INTRODUCTION

Moldavia, the smallest republic in the Soviet Union, has been a territorial football between Romania and Russia for well over 100 years. Like the Baltic republics, it fell within the Soviet sphere of influence under the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and there is reason to believe that some Moldavians may now wish to follow the lead of the Baltic republics in pressing for secession from the USSR. The 64 percent of the republic's population that is ethnic Moldavian has its cultural heart in Romania and, at the very least, seeks freer contacts with Romanians across their common frontier.

In the past 18 months Moldavian political and social life has been transformed. Fledgling independent groups have developed into major new political movements, such as the Moldavian Popular Front with a membership of between 700,000 and one million. Other independent groups include the Alexe Mateevici Club which led the successful drive to establish Moldavian as the official language of the republic, the Moldavian Democratic Movement aimed at establishing a state that adheres to the rule of law, the Moldavian Green Movement which works to increase public awareness of ecological issues, and others.

Groups of citizens in late 1988 began braving the wrath of the local authorities by organizing small public protests. By March 1989 the rallies had grown to include as many as 80,000 demonstrators who were calling, among other things, for the

removal of Moldavia's Party leaders. Both the protestors and the Moldavian government often turned to violence. The most egregious such instances of reciprocal violence occurred in 1989 on February 12 and 26, March 12 and November 7. The Moldavian Writers Union has charged that MVD troops used poison gas in breaking up the March 12 demonstration. In the spring of 1989 Moldavian authorities sentenced at least two demonstrators -- Yuri Ferar and Ion Tutunaru -- to one-year terms of compulsory labor or labor camp. Seven other demonstrators, who went on trial at the same time, received unknown terms.

Demonstrations leading to violent confrontations with the police continued until November 1989 when, in two consecutive rallies on November 7 and November 10, hundreds of civilians and police were injured and more than 100 demonstrators were arrested. Moldavian authorities imposed a "state of emergency."

Finally, the strength of public activism in Moldavia impelled the Kremlin to appoint a new First Party Secretary, Petru Lucinschi, in November 1989; he has emerged as a conciliatory force. He recognized the popular appeal of the unofficial organizations, and they were finally granted legal status.

Ethnic tensions have been a major factor in the movement for change in Moldavia. Ethnic Moldavians, who have long suffered from the cultural and linguistic heritage of Russification, made the Moldavian language the focus of a broad-based movement of

dissent. For years, Soviet authorities have claimed that Moldavian was a language separate from Romanian and, in order to create an artificial difference between the two languages, even ruled that Moldavian had to be written in the Cyrillic script. After many protest marches, in the fall of l989, Moldavian was instated as the official language of the republic and the Latin alphabet was reinstituted as the Moldavian script.

The legal requirement that thousands of office holders in the republic must now demonstrate proficiency in the Moldavian language by 1996 caused anger among the non-Moldavian part of the population and fueled the Inter-National Movement, created in early l989 to protect the rights of Russians and Ukrainians. The Inter-National movement advocates the retention of Russian as one of the official languages of Moldavia and of the Cyrillic alphabet for Moldavian. In addition, two ethnic groups, the Gagauz and the Russians of the Tiraspol region, have requested territorial autonomy from Moldavia. Such requests, which require approval from the Moldavian Supreme Soviet, reflect the high pitch of ethnic tensions in the republic.

Religious issues, particularly the issue of the independence of the Moldavian Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church, have also led to unrest in Moldavia. The election in March 1989 of an Orthodox parish priest, Petru Buburuz, to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies reveals the level of popular concern about religious issues.

A new stage in the democratic evolution of the republic was marked in February 1990 when the first round of the first competitive elections to the Moldavian Supreme Soviet took place. The Popular Front claimed that its candidates won 60 percent of the seats decided in the first round. Candidates of the Popular Front will also run in almost all the run-off contests to be decided in March.

The elections indicate that individuals espousing reformist and nationalist views enjoy strong popular support. Moreover, the Communist Party's role appears to be changing. Although First Party Secretary Lucinschi and Supreme Soviet President Mircea Snegur each easily won re-election, their role and the Party's role may become that of arbiter of competing social, political and ethnic forces. Such a stabilizing role would be socially useful, but it remains to be seen whether the Party is willing, and capable, of fulfilling this function.

BACKGROUND

Relations with Romania

Moldavia is one of three principalities to which Romania has historically laid claim. In the last century, parts of Moldavian territory switched back and forth between Russian and Romanian control. The cultural and territorial heart of Moldavia -- an ancient principality with Iasi as its capital -- remains in Romania.

The nature of the future relationship between Moldavia and Romania -- reunification, alliance, or close cooperation -- dominates the political climate in Moldavia. The new reformist Moldavian party leadership is well aware of popular desire for, at the very least, freer contacts between Romania and Moldavia: Moldavian party chief Lucinschi's commented to Literaturnaya Gazeta in late December 1989 that Kishinev has proposed opening the Moldavian-Romanian border following the model recently established by East and West Germany.

On February 27, 1990 -- two days after the elections in Moldavia -- Lucinschi seemed to backtrack on these promises. In an interview with Helsinki Commission staffer Judy Ingram, Lucinschi said that the tempo of opening the Romanian-Moldavian border would be decided by such issues as the convertibility of the Romanian and Moldavian currencies and their integration into the Soviet economy.

At present, despite reportedly strong popular support for

reunification, the major political players on the Moldavian scene, including the nationalist Moldavian Popular Front, treat reunification as a distant goal. But at least one leading Western expert on Soviet nationality issues, Paul Goble, predicts that Moldavia will join the Baltic states and Georgia in publicly pressing for secession from the USSR.

Incorporation into the Soviet Union

The USSR annexed Moldavia in 1924, but the territory later reverted back to Romanian control. Under secret terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), Bessarabia became part of the Soviet sphere of influence in 1940 and was occupied by the Soviet Army that year. After World War II, the Soviet Army again took control of Bessarabia. Bessarabia, plus parts of Ukrainian SSR, now form the Moldavian SSR, the smallest of the Soviet republics.

Demographic Composition

Moldavia has a population of 4.2 million, with Moldavians making up 64 percent, Ukrainians 14 percent, Russians 13 percent, Gagauz 3.5 percent (Orthodox Christians who speak a Turkic language), Bulgarians two percent and Jews two percent. Most of the urban population is Slavic -- in Kishinev, Tiraspol, Bendery, and Rybnitsa Slavs comprise from 50 to 85 percent of the population -- while the rural population, except for a few Gagauz areas in the south, is almost totally Moldavian.

New Moldavian Party Leadership

After a lengthy public pressure campaign, on November 16,

1989, a Moldavian Central Committee plenum dismissed Semen Grossu, the last republican First Party Secretary from the pre-Gorbachev era. Although Grossu had been much criticized for his opposition to reform, he did not fall from power until after a violent demonstration on November 10.

Grossu was succeeded by Petru Lucinschi (or Petr Luchinsky in Russian), a Moldavian who had been second secretary of the Tadzhik Central Committee since January 1986. Before that, Lucinschi had been active in the Moldavian Komsomol and Party organizations and had been deputy head of the Central Committee propaganda department in Moscow. In April 1989, Lucinschi became a full Central Committee member.

