Европа Централă вă анул 1980 (Europa centrală în anul 1980)
The rise of Moldovan language and identity is connected to the tumultuous history of the Danubian Principalities of Walachia and Moldavia, especially the latter. Both principalities were located at the fault line between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe, namely, the Habsburg lands, Poland-Lithuania, and Muscovy (Russian Empire). Between the late fifteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century, these two principalities were de facto or de jure Ottoman fiefs. In the case of Moldova, the Ottoman fief of the Crimean Khanate also played a role. At the turn of the fifteenth century, Moldavia’s Black Sea littoral was lost to the Ottomans, who directly incorporated it into their realm following the policy of turning the Black Sea into an inland sea of the Empire. In Osmanlıca the annexed littoral became known as Bucak (also spelled as Budjak or Budzhak on the basis of Russian spelling), or “borderland.” Walachia had lost its Black Sea littoral, together with the Danube delta, to the Ottomans even earlier, in the 1420s. This region, known as Dobruja, together with Bucak, was transformed into Silistre (Silistra) Eyalat (province) in 1593.

In the course of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806–1812 (fought when Russia was in alliance with Napoleon’s French Empire), St Petersburg annexed Bucak and the eastern third of Moldova located east of the River Prut. These two territories were shaped into a Russian Governorate of Bessarabia. To the Russian administrators, the local Romance language was known as “Moldavian,” due to the Russian spelling of the name of Moldova, namely, Молдавия. However, in Central and Western Europe most people associated this Einzelsprache with Walachia, where it used to be dubbed Walachian. Walachia, on the other hand, in Walachian/Moldavian was known to Walachian/Moldavianspeakers as Țăra Românească (Land of the Romanians), hence in Romanian the language is known as Română, which yielded the contemporary English name for the Romanian language. The Slavophone version of Orthodox Christianity and the Cyrillic-based language of (Church) Slavonic historically united the Walachians and Moldovans in the sphere of culture. Between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, Orthodox liturgical books were translated into Walachian/Moldavian (Romanian), indicating the rise of this language as a full-fledged Einzelsprache of liturgy and state administration. Obviously, due to the continuing high prestige of Slavonic, Walachian/Moldavian was written and printed in Church (Old) Cyrillic, so that the Romanian-language name of Walachia was actually spelled as Църна Рѣмѣнскъ, while that of Moldova as Молдова.

In 1818, Moldavian became the official language in Russia’s Bessarabia, while in the Ottoman Principality of Moldavia it finally replaced Church Slavonic in this function only in 1851. In both territories this language was officially known as Moldavian. In Bessarabia, at the level of script, Moldavian and Russian were kept apart, the former written and printed in Church Cyrillic, while the latter in Peter the Great’s early eighteenth-century Grazhdanka (“civil, secular script,” as opposed to Church Cyrillic). During the 1830s and 1840s Russian gradually replaced Moldavian in official use. In 1866 the subject of the Moldavian language was removed from the secondary school in the governorate’s regional capital of Chișinău. It was quite a symbolic decision, given that in the same year the United Principalities of Walachia and Moldavia were made into the unitary nation-state of Romania. The Russian authorities strove to isolate Bessarabia’s Moldavian-speakers from the growing influence of Romanian nationalism.

The use of the Latin alphabet for writing Romanian had commenced during the eighteenth century in the Habsburgs’ Transylvania. This tendency began spreading across the border to the Ottoman Principality of Walachia at the turn of the 1830s. In addition, it filtered through the use of Greek as both Principalities’ language of prestige and the main medium of central administration from the 1710s to 1821. Both the modern type of the Greek script and Russian Grazhdanka (modern Cyrillic) emulate the Antiqua type of the Latin alphabet, which caused a gradual shift from Church to Grazhdanka-style Cyrillic for writing and printing, first in Walachian, and later in Moldavian. Obviously, the Orthodox Church stuck to Church Cyrillic and to the prominent use of Church Slavonic. Early Romanian modernizers (or rather, Westernizers) and nationalists, typically after a formative period of education or employment in Habsburg Transylvania, wanted to distance Romanian-language culture from the Orthodox Church in emulation of Western and Central Europe’s post-Westphalian political standard of the separation of church and state. To this end, they developed a Romanian Civil Script ( alfabet civil), in which secular books and the press were produced. Meanwhile, for the time being, Church Slavonic was earmarked for ecclesiastical use. In practice, this Civil Script was quite an arbitrary mixture of Grazhdanka-style Cyrillic letters and Antiqua-type Latin letters, hence present-day historians and linguists tend to dub it the “Transition Alphabet” ( alfabetul de tranziție)
(Ivănescu 2000: 686-687). Writers and publishers used it in an idiosyncratic manner.

