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Police vs. Party? Institutional Hierarchies and Agency in Soviet Moldavia, 1944–1952

Igor Cașu 

Faculty of History and Philosophy, State University of Moldova, Chișinău, 60 A., Mateevici St., MD–2009, Chisinau, Moldova
i.casu@usm.md

This paper addresses an under-researched topic in Soviet post-war history. It is about institutional hierarchies in a newly annexed Western borderland based on recently disclosed archival materials from Chișinău (including ex-KGB and MVD) and Moscow depositories. In contrast to all-Union institutional practices, the Moldavian SSR's case study shows that the party was hardly a hegemonic institution in late Stalinism. Using *kompromat* and inside information, the political police (NKGB-MGB) controlled the party institution. In contrast to the Baltic republics, Soviet Moldavia was headed by weak first secretaries appointed with the connivance of local police. Agency is an essential variable in explaining the dynamics of institutional design and hierarchies in Soviet peripheries in late Stalinism. Political police's predominance in this period is explainable as Bessarabia – mostly part of Soviet Moldavia – was a contested territory between Romania and the Soviet Union and hence the need to establish a more repressive policy to counteract the mass expectations of a regime change. I also argue that the realities of the immediate post-war Soviet Moldavia do not fit the conclusions of a recent book on 'substate dictators' by Yoram Gorzliki and Oleg Khlevniuk (2020).

On 17 November 1938, Stalin ordered the end of the mass operations, known as the Great Terror or Great Purges (1937–8). Scapegoating police, he appealed implicitly to the party to take control over the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).¹ Purportedly, the party had to regain its hegemonic position in the Soviet institutional structure. Punishments in what has been aptly described as a 'purge of the purgers' included death sentences or prison terms for Nikolai Yezhov, the chief of the NKVD, and his appointees in the centre and peripheries.² In January 1939, Stalin sent another letter to the regional party bosses to moderate the party's wrath against his henchmen accused of indiscriminate violence against the arrested and cases of mass fabrication. He stated that the all-Union Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party allowed using violence, though only against the obvious (*yavnyye*) enemies of the people. However, it is common knowledge that physical violence was not an isolated phenomenon but employed on a mass level during 1937–8.³ Stalin implied that the party should not take *literally* what he said a few months earlier. The party should somewhat restrain the police but

¹ Vladimir N. Khaustov, Vladimir Naumov, and Natalia S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubyanka. Stalin i Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosbezopasnosti NKVD, 1937–1938* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Demokratsii, 2004), 607–11.

² Lynne Viola, 'Antisemitism in the "Jewish NKVD" in Soviet Ukraine on the Eve of World War II', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 34, 3 (2020), 393–408; Marc Junge, Lynne Viola and Jeff Rossman, eds., *Chekisty na skam'e podsudimyykh* (Moscow: Probel–2000, 2017). The volume contains a chapter on the Moldavian ASSR as well, which was a part of Ukraine from 1924 to 1940. The Moldavian SSR was created in August 1940 as a result of the merger between half of the interwar Moldavian ASSR and two-thirds of Bessarabia, the latter being annexed from Romania a month prior as a result of the Nazi–Soviet pact of 23 Aug. 1939.

³ Nikita Petrov and Mark Jansen, *Nikolai Yezhov – 'Stalinskii pitomets'* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009); Lynne Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial. Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

not reverse their roles.⁴ The war with Germany and its satellites would strengthen the security organs' position in the Soviet institutional assemblage by empowering them to employ the most radical measures to ensure victory over the deadly foreign enemy.⁵ After 1945, the post-1938 trend of making the party into the main actor in local Soviet politics resurfaced, though, as I argue, with rather mixed results. This is true in the case of Soviet Moldavia, which brings some new nuances to the conclusions of a recent otherwise very important book on regional power politics in the Soviet Union.⁶

