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MOLDOVA AND THE POLITICS OF MESO-AREAS

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Moldova presents a series of challenges for the student of mega- and meso-areas. It was a constituent republic of the USSR, and is accordingly a part of Slavic Eurasia. But its culture is predominantly Latin rather than Slavic; its religion is Orthodox, but independent; and it falls outside the “vodka meso-area,” with a culture that relates more closely to wine and cognac. The national territory is itself something of an accident: it has at various times come under Turkish, Romanian and Russian rule and acquired its modern boundaries as late as 1940, when Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia to the USSR and the Moldovian Soviet Socialist Republic was established. When the last Soviet census took place, in 1989, Moldovans accounted for 65 percent of the national population, Ukrainians for 14 percent and Russians for 13 percent;¹ this, indeed, was where Pushkin had served some years of exile, and where Leonid Brezhnev took up his first position as party leader of a Soviet republic in the 1950s. The closest cultural affinity is however with Romania, an affinity that was reinforced when – in 1989 – Moldovan began once again to be written in the Latin rather than the Cyrillic script.

Within the post-communist world, Moldova is again distinctive. It is, for a start, a divided society, with the eastern bank of the Dniester under the control of a nominally independent government based in Tiraspol, underpinned by the presence of Russian troops. And more than this: it is a post-communist country under communist rule, in that the parliamentary elections of February 2001 were won by the Communist Party of Moldova, with 50 percent of the vote and 70 percent of seats in the country’s single-chamber assembly. The new parliament duly elected the Communist leader, Vladimir Voronin, as president the following April.² As of the end of 2003, the Communist Party was the

¹ *Natsional’nyi sostav naseleniya SSSR* (Moscow, 1991), p. 122.

² See Ronald J. Hill, “Moldova votes backwards: the 2001 parliamentary election,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 17:4 (December 2001), pp. 130-39. Earlier developments are covered in Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, 2000).

only one of Moldova's parties that had a significant level of national support (64 percent would have voted for it if a general election had taken place "the following Sunday"), and the party's leader, Voronin, was the only politician who commanded a national following (for 30 percent he was the 'politician they trusted the most', although nearly as many 'trusted nobody' or declined to answer).³

In this paper we consider the place of Moldova within the world of "emerging meso-areas" using several bodies of evidence. We draw, first of all, upon a national survey carried out in early 2000 and representative of the adult population of right-bank Moldova although not of Transnistria, which is not accessible for purposes of this kind (further details are provided in the Appendix). A parallel questionnaire was administered at the same time in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, allowing cross-regional comparisons. In addition, we draw upon the Barometer of Moldovan Public Opinion that is conducted regularly by the Institute for Public Policy in Chisinau, most recently in November 2003,⁴ and upon comparable exercises in the UK, the US and European Union member countries. We focus in turn upon evaluations of the present regime, of civic institutions, and political values. In a final section we focus on Moldova's international orientations as it moves towards its own choice of meso-area: between a "Western choice" represented by the member countries of the European Union, and a "Slavic choice" associated with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

EVALUATING THE CURRENT POLITICAL REGIME

Moldovans are broadly in line with their colleagues in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine when they are asked to evaluate "the way this country is governed" (see Table 1). Only 4 percent, in 2000, believed

³ According to the *Barometrul de Opinie Publica*, November 2003.

⁴ The Barometrul was inaugurated in 1998 under the auspices of the Institutul de Politici Publice in Chisinau. The November 2003 survey was conducted by Iligaciu, an agency based in Chisinau; the sample was 1161 persons aged 18 or over, selected by a stratified, probabilistic, two-stage method, and interviewed face to face in either Moldovan (Romanian) or Russian between 1 and 17 November 2003; the datafile was consulted at www.ipp.md.