The alluded transition in the name of the Transition Alphabet, from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, was a prolonged process. This scriptal transition came to a conclusion at the time when, under continuing Russian pressure, the Ottoman Sultan had no choice but to accept the increasing autonomy of both Danubian principalities, resulting in their union in 1859. Three years later, in 1862, the shift from the Transition Alphabet to a full Romanian Latin script was officially proclaimed. However, the Orthodox Church in Romania continued using Cyrillic (gradually more Grazhdanka than Church Cyrillic) for writing and printing in Romanian until 1881. But the symbolic value of Cyrillic was of such high importance for Orthodoxy Christianity that a modified version of the Latin script was developed, whose appearance closely emulates Cyrillic. This Cyrillicized Latin alphabet is used to this day for wall inscriptions in Orthodox churches and in the titles of religious and theological books. In Habsburg Transylvania the switch from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet (but without the use of a transitional alphabet) was spearheaded by the crownland’s leading Walachian-language newspaper, *Gazeta de Transilvania*, founded in 1838. Beginning in 1852, its front page was published exclusively in Latin characters, while the rest of the content was mostly in Cyrillic. Under the influence of the official change in script in the United Provinces, this newspaper dropped Cyrillic in 1862, marking the decisive shift from the script to the Latin alphabet for writing and publishing in Walachian across Transylvania.

These changes did not impact the use of Cyrillic in Russia’s Bessarabia. First of all, Moldavian ceased to be employed in official use, decisively replaced with Russian. Second, Russian was obviously written in the “Russian (imperial)” script of Cyrillic, which did not allow for any downgrading of its status. Latin letters were reserved for a handful of scholarly books printed in French or German. The 1905 Revolution brought about political liberalization, including lifted restrictions on the use of scripts and languages in publishing across the Russian Empire. In Bessarabia, it was permitted to use Moldavian ( Romanian) in print beginning in 1906. However, most Moldavian-language newspapers and books were published in Cyrillic. The two Moldavian newspapers printed in Latin letters were pressed by the Russian authorities to close in 1907 and 1908, respectively. Hence, the exclusive use of Cyrillic for writing and publishing in Moldavian was de facto enforced, while the use of the alternative name of this language, Romanian, was discouraged. Yet the period of almost 70 years when Moldavian was not in any official use in Bessarabia produced a significant shift, namely, from Church Cyrillic to Grazhdanka. In Bessarabia, all post-1905 Moldavian-language publications were in the latter type of Cyrillic, typically known as “Russian letters.”

In 1918, in the wake of the February revolution in Russia, an independent Moldavian Democratic Republic was proclaimed in Bessarabia. Two months later, in April 1918, the Republic’s parliament voted for a union with Romania, which was recognized in light of international law by the Treaty of Paris in 1920. Meanwhile, in 1919 it was officially forbidden to use Cyrillic for publishing in Romanian, and the alternative name, Moldavian, for this language was discouraged. The union of Bessarabia-turned-Moldavia with Romania also entailed the enforcement of the single (Walachian, Bucharest) standard of the Romanian language across the entire territory of the rapidly enlarged state, including former Bessarabia. In addition, the meaning of the name of Moldavia once again was extended to refer both to post-1812 Moldavia and Bessarabia together. The 1812 partition of historic Moldavia was undone. In popular speech, interwar Romania was often dubbed *România Mare*, or Greater Romania.

However, in 1924 the Cyrillic-based Moldavian was back to official use in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, proclaimed on the Soviet frontier with Romania, that is, on the eastern bank of the Dniester. The territory of the interwar Moldavian ASSR had belonged to the prewar governorates of Podolia and Kherson, which had bordered on Bessarabia within the Russian Empire. The Moldavian ASSR was an ethnolinguistic national autonomy within Soviet Ukraine. In the framework of interwar Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization), a monumental language engineering effort was undertaken in order to endow almost a hundred previously oral speech varieties with respective written forms, making them into full-fledged Einzelsprachen. In addition, in the Soviet Union’s European borderlands, languages were actively constructed away from the same or similar languages across the frontier. The main idea was to isolate Soviet citizens from unwanted influences from abroad. In the case of Soviet Moldavian, first, traditional Cyrillic was replaced with a new “revolutionary” version of this alphabet. Subsequently, this language was infused with Sovietisms and dialectal Slavicisms, largely absent in (that is, already removed from) standard Romanian. Furthermore, the Dniester area’s Romance dialects were made into a new dialectal base of Moldavian. Part and parcel of *korenizatsiia* was a push for modernization in the sphere of language politics, stereotypically associated with the Latin script. The official policy of Latinization meant the replacement of Cyrillic, Arabic, and other writing systems of most of the Soviet Union’s languages with the Latin alphabet. As a result, in 1932 Cyrillic was replaced with Latin letters for writing and publishing in Moldavian, making it largely indistinguishable from the “capitalist language” of Romanian. But in another ideological lurch, beginning in the mid-1930s Latinization was replaced with Cyrillicization (sometimes referred to in English as Cyrillicization) so that to ensure a graphic (scriptal) unity (or monoscritalism) for the Soviet languages. A new type of more Russian-like Cyrillic was reintroduced for Moldavian in 1938. Apart from Moldavian, Russian and Ukrainian were also in official use in the Moldavian ASSR. Moldavian-speakers amounted to one-quarter of the Autonomous Republic’s population, while Russian- and Ukrainian-speakers comprised 10 and 50 percent, respectively. Not surprisingly, all the Moldavian-speakers were bilingual, and this sociolinguistic context translated into the heavy Slavicization of the Moldavian language.