On December 6, a Moldavian Central Committee plenum reshuffled its own leadership. Ideological Secretary Ion Gutsu, who had tried to act as intermediary between Semyon Grossu and the Moldavian intelligentsia, was demoted to the post of Secretary for Industry and Services. Gutsu was replaced by Eugen Sobor, former Minister of Culture, who reportedly is generally respected by the Moldavian public. The important position of Secretary of Agriculture, vacated by Mircha Snegur when he was elected Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman, went to conservative apparatchik, Nikolai Kutkovetsky. Moldavian KGB Chief Georgy Lavranchuk became a full member of the Central Committee Bureau.

Two new candidate members for the Central Committee Bureau are members of ethnic minorities: the Gagauz Georgy Samsi and the

Bulgarian Ilya Arnaut. Their appointments should be seen in the context of the Gagauz campaign for territorial autonomy in Moldavia and the uncertain, but potentially crucial, Bulgarian attitude towards that campaign. Arnaut has a record of opposition to Moldavian national goals.

Lucinschi broke precedent by giving his inaugural speech in Moldavian, marking the first time since Soviet annexation that a Moldavian party leader addressed a Moldavian Central Committee plenum in the Moldavian language. Aware of high ethnic and social tensions in Moldavia, Lucinschi has emerged as a conciliatory force who has often expressed his willingness to work with all "constructive forces" in the republic. Indeed, on February 1, 1990, the Moldavian Supreme Soviet Presidium announced its intention to invite leaders of all public movements in the republic to round-table talks.

In his speech on February 5, 1990 at a Central Committee plenum, Lucinschi proposed that "round-table talks" also be held on the national level. Such a forum, he noted, could serve as a "kind of public parliament" for officials and members of the "all the country's movements, fronts, and unions," and the resulting "dialogue with all forces is essential to ensure peace and to prevent violence and mass disorders."

Shortly after the February elections, Lucinschi described his view of the Communist Party role in healing the ethnic divisions in Moldavia. Speaking to Helsinki Commission staffer,

Judy Ingram, Lucinschi said he respected many Moldavian Popular Front goals, noting that the major difference between the Front and the Party was in the pace of the reforms. He agreed that local Party cadres should have a more representative ethnic mix and that the rights of ethnic minorities should be safeguarded.

THE BIG THREE: ETHNIC TENSION, ECONOMIC DECLINE AND ENVIRONMENTAL BLIGHT

Introduction

Three major issues dominate the present political scene in Moldavia: tensions among the various ethnic groups in the republic, steadily declining living standards, and environmental degradation. Unless the new political forces in Moldavia can come to grips with these issues of vital concern to all sectors of the population, the prospect of vocal, publicly expressed anger and even violence is high.

Russification and Ethnic Tension

For many years, Moldavia, along with the other non-Russian areas of the USSR, was subjected to strict Russification policies by the Party -- both from Moscow and at the republic level. Quota systems were set up for local populations in housing, higher education and employment. The Russian language was extolled as "more equal" than any other, with strong preference being given to the Russian language and culture over those of the local nationality. The Moldavian language, which is a dialect of Romanian, was decreed by the Soviets to be a separate language from Romanian -- until 1989 when popular pressure forced official recognition of this linguistic truth.

It was Stalin who "refined" Soviet Russification policies, setting quotas and shaping cultural and lingustic policies. As a *result, less than 50 percent of the people living in the

capitols of the non-Russian republics, including Kishinev, are of the indigenous nationalities. Soviet Russification policies were dictated, quite literally, by a desire to keep non-Russians, in this case Moldavians, down on the farm. It was Stalin who ruled that the Cyrillic script should replace the Latin alphabet in the writing of Moldavian.

Even today, Moldavia suffers from the Stalinist legacy of Russification. This can be seen by the predominance of Moldavians in rural areas, and by Moldavian complaints that it often takes years to find housing in Moldavian cities, while Russian industrial workers -- brought in from outside the republic -- usually are given housing within six months.

When it comes to the use of Moldavian versus Russian, the battle lines are clear. Although Moldavian was finally granted the status of an official language in 1989, Russian was preserved as the language of inter-nationality communication. This new official status for Moldavian at the cost of Russian was far from popular with most of the non-Moldavian population. After all, most of them had never learned Moldavian -- since the previous educational and cultural policies had never made that necessary -- and now they see that knowledge of Moldavian will be a pre-condition for employment in the republic.

In a March 5, 1990, report on the Moldavian elections, issued by the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Judy Ingram, who recently visited Moldavia, summed up

ethnic tensions at their most visceral:

> Moldavians ask, at a minimum, that Slavs recognize the sovereignty of the Moldavian republic and see their place as in, rather than above, that republic and that Slavs no longer be given preferential treatment in jobs and education. Slavs ask that they not be personally subject to punishment for fifty years of Russification of the republic either through personnel purges or violence. At the extremes, vocal and altogether visible in Kishinev as in other Moldavian cities, Moldavians call for all "outsiders" -- whether they arrived two or 200 years ago -- to leave the republic immediately, while Slavs call for strengthening the police state to protect them from angry mobs.

Living Standards

Along with the rest of the Soviet Union, the last few years have seen a drastic decline in living standards in Moldavia. Recently, Moldavian officials have acknowledged unemployment among Moldavian workers, mostly in the agrarian sector. At the same time, however, migration by Russian workers, primarily to work in the industrial sector, continues -- if at a slower rate. Since the republic is primarily agrarian, one assumes that severe food shortages do not plague Moldavia -- at least not as much as in other parts of the country. Chronic housing shortages and endemic failures in the health care system have left their mark on Moldavia. Popular discontent over poor living conditions has contributed to the radicalization of the political environment.

Environmental Blight

As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, pollution, both in industry and agriculture, is a major new popular concern. According to the Moldavian Green Movement, excessive use of

pesticides has poisoned about 95 percent of the arable land and almost all of its freshwater sources, making it second only to Uzbekistan in this respect. Industries, usually located in Moldavia by order of Moscow ministries, produce pollution. In fact, most major industrial installations are seen as Moscow's creatures, further fueling ethnic tensions.

The Moldavian Green Movement

Although the Moldavian Green Movement is a relatively new unofficial group, it has played a leading role in increasing public awareness of ecological issues. It dates back to November 1988, when it began as an outgrowth of Green Action, a group of Moldavian intellectuals who called public attention to the degradation of the local environment. The Moldavian Greens are affiliated with the Moscow-based national Social Ecological Union, founded in December 1988.

The Green Movement steering committee includes: Ion Dediu and Valeriu Bobeica, biology professors at Kishinev University; filmmakers Anatol Codru and Dumitru Olarescu; and journalists Gheorghe Malarciuc and Valeri Kosarev. With the aim of official recognition, the Moldavian Green Movement applied for permission to hold an inaugural meeting in Kishinev on February 25 and 26, 1989.

Official sponsorship for the meeting came from the Moldavian Writers and Cinematographers Unions; over 200 people attended the February 25 meeting, according to Green press spokesman Vasile

Nastase, a reporter for the Moldavian Komsomol newspaper. At their meeting place, however, the Greens were confronted by the local authorities who had denied them a meeting permit. Moldavian Central Committee Secretary Vladislav Semenov indicated that the Green conference might be approved at a later date if it changed the composition of its steering committee and joined the official Society for the Protection of Nature.