Moldova was “a democracy,” but 37 percent thought it was “making progress towards democracy” and another 22 percent thought it was “less undemocratic than it used to be” (just 19 percent thought it had been “more democratic in the Soviet period”). Moldovans, however, were very dissatisfied with “the way democracy was working” in their country, and more dissatisfied than their counterparts in almost all of the other post-Soviet republics. Only 11 percent were “very” or “fairly satisfied,” similar to Ukraine but about half the level of Belarus, and among the lowest figures across the entire Commonwealth of Independent States.⁵ These figures themselves are lower than in any of the EU candidate countries (where satisfaction averages 32 percent), and lower again than among the EU’s existing membership, where as many as 58 percent are “fairly” or “very satisfied” with the working of their democracy.⁶

Nor is there much belief that human rights or the rule of law are widely respected. Just 15 percent thought individual human rights were respected to some degree, which was similar to the figure in Russia and Ukraine but just half the corresponding proportion in Belarus (and again much lower than among the EU candidate countries).⁷ There is also a very general perception that the rule of law is weak, and that levels of corruption are high and increasing. Not many think any of the post-Soviet republics is close to the rule of law, but Moldovans were likely to think their state was further away from that ideal than their counterparts in Russia and Ukraine, and (by a considerable margin) in Belarus, where authoritarian forms of government have had the effect of limiting some of the most obvious abuses of office. Some 36 percent thought “almost everyone” in the

⁵ Only Russia, on Eurobarometer figures, had a lower level of satisfaction with the “way democracy [was] developing” (6 percent): *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer 6* (Brussels, 1996), Annex Figure 6.

⁶ *Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2* (2003), p. 19 (accessed at www.europa.eu.int). The “candidate countries” are defined as the ten that were set to become members on 1 May 2004, and also Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. “Satisfaction with democracy” measures are admittedly problematic: see Jonas Linde and Joakim Ekman, “Satisfaction with democracy: A note on a frequently used indicator in comparative politics,” *European Journal of Political Research* 42:3 (May 2003), pp. 391-408.

⁷ *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer 6*, Annex Figure 7 (40 percent of respondents in the Europe Agreement countries thought there was “a lot” or “some respect” for individual human rights).

national government was engaged in bribery and corruption, and another 43 percent thought “most officials” were engaged in it. And nearly three-quarters believed corruption had “increased a lot” since the Soviet period, a larger proportion than in Russia and Ukraine and more than twice as large as in Belarus.⁸

The same impression emerges from the November 2003 Barometer of Moldovan Public Opinion, which considered not only the level of corruption in the country as a whole but also the extent to which ordinary Moldovans had to offer goods, money or services in order to “solve problems” in their daily life. Very substantial proportions said they had to offer inducements of this kind in their dealings with the health service (43 percent), the courts (31 percent), the police (27 percent) and the education system (23 percent). Smaller but far from negligible proportions said they had to offer similar inducements in their dealings with employers (12 percent) or local authorities (9 percent). More generally, only 13 percent thought the police operated within a “legal framework”; only 11 percent thought people could “run their own business with no need to bribe public officials”; and only 9 percent thought the judicial system “treated all people equally and punished the culprits regardless of their status.”⁹ A 2002 survey commissioned by the US Department of State found similarly that only 10 percent believed the police “operated within the law,” and that only 7 percent thought there was “equal justice for all.”¹⁰

Nor was it only Moldovans themselves who took this view. According to Transparency International, which records levels of corruption (as their respondents choose to define it) not among local populations but among businessmen who regularly have dealings in foreign countries, Moldova is in fact one of the world’s most corrupt regimes. According to their latest survey, made public in October 2003, Moldova ranked as the 100th most corrupt country of the 133 that were included, well below Belarus (53) and the Russian Federation (86)

⁸ Corruption within the post-communist region, although not in Moldova, is considered further in William L. Miller, Ase B. Grodeland and Tatyana Y. Koshechkina, *A Culture of Corruption? Coping with Government in Post-Communist Europe* (Budapest, 2001).

⁹ *Barometrul de Opinie Publica*, November 2003.

¹⁰ US Department of State, “Moldova struggles toward democracy,” M-103-02, 18 September 2002, p. 6 (the survey was conducted by Civis of Chisinau, n=1150).

TABLE 1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

	Moldova	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
A democracy?	4	2	2	2
How satisfied?	11	22	n.a.	11
Human rights respected?	15	28	19	9
A rule of law state?	27	46	30	36
How corrupt?	79	57	82	77
Increasingly corrupt?	70	36	63	58

Question wordings were: “In your opinion, the course of development that has been adopted by our country characterises it as...” (response: “a properly formed democracy”); “Tell me please how satisfied you are with the level of democracy in [country]?” (response: combines “very” and “fairly satisfied”); “And to what extent at the current time are individual human rights respected?” (response: combines “greatly” and “somewhat respected”); “How close do you think the central government embraces the idea of a rule-of-law state?” (response: combines “very closely” and “to some extent”); “In your opinion, how widespread are bribery and corruption in the central organs of power in [capital]?” (response: combines “almost everyone” and “most officials”); “Compared with Soviet times, would you say that the level of bribery and corruption in our country has...” (response: “significantly increased”). Responses show percentages.