This article aims to shed new light on post-war institutional hierarchies at the regional level, forever changed by the experiences of both the Great Terror and the Great Patriotic War. I argue that the political police (MGB) had a hegemonic role in Soviet Moldavia's institutional design from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s not only because of the specific conditions wrought by the war, combatting war collaborators in the territory of a former Nazi ally (Romania), but also because of the strong personality of the local MGB chief, Iosif Lavrent'evich Mordovets. The issue of institutional hierarchies was addressed in a limited fashion concerning both the 1930s and immediate post-war years. Despite focusing exclusively on the all-Union level and not the republics or regions, Oleg Khlevniuk does convincingly reveal how the party's supreme body, the Politburo and Stalin personally, dominated the main policy issues during the second interwar decade. In turn, the war and the enormity of his formal obligations at various institutions forced Stalin somewhat reluctantly to delegate power to his trusted persons. After 1945, this model continued, even though the aged Stalin grew suspicious of everyone and often reshuffled cadres to ensure his personal dictatorship.⁷ In turn, David Shearer and Paul Hagenloh explained how, by controlling the political (or security) and civil police, the *vozhd'* (or supreme leader) secured the party's indisputable hegemonic role in the institutional make-up of the Soviet Union.⁸ For the post-war period, Yoram Gorlizki sheds new light on the Politburo and Stalin's role in the decision-making process, including in their relation to the political police.⁹ Vladimir Khaustov dealt with the relationship between the political and civil police and the party from 1917 to 1953. He argues that the relation between the party and the NKVD was established by a Politburo secret decision of 15 July 1934, which was never formalised by the Council of Ministers, i.e. it existed outside the state's legal framework.¹⁰

The regional police, in turn, as James Harris put it, had a dual subordination, both to the centre and to the local party organisation and its leaders.¹¹ This is a useful observation, and, as I will argue in the case of the immediate post-war Soviet Moldavia, the dynamics of dual subordination varied according to numerous factors. It depended on structural factors to an extent, but more important was the agency of the local elite.¹² My article seeks to elaborate on the landmark work of Yoram

⁴ V. N. Khaustov, V. Naumov and N.S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubyanka. Stalin i NKVD–NKGB–GUKR 'SMERSH', mart 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Materik & Fond Demokratiia, 2006), 14–15.

⁵ Vladimir Iampolskii et al., eds, *Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, vol. 1–8 (Moscow: Rus', 1995–2008).

⁶ Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Substate Dictatorship. Networks, Institutional Change in the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

⁷ Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and His Inner Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). On Second World War developments, O. Khlevniuk, 'Soviet People's Commissariats and Decentralization of Management of the Economy during the Great Patriotic War', *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 90, 5 (2020), 537–47.

⁸ Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police. Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–41* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009), 196–226; David Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism. Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 20–5, 126–9, 181–3, 233–7, 291–9.

⁹ Yoram Gorlizki, 'Stalin's Cabinet: The Politburo and Decision Making in the Post-War Years', *Europe–Asia Studies*, 53, 2 (2001), 291–312.

¹⁰ Vladimir Khaustov, 'Razvitie sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: 1917–1953 gg', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42, 2–4 (2001), 357–74 (358–9).

¹¹ James Harris, 'Dual Subordination? The Political Police and the Party in the Urals, 1917–1953', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42, 2–4 (2001), 423–46.

¹² I mean by agency the capacity possessed by people to act on their own volition understood as arising from and relative to the options made available by a person's position in a political system and society. See more in Ivan Karp, 'Agency and Social Theory: A Review of Anthony Giddens', *American Ethnologist*, 13, 1 (1986), 131–7.

Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, which examines regional dictatorships in the Soviet Union from the late Stalinist period up to the 1970s. This recently published contribution represents a breakthrough in the literature on Soviet regional and republican politics and substate authoritarianism across various political regimes in the twentieth century. It can serve as a platform for verifying and extending a solid theoretical design, although based on a rather limited number of case-studies. The authors' assumptions, however, do not fit the realities of the immediate post-war Soviet Moldavia. In fact, they exclude from their analysis Soviet Moldavia and many other union republics altogether. Contrary to Gorlizki and Khlevniuk's conclusions, for most of Stalin's latter years, the role of 'substate dictator' in Soviet Moldavia was played by the local MGB chief rather than the republican party leader. The authors themselves reckoned that their source base is limited as a whole to party archives, including that on the reconstitution of party-police relations.¹³