Acting as an unofficial organization, the Green Movement announced its plans for 1989: heading a public information drive to oppose plans to build a nuclear power plant in Moldavia; and beginning independent monitoring of industrial pollution in the republic and of cross pollution from Romania. In the summer, the plan is to launch "Expedition Prut" in which an interdisciplinary group of scientists will examine ecological damage along the entire Prut river from the northern Carpathians to the Lower Danube. The group's findings will be published and a documentary film will be made. This project is being coordinated by the Public Committee to Save the Prut River, founded by leading Moldavian scientists. Although the local authorities have made clear their opposition to these projects, the Green Movement hopes to gain international cooperation.

After months of local party pettifogging, the Green Movement was finally granted official recognition in February 1990. The threat the Green Movement program poses to business-as-usual in Moldavian agriculture and industry may partially explain the

delay in its legalization.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES

The Moldavian Language Issue

The Alexe Mateevici Club

Named after the Moldavian poet and Orthodox priest, Alexe Mateevici (1888-1917), the club was founded by some fifteen young Moldavian intellectuals in Kishinev on Easter, 1988. The club's founders were moved by a concern over the survival of Moldavian ethnic identity and culture in the face of forced assimilation; they felt that they had to act to counteract "Soviet policies which have deprived the Moldavians of both their past and their future." Encouraged by perestroika, these activists felt that it opened up real opportunities for Moldavians to influence official policies through the partially democratized electoral process.

Concentrating on cultural issues, the Mateevici Club has lead public efforts to make Moldavian the sole state language of the republic, to restore the Latin script, and to recognize officially the identity of the Moldavian and Romanian languages. Through its local groups, the club has collected hundreds of thousands of signatures on petitions to the authorities and the media to support these demands.

In order to increase public awareness of these cultural issues, the Mateevici Club holds mass meetings on alternate Sundays in the Summer Theater. Unofficial political activists and cultural figures lecture on cultural, political and social issues and respond to audience questions. Audiences are a cross-

section of Moldavian society, including many industrial workers and peasants. In fact, club leaders continue the cultural tradition of Bessarabian agrarian populism and of close links in Moldavia between urban intellectuals and a rural environment. Club leaders claim that some 150,000 people support club activities in various ways.

The Mateevici Club works closely with the Moldavian Democratic Movement which emerged at about the same time and pursues complementary goals. The Democratic Movement presses for a total program of political, economic and social reform, while the Mateevici Club focuses on national and cultural demands.

Toward a New Moldavian Language Law

In a break with official language policy, a group of leading Moldavian intellectuals in March 1989 published an unofficial literary journal in Moldavian, using the Latin script. Because of strong local Party opposition, the journal was printed in Latvia, and all 60,000 copies sold out in Moldavia in three days.

The Moldavian Popular Front received permission from the Party to hold a public rally on August 27, 1989, to press for Moldavian as the official language. As many as 500,000 Moldavians, mostly peasants, turned out in a massive show of support.

Demonstrators pressed four main demands: that Moldavian be made the state language of the republic; that it be recognized as the language of inter-ethnic communication in the republic, with

Russian being reserved as the language for communication among Union republics; that the Latin script be used for the Moldavian alphabet; and that there be official recognition of the identity of Romanian and Moldavian. These demands were made in many appeals and petitions by the Moldavian population which, since late 1988, had been signed by more than one million people.

The timing of the August 27 rally was key -- just a few days before a Moldavian Supreme Soviet session was to meet to vote on this issue -- and it occurred during a series of strikes at factories in Russified areas of Moldavia.

This vociferous popular campaign for official status of the Latin-script Romanian language -- led by various unofficial groups in Moldavia, particularly the Alexe Mateevici Club, against strong local Party resistance -- ended in victory on September 1, 1989. After a four-day session, the Moldavian Supreme Soviet reinstituted the Latin script for Moldavian and made it the official language of the republic, downgrading Cyrillic-script Russian. Furthermore, the new language law requires that the holders of tens of thousands of jobs -- from management level to the rank-and-file -- must be bilingual by 1996, or they will lose their jobs.

The Slavic Backlash

The Inter-National Movement

In January 1989, the "Unity" Inter-National Movement for the Defense of Perestroika, composed principally of ethnic Russians

and Ukrainians in Moldavia, began to take shape. Its organizing committee includes the chief editor of the Moldavian Party daily newspaper, Sovetskaya Moldavia, several factory directors, and some mid-level Russian administrators.

Inter-National Movement activists acted on the realization that if minorities do not press their own demands, their rights might be violated. In fact, the organization represents a broad range of views on goals and tactics. Moldavian activists, however, view Inter-National Movement as largely comprised of opponents to liberalization, bureaucratic holdovers from the Brezhnev days.

Although Inter-National Movement does not directly oppose the decision to make Moldavian the state language, it does oppose reintroduction of the Latin script for Moldavian. Furthermore, keeping in mind the needs of the Russian 12 percent of the Moldavian population, it requested that Russian also be made a state language of the republic.

The Inter-National Movement election platform advocated a two-chamber Supreme Soviet, with a Council of the Republic and a Council of Nationalities, to protect minority rights; creation of a Constitutional Oversight Committee with representatives of all ethnic groups; support for the national Communist Party nationalities program; and a mixed economy. As for housing, the medical system and the environment, the Inter-National Movement program is similar to that of the Moldavian Popular Front.

Protest Strikes

Before the Moldavian Supreme Soviet met to consider the language issue, various Russian-speaking groups in the republic held protest meetings, calling for a postponement of the session until after the planned Central Committee meeting on nationality issues. Furthermore, the protestors demanded "parity" between Moldavian and Russian in the republic. City Party committees in Russian-dominated Bendery, Tiraspol, and Rybnitsa plus factory directors and other officials supported these protests through "warning strikes" on August 16, 17, and 21.

The Union of the Working People of Moldavia was organized on August 23, 1989, by representatives from Tiraspol, Bendery, Rybnitsa and Kishinev. It called for a republic-wide strike to support the demands that the legislative session be postponed and draft laws changed.

When the Moldavian Supreme Soviet met on August 29, 1989, over 100,000 Russian-speaking workers in more than 100 enterprises were on strike. Strike headquarters, located in Tiraspol, were staffed by factory directors, trade union officials and administrators. In addition, there were mass rallies of strikers in Tiraspol on August 25 and 28.

The Moldavian Popular Front held inconclusive talks with strike leaders, with five representatives from each side, on August 26 in Kishinev and on August 28 in Tiraspol. Front supporters formed "anti-sabotage" committees in factories and

other places in Kishinev, where ethnic Moldavians comprise about 40 percent of the work force.

Initially, some strikers sought the retention of Russian as the sole official language of the republic, while others advocated Russian-Moldavian bilingualism. Today, however, according to a recent visitor to Moldavia, the Russian-speaking population of the republic seeks Russian-Moldavian bilingualism.

Demands for Ethnic Autonomy inside Moldavia

On February 1, 1990, the Moldavian Supreme Soviet Presidium rejected the decision by the Tiraspol Rayon, with its majority Russian population, to declare itself an independent territory. The Presidium invalidated the results of the Tiraspol referendum and its resulting declaration as a violation of constitutional provisions.