Sources: Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine surveys, 2000; Russia survey, 2001 (the corruption question records those who believed it was “widespread”).

although just above Ukraine (106). In 2002 Moldova ranked 93, the same as Uganda, and in 2001 it came in at 63, above Russia as well as Ukraine, although fewer countries were included in the rankings in both of these years.¹¹ Overall, our evidence suggests that Moldovans share a broadly negative view of the democratic credentials of their post-communist system with counterparts elsewhere in the region, but they are particularly likely to be sceptical about the integrity of their legal system and more likely than others to believe that corruption is widespread and increasing.

¹¹ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, 1963).

MOLDOVANS AND THEIR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Among the most fundamental attributes of a pluralist political order is trust in civic institutions, and in other citizens. For Almond and Verba, writing in their *Civic Culture*,¹² it was clear that pluralist politics would be strongest where popular attitudes were most supportive, and that supportive attitudes helped to sustain a corresponding set of political institutions. Within this complex of attitudes, moreover, trust has generally been seen as one of the most important. Trust, for instance, could “indicate the extent of diffuse political support,” and a high level of trust in some institutions could “compensate for low or declining confidence in others, or cushion and blunt the effect of their temporarily deficient credibility.”¹³ But conversely, a lack of confidence in the democratic process had been one of the factors that undermined Weimar Germany, and the gradual withdrawal of confidence in politicians and the political system as a whole had considerable implications for the stability and even the survival of democratic government in later decades.¹⁴

One of the most generally supported conclusions of survey research into post-communist values has been that ordinary citizens have low levels of trust in their civic institutions, and particularly in their political institutions. Russians, for instance, are actually quite ready to trust their fellow citizens – it was through social networks of this kind that they survived the communist period, and through such networks that they continue to make good the shortcomings of the consumer market.¹⁵ But there are much lower levels of trust in civic institutions of all kinds: from the churches to organs of government, including structures such as trade unions and political parties that nominally represent the interests of newly enfranchised citizens. Indeed, there is less trust in

¹² The *Corruption Perceptions Index* was consulted at www.transparency.org. In 2002 there were reports on 102 states; in 2001, on 91.

¹³ Fritz Plasser, Peter A. Ulram and Harald Waldrauch, *Democratic Consolidation in East-Central Europe* (London, New York, 1998), p. 111.

¹⁴ Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2002), p. 237.

¹⁵ William L. Miller, Stephen White and Paul M. Heywood, *Values and Political Change in Post-communist Europe* (London, New York, 1998), p. 100.

the new and independent trade unions than in their Soviet-period equivalents.¹⁶ Levels of trust, moreover, have generally been declining, even for the churches and armed forces, which had traditionally enjoyed the greatest public confidence.¹⁷

Distrust is a much more general characteristic of the post-communist nations, according to the survey evidence. Popular evaluations of post-communist institutions “range from sceptical ... to outright distrust”; there is most trust in the least democratic institution, the armed forces, and least of all in the institutions of representative government, especially parliaments and political parties. Across all institutions in eleven post-communist societies in the mid-1990s, 31 percent expressed trust, 22 percent were sceptical, and 47 percent were distrustful. The “overall pattern” was one of “severe skepticism, bordering on outright distrust of current institutions”; positive trust in any institution was extremely limited, and “even skepticism [was] in short supply.”¹⁸ Low levels of trust, in turn, depress support for the new regime, and increase support for military, authoritarian and other alternatives.¹⁹ Within this context, do Moldovans, compared with others, believe they can have confidence, not just in their political institutions, but in civic institutions of all kinds? Or are they alienated, disaffected and disengaged?

We set out the evidence in Table 2, drawing upon survey evidence for two time points and for a range of national locations. Broadly, Moldovans have most confidence in their religious institutions, and increasingly so. As in other countries inside and outside the post-communist world, they also have confidence in their armed forces.²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102, and (for trade unions) Richard Rose and Christian Haerpfer, *New Russia Barometer III: The Results* (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, 1994), p. 32.

