

Eurovision song contest and identity crisis in Moldova

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The Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) was created for strengthening the development of a European soul. But generally speaking, one can say it has been used as a tool for nation-branding, and as a means for Central and Eastern countries to “return” to Europe, in particular after the fall of their Communist regimes. In the difficult social, economic, political, and historical context of the Republic of Moldova nowadays, the ESC furthermore allows the discursive construction of the nation and the building of a particular *self*. Accordingly, based on a method inspired by the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology applied to three local newspapers, the research demonstrates how the ESC acts as a sound box when building the Moldovan *self*. The Moldovan identity that emerges from the articles seems to be an identity in crisis which proves much different from the usual political constructions of the nation. This bottom-up identity put forward by journalists has indeed to be related to the twofold crisis in which Moldova is at the moment: social and economic, on the one hand, and linked to a permanent struggle between a separate Moldovan or an integrated Romanian identity, on the other.

Keywords: Eurovision; Moldova; newspapers; identity; nationalism

Introduction

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) created the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)¹ after World War II in order to strengthen the development of a European soul (Bourdon 2007; Sandvoss 2008). Since the first edition in Lugano in 1956, participants representing countries from all over the continent compete every year with a song. At the end of the show, after each country has given its votes, the winner goes home with the trophy and their country has the privilege to organize the event the following year. The contest gives the opportunity to European countries to be on stage in front of the rest of the continent, and it has been used consequently as a tool for nation-branding and as a means for Central and Eastern European countries to “return” to Europe, in particular after the fall of their Communist regimes (Smith 2000; Eglitis 2002; Bolin 2006, 190–191; Baker 2008, 174; Jordan 2009). The Republic of Moldova is no exception. In the difficult social, economic, political, and historical context of the country nowadays, the ESC is one of the most important cultural events of the year. Moldovans can enjoy the show on a huge screen on the main square of Chisinau, the capital city, and artists from all over Europe are invited by a local telephone company to entertain the crowd before the show.

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Dwelling upon such an enthusiasm for the show, the research looks at the impact of the show in the country and uses an innovative method inspired by the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology (Wodak, 2008) applied to three local newspapers to analyze the way the contest contributes toward building a Moldovan “self.”

Moldova seems indeed an interesting case study when looking at the internal construction of a certain identity and the discourse that the contest allows. Unlike the irony that can be found in British comments of the ESC (Coleman 2008), the contest is seen in Moldova as something very important and journalists take seriously all developments around the contest. Writing and commenting about the contest, journalists create a particular image of the country and their discursive constructions are different from what can be observed in other countries. In Lithuania or in Turkey, for example, the contest has put an emphasis on the discursive construction of the countries’ European identity (Ingvaldstad 2007; Christensen and Christensen 2008). In Russia, where the Europeanness of the nation is debated, Russian involvement in the contest is ideologically co-opted by political elites for purposes of nation-building. The identity that is put forward through the ESC is made of nostalgia for a glorious Soviet past (Meerzon and Priven 2013; Johnson 2014). In Finland, failure and shame have been put forward as markers of identity (Pajala 2007). The history of the contest has provided material for a national narrative where Finland seeks success in an international arena, only to fail yet again. Pajala shows that over the decades, Finnish lack of Eurovision success became a well-established theme in the media, and by the late 1990s, talk shows made fun of the “national trauma” of Eurovision failure but also discussed earnestly the causes of the failed Eurovision efforts (2011, 407–408).

In Moldova, the research shows that the discursive construction of identity at stake when dealing with the ESC is a mix between Finnish shame identity and Russian dreams of grandeur, with a bit of Turkey’s or Lithuania’s affirmation of Europeanness. Nevertheless, this article shows that this identity is marred by regrets and a very negative and painful description of the *self*, which is to be related to the state in which the country finds itself at the moment. This is the consequence of a long-lasting crisis which expresses itself in incertitude about the very definition of the majority of the country’s population. While politicians and nation-builders usually construct glorious nations, using various “myths” (Schöpflin 1997) linking the past, the present, and the future (Wodak et al. 2009), this article aims at demonstrating that a pathological self can be found when looking at a different set of actors. Moldovan politicians construct an ideal nation on its way to the “locus amoenus” of the future (Danero Iglesias 2013), but journalists in the country construct a radically different image of a nation and a people in crisis.