Ethnic Minorities in Moldavia

The Gagauz

The Gagauz, a Moslem Turkish minority in Moldavia, have been demanding autonomy for several years. In mid-November, a Gagauz congress voted to proclaim part of southern Moldavia an autonomous territory. The Moldavian government immediately declared this vote unconstitutional. A commission of the Presidium of the Moldavian Supreme Soviet was set up some time ago to examine the Gagauz autonomy issue, but it has not yet reported its findings. On October 29, the Moldavian Popular Front declared its opposition to a Gagauz ASSR, the formation of

which would require Moldavian Supreme Soviet approval.

Other Ethnic Minorities

There are Jewish, Gypsy and Bulgarian minorities in Moldavia. The next few years, when tensions are likely to be high and living standards low, may see a further rise in ethnic hostilities. Unfortunately, there is little reason to think that the Gypsy, Jewish and Bulgarian minorities in Moldavia will be immune from such tensions.

Religious Issues

Popular support for religious concerns was seen in the election of an Orthodox parish priest, Petru Buburuz, to the Congress of People's Deputies. Buburuz, running in a district where many Russians live, ran under the rubric, "The People's Will -- God's Will."

Buburuz' program spells out many issues of concern to religious believers in Moldavia: reinstatement of religious instruction in schools; unrestricted opportunities for the Church to preach the Gospel; an increase in church publications; the organization of Sunday schools in parish churches; and the return to religious communities of church buildings that had been closed or taken over by the state authorities. He also asked for ecclesiastical independence for the Moldavian diocese which is currently dominated by a Russian hierarchy.

The Moldavian Popular Front platform gives a clear picture of major popular religious demands, including some raised by

Buburuz. The platform calls for the reinstitution of the study of religion in schools; for greater opportunities for the church to train priests and publish religious materials in the Moldavian language; for freer public access to, and circulation of, domestic and foreign religious publications; and for the return of monasteries and churches to religious communities. Perhaps most significant, the Popular Front advocates the establishment of an autocephalous Moldavian Orthodox Church, which, like the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, had been forcibly merged with the Russian Orthodox Church after World War II.

THE MOVEMENT TOWARD DEMOCRACY

Last year marked the beginning of a strong popular drive for democracy in Moldavia. A series of demonstrations, mostly in Kishinev, with steadily growing numbers of participants and increasingly diverse and radical demands, played an important role in this process. Various "informal" popular groups, espousing environmental, cultural, and nationalist causes, gained strength and influence throughout the year. Linguistic and cultural issues were the initial focus of popular activism by both the Moldavian majority and the various ethnic minorities in the republic. Local party reaction to this upsurge of popular activism moved from open hostility to sullen acquiescence and, finally, to an open dialogue born of necessity.

Demonstrations

Unauthorized rallies and demonstrations began in Kishinev in late 1988; by January 1989, they had assumed massive proportions. Most were held without official permission and occurred despite a city council ban on public gatherings in the middle of Kishinev. Until March, the protestors' slogans did not vary. They proclaimed: "Perestroika, Glasnost;" "State Language -- Latin Script" (demanding official status for Moldavian and restoration of the banned Latin alphabet); "Halt Migration" (an end to state-sponsored settlement of people from Slavic and other republics); "Down with Colonization" (a reference to economic

exploitation by Moscow ministries); "Away with the Mafia" (a call to fire the Brezhnev-holdover party elite); "Interethnic Strife -- the Bureaucracy's Weapon" (a reference to the setting up of a branch of "Inter-Front" in Moldavia by ethnic Russians).

By March, the demonstrators' mood had become more radical, due to the local party leadership's continued failure to address popular concerns. New slogans appeared: "Down with Grossu" (Moldavian First Party Secretary Semen Grossu, the last remaining republic party leader from Brezhnev days); "Government Crisis" (implying that the local leadership was incapable of responding to the people's needs). More and more often, posters were written in Moldavian, using the Latin script.

Thousands of demonstrators followed a set path in Kishinev, starting out at the statue of the medieval prince, Stephen the Great, honored by Moldavians as the symbol of their nation. Dozens of speeches on democratization and nationality rights were made at the statue. Then, the crowd -- which sometimes was in the tens of thousands -- moved in a procession down the city's main avenues, towards the huge Victory Square, passing the Lenin monument and ending up in front of the Central Committee building. Mass sit-ins were held along the way in front of various government buildings. The demonstrations were held on Sundays, usually lasting from noon until night, holding up traffic. Authorized rallies were held in Kishinev's open-air Summer Theater, which seats 8,000 but has held as many as 15,000.

Traffic tie-ups provided an excuse for city officials to call in police reinforcements and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) troops. At first, the authorities tried to keep a lid on the situation without using too much violence. Selective use of force, however, was applied against demonstrators in Kishinev on more than one occasion, most notably in November 1989.

As a general preventive measure, in late February 1989 the city authorities banned all unofficial meetings in central Kishinev --but this prohibition has been ignored repeatedly. Party officials also ordered a drastic cutback on train and bus transportation between Kishinev and the countryside. This was done to prevent the overwhelmingly Moldavian peasantry from participating in these rallies -- and apparently was at least partially successful.

As demonstrators swelled in numbers, pressed more radical demands, and became increasingly strident, Moldavian officials resorted to the use of violence. On March 12, 1989, there is circumstantial evidence that MVD troops or the local police may have used poison gas -- although without causing fatalities (see below). After clashes between demonstrators and the police in November, a state of emergency was declared in the republic.

Major Unofficial Demonstrations

Moldavian authorities did not allow the Moldavian Democratic Movement to hold a rally on December 10, 1988, to mark International Human Rights Day. Instead, this demonstration was

held on January 15, 1989, as an authorized event in the Summer Theater. Some 15,000 people attended, cheering speakers who demanded publication of the text of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in the republic's press and the telling of the whole truth about the Stalinist terror in Moldavia, including official rehabilitation for its victims, and a "Book of Memory" in their honor. A resolution adopted at the rally reiterated well known views on language, migration, and economic and ecology issues. Sovereign rights for the Moldavian people were demanded; the reopening of churches and monasteries was requested; and there were calls for the firing of media and republic party officials who had "slandered" independent groups while denying them the right of reply. Nevertheless, Party officials did not allow this Democratic Movement resolution to be printed in the republic's media.

An unauthorized demonstration was held on January 22 in central Kishinev in which some 10,000 to 15,000 people took part. After a shoving match with the police, the crowd seized stands and used them as an improvised speakers' rostrum. The Moldavian media accused the unofficial Alexe Mateevici Cultural Club of having instigated the fracas.

The police, reinforced with Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) units, broke up a procession of several thousand protestors in front of the Council of Ministers building on February 12. This is the first time that MVD troops are known to have been

deployed at a Moldavian rally. Force was deployed; the crowd broke up; onlookers joined in; the event lasted several hours. Even the official Moldavian press agency noted that excessive force had been used. A similar unfortunate scenario was repeated on a smaller scale one week later.

By February 26, however, the tables were turned: demonstrators overwhelmed the police in central Kishinev. Unofficial observers put the number of participants at 20,000 to 30,000. The crowd persisted until First Party Secretary Grossu appeared on the balcony of the Central Committee building to address them. When Grossu spoke Russian, the crowd shouted him down until he switched to platitudes in Moldavian. This time, however, the police showed restraint, and the MVD troops merely observed from the sidelines.