¹⁷ For VTsIOM time-series data see Stephen White, *Russia's New Politics* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 270.

¹⁸ William Mishler and Richard Rose, “What Are the Origins of Political Trust?” *Comparative Political Studies* 34:1 (February 2001), pp. 30-62 (at p. 41). Moldova did not form part of this investigation, nor of the New Democracies Barometer on which it was based.

¹⁹ Richard Rose, William Mishler and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 155.

²⁰ The US Department of State survey found most confidence in the Moldovan Orthodox Church (75 percent), followed by the presidency (52 percent), but rather less in the armed forces (33 percent) and least of all in the legal system (just 13 percent) (“Moldova struggles toward democracy,” p. 5).

However, it is only in relation to the church that levels of confidence are comparable with those in the European Union. In every other respect levels of confidence are lower in Moldova and the other post-communist countries, with dramatic differences in respect of law enforcement: the courts, and most of all the police and armed forces. It is also notable that in the post-communist countries there are particularly low levels of confidence in political institutions of all kinds: in the presidency, parliament, and political parties. Nor is there much more confidence in other institutions by which social interests might otherwise be represented, such as private business or the trade unions.

Among the post-communist countries we have been considering the Moldovan figures are not untypical, although the church enjoys relatively more confidence and the armed forces rather less. Levels of confidence in 2003 appear also to have been boosted by a “honeymoon effect” stemming from the Communist victory in the election two years earlier, which has raised popular support for the presidency (which is no longer directly elected), and to some extent for parliament and the political parties. Social institutions have nonetheless retained more confidence, as a whole, than political institutions (parties are still the least trusted of all). And in nearly every case levels of confidence, even in 2003, are lower than their equivalents in the European Union, with the widest discrepancies in relation to law and its enforcement by the police or armed forces; levels of confidence are also lower than in the candidate countries, with the greatest disparities once again in relation to the police and legal system.²¹

Communist societies had high levels of membership – but it was overwhelmingly compulsory membership, of trade unions, youth or women’s associations. Membership of a political party was more selective, but levels of membership were relatively high in comparative terms. Membership of the Soviet Communist Party approached 10 percent of all adults, and a third of all those who had a college degree; membership of the ruling party was higher than this – more than one adult in five – in Romania and the German

²¹ *Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2* (2003): trust in the armed forces averaged 72 percent in the candidate countries, in the churches 57 percent, in parliament 43 percent, in the national government 47 percent, in the police 54 percent and in the legal system 44 percent (pp. 18, 21).

TABLE 2. TRUST IN CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

	Moldova 2000	Moldova 2003	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine	EU 15
Church	63	71	56	48	35	44
Army	36	39	50	49	49	70
Courts	33	30	28	18	20	51
Police	25	30	20	18	16	67
President	24	57	41	22	30	48
Trade unions	23	28	25	21	19	39
Private business	22	31	27	16	20	33
Parliament	19	36	23	12	10	51
Political parties	14	24	12	9	7	18

Question wordings were: “To what extent do you trust each of these social institutions to defend your interests?” (figures show the percentage who chose 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale), or (in 2003) “To what extent do you have confidence in...?” (figures show the percentage who chose “full” or “some trust”). For the EU 15, the figure for “President” relates to “national government” and for “private business” to “big companies”; for Moldova 2003, “private business” refers to “banks.”

Sources: as Table 1 (for Moldova 2000, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine); Barometrul de Opinie Publica conducted under the auspices of the Institutul de Politici Publice, November 2003, consulted online at www.ipp.md; and *Eurobarometer 56*, fieldwork November 2001, accessed at europa.eu.int (for the EU 15).

Democratic Republic.²² Post-communist systems operate within a rather different environment: there are no single ruling parties, constitutions generally specify a multiparty system, there is a separation of powers, and associational membership is, in principle, entirely voluntary. The consequence has been, in every case, that levels of membership have fallen dramatically.

Moldova is representative of this wider picture (Table 3). Democracy, as elsewhere, is supposed to operate in “conditions of political pluralism, incompatible with dictatorship and totalitarianism” (article 5 of the constitution). Taken as a whole, adult citizens are less likely to be engaged in civic associations than their counterparts in Belarus, particularly in

²² F. F. Petrenko et al., *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo v sotsialisticheskikh stranakh* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1980), note party membership of a million or more in the USSR, GDR, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Korea, Vietnam (and, they might have added, China) (p. 68).