In line with the division of Central Europe, as outlined in the secret Soviet-German Pact of 1939, in 1940 the Soviet
Union seized Bessarabia from Romania. The Moldavian ASSR was dissolved and replaced with a Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. It was composed from two-thirds of the Moldavian ASSR’s territory that closely hugged the eastern bank of the Dniester and from Bessarabia, but without the latter region’s Black Sea littoral, which was incorporated into Soviet Ukraine. Overnight, the Latin script-based Romanian was replaced with the Cyrillic-based Moldavian. In 1941, Romania retook Bessarabia alongside wartime Transnistria (or the extensive region between the Dniester and the Southern Bug). Moldavian entirely disappeared from official use, fully replaced with Romanian, and the auxiliary employment of Ukrainian and Russian when needed. Three years later, in 1944, the Red Army overran these areas. The Moldavian SSR was reestablished and the international and administrative borders reinstated where they had been in 1940. As a result, Moldavian replaced Romanian as the Moldavian SSR’s national and leading official language, side by side with Russian.

After the war, it soon turned out that the Moldavian standard steeped in the Dniester dialects was hard to understand for many Romance-speakers in the Moldavian SSR who had lived and received their education in interwar Romania. As a result, in 1951, it was decided to make the dialects of central Moldova (that is, of the republican capital of Кишинэу Kishineu, or Chișinău in Romanian, and its vicinity) into a new dialectal basis of Moldavian. In this way, Moldavian became much closer to Romanian, the sole substantial difference being the two different scripts employed for writing and publishing in these languages. What is more, after 1945 Romania found itself in the Soviet bloc, postwar Romanian was infused with a lot of Sovietisms and Slavicisms, which in turn made it more similar to Moldavian. Unlike in the case of Serbo-Croatian, no letter-to-letter correspondence was established between the Moldavian Cyrillic and the Romanian Latin alphabet. Requests to this end were rejected, though in 1967 a new unique Cyrillic letter [ж] was introduced, corresponding to the pronunciation /ʤ/ of the Romanian [g] before [a], [e] and [i]. In a way, [ж] crowned the standardization process of Moldavian and became its handy logo-like symbol.

In 1989, the Cyrillic-based Moldavian was replaced with Romanian in Latin letters as the official and national language of the Moldavian SSR. A hope was for a reunification with Romania. Cyrillic and the Moldavian language were seen as symbolic of the unwanted imposition of Soviet communism and the 1940 Soviet annexation of Bessarabia. But this espousal of the Romanian language and national project alienated one-third of the republic’s population, who were mainly Slavophone and identified as Ukrainians, Russians, or Soviets. In 1991 the Soviet Union broke up, Moldavia gained independence, and it was decided that the Romanian language version of this country’s name, Moldova, should be used in other languages. The following year, in 1992, a civil war broke out, and with the help of the remaining Russian army the part of the country located on the eastern bank of the Dniester was made into a de facto polity of Transnistria (in its own official use known as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic). This area had never belonged to historical Bessarabia but had been part of the interwar Moldavian ASSR.

In reaction to this civil war that endangered the economy, stability, and the very existence of Moldova as a state, the idea of a union with Romania was dismissed (if not altogether abandoned), and in 1994 a new constitution declared Moldovan as the country’s official and national language (Article 13). However, the Latin script was retained for this post-1994 Moldovan, meaning that the language is indistinguishable from Romanian in anything but name. Two years later, in 1996, the internationally unrecognized Transnistria adopted its own constitution, which declared Moldovan, Russian, and Ukrainian as its official languages (Article 12). Apart from sticking to the Russian-style official name of this first language in international use, in Transnistria Moldavian officially continues to be written in Cyrillic. However, in practice few Moldovan-language publications are produced, and Russian dominates as the leading language of the mass media, publishing, and public life. Romance-speakers amount only to one-third of the population, and their cultural and educational needs are met by books and newspapers from Moldova and Romania, obviously published in the Latin script-based Moldovan/Romanian. The world’s sole remaining Moldavian-language newspaper published in Cyrillic is Днестровская правда Dnestrovskaya Pravda (The Dniester Truth), founded in 1941. Neither newspaper has a website, hence their reach in cyberspace is nil.