On International Women's Day, March 8, a group of 5,000, including many women, held an unofficial march to press language and educational issues. They demanded, for example, Moldavian-language kindergartens and schools for Moldavian children and an end to the teaching of "falsified history." Again, security forces did not interfere.

March 12 saw a very large unofficial rally -- with estimates of up to 80,000 participants. At this rally, the tricolor flag, not of Romania, but of the Moldavian Democratic Republic (1917-1918) was publicly shown for the first time. The official Moldavian media claimed that thousands charged through police

cordons and for eight hours "committed grave violations of public order" in downtown Kishinev.

Later reports in the leading liberal Moldavian Writers' Union weekly, Literatura si Arta, claimed that MVD troops had used gas against the demonstrators, which was initially assumed to be tear gas. But a gas cannister, brought by Kishinev residents to the Writers' Union offices in mid-April, revealed a different version of events. The cannister was marked "Cheriomukha 10," it was issued in 1987 and bore an instruction label. It turned out to be the same gas that had been used with such lethal effects against 19 Georgian demonstrators on April 8.

The March rally also marks the initial phases of a dialogue between republic party officials and protestors. A delegation from the Moldavian Democratic Movement and the Mateevici Club was invited into the Central Committee building for talks with members of the republic's Party bureau. The delegates agreed to ask the crowd to disperse after the Party leaders said they would permit a rally the next Sunday to explain their views on various subjects to the protestors.

As they promised, Moldavian officials gave permits for two rallies, one organized by the Democratic Movement and the other by the Mateevici Club. Some 15,000 people attended each rally held at the Summer Theater. Now the tricolor flag was draped as the backdrop for the speakers' platform. The republic media noted that top Moldavian Party and government officials attended

the events and received over 1,500 written questions on diverse issues. Grossu and other leaders gave speeches and answered a few questions. Unofficial activists noted that listeners were particularly dissatisfied with official responses on language and migration policy.

Some 20,000 people are estimated to have taken part in an officially authorized rally organized by the Democratic Movement at the Summer Theater on April 9. The rally's theme was the issue of the state language and the Latin alphabet. This rally was notable for the participation of a representative of the local Ukrainian community who stressed interethnic cooperation. A resolution was issued which urged voters to organize meetings with their Moldavian Supreme Soviet deputies to press language demands. This call to political activism, asking for specific actions by political representatives, also marks a new stage of political awareness.

Moldavian activists were disappointed that the local Party leaders had only responded in the most minimal way to their call for a dialogue. The leaders of the various unofficial groups decided to ask their fellow activists not to hold any more unauthorized demonstrations in Kishinev until the Party leaders actively engaged with unofficial groups on serious discussions of major issues of public concern.

At this time, Moldavian authorities sentenced at least two demonstrators who took part in unofficial rallies in March and

April 1989; they were sentenced for "infringing regulations for the organization and conduct of street...demonstrations" (Article 200-1, RSFSR Code). Yuri Ferar received a conditional one-year camp sentence with compulsory labor recruitment. Ion Tutunaru was sentenced to a one-year term of corrective labor with a 20 percent pay cut. Seven other demonstrators who were tried at about that time received unknown terms or labor recruitment.

On June 25, the largest rally to date was held on Kishinev's vast central square; some 80,000 took part -- despite a downpour. The rally was organized by the Moldavian Popular Front to mourn the Soviet annexation of the territory of the Moldavian SSR. The mood and demands of the Moldavian public had radicalized -- as seen in the slogans of that rally. Some of the crowd's placards read: "June 28 -- A Black Day for Moldavia;" "Stalinism -- Genocide of the Moldavian People;" "Let us Stop Colonization and Russification;" "Down with Neocolonialism;" "The People Demand the Resignation of the Government;" "We want Nationally-Minded Leaders;" "Make Moldavia a Demilitarized Zone." The rally's theme, the impact of Stalinism on the Moldavian people, was addressed by almost twenty speakers; it was the first mass protest organized by the Moldavian Popular Front. Most speakers, including People's Deputies, Popular Front activists, historians, and several Ukrainian representatives, focussed on the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the 1940 Soviet annexation of Moldavia which resulted. Twenty speakers described various

aspects of Stalinist policies which still affect the republic today: forced assimilation, uprooting of peasants from the land, forced migrations, cultural deprivation, anti-religious policies, environmental destruction, and centralized bureaucratic rule.

The protesters drew up four documents of political demands. And, for the first time, people at the rally approved territorial claims in a resolution demanding the "return to the Moldavian SSR of the ancient territories of the Moldavian people which were unjustly incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR in 1940" and cancellation of "faulty" decrees of 1940 ceding northern Bukovina, the three Bessarabian counties and the eight left-bank-of-the-Diester rayons to the Ukrainian SSR. The rally called for consultations among the Supreme Soviets and the governments of the Moldavian, Ukrainian and All-Union Supreme Soviets on this issue.

Another resolution denounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and called for candid discussions of "the full truth" about it. Other nationalist demands included: "an objective official reevaluation" of the Soviet annexation of Moldavia in 1940; observance of June 28 as a "national day of mourning" (the date when the Soviet army entered Bessarabia in 1940); observance of December 2 (the proclamation date for the 1917 Moldavian Democratic Republic); and an end to the "anti-Moldavian campaign" of the Inter-National Movement in Moldavia. Righting the wrongs of Stalinism was another focus: the full rehabilitation of all

the victims of repression from Stalinism to the present; observance of July 6 (the first day of a major wave of deportations of Moldavian peasants to Siberia in 1949) as a "memorial day for Stalinist victims." The group also sent a cable to Gorbachev asking him to support its call for the removal of the present anti-reformist leadership in Kishinev and its replacement with new, more liberal leaders.

Moldavian activists, organized by the Popular Front, even managed to foil two officially sponsored public events: celebrations of the June 28 anniversary of the entry of Soviet troops into Bessarabia in 1940; and an officially authorized Inter-National Movement rally on July 9. After a brief scuffle between Popular Front and Inter-National Movement supporters, the Inter-National Movement rally was cancelled. The Inter-National Movement supporters carried red flags and called Moldavians "fascists", proclaiming "We are not guests, we are at home here." The Popular Front advocates carried the tri-color flags of pre-Soviet Moldavia and called the Inter-National Movement people "Stalinists." While some Russian and Jewish residents of Kishinev joined the Popular Front forces, most of the Popular Front supporters had brought in large groups of peasants from the countryside. The Inter-National Movement, on the other hand, used state-supplied buses to bring in supporters from east of the Diester River. Security forces maintained watch from the sidelines; for the first time, some Moldavian police fraternized

with the demonstrators.

Official reaction to the clearly radicalized and expanded nature of the demonstrations was muted. Although the authorities no longer automatically denied rally permits, they still showed no interest in entering into a political dialogue with the Popular Front. Instead, Party leaders continued to address the Moldavian public in cliched exortations, totally irrelevant to people's political needs. In short, a political vacuum existed in the republic.