Therefore, along with a recent development of research in social sciences about the ESC (Fricker and Gluhovic 2013; Tragaki 2013), the research here demonstrates that a contest that may seem trivial gives a particularly relevant case for studying the construction of national identity. In the Moldovan case, the ESC is a sound box of the constructions of different versions of a Moldovan identity that are in a permanent conflict in the public arena. The research follows Christensen and Christensen who argue that the ESC is a cultural event constitutive of a temporally limited communicative space which is dense in scope. While there exist a variety of communicative spaces within which discursive debates take place in elongated time frames, the discursive zone around the ESC emerges as an extension of these spaces where existing debates are expanded and intensified. The politico-cultural issues addressed inside the short-lived discursive space emerging around the ESC are then superimposed on existing discourses, but dissolve within a short period of time, with each intensive round adding a new layer of sediment to public debates and social imaginaries (Christensen and Christensen 2008, 168).

The Moldovan identity crisis

The Moldovan identity crisis is not new and what it means to be “Moldovan” has never been an easy question. Moldova has historically been at the margins of larger and multinational states, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Greater Romania, and the Soviet Union. The country is commonly described as being located “at a crossroads” (Parmentier 2003; Buduru and Popa 2006), where the mixed character of the current population is a reflection of geographical and historical developments. Dealing with a population composed – according to the last 2004 census – of about 75% of Moldovans, 8% of Ukrainians, 6% of Russians, 4% of Gagauzi,² and 2% of Bulgarians, since independence in 1991 successive governments have attempted to create a nation. This has meant constructing a Moldovan nation in a permanent struggle between two different visions of the identity of the majority of the population in the country: Moldovanism and Romanianism. The former highlights the specificity and uniqueness of the Moldovan people, and its right to self-determination in a sovereign independent country, while the latter emphasizes the links of Moldovans with neighboring Romanians. In this vision, Moldovans have been artificially separated from Romania after what is seen as an annexation by Tsarist Russia in 1812 and by the Soviet Union during and after World War II. Moldovanism was created by Soviet authorities in 1924 as a means to justify the integration of Bessarabia in the Soviet Union (Casu 2000). The doctrine was at the core of Soviet national policy with regard to Moldova even if it remained mainly “stipulated” (King 2000, 108).

Starting from Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Romanianist and reformist political leaders went at the forefront of local politics and led the local national awakening of Moldova against the Soviet center. Nevertheless, a fracture line emerged slowly between the more radical Romanianist members, who advocated the destruction of the Union and unification with Romania, and its more moderate members, who seemed satisfied with local control of cultural and economic resources in a new Soviet federation. As relations with Romania culminated, the multiethnic coalition that supported a general restructuring of the republic imploded. Gagauz and Transnistria left the movement, the first against the importance assumed by a new generation of leaders and the second against laws raising fears of a cultural forced assimilation. While civil war broke out between Moldova, Transnistria, and Gagauzia, moderate Moldovanists in Chisinau were able to take the lead at independence in 1991. The newly independent Republic of Moldova emerged as a case of “pluralism by default” (Way 2003, 455), in which the elite benefited from the weak networks from Soviet times. These elites were characterized by strong individualism, in the context of political polarization on the issue of identity. *Moldovan* language, and not *Romanian*, was made consequently the official state language, while Russian kept the status of language of interethnic communication. At the same time, laws on citizenship were made inclusive and minorities have been free to preserve their identity. Moldova emerged, therefore, as a different country from neighboring Romania and kept strong links with Russia in a permanent ambiguous situation (Fruntasu 2002, 300; Solonari 2002). Identity occupied a key place in the Moldovan political life throughout the 1990s for several reasons: first, the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria polarized the issue of identity politics in Moldova, which took over the cleavage of Communist/anticommunist in a context where all the new elites were coming from the old regime (March 2005, 12). Moreover, according to King, at least two reasons for this persistence can be found: the electoral system of proportional representation in a single constituency discouraged the creation of strong and stable parties; and the sequence of electoral events (local, parliamentary, and presidential elections) forced parties to be permanently

“campaigning,” which prevented any major reform. Clear partisan ideologies did not emerge, and the national question remained the most important determinant of political affiliation, a “safe heaven” in Trifon’s terms (Cazacu and Trifon 2010, 230). While local politics concentrated on this identity issue, opposing Moldovanists and Romanianists, the elites in power were permanently “Moldovanist,” building “legitimacy by history, by values used to define a Moldovan specificity significant enough to justify, beyond the geopolitical circumstances, a distinctive statehood” (Zub 2004, 133).

