

**Negotiating Moldavia's Borders. Ethnicity, Infrastructure, and Elite
Infighting in the Shaping of a Soviet Autonomous Region in the 1920s**
(Abstract)

Dumitru LISNIC*

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This study explores the creation of the Moldavian Autonomous Region (MASSR) in Soviet Ukraine with a special emphasis on the multiple factors that influenced the layout of its borders. By examining this case from a comparative perspective, the study identifies the peculiarities of the process of drawing the borders of MASSR and the similarities between it and the cases of other Soviet autonomous regions and national republics.

According to Terry Martin, MASSR is a peculiar case of a Soviet national unit created mainly to achieve the Soviet geopolitical goal of annexing the neighboring Romanian border region of Bessarabia. The ethnic landscape of MASSR is frequently cited as important evidence supporting this argument. While not disputing Martin's argument about MASSR's geopolitical goals, this study posits that in the 1920s, the region of *Pridnestrovia* was home to a significant enough Moldovan population to make them the most numerous ethnic group in this national unit if the borders had been drawn differently. MASSR's borders were determined based on a series of principles, which could be categorized according to Francine Hirsch's national, economic, and administrative principles. Furthermore, the geopolitical tensions surrounding the creation of MASSR spilled over into the competition between Ukrainian party leaders and proponents of forming a Moldavian republic. This competition influenced its borders in a way that made Ukrainians the most numerous ethnic group within Moldavia's population, thus minimizing the risks for Soviet Ukraine of losing territories in the event of the creation of a separate Soviet republic of Moldavia following a potential Soviet occupation of Bessarabia.

* Lector universitar, Universitatea „Alec Russo”, Bălți; e-mail: dumitru1999.lisnic@gmail.com.