As the year went on, the gap between the people and the local Party in Moldavia continued to widen. In fact, the November 7, 1989, parade in Kishinev set off a series of dramatic events. During the military parade, people climbed over tanks and obstructed the path of other military vehicles; 30 people were arrested.

On November 10, thousands of people -- many carrying Moldavian national flags -- stormed the Kishinev Ministry of Interior building -- which later was set on fire -- demanding the release of those arrested three days before and calling for the resignation of the Moldavian government.

The Moldavian Interior Minister, Vladimir N. Voronin, said on local radio on November 11 that 20,000 people had tried to storm the Interior Ministry headquarters, demanding the release of the 30 who were arrested. Ninety four militiamen had been injured, and 50 had been hospitalized, three in serious

condition. About 50 civilians had also been injured. Seventy were arrested. The minister said the militia had used tear gas and fired into the air to disperse crowds that were throwing rocks and bottles and trying to force their way into the building.

The head of the Moldavian News Agency told the AP that 46 protestors had been hurt, along with 142 members of the security forces, including four in "grave condition." By November 15, the official injury toll of protestors had risen to 215, according to Soviet Deputy Interior Minister Ivan Shilov. Popular Front sources in Kishinev consider this figure to be too low since it only includes those who sought public medical assistance.

The November 10 demonstration was organized by the Moldavian Popular Front. Its leaders, however, said a group of "criminals and drunkards" joined the rally -- orderly until then -- and began to attack the building. As more people joined the rioting, local authorities asked the Popular Front to try to calm the crowds. While the Popular Front admitted that some Moldavians "provoked and organized" the violence, it also claimed it could not control "these extremists."

On December 30, according to Reuters, some 5,000 Moldavians rallied in Kishinev. Some speakers called for independence, others for union with Romania.

Republic autonomy figured prominently in a major election rally, sponsored by the Moldavian Popular Front and the Communist

Party, which was held in Kishinev on February 11, 1990. A crowd estimated in size from 50,000 to 300,000, pressed this issue.

"The State of Emergency"

After the November 10 violence, Moldavian authorities imposed a series of "emergency measures:" all rallies and meetings were banned; vehicles not vital to the economy were barred from city streets; special Ministry of Internal Affairs troops were called in to Kishinev; privately held weapons were confiscated; the sale of alcohol was forbidden after 8 p.m. and young people also had an 8 p.m. curfew. The use of radio transmitters and public address systems was also temporarily prohibited. All these measures were in effect until "further notice" and were intended to "restore stability" in Kishinev.

The day after the disturbances, Moldavian officials -- the leadership of the local Communist party, the ruling board of the Moldavian legislature, and the republic's council of ministers -- met in emergency session. They issued a statement saying that the events had shaken Moldavia and appealed to people to "observe order and preserve tranquility." They also imposed a series of "emergency measures."

A few days after "emergency measures" were imposed, Kishinev radio interviewed Major General Viktor Maksimov of the USSR MVD troops. The General said that the previous day had proceeded "normally." He also commended the Popular Front for

acting "constructively" in this situation.

Unofficial Groups

(For the Moldavian Green Movement, see Chapter II; for Mateevici Club, see Chapter III.)

The Moldavian Democratic Movement

The Moldavian Democratic Movement was first discussed at a meeting of members of various creative unions in Kishinev on June 3, 1988. An organizing committee of 25 was elected, including writers, journalists and scholars, mostly ethnic Moldavians but also including several Ukrainians, Jews and Russians. Its first public rally was held in Kishinev on June 27, when it was announced that it plans to seek legal recognition from the authorities. Some 300 support groups have been organized throughout the republic.

The movement stands for recognition of universal democratic principles and "a state based on the rule of law" within a USSR organized along genuinely federative principles. Members cannot engage in "national chauvinism or any form of violence." Members shall work only through "legal and constitutional methods" and in accordance with the provisions of the UN and CSCE documents.

As for Moldavian sovereignty, federalism is seen as the key to fulfill "the Moldavian SSR rights as a sovereign national republic." The movement seeks a right of veto on legal matters deemed to be of "vital importance for the republic" and wants the republic to have the right "to maintain direct links with other

states and with international organizations." In the economic sphere, the program calls for "a radical transformation" and "humanization" of the economic system by replacing "command mechanisms," "ministerial fiat" and the state monopoly with enterprise self-management, market mechanisms, and a "pluralism of property forms." In its cultural demands, the Democratic Movement platform mirrors that of the Mateevici Club. It also asserts that all ethnic groups in Moldavia should have their cultures and languages preserved.

The Democratic Movement program devotes considerable attention to human rights. It calls for adequate legal guarantees to ensure that authorities observe the rights of association and assembly; the inviolability of the person, domicile, and correspondence; freedom of conscience, opinion and expression; and other civil rights theoretically provided for by the USSR and Moldavian SSR constitutions. It also asks for the rehabilitation of people sentenced for their political or religious beliefs.

The Democratic Movement program pays special heed to the victims of Stalinism. It demands the annulment of judicial sentences and administrative decisions ordering deportations from Moldavia during the 1940s. It asks that public monuments be erected to honor the memory of the victims of Stalinism. It urges the publication of the names of both the victims and the perpetrators of the deportations. It asks that all the mass

repressions carried out before, during and after World War II not be subject to statutes of limitations.

Ecology is the subject of a major portion of the Democratic Movement platform. It demands strict measures for environmental protection, with public control over their implementation. It calls for severe financial penalties for industrial polluters; mandatory environmental studies before any new industrial project is undertaken; an end to forced industrialization, and increased investment in agriculture.

Contact with nationalist groups in other parts of the Soviet Union has been very important for the Democratic Movement. The experience of similar nationalist undertakings in the Baltic states and in Armenia have influenced its program and organization.

After months of ignoring the Moldavian Democratic Movement or obstructing its activities, the local party authorities held a seven-hour discussion with it on December 15, 1988. This meeting marked the start of many official see-saws between violence and apathy towards the Movement and other unofficial groups in Moldavia. Finally, in November 1989, after major clashes between protestors and police and the imposition of the state of emergency, a new reformist Moldavian Party leadership was put in place (see Chapter I). This local Party leadership has so far acted in a conciliatory and cooperative vein with the unofficial groups and organizations in Moldavia.

The Moldavian Popular Front

Attended by some 200 delegates -- of whom thirty are Party members -- the founding congress of the Moldavian Popular Front was held at the Moldavian Writers' Union on May 20, 1989. The Moldavian Popular Front functions as an umbrella group for the following organizations: the Moldavian Democratic Movement; the Alexe Mateevici Club; the Cultural Clubs Movement; the Green Movement; the League of the Unemployed; the Democratic League of Students; the Society of Historians and the Moscow-based Moldavia Cultural Association. Speeches were also given by a Russian journalist, a Ukrainian engineer, and a Gagauz teacher.

The Front publishes its own newspaper, "Awakening," and elected a nine-member executive committee: writer Ion Hadarca; literary scholars Andrei Turcanu and Iurie Rosca; physicians Anatol Selaru and Pavel Gusac; social scientist Nicolai Costin; lawyer Mihai Ghimpu; engineer Gheorghe Ghimpu; and economist Iurie Plugaru. Estimates of Front membership range from 700,000 to one million, making it the strongest political force in Moldavia today. Many Front members also belong to the Communist Party, as well as various unofficial groups.