Defining the content of the national body has been a permanent aspect of Moldovan political and public life and has passed through a fight, among other issues, over the name of the language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of the country, over the interpretation and teaching of history, as well as over monuments and public holidays (Ciscel 2006; Ihrig 2007; March, 2007). Schematically, while Moldovanism today is mainly to be found among the members of the Communist Party of Moldova in power between 2001 and 2009, Romanianism can mainly be found among parties who oppose the Communists and who are now the leaders of the government coalitions in place since 2009. The authorities focused on identity politics and they did not really implement the much needed economic reforms after independence. Consequently, the country is now in a deep social and economic crisis. The country is often labeled as the poorest in Europe and emigration is massive, sometimes qualified as “total” (Mashkova and Crudu 2005, 108).

The Eurovision song contest and Moldova

After the fall of Communist and Soviet regimes between 1989 and 1991, the integration of Central and Eastern European countries into the contest has gradually led organizers to deal with an increase in participants: several qualification systems have been tried and the system of semifinals was introduced in 2004. At the same time, the competition started being open to the audience by using a telephone voting system. The new participants have proven effective in the competition: all winners between 2001 and 2011, with the exception of Germany in 2010, are countries that joined the competition recently (Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, Serbia, Russia, and Azerbaijan) or had never won before (Turkey, Greece, Finland, and Norway), relegating the countries of Western Europe and the founding countries of the contest in the bottom of the rankings.³ The Central and Eastern European countries can be seen now as important players in the contest and, to the extent that 195 million people watched the 2014 contest which took place in Copenhagen, interest of participant countries in nation-branding is clear (Anholt 2005). Following these changes, the contest is seen by many commentators as utterly political and only determined by the vote of the “Eastern Bloc” countries of the continent showing some form of regional solidarity during the competition. The “political” nature of the contest is obvious (Raykoff 2007, 2) and voting blocs have been analyzed and discussed thoroughly (Gatherer 2004; Ginsburgh and Noury 2008).

Moldova first participated in 2005, directly after Moldovan national television joined the EBU in 2004. Compared to other countries of the region, Moldova has not proved particularly different in its relationship with the ESC. Like in Azerbaijan, for example, the contest is seen as a way to belong to the West (Ismayilov 2012). Therefore, the first Moldovan participation was publicly supported by the then-President Voronin, who attended the national selection on television and committed the government in financing the country’s participation. The “ethnic rock” band *Zdob si Zdub* was then selected and traveled to Kyiv. As this political involvement shows, the ESC is seen as an opportunity for enhancing the international image of the country. The act combines elements of Moldovan folk

and contemporary rock music and gives the perfect image of a modern and multicultural country. On this basis, when Moldova obtained sixth place, President Voronin decorated the members of the band with the Medal of Merit of the Civic Order. This involvement of politicians does not seem particularly original and echoes the making of Sertab Erener a national hero in Turkey after she won the contest in 2003 (Solomon 2007, 153). The ESC is perceived as the main opportunity to show Europe what the country is about. Therefore, nation-branding through the contest is in line with Ukraine (Baker 2008), Turkey (Grumpert 2007), or even socialist Yugoslavia (Vuletic 2007).

At the same time, scandals around the contest have been numerous. For example, for the first participation in 2005, Moldovan viewers had the possibility to vote for their favorite song and country by telephone. Nevertheless, due to a supposed failure of the telephone voting system, a jury took over the Moldovan vote and granted 12 points to Latvia, the maximum score, followed by Russia, Ukraine, and Romania. Such a vote was seen in the press as not normal, as a fraud, and a parliamentary question was even asked about it. The EBU was then notified of the issue and the participation of Moldova in the competition the following year was called into question. Scandals occur as well during national selections, like in 2006, when the representative of Moldova seemed to have been imposed by the Ministry of Culture, or in 2010, when the organizers of the national selection decided to include in the final round candidates who had not been selected by the jury but had been saved by telephone voters. These candidates include Pavel Turcu, an amateur singer, whose song was a huge hit on the Internet and whose candidacy was publicly criticized by the Prime Minister at the time.

Finally, Moldova has not been spared by “buddy voting” (Björnberg 2007, 17). Points given to other participants since 2005 have been mainly to Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. At the same time, Moldova has been given points by the same countries and by countries where the Moldovan diaspora is numerous, such as Portugal. In this regard, Moldova and Romania are booed almost every year when they give each other 12 points.