In particular, I will concentrate on the interaction between four leading republican-level institutions during two critical periods in the immediate post-war years – first, during the famine of 1946–7, and second, during the mass pre-collectivisation drive and the deportations of 1949. These institutions are the party, the government, civil police (NKVD/MVD) and political police (NKGB/MGB). The primary purpose of this article is to look at how these institutions cooperated, competed and even clashed over the implementation of various policies, especially those implying the use of violence and repression. To a lesser extent, I will also refer to other instances when the interplay between institutions resulted in tensions or disagreements concerning implementing a given policy.

The Moldavian MGB (political or security police, 1946–53) and the MVD (civil or regular police since 1946) submitted reports to both higher officials in Moscow and the republican party-state leadership. What in fact was dual subordination, or rather double oversight, offered the opportunity for independent action by the MGB and MVD. Communication between the MGB and MVD, on the one hand, and party, on the other, had its peculiarities. Usually, only the first secretary of the Central Committee (CC) had access to the top-secret information produced by the political and civil police. Moreover, the most sensitive reports to the republican boss were returned immediately to the MGB or the MVD, without copies remaining at the party headquarters.¹⁴

The local party institution in Soviet Moldavia itself, formally responsible for coordinating all institutions' activity on the ground, was supervised by the Bureau of the CC of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party for Moldavia (All-Union C(b)P or Moscow Bureau for Moldavia). This bureau was established in March 1945 and disbanded in April 1949. As Elena Zubkova argued for the Baltic republics, Moscow's bureaus were established in areas where the local authorities did not entirely control the situation,¹⁵ and one may add, in sensitive areas where a direct oversight of the local elites was needed. According to its statute, it doubled and overlapped with the local CC departments. All its decisions were mandatory for the republican CC. The Moscow Bureau in Moldavia included a special

¹³ Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Substate Dictatorship*, 1–8, 24. The main arguments of this article were formulated and developed before the above-mentioned book had been published. The first draft of the paper was presented at a conference organised by Georgetown University in early April 2020, while the book was out months later, in September 2020. I myself, in turn, had access to both civil and political police archives preserved in Chişinău depositories.

¹⁴ The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republic of Moldova, former MVD of Moldavian SSR (hereafter AMAIRM-MVD), Fond 16, Delo 1, List 47; Delo 48 (Osobaia papka Ministra MVD MSSR); The Archive of Social-Political Organization of the Republic of Moldova (hereafter AOSPRM), Fond 51, Opis' 4, Delo 51, *Spetssoobshchennia, spravki i perepiska s Ministerstvom Gosbezopasnosti MSSR*, 14.01.1946–21.12.1946; 5, 70, *Perepiska s s Ministerstvom Gosbezopasnosti MSSR*, 15.01.1946–30.12.1947; 71, *Perepiska s Ministerstvom Vnutrennikh Del MSSR*, 14.01.1947–29.12.1947; 72, *Perepiska s MVD MSSR*, 21.02.1947–23.12.1947; 7, 101, *Spravki i perepiska s MGB, MVD, Ministerstvom Justitsii, organami prokuratury i Verkhovnym Sudom MSSR*, 31.01.1948–06.12.1948; 187; 9, 54, *Perepiska s MGB, MVD, gorodskimi i rayonnymi prokuraturami MSSR*, 06.01.1950–22.12.1950.