The founding congress issued two appeals: to all citizens of Moldavia and to the newly elected national Congress of People's Deputies. The first document urges members of all ethnic groups in the republic to assist in the reform of the Soviet system;

calls for national and cultural rights for all ethnic groups in Moldavia; and warns against the local Party leadership's manipulation of interethnic tension to preserve its power. The second document calls on the Congress to set up an elected commission to control the activities of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Popular Front program consists of twenty resolutions: it calls for a renewal of the local Party leadership; it asks for the legalization of the Popular Front; it calls for an urgent reform of the school system, including the reinstatement of Moldavian as the language of instruction, and demands that Moldavian be made the state language of the republic, without any special status for Russian; it calls for the creation of "genuine federalism" in the USSR and for the guarantee of human rights stipulated in international agreements signed by the Soviet Union -- including CSCE; it asks for an immediate halt to in-migration from the RSFSR and out-migration of Moldavians; it expresses alarm over the state of the environment and calls for measures to reverse it; it condemns the local media as "anti-reformist;" it calls the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact "a criminal agreement between two totalitarian states" and asks that the Soviet and Moldavian governments "evaluate the pact and its validity publicly from the standpoint of international law;" it calls for full sovereignty for the Moldavian SSR; it demands the legalization of the pre-Soviet Moldavian tri-color flag; it asks that all

soldiers be given the right to serve in republic military units rather than the Soviet army; it asks for the establishment of Moldavian consulates in Bucharest and other cities and for the removal of impediments to person-to-person contacts as stipulated in the CSCE Vienna Concluding Document; it appeals to the Congress of People's Deputies to enact laws to guarantee Soviet citizens the rights of free expression, assembly, and association, unlimited glasnost and the right to receive and impart information; it asks the Congress to repeal the decrees of July 1988 and April 1989 which punish participation in unauthorized demonstrations and criticism of public officials and institutions; it calls on the Congress to enact a law to guarantee unofficial candidates and organizations rights equal to those of official candidates in competing for election and to deny any party or individual privileged status; and it made a series of proposals on religious issues. (See Chapter III)

In a major bow to the groundswell of support for the Popular Front, the Moldavian Party granted it legal status on October 26, 1989. This step marked a new stage of official willingness to enter into a dialogue with the Front. New Moldavian party chief Lucinschi has accelerated this trend, even calling for a republic round table between the Party and unofficial groups to discuss common problems.

NEW ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Elections to the Congress of People's Deputies

The March 1989 Elections

Candidates supported by Moldavian unofficial groups for the national Congress of People's Deputies won ten out of the 16 races they could enter, out of a total of 37 election races decided on the first ballot in March 1989. This was considered a good show, in view of the unofficial groups' most severe handicap -- without registration, they did not have the legal right to support candidates openly. Candidates supported by unofficial groups labored under other difficulties: their media access was severely limited; their resources were so scant that they could only enter one third of the races; and they faced a solid anti-reform Party front.

Members and active supporters of unofficial groups won six seats to the Congress: Mihai Cimpoi, Nicolae Dabija, Ion Druta, Ion Hadirca, Dumitru Matcovschi and Grigore Vieru. Four other candidates who shared their views captured seats: Anton Grajdieru, Eugeniu Doga, Gheorghe Ghidirim and Gheorghe Rusu. In addition, two candidates elected as representatives of official public organizations, Moldavian Writers' Union Chairman Ion Constantin Ciobanu and Moldavian Theater Professionals' Union Chairman Veniamin Apostol, support political reform and Moldavian national demands.

Notable Moldavian officials who lost their election bids

include the KGB chairman; a biologist known for his support of chemical-intensive agricultural methods; the minister of education; and several influential Party secretaries.

Campaign Tactics

In order to try to influence the election in their favor, Moldavian officials reportedly used various unethical methods. They were reported to have used local newspapers and radio programs for heavy-handed polemics against unofficial candidates; the meetings of unofficial candidates were packed with hecklers; party activists were stationed inside polling stations to pressure voters on election day. According to Judy Ingram, the Moldavian Writers Union weekly journal, Literatura si Arta, compiled a lengthy list of electoral law violations based on voters' complaints from around the republic.

The May 1989 Runoff Elections

Under procedures which required repeat elections in districts in which no candidate received an absolute majority of votes in the first round of elections, six runoff races were held in Moldavia on May 14 and 21, 1989. The results of these elections again showed the strength of reformist sentiment, with candidates affiliated with Moldavian unofficial groups winning half the seats.

The poet Leonida Lari won by a wide margin over the Moldavian Minister of Culture. She is a leading light in the Mateevici Club and headed the Latin-script Moldavian language

literary journal, unauthorized by the authorities.

The Moldavian Minister of Internal Affairs, Vladimir Voronin, was defeated by Constantin Oboroc, chairman of a village soviet. He ran on the Democratic Movement platform.

Orthodox parish priest, Petru Buburuz, supported by two unofficial movements, bested an Inter-National Movement candidate. (See also Chapter III.)

Proposals of Moldavian Reformist Deputies

Moldavian reformist deputies have cooperated closely with other liberals from the RSFSR, the Baltic states and Georgia. In the opening days of the Congress, two such Moldavian deputies, Mihai Cimpoi and Ion Druta, presented proposals on behalf of the Moldavian group.

Treatment of demonstrators and police violence was the focus of particular attention. Cimpoi called for suspension of the April 8, 1989, decree which sets penalties for those who "discredit" public institutions and officials, and criticized the July 1988 demonstration law. He demanded an "immediate" official reply to a Latvian deputy's inquiry about the April killings of 19 Georgian protestors. His colleague Druta proposed that special laws be enacted to "prohibit the use of force by army and Internal Affairs Ministry troops" against civilians and to "oblige the authorities to solve all problems by political means." Addressing Gorbachev as the head of the Soviet Defense Committee, Druta asked him to explain the contrast between Soviet

international rhetoric on the need to settle disputes peacefully and its reliance on force inside the USSR.

Moldavian deputies also proposed that the Congress begin drafting a resolution on the status of national languages. Cimpoi, referring to a suspicious car accident involving two Moldavian deputies, asked that provisions for the protection of deputies be drafted.

The Moldavian Congressional Delegation

About one third of the total of 55 Moldavian congressional seats are held by liberals and their allies. The fifteen core members of this group include seven writers, a literary historian, a theater director, a musician, an educator, two physicians, a priest and the chairman of a rural soviet.

Moldavian Local Elections in March 1990

The Electoral Law

The Moldavian Supreme Soviet passed the final version of its electoral law on November 23. It lowered the minimum number of labor collective members needed to get a candidate on the ballot from 300 to 200. It also denied social organizations the right to put forward their own supra-territorial candidates. In order to vote, residents of the republic must be at least 18 years old; in order to stand as candidates, they must be at least 21.

The Nomination Procedure

Candidates for each of Moldavia's 380 electoral districts

are nominated by labor collectives, collectives of secondary and higher-level students, regional and city organs of social organizations in the corresponding district, voters' assemblies in their place of residence, assemblies of authorized kolkhoz representatives, and military servicemen. Labor collectives with no less than 100 workers can put forward candidates, as can meetings of 300 or more voters in their place of residence, called by no less than 20 voters. Over half the voters at such meetings must vote to nominate the candidate. The district electoral commission must be told of the nomination meeting at least three days in advance.