Methodological considerations

This contribution does not, however, concentrate on these different elements as such, but on the way they are represented and reconstructed in the local press. Indeed, while nationalism and the discourse on the nation are often studied using a top-down perspective, the present article concentrates on journalists and the way they talk and comment about the country’s participation in the contest in a bottom-up approach. This particular approach helps shedding light not only on Moldovan nationalism in particular, but also on the regular understanding of nationalism in general (Hobsbawm 1990, 10–11; Brubaker et al. 2006, 13–7). In what may appear as a “jungle” of theories and typologies of nationalism in the current literature in social sciences (Roger 2001, 1), nationalism can be seen as part of an inherent logic of inclusion and exclusion. According to authors such as Spencer and Wollman, at the heart of nationalism as a political project, regardless of the form it takes, a logic of exclusion is essentially at work. All forms of nationalism have one thing in common: an “other” against which all definitions of the nation are built (1998, 255). All forms of nationalism are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive (Brubaker 1999, 64). What distinguishes nations is not so much language, culture, and national identity, but the more or less inclusive content, scope, and character of the national culture and the modes of integration among its members (Dieckhoff 1996; Kymlicka 2001). This proves to be particularly important in a case such as the Republic of Moldova. Indeed, various research has shown that nationalizing policies, practices, and discourses (Brubaker 2013) on the part of the Moldovanist

authorities as well as the Romanianist opposition is centered on the majority of the population and shares similar patterns of exclusion, with minorities being permanently in a position of tolerated guests in a country which belongs exclusively to the majority of the population (Ihrig 2007). Inclusion and exclusion go through the discursive construction of a *self* and an *other*, and the perspective adopted here is that of Calhoun and Ozkirimli, for whom the nationalist discourse is the ultimate framework of explanation and legitimation of the present world (Calhoun 1997, 21–22; Ozkirimli 2000). The aim of the article when looking at the construction of identity in times of a twofold crisis is, therefore, to look at the way the Moldovan *self* is discursively constructed. To investigate this discourse in the Moldovan case, the research draws from the Vienna School of Critical Discourse Analysis that takes into account the historical dimension of discursive acts and considers discourse as a social practice which assumes a dialectical relationship with its context: the context shapes and impacts discourse, while discourse impacts political and social realities (Wodak et al. 2009, 7–8). *Discourse* is used then as a general and encompassing term. It is defined as a social activity which produces meaning with language and other symbolic systems in some specific situations. Discourse defined this way implies models and common practices of knowledge and structure, while the *text* is a unique and specific realization of discourse (Wodak 2008, 6).

The texts used here come from three Moldovan newspapers that appear in Romanian, the language spoken by the majority population of the country: *Moldova Suverana* (Sovereign Moldova), *Timpul* (The Time), and *Jurnal de Chisinau* (The Chisinau Journal). These three newspapers belong to opposite political camps: the first is close to the Party of the Communists, advocating a Moldovanist definition of the nation, while the two others are close to Romanianist parties. Taking into account these two different discourses on the nation allows highlighting the differences and similarities between them both. For the analysis, all the articles dealing with the ESC have been analyzed over a period running between 2005, the year of the first country's participation in the ESC, and 2013.⁴ In each of the articles, the analysis focused on three interwoven dimensions: the content, the discursive strategies at work, and the means and forms of realization which were used (Wodak et al. 2009, 30–47). With regard to these three dimensions, the main objective has been to analyze what it means to be *Moldovan* as a people and what *Moldova* means as a country and to compare the different constructions available in the different newspapers.⁵

The Eurovision song contest and being *Moldovan*

The different constructions of *self* and *other* can be found when journalists comment and talk about the various phases of the participation of the country in the ESC. First, the phase of the national selection before the contest and the moment in which the final results are known mainly allow journalists to give a particular meaning to being *Moldovan* in a country like present-day *Moldova*.

Before the contest, a national selection is organized. The first year that Moldova intended to participate, in 2005, the organizers noted that there were 16 registered candidates on the eve of the deadline for the submission of applications. The next day, they finally reached 35. The situation then calls for the following generalization by the commercial director of the national TV channel, which is included in *Jurnal de Chisinau*: “This is exactly the same with Moldovans: artists will only register at the last moment” (JC04/02/2005). This quote indicates a general tendency for Moldovans to take things lightly. Contrary to this generalization, the first selection in 2005 proved to be well organized, leaving a journalist writing that this is not a “Moldovan” habit (T24/03/2005).