¹⁵ Valeriu Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă, 1940–1953* (Chişinău: Cartier, 2011), 130–57. In April 1949–July 1950, the Moscow bureau was transformed into the institution of the plenipotentiary, with a smaller personnel and limited prerogatives. Similar bureaus functioned in the Baltic republics in 1944–7. Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kremli'* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008), 139–45.

representative of the Soviet Union's MGB and MVD, who, in turn, was charged with supervising and coordinating the activity of both the political and the civil police. Nikolai Golubev, who filled in this position for three years (1945–7), seems not to have had sufficient authority, the personal capacity or networks in Moscow to dominate the republican police institutions.¹⁶ In many instances, his power was challenged by the shrewder and better-connected Iosif Mordovets, a former SMERSH¹⁷ officer. Mordovets was the longstanding head of Soviet Moldavia's state secret police and the only republican official to serve without interruption from 1944 well into the post-Stalin period, up to 1955.¹⁸ He was, for that matter, a 'Moldavian Beria', either participating in or coordinating all repressive campaigns in post-war Moldavia. Lucky for him, he avoided the fate that befell others associated with Lavrenti Beria or Viktor Abakumov.¹⁹

There were tensions not only between the local party (including their representatives from Moscow) and the local MGB chief, but also between the political and civil police. This competition echoes the interwar squabbles between the *militia*, i.e. NKVD, and the political police, the *Cheka*, and later the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate), which lasted until their fusion in 1934. These conflicts continued up to the Soviet collapse in 1991. The *chekists*, or secret police, pretended they were better educated, had a purer ideological background and purportedly dealt with fundamental issues, like catching spies and saboteurs, terrorists and political enemies. Their condescending view of the *militia* was grounded in the latter's specialisation in non-state security issues such as petty thefts, hooliganism, illegal trade, embezzlement, robbery – in a word, in ordinary crime and public order policing. In practice, however, the civil police dealt with political issues as well and the dividing line between social order and state security was blurred.²⁰

The political police's weight in the institutional structure of the Soviet regime in Soviet Moldavia is understandable for various reasons. The NKGB/MGB had its network of agents in every government agency. This network had the aim to prevent financial irregularities, stealing, and embezzlement. The political police also approved the persons responsible for protecting state secrets in all state institutions. Thus, the heads of the secret departments existing within state agencies and organisations acted as informal political police agents.²¹ In this way, the political police held substantial leverage over the party and governmental institutions and, indeed, could easily blackmail their representatives.

Moreover, the MGB's sixth department, charged with the protection of the party leaders, in reality had them under surveillance. In Lithuania, First Secretary Antonas Sniečkus, an authoritative party leader highly valued by Moscow, gave up the MGB protection precisely for that reason. In Soviet Moldavia, no party leader even dared to raise this question.²² Even though both party leaders in Moldavia and Lithuania had formally the same status in their own republics, agency is essential in explaining the difference in dealing with local republican political police.

¹⁶ Nikita Petrov and Konstantin Skorkin, eds., *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941* (Moscow: Zven'ya, 1999), 137–8; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 196–7.

¹⁷ The Soviet military counterintelligence and repressive organ established in April 1943 and disbanded in May 1946.

¹⁸ Pavel Moraru, *Serviciile secrete și Basarabia. Dicționar, 1918–1991* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2008), 162–4.

¹⁹ Lavrenti Beria was appointed deputy chief of the all-Union NKVD in September 1938 and head of the NKVD two months later, serving until December 1945. Between December 1945 and March 1953, he was deputy chairman of the Soviet Union's government (Council of Ministers since March 1946) in charge of state security. He was executed in December 1953. Viktor Abakumov was Beria's rival, head of the SMERSH (1943–6) and chief of the MGB (1946–51). He was executed in December 1954.

²⁰ ASISRM-KGB, Delo po operatsii IUG, 46–7, 78; AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 86, 60–1; Shearer, *Policing*, 64–93, Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police*, 195–226.

²¹ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 45, 5–10, *Dokladania zapiska 'O sostoiianii sekretno-mobilizatsionnogo Deloproizvodstva i sokhrannosti gostain v Narkomatakh i Upravleniakh Moldavskoi SSR'*; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 200–2.

²² Marius Tărăță, Lilia Crudu, et al., eds., *Instituțiile și nomenclatura sovietică și de partid din RASSM și RSSM, 1924–1956* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2017), 248; ASISRM-KGB, *Sovershenno Sekretnye prikazy NKGB-MGB MSSR za 1946 g.*, 6, Delo 5, f. 118; 6, 6, 35; Pocius, ed., *Lietuvos*, 151–53; Zubkova, *Pribaltika*, 144.

