

Transnistria: Moldova's Donbas?

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History of Transnistria (Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic)

The region of Transnistria did not historically belong to the Principality of Moldova.

The region was included in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), which was an artificial political entity within the Ukrainian SSR created by the Bolsheviks in 1924 to serve as a launchpad for their attempts to regain control of Bessarabia (the region between the Prut and Dniester rivers).

The Soviets attempted to create a distinct Moldovan nationality that was similar yet different from the Romanians.

This was done by stressing the differences between the Moldovan dialect and standard Romanian. However, Moldovanization was ineffective and became politically useless after the Soviet Union annexation of Bessarabia in 1940.

During perestroika, the Romanian nationalists' unwillingness to politically compromise on language policy radicalized the residents of Transnistria.

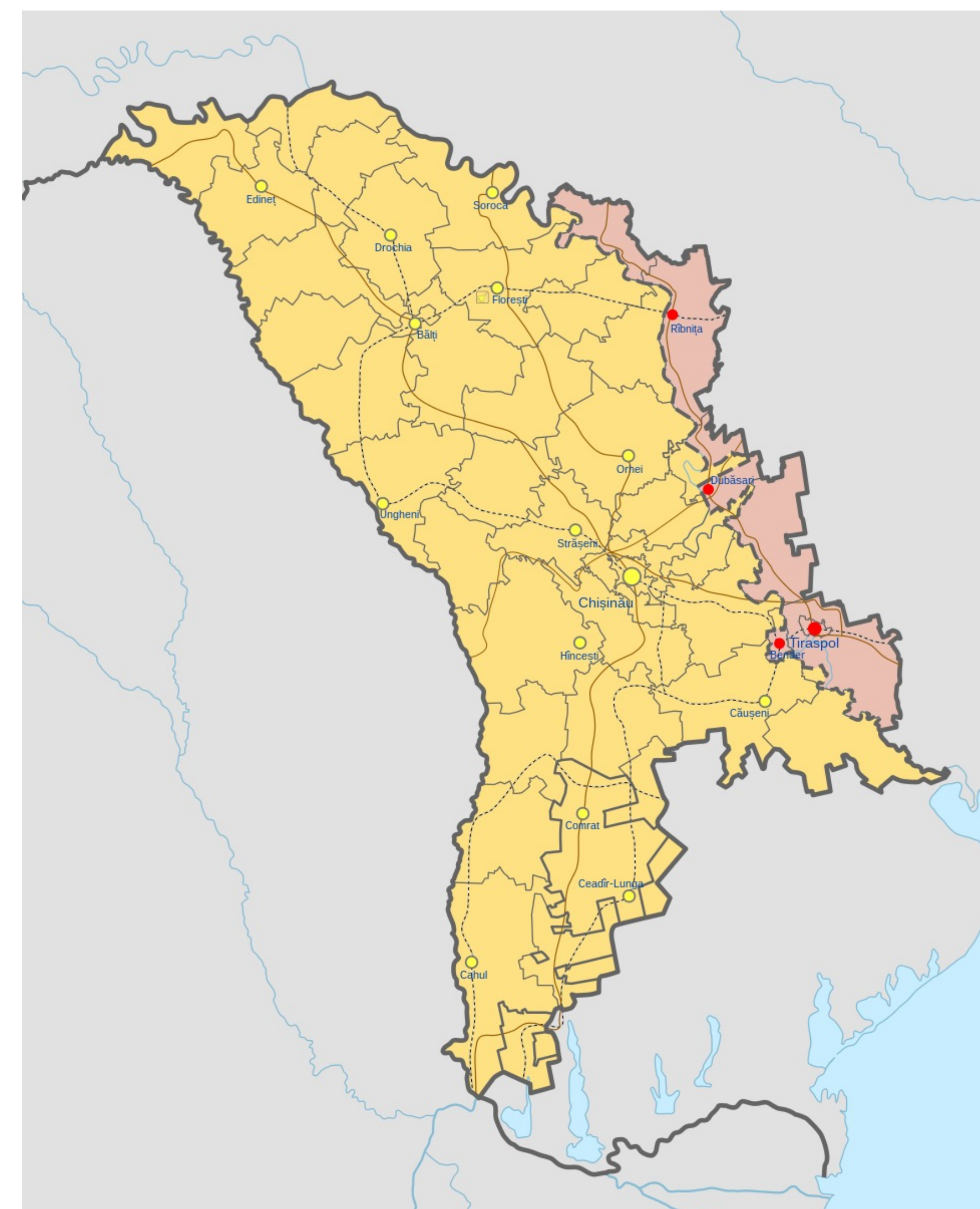
When the Moldovan Supreme Soviet declared local sovereignty in the summer of 1990, the Transnistrians in turn declared the independence of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic in September. Through 1991, the PMR authorities evicted political authorities loyal to Chisinau using equipment from the Soviet Union's formidable 14th Army.



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Ethnic Conflict? No.

In 1989, ethnic Moldovans comprised 64.5% of the 4.33 million inhabitants of Moldova, with Ukrainians and Russians consisting of 13.8% and 13.0% of the population respectively. In Transnistria, however, Ukrainians and Russians comprised 53% of the 546,000 inhabitants of Transnistria in 1989, while ethnic Moldovans made up 40% of the population.



However, despite the claims of Russian and Romanian nationalists, the Transnistrian conflict is not an ethnic conflict between the Slavic minorities and the Romanians.

Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians fought on both sides of the Transnistrian conflict. According to Charles King, outside Transnistria, the Slavic peoples in Moldova “have displayed little affinity for the aims of the PMR leadership.”

Intellectuals and politicians influenced and utilized popular fervor for career purposes.

The Russian minority exerted a strong cultural and political influence in Transnistria due to Sovietization. Bessarabian Moldovan politicians saw the opportunity to seize influence from the hitherto politically dominant Transnistrians during the 1989 cultural movement.