Generally speaking, *our* country seems, according to the articles, to suffer from a lack of professionalism, from a lack of organization, and from mediocrity. In addition, the national selections highlight what commentators call a “Moldovan style” that consists of “hiding something.” The 2006 selection is, for example, a “Moldovan fair” (T03/03/2006), where the rules are not known by the members of the jury, nor respected by the organizers:

What have we learned as a result of the national selection “Eurovision 2006?” We have the same stylist and choreographer for all artists, the jury selected for the finals did not know anything of the voting procedures, and Moldova is the country of all possibilities, in which rules are not respected. (T03/03/2006)

The problem highlighted here seems to be culturally Moldovan and according to the commentators, “This is inevitable, something does not work with Moldovans” (T03/03/2006). Similarly, journalists use harsh words to describe *Moldova* as a whole as a “country of thieves” (JC03/03/2006), “of all the crooks” (JC03/17/2006), or as “our corrupt nation” (JC10/03/2006). The way the selection was organized that year allegedly made theft and corruption visible in the country. An article in *Timpul* then shows how this way of organizing events is even a “habit” and uses some irony:

It is obvious that in any contest or festival organized here, the artists (...) blame the jury and the organizers for their incompetence, their tricks and their arrangements for some money. It is certain that the organizers have denied all suspicions, only stating that the winner was the best candidate. (T24/02/2006)

This excerpt shows a generalization that appears as obvious. This type of comment is recurring. Already in 2005, the selection sparked criticism because the result was “a foregone conclusion” (T02/11/2005). Moreover, and “as usual” (T11/02/2005), the viewers’ vote had not been made public (T27/05/2005), marking a first “scandal” (JC04/03/2005).

Criticisms are always directed at a “here” in a generalization understood as obvious. Therefore, according to these consecutive troubled and challenged selections, the journalist of *Moldova Suverana* considers that the issue comes from a “good native tradition” (MS01/03/2006). When the 2008 ESC produces no scandal (T08/02/2008), the journalists are amazed. The new selection process arouses suspicion: doing it behind closed doors is part of a “Moldovan sweet style.” Indeed, in Moldova, such an event “cannot” be organized respecting the rules (T11/02/2008).

To reach the final, and looking back at this image of the *self* that emerges from the articles commenting on the selection processes, the solution seems simple: you need to “think European and not Moldovan, e.g. just with criticisms and nonsense” (JC16/03/2012). In this article from the *Jurnal de Chisinau*, “European” is understood in a way which makes Moldova appear uncivilized and in need of making an effort to meet its neighbors’ civilizational standards and conquer Europe (JC22/03/2013). More generally, the onstage performances of the Moldovan participants in the ESC make sense only according to their place in the final ranking. In 2006, according to the Acting Mayor of Chişinău, if the result is not good, the Moldovan representatives are not guilty. Indeed, Moldovans as a people are guilty because of their indifference (JC29/05/2007):

I believe that Moldovans have done a good job. But others have done better. Unfortunately, Moldovans are not active. In such a situation, Moldovans abroad should have voted for their country so we would have obtained more points. But we are like that, I do not know how, more indifferent. (JC06/06/2006)

Indifference here is seen as characterizing Moldovan identity and appeals to a local proverb defining the Moldovan, but also Romanian, state of mind *Capul plecat, sabia nu-l taie*, which can be translated roughly as “no sword cuts off a bowed head.” Once

again, an ESC-related development is commented on in the press and allows for a generalization. All these generalizations are negative, understood as obvious, and shared by all newspapers and journalists. It is interesting to note that both Romanianist and Moldovanist newspapers construct the same negative identity.

Romanian or Moldovan?

Historically, Moldovans have been torn between Romania, Europe, and Russia. In this context, contrary to the selection processes, other phases of the contest show how the constant hesitation between Moldovanist and Romanianist visions of the *self* can be found in the discursive constructions.

The Moldovan candidates represent the nation in the eyes of Europe. Therefore, they are tried in the media, and sometimes in a national perspective, as some examples show. For example, the band *Zdob și Zdub*, which participated in 2005 and 2011, is led by Roman Iagupov, who was born in Volgograd in Russia in 1973. The band is famous not only in Moldova but also in Russia and Romania, while their songs are in Romanian, Russian, and English. The fact that Roman Iagupov learned Romanian and even wanted to obtain Romanian citizenship, before abandoning the idea, is emphasized in newspapers. He also sings local folk songs to the journalists who interview him, “showing that he respects the Romanian folklore and traditions” (JC06/05/2011). In a state like Moldova, where authorities are struggling for imposing a particular identity, this can be seen as the image of a “good” Russian, who managed to fit into the Republic of Moldova, notably learning the language of the majority. Therefore, one swiftly understands the official support received by the band from the authorities.

