money for investments in cultural development coupled with the weak purchasing power of potential cultural consumers;
- culture programmes of international agencies are winding down their activity and little presence of foreign cultural institutes that traditionally partner in projects for local cultural development;
- strong emigration and brain drain of most talented young artists without significant chances that they return;
- weakness of cultural industries and attendant professional groups;
- increasing authoritarianism and interfering tendencies in relation to cultural processes on the part of the state;
- strong tendency towards clientelism on the part of state cultural policy making and funding agencies.

### **Capacity**

- chronic problems of qualification, capacity and resources in both policy-making and policy implementation (lack of adequate legislation, professional training, contradictory and outdated legislation that penalises cultural activity, questionable commercial viability of cultural offers, lack of interest of wider public, etc) requiring significant structural reform;
- absence of cooperation / communication between state culture sector, non-state / non-governmental cultural sector in strategising the role of cultural action within the reform process;
- marginal status and treatment of “contemporary” or “innovative” cultural forms as potentially subversive and as representing “foreign” cultural interests because of their association with one of the identity communities;
- lack of sustainability and commercial viability of independent cultural activity.

In this relation, the answers of respondents and results of the consultation meeting identified two main categories of strategies that could support cultural actors to be actors of change.

1/ Active support of the creativity of the cultural community by providing them with opportunities to engage in the process of artistic creation and the promotion of this production to a wider culture consuming public.

2/ The fostering of a democratic political culture through support to the civic educational functions of civil society and independent cultural participation, including the fostering of European values and identity.

These two directions imply several possible concrete actions and initiatives:

a/ International partners should advocate for governmental and non-governmental partners to work together in favour of an integrated policy making process that takes into account the needs of both the capital and the peripheral areas. This process should focus on the elaboration of strategies for cultural development and practical measures that favour actual implementation taking into account the reality of a lack of resources and making use of the small, but nevertheless, well educated, generation of young cultural managers available to the cultural sphere. In particular, such strategies should focus on preventing the further progression of the current and far-reaching brain drain that the cultural sphere experiences and the further development of relevant educational and professional development opportunities for cultural managers.

b/ International and foreign institutions should offer a consistent moral and material support to independent cultural creators in Moldova, in the form of grants, creative fellowships, study or practise visits abroad, sponsorship for participation in international events important to the cultural community, where local cultural actors could familiarize themselves with the cultural milieus and realities of the European space and construct fruitful personal and institutional relationships with their European counterparts. Focused financial support, even small scale, is needed for journals, publishing houses, theatre companies, exhibition and art galleries, video studios and independent TV channels among others. In addition, this support should not exclusively focus on the capital and large urban centres, but take into account the very special cultural needs of rural communities.

c/ The public service broadcasting and general media environment should be reformed to provide the legally foreseen space to Romanian language programming. Further, efforts should be made to re-establish the independence and accountability of public service broadcasting in Moldova and to re-instate the trust of the cultural consumption and production community in state cultural institutions.

d/ A special programme to develop the interest of the Moldovan reading public in Moldovan literature is needed. This programme could include activities such as meetings of the literary community to discuss the latest literary trends and issues, book launches and public readings. It should be supported by visible advertising and promotion. This could stimulate the design community. This programme could accompany actions to revitalise the public library network, especially in small culturally peripheral communities, including the provision of resources for libraries to digitalise and acquire new and up to date collections. These actions could be developed in cooperation with the publishing industry. International actors could also provide more support for the development of literature emanating from Moldova, by providing more support for translations and distribution both inside Moldova and abroad.

e/ International institutions working with and on culture should establish their programmes with a presence in Moldova rather than exiting the field. The ability of the field to contribute to change is also dependent on the support it receives from the wider European cultural community, including European institutions such as the European Union. The European Neighbourhood Policy should be revised to foresee a stronger role for culture and the cultural community, which should be understood as an integral partner in developing European political and social integration of Moldova. The cultural community should equally be seen as an integral partner in the process of resolving the Transnistrian conflict. For this advocacy inside and outside the country is needed.

In conclusion, there is a need to develop a two prong strategy of supporting both the public and independent cultural sectors so that they meet their maximum potential in their particular spheres

of responsibility and expertise. At the same time the relationship between these two sectors needs to be developed and supported for mutual benefit. This will increase the capacity of both sectors individually and create an impetus for in depth reform of a long term nature. Noteworthy is that the cultural sector, both its non-governmental and governmental sectors, stands before an important opportunity. The project of the Soros Foundation Moldova and the European Cultural Foundation currently in process entitled “Visions on Cultural Policy of Moldova: From Changes to Sustainability”, through which a series of roundtables with professionals from different fields of culture were organised, and in which representatives from both the governmental and non-governmental sectors were brought together for the first time to develop their common vision of the development of the cultural field, can serve as a basis for the cooperation required for a sustainable and long term cultural development process.