TABLE 3. LEVELS OF ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

	Moldova	Belarus	Ukraine	Russia
Sporting or health group	6	10	n.a.	8
Musical, literary or cultural society	7	4	3	2
Political party	4	2	1	1
Residential or neighbourhood group	4	3	2	2
Charity	5	3	3	1
Trade union	22	38	24	19

Sources: As Table 1 (figures show percentages indicating membership).

terms of trade union membership, but more likely to be engaged than in Ukraine or Russia. Overwhelmingly, Moldovans are not members of a political party (the only substantial membership is claimed by the Communist Party, with about 15,000 members throughout the country, and it is the only one with a functioning national organisation), and relatively few (about 14 percent in our 2000 survey) identify themselves as “supporters” of one or other of the parties. Predictably, former members of the CPSU were more than twice as likely to be party supporters as the sample as a whole, and four times as likely to be a member.

In a broader comparative perspective, all of these patterns of civic association are relatively low. As Howard has shown, for all types of organisation – except trade unions – average levels of associational membership are much lower in the post-communist countries than in post-authoritarian countries such as Spain, Brazil or South Africa, as well as in the older democracies. The post-communist countries have particularly low levels of membership of associations that are political in character, such as political parties or environmental groups. They are also low in terms of church membership, and in terms of participation in educational, cultural and artistic organisations. Among the post-communist countries themselves, moreover, levels were lowest of all among the former Soviet republics, such as Russia, Estonia and Ukraine (Moldova was not separately identified); and generally, memberships were tending to decline still further.²³

²³ Marc Morje Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 67, 66, 90.

Membership of civic associations is of course only one of the ways in which citizens can attempt to influence the regime that rules in their name, and membership may not in itself convey a sense of political efficacy – during the communist period, clearly, it was almost entirely formal. If Moldovans find aspects of their situation unsatisfactory, such as high levels of corruption, do they have the means to change them – or at least, do they believe they can attempt to do so? And how important are competitive elections in this context? We explored this dimension of Moldovan politics more closely by asking a series of questions about individual political efficacy: whether elections, in the view of ordinary citizens, “made a difference,” whether elections allowed ordinary citizens themselves to exercise an influence on government, and whether, whatever their views about the effectiveness of the electoral mechanism, ordinary citizens believed they should take part. We set out our results in Table 4.

Nowhere, clearly, is there a political system that simply reflects the political preferences of its members, nor is there a population that believes it can exercise such an influence. Nonetheless, it is not a universal that citizens have a low opinion of their ability to influence government decisions. In the United States, for instance, fully 50 percent, according to national surveys, believe they can exercise a degree of influence of this kind.²⁴ In the United Kingdom the proportion is rather lower, but still about a quarter of those who were asked in the 2001 British Election Study thought they had “some say” in government decisions.²⁵ Levels of political efficacy in post-communist Europe, however, are much lower than this: in Moldova just 2 percent believed they could have “a lot” of influence on the making of government decisions and 18 percent believed they could have “some influence,” with similar proportions in the other post-Soviet republics.

Moldovans are also representative of opinion throughout the region in their view of the extent to which elections can “change the future course of events in our country,” and in their belief that they can influence government in this way (Russians were exceptionally pessimistic). Moldovans, however, are much less representative of opinion in the other post-Soviet republics in their view of the importance of taking a personal part in the electoral process. Fewer than half thought

²⁴ See the National Election Studies database at www.umich.edu/~nes, table 5b.2.

²⁵ See the 2001 British Election Study held at the UK Data Archive, question BQ65A.

TABLE 4. MEASURES OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

	Moldova	Belarus	Ukraine	Russia
Do elections make a difference?	14	22	17	11
Can people like you influence government?	20	24	16	12
Do elections allow people like you to influence government?	38	56	43	5
Should you vote?	43	79	79	66

Question wordings were: “Some say that elections can change the future course of events in our country. Others say that however you vote, nothing will change. What do you think?” (response: “elections can definitely change the course of events”); “How much influence do people like you have on the actions of the central government?” (response: combines “a lot” and “some”); “What do you think, does participation in national elections allow people like you to influence the government [*upravlenie*] of the country or not?” (response: “definitely”); “In your opinion, how should people like you behave when there are national elections?” (response: “make every effort to take part”).