Conversely, the 2010 candidates, Sunstroke Project and Olia Tira, are a band originally formed by Anton Ragoza and Serghei Stepanov, from Tiraspol, Transnistria. Olia Tira, whose real name is Olga Tira, was born in 1988 in Potsdam, in the German Democratic Republic, of a Russian father, a soldier in the Soviet Army, who then settled in southern Moldova. Unlike other artists who represented Moldova, Sunstroke Project and Olia Tira have been harshly criticized for some national reason: their major lack of knowledge of the language of the majority. An article in the *Jurnal de Chisinau*, issued before the ESC, is still in favor of the group and especially the singer: “At 17, Olia Tira launched her first album (...). The fact that she is fluent in Romanian, although Olia Tira is ethnic Russian, is a good thing” (JC09/04/2010). Her knowledge of Romanian is welcomed by the journalist. However, the sentence is constructed through a cliché: she speaks Romanian, although she is Russian. Russian speakers are often portrayed in Moldova as if they do not want to integrate and do not want to learn the language of the majority of the population. Here, Olia Tira has made an effort, which, according to such clichés attached to Russians in Moldova, is not common. Generally speaking, the issue of the Russianness of some is important. For example, in 2006, *Jurnal de Chisinau* makes this comment:

Throughout the ten minutes during which viewers were voting, a girl with a pronounced Russian accent commented a short film about the Eurovision last year, and in the end, she attributed the success of the “Zdubi”⁶ to the [national TV channel]. Shame! (JC17/03/2006)

This language issue makes sense in comparison to the absence of remarks about singers labeled as Moldovan or about Roman Iagupov, who speaks fluent Romanian, claiming even his “Moldovanness.” This last case is considered normal; while Sunstroke Project and Olia Tira deviate from it, they seem to belong to a “Russian other,” and appear, as such, not worthy to represent Moldova in Europe.

Besides this first insight on how a certain Moldovan *self* is constructed in relation with a Russian *other* in the Romanianist newspapers, the *self* is generally constructed in a context of hesitation between two trends, Moldovanist and Romanianist. This hesitation is very clear when the question arises of Moldova being represented by citizens of neighboring Romania, or Moldovan citizens aiming at representing Romania at the contest.

In the 2006 national selection, the Romanian band Indiggo was not allowed to participate. Indeed, the Minister of Culture did not open the selection competition to foreigners. In an article favorable to the cause of the band, a journalist then repeats the statement: “The Minister Cozma gave a statement in which it was forbidden to foreigners, as though we, Romanians, were strangers” (JC21/03/2006). This decision is then described as an abuse which consists of considering a Romanian as foreign. The national link between Romanians and Moldovans is very strong here. The same year, and paradoxically with regard to the Minister’s statement, the singers from the Romanian band Akcent were invited to participate in the second round of the Moldovan selection. The band declined the invitation and Moldovan fans got upset, forcing one member of the band to issue this statement: “We believe it would have been better to represent Romania. It is not an issue of racism or anything” (JC21/03/2006). This reveals, contrary to the previous statement, a difference between Moldovans and Romanians, while the anger of the fans is to be linked with the common national identity of Moldovans and Romanians. But the distinction between Romanians and Moldovans here comes from a Romanian band. Commenting on the invitation made to Akcent, *Moldova Suverana*, the Moldovanist pro-government newspaper, declares:

Let the Romanian Akcent (. . .) go represent Moldova in the Eurovision! We have given them Anna Lesko, O-zone, Pavel Stratan, Alternosfera, and many many other artists. Once all of them have crossed the Prut and have forgotten to come back home, Akcent can be ours. (MS01/03/2006)

According to this excerpt, Moldova has lost much of its talent by letting artists go to Romania. When in 2008 some Moldovan candidates intended to participate in the Romanian ESC selection, the same newspaper showed very clearly its opinion: “They will fight to represent the neighbors at the Eurovision and not their country . . . We do not even comment on that” (MS01/02/2008). Romania is considered here as a “neighbor” (MS25/02/2012), a neighbor who has somehow stolen talented Moldovan artists. In the same way, *Moldova Suverana* always insists on the Moldovan origin of singers who perform in Romania, and insists in the fact that all Moldovans, for example, were eliminated from the Romanian selection of 2012 (MS25/02/2012). The identity between Moldovans and Romanians as one can find in the *Jurnal de Chisinau* is completely denied in *Moldova Suverana*, showing how the two competing national trends can be found in the press.