All political players criticized the minimum number of voters needed to nominate candidates. Moldavian Popular Front candidate Yuri Rosca pointed out that it discriminates against such enterprises as museums and newspapers which face higher requirements that other enterprises. Moldavian first party secretary Lucinschi and Inter-National Movement candidate Vladimir Solonar each suggested on his own that every candidate should be able to collect the signatures of a certain number of voters in a district in order to be nominated. Lucinschi saw that the different minimum requirements for social organizations, enterprises and residential communities only led to further tension among the various interest groups in Moldavian society.

Profile of the Candidates

A total of 1,828 candidates competed in the February 25

Moldavian Supreme Soviet election: some 340 were supported by the Moldavian Popular Front and 33 by the Green Movement. More than 80 percent of the candidates belonged to the Communist Party. Izvestiya (February 27) gave a breakdown of the candidates' professional backgrounds: a scant four percent were drawn from the working class; there were 883 directors, chairmen and managers; about 300 "leading figures" such as doctors, agronomists, and Party secretaries; 70 writers, artists and journalists; 15 from the military; 15 priests; and 12 cooperative owners. The preponderance of Party members who were elected to the new republic Supreme Soviet led several observers to comment that the people of Moldavia were creating a one-Party parliament. The large number of Party members elected to the Moldavian Supreme Soviet also points to the increasing variety of views held by mid-level Party members -- as well as the decreasing role of ideology over personality.

Districting

For the first time, electoral districts were drawn according to the number of eligible voters, not residents. Moldavian Popular Front activists thought that some districts at first had been unfairly drawn so as to give Gagauz and Russian candidates an unfair advantage. According to Judy Ingram of the Congressional Helsinki Commission, some Jewish voters wanted special Jewish electoral districts created in the future to ensure the election of a deputy to represent their interests.

Since some districts were redrawn on appeal, this was not a major issue during the elections.

Absentee Ballots

The present electoral law does not set up a uniformly applied system of distributing and collecting absentee ballots, giving rise to some complaints.

Access to the Media and Funding

According to the election law, "Moldavian SSR candidate People's Deputies from the time of their nomination are quaranteed equal rights to speak at pre-election and other meetings ... in the press and on television and radio."

Weeks before the election, candidates had two-minute television spots and some were featured in a few televised discussions. Unfortunately, however, many candidates did not have an opportunity to appear on television. Candidates already holding leading Party positions had much more extensive media coverage. Apparently, no effort was made to give candidates equal time or the right of reply.

Most complaints on media treatment came from Inter-National Movement candidates. Unlike other unofficial Moldavian groups, Inter-National Movement did not have its own media outlet or other organs that supported its platform. Inter-National Movement candidates complained that the official Moldavian-language press rejected their views as nationalist incitement.

The election law specified that only state-provided resources should be used in the pre-election campaign. In an interview with Judy Ingram, however, a Central Election Commission official admitted that this provision had only been honored in the breach. Although the election commission was supposed to print campaign posters, some candidates had their own printed -- probably for fear that they would not have any otherwise. Rumor had it that some candidates were taking advantage of various resources at their workplaces. For many, however, resources were scarce -- the Popular Front had only one telephone in its Kishinev headquarters.

Campaign Rallies and Literature

By law, election commissions were responsible for organizing meetings between candidates and voters. In addition, candidates and their appointed representatives met individually with voters. Candidates were allotted five appointed representatives who would be compensated for their lost salaries while they campaigned. In addition, they could have as many volunteers as they could garner.

Meeting in emergency session on January 31, the Moldavian Supreme Soviet decided to declare a moratorium on political activities likely to increase national tensions. Apparently the moratorium -- which in any case was not enforced -- was aimed more at frequent demonstrations in major Moldavian cities than at election rallies.

On February 11, a major pre-election rally was held in Kishinev when a crowd -- unofficial estimates of which ranged from 50,000 to 300,000 -- gathered to press for autonomy for the republic. Jointly sponsored by the Moldavian Popular Front and the Communist Party -- a sign of how much political alignments had changed -- the Moldavian Popular Front requested that the rally be broadcast live on television -- but it was only televised later. Some segments of the rally were excised: Moldavian Popular Front candidate Yuri Rosca's speech and the list of Moldavian Popular Front candidates.

Complaints

The situation in rural areas was the single major complaint of Moldavian Popular Front representatives. They said that an atmosphere of fear predominated and that therefore rural voters would most likely vote for local Party officials on whom they depended.

Delay and obstructionism by election commission officials was the other area of serious complaint. For example, one Popular Front candidate only succeeded on the third attempt in getting registered as a candidate. The Green Movement experienced a delay of more than two months in its registration as a legal organization due to quibbles by the Moldavian Council of Ministers. It was finally registered in the first week in February, almost ten days after the candidate nomination period had closed. Thus, the Green Movement could only endorse

candidates after the fact.

These and other complaints could be referred to the Central Election Commission. Such referrals, and resultant commission registration, it was hoped, would ward off such problems in the future.

Election Results

Of the approximately 2.8 million eligible voters in Moldavia, 83.5 percent took part in the February elections. Of the 1,892 candidates, 140 deputies were elected; two candidates in each of 237 districts will take part in a second round of elections on March 10. In two months, new elections will be held in three districts where the required 50 percent of registered voters did not show up.

Of the 140 deputies elected into the Moldavian Supreme Soviet, 65 percent are ethnic Moldavian, 15 percent Russian, almost 13 percent Ukrainian, five percent Gagauz, and two percent Bulgarian. Over 80 percent are Party members.

As for political alignments, the Moldavian Popular Front estimates it won a 60 percent majority of the 140 seats decided in the first round, and got its candidates into almost all the runoff elections. First party secretary Petru Lucinschi and Supreme Soviet President Mircea Snegur each won an easy victory in his district.

Political Trends

The February 25 elections showed that non-Communist groups,

especially the Moldavian Popular Front, has strong popular support. While the Moldavian Popular Front will likely play an increasingly important role in republic politics, the Communist Party has moved from its "leading role" to arbiter of competing social, political, and ethnic forces.

The high percentage of Party membership among those elected, however, shows that old ideological distinctions have become blurred. Most candidates, however, did not indicate their movement affiliations on the platforms posted at the polling stations. Since ideological positions were not clearly spelled out in campaign posters and in newspaper articles, it was voters who attended meetings and rallies who were well informed on ideological identifications.

The real social divide is seen in the line-up between local party bosses and Moldavian Popular Front candidates who will face off at the runoff elections. As the Soviet Union moves closer to a real multi-party system, ideological distinctions and affiliations will come into sharper focus.

Sources

The author would like to acknowledge invaluable assistance from two main sources: Vladimir Socor of Radio Liberty Research (particularly his reports on political and cultural trends); and Judy Ingram of the Commission on Security and Cooperation staff (particularly her report on the March 1990 elections). In addition, the author relied on reports The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, The U.S.S.R. News Brief, discussions in January 1990 in Moscow with staffers at the Moscow Information Bureau, and comments by Paul Goble, Deputy Director RFE-RL Research, in Washington in March 1990.