Sources: As Table 1.

they should “make every effort” to do so, and rather more thought either that there was “no point” in doing so (28 percent) or that there was no overriding need to do so if it was for any reason “inconvenient” (20 percent). Turnout in the February 2001 election was higher than these figures would suggest, at 68 percent; they may nonetheless reflected the peculiar nature of the Moldovan electoral system, in which the entire exercise takes place through a national contest between party lists and there are no deputies with an attachment to a particular constituency. Voters, in these circumstances, are more likely to regard themselves as spectators rather than participants.

MOLDOVANS AND THEIR POLITICAL VALUES

If, finally, Moldovans were able to influence government decisions, in which direction would they choose to exercise that influence? We asked a series of questions about policy choices and larger philosophical

TABLE 5. POLITICAL VALUES: MOLDOVANS COMPARED

	Moldova	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
Military rule?	12	8	11	7
Communist rule?	39	26	42	30
Monarchy?	12	11	10	8
A strong leader?	59	22	29	44
A communist party?	16	10	19	21
A planned economy?	37	33	39	40

Question wordings were: "There are different opinions about the nature of the state. To what extent do you think it would be better to restore the communist system? That the army should govern the country? That it would be better to have a strong leader and get rid of parliament? That a return to monarchy would be better?" (percentage in complete or partial agreement); "If there was a parliamentary election this week, what party orientation would you vote for?" (percentage opting for "a communist party"); "Which of the following statements are you more inclined to agree with? State ownership is the best way to run an enterprise OR an enterprise is best run by private entrepreneurs?" (percentage in complete agreement with the first statement).

Sources: As Table 2.

positions in this connection. We were interested, for a start, in forms of rule. Did Moldovans, given their clearly expressed electoral preferences, favour a communist system in principle – or at least to a greater extent than in the other post-Soviet republics? Did they favour a planned or a market economy? Did they think of themselves as on the "left," the "right," or neither? And what view did they take, in retrospect, of Soviet system?

Clearly, there is little support anywhere in the region for military rule, and little more for a restoration of the monarchy (see Table 5). Moldovans were more favourable than most towards the return of communist rule, but less so than Russians; and they showed no more enthusiasm than their counterparts elsewhere for "a communist party" when they were given a choice of political orientation. Their most distinctive preference was for a "strong leader" who would get rid of parliament – not a democratic option, but not a straightforwardly communist one either. There was no stronger support for a planned

economy than in the other post-Soviet republics; nor was there any greater propensity to identify with the political left. Only 7 percent of our Moldovan respondents placed themselves “on the left,” as compared with 5 percent in Belarus, 10 percent in Russia and 14 percent in Ukraine; the overwhelming response, however, was not a different political identity, but none at all (63 percent).

We asked, in other questions, about attitudes to the Soviet past. There was some support for a communist party in general, and for the Moldovan Communist Party in particular, according to election results as well surveys. But are Moldovans more likely than other post-communist publics to support the principles of the Soviet system, and (in this sense) to identify with Slavic-Eurasian rather than Western values? We asked a series of questions in this connection about the “best” as well as the “worst features” of the Soviet system. What were the major shortcomings of the Soviet system, in the view of members of the ordinary public across the region? What, if any, were its positive features? And what were the views of Moldovans compared with their counterparts in other countries?

We set out our evidence in Table 6. Moldovans, it emerges, are broadly representative of the post-communist region in their responses. In each of our four countries, the most positive feature of the Soviet system was its guarantee of full employment; Moldovans were particularly likely to take this view, although our Ukrainian respondents were even more inclined to do so. Two other features of the Soviet system were identified by up to a quarter of our respondents, and by substantial proportions of Moldovans: it provided a stable economic environment, in which prices and wages were determined centrally and were relatively predictable over long periods, and it maintained peace between the various ethnic groups. Very few, in Moldova or elsewhere, believed it was a system with no redeeming qualities.