Finally, the moments in which the Moldovans have to give points to other participants also creates a moment in which the *self* can be defined as Romanian or Moldovan. The year 2005 is exemplary in this respect: that year, at the end of the contest, Moldova gave 12 points, the maximum score, to Latvia. Moldova then gave 10 points to Russia, 8 to Ukraine, and 7 to Romania. Journalists from *Jurnal de Chisinau* and *Timpul* revolted: giving 10 points to Russia and 7 to Romania was for them a betrayal. Giving 12 points to Romania would have been natural (JC24/05/2005). The journalists investigated and spoke to all members of the Moldovan jury, who told them that they all gave 10 points to Romania and only 2 or 3 to Latvia (T27/05/2005). The journalists concluded there was fraud committed (T24/06/2005). *Jurnal de Chisinau* qualifies the vote as

“Teletiganeala” (JC27/05/2005), an untranslatable word making a link between the theft of the public votes and what is here considered as a “Gypsy” habit. The newspaper blames the President of the Republic for voluntarily influencing the vote. According to *Jurnal de Chisinau*, this fraud is a “petty and ugly manipulation” (JC27/05/2005). The situation illustrates the national links between Romanians and Moldovans as well as the construction of a common identity in opposition newspapers. In contrast, the pro-government newspaper does not consider the incident as a problem.

In 2006 Moldova gave 12 points to Romania. *Jurnal de Chisinau* and *Timpul* believe that it restored the natural course of relations between Moldova and its Romanian “brothers” (JC23/05/2006). The same happened in 2009, Moldova gave 12 points to Romania and Romania gave 12 points to Moldova. *Moldova Suverana* then warned its readers against a misinterpretation: the Eurovision is a “barometer of the relations between ethnic groups and peoples” and they should not see any “spiritual rapprochement” between the two neighbors (MS19/05/2009). Comments from other newspapers proved very satisfied and eager to politicize the awarded points, as in this comment from a Romanian citizen of Vaslui in Romania reproduced in full in *Timpul*:

Beyond what the Russian effort meant in order to put themselves in front of the world with a sound and light show, (...) if we find a reason to rejoice, it can only be related to the fact that we got 12 points from our brothers in Moldova. And we are equally pleased that the Romanians gave 12 points to Nelly Ciobanu [the Moldovan participant], to the same natural extent, showing that we are made of the same blood, the Moldovan hora⁷ is actually the same as the Romanian hora, being at the same time the Union Hora. (T21/05/2009)

Following this comment, the fact that Moldovans and Romanians share the same national dance illustrates the identity of their nation. However, the following article in *Jurnal de Chisinau* shows that we no longer speak of “one people” but of the “population of two states” which are different:

Despite political tensions in recent times between the two sides of the Prut, the population of these two states has shown once again solidarity. (...) Great disappointment came from Russia, which gave us one point! One single point?! With all Moldovans working there, we deserve more, don't we? (JC19/05/2009)

The article does not call for the union of a people, but acknowledges Moldovan independence, while introducing another state in the equation. Russia would be liable to Moldova, in a stylistic device of personification that characterizes Russia as a whole. The same article contains a further comment made by the Eurovision presenter on Russian national television, the star singer Filip Kirkorov, when the Moldovans gave their 12 points to Romanians: “Romanians are Romanians,” they are made of the same blood” (JC19/05/2009). This comment appears as an adversarial element in the construction of “solidarity” between Romanians and Moldovans.

The ESC as a sound box

As one can observe when reading these articles, the ESC discursively creates a particular *self* and *other* and serves as a sound box of various conflicting images of an identity which needs to be replaced in a general twofold crisis: social and economic, on the one hand, and hesitant between the belonging to a separate Moldovan or an integrated Romanian nation, on the other. The newspaper articles analyzed here highlight a particular image of Moldovan society today which is not to be seen in other contexts. Compared to other studies of the discursive construction of the Moldovan *self* in public discourse (Van Meurs 1994; Ihrig 2007; Danero Iglesias 2013), the research shows here a very negative

construction of the country and its inhabitants. They seem to suffer from corruption, from arrangements between crooks, from incompetence, and from disorganization. Rules seem not to be respected and some are taking advantage of such a situation. The most significant element in relation to this extreme construction is that the ones considered guilty for such a situation are mainly Moldovans themselves. Strikingly, the three analyzed newspapers which were selected agree on such a negative construction, even though they do not share the same vision of Moldovan identity.

Moldova is constructed as a country which seems not civilized and not European, of which citizens cannot be proud. In this context, the few positive features of this *self* that are mentioned in the articles are striking. In 2011 a Russian band comes to Chisinau and holds a concert at Chisinau's main square in the context of a whole ESC-related show organized by Orange in the evening of the contest. An interview is proposed by *Timpul* (T20/05/2011) and *Jurnal de Chisinau*:

The band Diskoteka Avaria says that we have the most wonderful audience, that is vibrant and unpretentious. However, what the three boys said they prefer in Chisinau are the very pretty girls and the good wine. It's a shame they can only take wine and brandy back with them when they return and not girls, as they told us, laughing. (JC20/05/2011)

Given this positive characterization, one of the headings of the article uses the compliment in a construction that shows pride: "We have pretty girls and good wine" (JC20/05/2011). This stereotype of Moldova is probably the most spread in Europe, alongside poverty. When poverty is added to the equation, "wine" and "women" are often linked to issues of alcoholism and prostitution, and we have come full circle when portraying Moldova and its inhabitants from the outside. One can therefore only wonder why pride in this article emerges on the basis of such a stereotype.