### *Perspectives and Opportunities*

According to the evidence provided by our limited survey of actors involved in the culture sphere and a variety of other sources of information, especially the consultation meeting, it is possible to discern some perspectives relevant for the development of the culture sphere in Moldova as a more or less constructive agent of change. Nevertheless, it is the strong impression of this author that the constructiveness of this contribution will be contingent on the resolution of several problems of a political nature, although admittedly the power to influence all of these does not necessarily lie in the hands of the cultural community.

In the first place, preparation for European Union integration will continue to have a positive impact on the capacity of the Moldovan cultural community to be actor of change, as long as it itself continues. There are two notable uncertainties in this relation. First, the attitude of the current government, which regularly pronounces its commitment to European Union accession, but does not regularly enough make the reforms necessary to underpin that commitment with real action, is crucial in this respect. President Voronin does not always voluntarily tend towards Moscow, but at the same time he does not voluntarily enough tend towards the European Union, either. For as long as the foreign policy stance of the Moldovan government continues to vacillate so will reform and democratisation, which are important for underpinning the change efforts of the cultural community, most notably in the sphere of public cultural policy. The second is, of course, the attitude of the Union itself towards Moldova. For as long as the perspective of accession remains as vague as it currently is, the incentives for the current and successor governments to reform will be limited.

A second contingency, not unrelated to the difficulties Moldova faces in terms of European Union accession, is the monopolistic attitude of the government authorities responsible for cultural policy development to that process and their exclusion of important sections of the cultural community from decision making. As with any process of state building and identity formation, the process of cultural policy making will only be constructive and sustainable in the long term if it ensures the active confrontation of different cultural interests in the public sphere. To the extent that the Ministry for Culture and Tourism has the legitimate mandate to initiate and even more importantly to implement cultural policy development the cultural community finds itself somewhat paralysed – on the outside shooting in, as the saying goes. Cooperative relationships are required for the policy making process to take off and be sustained for the long run. To this end, the governmental authorities need to change their attitude. There are signs that this is happening, as testified to by the more open attitude of the Minister of Culture to participation in debates and discussions about cultural policy initiated by the independent sector. The cultural community for its part needs patience and perseverance to keep this on the agenda of the public sphere, such that it exists given state control of the media.

A third contingency is the willingness and the capacity of the entire system for reform. Of particular importance to the capacity of the cultural community to be an actor of change is the decentralisation process. Real decentralisation would put the responsibility and legitimacy for cultural policy making and implementation into the hands of the real grass roots actors and beneficiaries, something that is known from the development field to have a positive impact on the sustainability of communities and actions. It would also automatically limit state interference

in cultural processes, improve transparency and improve respect for fundamental political rights like freedom of expression. But, for this to happen, political will at the level of central and local government would be required along with important investments. It is not good enough to simply shift the responsibility down the hierarchy. Real decentralisation requires financial commitments and capacity building. To date the tendency has been to reabsorb functions, creating a strong atmosphere of control, a lack of transparency and the risk of increased corruption.

Taken together represent serious barriers to the capacity of the cultural community to be actors of change in practice, even if in theory, they are well placed to be such.

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*This report has been compiled on the basis of information collected by questionnaire, secondary source research and consultation meetings with leading figures from the independent culture sector conducted in Chisinau, Moldova in July 2007. The Rapporteur Generale prepared a draft report using the information contained in the questionnaires received from a limited number of respondents working actively in different branches of the culture sector as well as publicly available material written in English and Russian. The ECF/GMF EE RG team travelled to Chisinau, Moldova to meet a cross-section of relevant actors from Moldova to build a more in-depth picture of the situation of the culture sector and its potential as an agent of change. Based on the consultation meetings, the draft report was expanded and refined.*

*The present document is the final result of the situation assessment undertaken. Its preparation forms part of a wider process to document the situation and potential of the culture sectors in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine with a view of understanding how an international partnership such as that between ECF and GMF can contribute to supporting the contribution of the cultural sphere to transformation processes, in particular processes of Europeanization, modernization and democratization, in those countries and the region of Eastern Europe more broadly. This country report will be included in a synthesis report outlining the common trends in the situations of the culture sector in the three countries and strategic approaches for the international community to underpin the efforts of cultural actors of change in the region.*

*The ECF/GMF team would like to thank all those who have contributed to the development of the Eastern European Reflection Group process and the preparation of these reports, not least those cultural actors of change who have contributed with their motivation, time and commitment to the Europeanization, modernization and democratization of their respective countries.*

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