But cyberspace is a new field where the ideological conflict between the proponents of the Latin alphabet-based Moldovan/Romanian and the Cyrillic-based Moldovan/Moldavian continues to be battled out. A Wikipedia in the Cyrillic-based Moldovan/Moldavian was founded in 2005. However, already since 2006 its opponents, who see the use of “Eastern” in its character Cyrillic as ideologically unacceptable for the “Western” Romanian/Moldovan language, repeatedly petitioned for the closure and deletion of this Wikipedia. After a full decade, in 2016, they succeeded in getting the Moldovan/Moldavian Wikipedia closed down, and a year later, in 2017, it was deleted (Proposals for Closing 2016). Nowadays it is available as a reduced functionality resource on mirror sites, with its search function linked to the Romanian Wikipedia (Викимолдия Vikimoldiia 2018). Meanwhile, in the 2004 census, 16 percent of Moldovans declared Romanian as their native language, and in 2013 the constitutional court announced that the Declaration of Independence takes precedence over the Constitution, hence Moldovan should be officially known as Romanian (Roudik 2013). In order not to let the language question become a cause of a renewed conflict that could turn violent, the authorities mostly uphold the constitutional status quo.

The situation can be analyzed from the perspective of the politics of script. Despite their different names, Romanian and Moldovan are written in Latin letters and thus are nonscriptal. This is also true of the Turkic language of Gagauz, which is official in Moldova’s Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. Its script was changed from Cyrillic to the Latin al-
alphabet in 1996. As such, Romania and Moldova are part of the larger European space of monoscriptalism in the Latin alphabet, which extends from Lisbon to the unrecognized Moldovan-Transnistrian frontier, and from Scandinavia to the Romanian-Bulgarian border. On the other hand, Transnistria belongs to the Cyrillic monoscriptal space that extends from the Transnistrian-Moldovan boundary to Vladivostok.

Whatever a final, if any, decision might be in the discussion on the name of the Moldovan language, the febrile ideological strife already heavily impacted on the preservation of the Soviet printed material published in the Cyrillic-based Moldavian. It appears that amidst the political furor, most books and periodicals in this language deemed as “ideologically undesirable” were ditched by readers, institutions, and public libraries across Moldova and Transnistria. Bookinist stalls and bookstores with second-hand publications do not stock such titles, except for a few classics since some older readers prefer to read Moldovan/Romanian-language fiction in Cyrillic. Geographical and historical school atlases in the Cyrillic-based Moldavian, once ubiquitous, are unobtainable. The National Library of the Republic of Moldova has some such geographical atlases in its holdings, but none of the historical ones. The former can be found with the use of the traditional card catalog. This library’s new online catalog is exclusively in the Latin alphabet-based Moldovan/Romanian with all the Cyrillic-based Moldavian titles transliterated into the former. The only remaining clue that a title may be in Cyrillic is the place and year of publication. The Russian State Library’s online catalog does not yield any hits when search is done with the employment of the Moldavian Cyrillic, while searches with the use of the place and year of publication do not generate any hits either. This means that this second largest library in the world either does not preserve any Soviet-time publications in the Cyrillic-based Moldavian, or information on them is available only through the onsite card catalog.

Given the ideologically motivated and highly successful suppression of the Cyrillic-based Moldavian publications and of information on them, Map 32 offers a glimpse of how Central Europe looked through the lens of this Soviet Einzelsprache in 1980. The inclusion of this map in the atlas does not serve any ideological claims, be it in favor or against the Cyrillic-based Moldavian language. The sole purpose is to preserve a memory of the use of this Einzelsprache in Soviet Moldavia’s publishing, administration, and culture, without which future researchers of the Moldavian SSR may not be even able to locate indispensable published material.

Obviously, from the perspective of ethnolinguistic nationalism, which equates language with nation, two different nation-states with the same shared national language appear to be an “abnormality,” hence so much heated discussion on the name of the Moldovan language in Moldova and Romania. However, peace and stability in postwar Central Europe, among others, was ensured by the decision of Austria’s inhabitants that rather than belonging to the German nation, they should constitute a non-ethnolinguistic nation of Austrians in their own right. As a result, Austria and Germany are two separate nation-states with respective Austrian and German nations, though both share the same national and official language of German. Human imagination can easily overcome such discrepancies, and the model of statehood can be redefined with a bit of good will, if people’s interests are put first, before politicians’ unprincipled deal-making in search of votes.