The research shows further what elements are constitutive of this identity: to be *Moldovan*, one must be either ethnically "Moldovan" or "Moldovanized," that is to say, one has to learn the state language and to integrate. But what it means exactly to be Moldovan is not exactly clear as the research also shows how the discourses are part of a general context of hesitation on the country's identity between Moldovanists and Romanianists, on the issue of the majority of the population being actually Moldovan or just part of neighboring Romania. One can see that Romania is very much present in the articles. In *Jurnal de Chisinau* and *Timpul*, Romania is more likely to be constitutive of the *self* in a constructed similarity between Moldovans and Romanians. In this respect, as we have seen, the only article in *Jurnal de Chisinau* where the two populations are bound only by solidarity ends with a quote from a Russian commentator who gives back the identity between *Romanians*. For *Moldova Suverana*, Romania is seen as a neighbor. In this way, we can consider that *Moldova Suverana* remains faithful to the Moldovanist vision of the government, supporting the independence of the Moldovan nation. *Timpul* and *Jurnal de Chisinau* keep a Romanianist line of argumentation emphasizing the unity of the Romanian nation.

If we put together these two points related to the construction of a particular identity, the ESC in Moldova is not just a contest. The article demonstrates one more time, if necessary, that the ESC is not only this "tacky" show, but it is also a sound box and a pretext for journalists for defending and constructing their own vision of national identity. In Moldova, the constructions that were found in the analyzed newspapers seem to create an identity in crisis, reflecting not only the social, economic, and political difficulties in which the country has found itself since independence in 1991, but also the general and historical interrogation about the definition of the Moldovan people as a nation. While the article sheds new light on issues of nationalism and identity in Moldova, in particular, such

constructions are original and far different from the usual discursive constructions of the nation and of the *self* that one can find in usual nationalist discourses studied in social sciences in a top-down approach. The article shows that looking at different actors and using a different focus allow giving new insights on the way nationalism and identity are being constructed.

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Notes

1. The ESC consists in an event to which each national member of the EBU can send a representative. In the first half of the evening, contestants from each country perform an original song and, in the second half, each country awards points for its top 10 songs (from 1 to 8 points to the places 10 to 3, 10 for the second place, and 12 for the first place). Countries cannot vote for their own representatives.
2. A minority group whose language is Turkic and who are Orthodox Christians, living in southern Moldova.
3. Nevertheless, since 2012, the contest has been won by Western countries that have been participating since the 1950s (Sweden in 2012, Denmark in 2013, and Austria in 2014). But Denmark and Sweden are also often seen as “buddy voters” along with other members of the “Scandinavian block.”
4. For a total of 110 articles. Newspapers articles that were used as primary sources have been referred to as following: the first (two) letter(s) for the newspaper (MS for *Moldova Suverana*, JC for *Jurnal de Chisinau*, and T for *Timpul*) followed by the date of publication of the article.
5. These different discursive constructions are to be found mainly in the early years of the country’s participation in the contest. Gradually, newspapers no longer carry discursive constructions in which a particular Moldovan *self* emerges. Meanwhile, the supposed purity of the European competition is increasingly questioned. Journalists mention on several occasions that the contest is “political” (JC01/03/2011) and that some countries vote for their neighbors and not for the best songs (JC10/05/2011). In addition, it seems that in recent years all discursive constructions of a national character are only found on the Internet and not in the press. As an article in the *Jurnal de Chisinau* in 2011 shows, the Internet is full of blogs where the Eurovision demonstrates that Moldova does not know what its identity is, that the Romanian identity has no border, or that Moldova has nothing and is only a kind of “clown” (JC16/05/2011). All these blogs tackle issues that have been put forward in the present article, and the comments available on social networks and the Internet in general can be used for analyzing the construction of the local *self*. Taking into account articles available in newspapers allows the research to be systematic and exhaustive. The objective here is to analyze a general and latent discourse which can be found in the texts of a supposedly independent press. By using regular news articles, the aim is to make visible the interconnectedness of things (Fairclough, 1995, 747). Blogs and other social media are close to the genre of editorials, where opinions are made salient on purpose, and give another account of the construction at stake.
6. Nickname of the members of the band *Zdob si Zdub*.
7. Group dance in circles.

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