There was a similar level of agreement about the “worst features” of the Soviet system. The worst feature of all, in each of our four countries, was the massive and unaccountable bureaucracy that dominated public life across the region. Moldovans shared this view; but almost as many, and twice as many as in any of the other countries, thought the Soviet system had no negative features at all. The next most frequently cited deficiency was human rights, but no more than one in

TABLE 6. THE "BEST" AND "WORST FEATURES" OF THE SOVIET SYSTEM

(A) THE "BEST FEATURES"

	Moldova	Belarus	Ukraine	Russia
Job security	39	24	44	27
Economic stability	17	22	25	20
Inter-ethnic peace	16	22	11	24
Greater equality	11	9	6	11
Law and order	11	11	6	11
No good features	3	4	2	2

(B) THE "WORST FEATURES"

	Moldova	Belarus	Ukraine	Russia
Bureaucracy	26	26	25	26
No bad features	25	8	11	12
Human rights	12	12	19	9
Economic stagnation	9	20	10	18
Pollution	8	7	10	8
Corruption	7	13	8	12

Sources: As Table 1; don't knows and others excluded. Respondents were asked to identify a single most important fault from a list provided.

eight of our Moldovan respondents thought this was the Soviet system's most serious shortcoming; others identified economic performance, but less often than in Belarus and Russia. Overall, Moldovans shared a pattern of responses that was characteristic of the other countries in the Slavic-Eurasian area; they were if anything "more Soviet than the Soviets themselves," in that they were by some margin the most likely to find no faults at all in the Soviet system.

Moldovans were also representative of opinion in the other post-communist countries when we asked in which particular ways they thought their freedoms had been enhanced since the end of Soviet rule. There was overwhelming agreement, for instance, that it had become easier to practice a religion (83 percent agreed). It was easier

to choose whether or not to take an interest in politics (70 percent), and to express one's opinions (69 percent). But what about the ability of citizens to exercise an influence over government? In these respects there was a much more qualified set of responses. Fewer than a third (32 percent) thought they were less likely to be arrested without justification; even fewer (22 percent) thought their influence over government had increased since the end of communist rule; and only 12 percent thought the post-communist government treated them more fairly and equally than its Soviet predecessor. These responses were very typical of the post-Soviet region as a whole: civil liberties, it was thought, had improved considerably, but there had been no transformation in the relationship between citizen and state, and in some respects the influence of ordinary citizens appeared to be less than it had been in the late Soviet period.

MOLDOVA AMONG THE NATIONS

We turn finally to the place that, for ordinary Moldovans, their country should occupy in a world of emerging meso-areas. Did they, in particular, favour an international orientation that was directed towards the member countries of the European Union, ideally extending as far as membership, and towards NATO? Or did more of them lean towards an association with Russia and the other post-Soviet republics, as their strongly communist electoral preferences (and, for instance, their view of the Soviet system) might have suggested? We set out the evidence on these and other issues in Table 7.

Moldovans, in fact, were no more likely than their counterparts in the other former republics to stress the importance of good relations with Russia. They simply reflected a widely shared opinion throughout the region, which itself reflected geographical proximity, family relations and commercial associations that had been established over many years. About a quarter of our Moldovan respondents, for instance, had a close family member who lived in Russia or one of the other CIS states; and Russia was still by far the country's largest trade partner. Moldovans, equally, were no more likely than any others to regret the passing of the

TABLE 7: INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATIONS: MOLDOVANS COMPARED

	Moldova	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
Relations with Russia	71	69	-	72
USSR nostalgia	62	65	n.a.	57
EU membership	69	54	48	58
NATO membership	60	29	36	36

Question wordings were: “With which countries do you think it is important for [country] to have good relations?” (percentage identifying good relations with Russia as “very important”); “How much do you agree with the following statement: ‘It is a great misfortune that the Soviet Union no longer exists?’” (percentage in complete or partial agreement); “If our country were to join the European Union in the future, how would you feel about this?” (percentage strongly or somewhat in favour); “Do you think that our country becoming a member of NATO would be...” (percentage indicating “a very good” or “a good thing”).

Sources: As Table 2.

USSR, in spite of their strong electoral support for a communist party and the Communists’ declared intention of restoring a closer relationship with Russia and eventually joining the Russian-Belarus Union.

Conversely, Moldovans were the most enthusiastic of the post-Soviet republics about a Western orientation, including not simply membership of the European Union but also of NATO. Moldova’s Communist leadership had refused to sign the declaration that was issued by the country’s other parties in favour of EU membership, but in spite of this, the country’s strongly Communist electorate was overwhelmingly favourable towards the idea of EU membership, and strongly supportive of the idea of NATO membership – the only one of the four post-Soviet republics in which this was the case. The evidence of the Barometer of Public Opinion was similarly that a very large majority (68 percent) would vote in favour of EU membership; twice as many thought Moldovan foreign policy should be oriented towards the EU rather than the CIS, and attitudes towards the EU were markedly more favourable than towards any other international organisation.

Were these distinctively pro-Western orientations characteristic of Communist voters, and not just of a mass electorate within which they formed the largest group of party supporters? There were differences, certainly, but relatively modest ones. Those who said they were likely to vote for the Communists “next Sunday” in our 2003 survey were also supportive of EU membership, but just less emphatically so (57 percent compared with 69 percent for the entire sample). Prospective Communist voters were strongly of the belief that good relations with Russia were “very important” (84 percent): but so were their counterparts who supported other parties (71 percent). Communist identifiers were actually somewhat less likely to regret the demise of the USSR than the sample as a whole (57 percent “completely agreed” it was a misfortune, compared with 62 percent for the entire sample). Conversely, they were more cautious about membership of NATO, but still supported it by a plurality (47 percent) if not an overall majority.

Given the divided nature of Moldovan society, we also related these patterns of international orientation to language use. Here again there were relatively few differences, at least in relation to the European Union. Moldovan speakers were strongly supportive of the EU as an institution, but hardly less so than their Russian-speaking counterparts (63 percent in the first case, 67 percent in the second). Both were strongly supportive of admission (68 and 64 percent respectively). Russian speakers, however, were more favourable towards the Commonwealth of Independent States (62 percent as compared with 46 percent among their Moldovan-speaking counterparts), and somewhat less favourable towards NATO (30 percent as compared with 39 percent). They were also less likely to favour the idea – an entirely hypothetical one – of NATO membership (just 11 percent of Russian speakers were supportive and 44 percent were opposed, compared with 30 percent of Moldovan speakers who supported NATO membership and 16 percent who opposed it).

Moldovans, accordingly, are indeed something of a paradox within the Slavic-Eurasian mega-region. They share the political values of the Slavic countries that represent its core; they are at least as strongly committed to the Soviet system as our Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian respondents, and they are unique within the post-communist world in electing a Communist government with the support of a majority of the

voting electorate. But at the same time they are strongly oriented towards membership of the European Union, which is based on very different principles of economic and political management, and they are almost as strongly committed to membership of NATO, which has at least historically been dedicated to the defence of Western countries against a communist external threat.

This, as we have seen, is a paradox that runs through Moldovan society: less in terms of its party-political allegiances, and rather more along the lines of its division by language, religion and culture. These are divisions that in turn make it difficult to place Moldova among the meso-areas. There is general approval of many "Soviet" values, but also of a closer relationship with the European Union. At the same time there are differences on the kind of relationship that Moldova should have with the other former Soviet republics, and on whether it should affiliate not simply with the EU but also with the military alliance of the Western world. These differences, and the still larger differences that exist between the two parts of a divided country, are likely to mean that Moldova will remain a paradox for some time to come.

APPENDIX

Our Moldovan survey was carried out by the Chisinau agency Opinia under the direction of Tudor Danii, in association with Socis of Kyiv. Fieldwork took place between 12 and 19 February 2000. The universe for the study was the resident population of Moldova aged 18 and over, excluding residents of the self-declared republic of Transnistria, which is disproportionately Russian in population. A multi-stage stratified sample was constructed in accordance with Opinia's normal practices; 111 interviewers were employed, who conducted 1000 face-to-face interviews in respondents' homes. In addition, 37 monitors checked all stages of the fieldwork. A full set of results may be consulted in Stephen White, *Public Opinion in Moldova* (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, SPP 342, 2000).

Our survey in Belarus was conducted by Novak of Minsk under the direction of Andrei Vardomatsky. Fieldwork took place between 13

and 27 April 2000. The total number of interviews was 1090, using the agency's normal three-stage stratified sampling model. Our Russian surveys were conducted by the All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (n=1940, fieldwork 19-29 January 2000), and by Russian Research (n=2000, fieldwork 10-26 April 2001). In Ukraine our survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology under the direction of Vladimir Paniotto and Valeriya Karuk. Fieldwork took place between 18 February and 3 March 2000, using a four-stage stratified sample; interviews took place on a face to face basis in respondents' homes, yielding a valid total of 1590.