To better understand the specificity of the Moldavian case, I draw some parallels with new Soviet territories such as the Baltic republics, especially with Lithuania and old Soviet territories, like Azerbaijan, and a few Russian regions such as Sverdlovsk, Pskov and Chelyabinsk. In addition to the above-mentioned factors shaping the specificities of the Moldavian case, one should also take into account the fact historical Bessarabia (mostly part of Soviet Moldavia, now the Republic of Moldova) has been the apple of discord in Romanian-Russian/Soviet relations. The majority of the population then and now speaks Romanian, but the sense of national identity remains confused.²³ The Soviet border guards on the Prut River, the newly Soviet-Romanian border, were ordered to execute anyone trying to cross into Romania during the 1946–7 famine. As Colonel Vladimir Ashakhmanov, the main perpetrator of these executions, reckoned, the harsh measures were taken ‘to teach a lesson’ to the Bessarabians and ‘frighten them to death’,²⁴ i.e. to make them understand their inclusion in the Soviet Union is for good and cannot be reversed. The aim of the Soviet nationalities policy in Soviet Moldavia was to create a new nation and build a new language, an endeavour which has been largely compromised by the Khrushchev *otstepel’* (thaw) in the late 1950s–early 1960s.²⁵

Institutional and Bureaucratic Tensions in 1944–5

The military operations in Soviet Moldavia in March–August 1944 witnessed cooperation, but also tensions and even open conflicts between various institutions. In issues pertaining to crimes committed by the Soviet soldiers, the party and civil police were aligned against the Red Army and political police. September 1944, when the capital Chişinău was reoccupied, witnessed a growing conflict between the party and local city government on the one hand, and the republican government, as well as civil and political police on the other. As war operations ended and Soviet-type pacification ensued, one can notice the political police trying to avoid a collision with the party by being more cooperative while also trying to control it. Meanwhile, in contrast, the civil police became more antagonistic to the party. The demise of the NKVD chief in early 1946 at the initiative of the republic’s party leadership probably persuaded the MGB chief to be more cautious, avoiding overt conflicts with the party.

In the spring of 1944, after crossing the Dniester River, the party organs and the Red Army worked together at coordinating certain activities determined by the development of war operations. On 5 May 1944, an operation to evacuate the population inhabiting a 25 km strip close to the frontline in central Bessarabia was launched. About 265,000 persons from sixteen districts were displaced, which was a common occurrence during the war. It aimed at protecting the population from the enemy artillery attacks but was also necessary for tactical reasons, such as planning deception operations in the wake of an offence. The task of protecting peasant households and property in the evacuated areas fell to the Red Army. Still, in many instances, whole villages were subject to all-out robbery and destruction by the Soviet soldiers and officers for reasons not connected in any way to the war effort. Nikita Salogor, the *ad interim* republican party leader, was informed in detail about these transgressions by Mikhail Markeyev, head of Soviet Moldavia’s NKVD (civil police until March 1946). Salogor sent several protests to General Ivan Susaykov, a member of the second Ukrainian Front’s War Council.²⁶ As the latter did not react, Salogor sent a letter to Malenkov, asking for the offenders to be punished, but also to no avail. However, in a few cases after Beria informed Stalin, some measures

²³ The best on this subject is Andrei Cusco, *A Contested Borderland: Competing Russian and Romanian Visions of Bessarabia (Late 19th–Early 20th Centuries)* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2017), and Charles King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

²⁴ AOSPRM, 51, 5, 84, 85–91.

²⁵ Igor Caşu, ‘The Quiet Revolution: Revisiting the National Identity Issue in Soviet Moldavia at the Height of Khrushchev’s Thaw (1956)’, *Euxeinos*, 12, 5–6 (2014), 77–91.

²⁶ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 73, 24–27, *Informatsiia o sostoianii okhrany imushchestva, zhilykh i nadvornykh postroyek, ostavlennykh khrety’anami payonov Moldavskoi SSR, otseleennyimi iz 25-kilometrovoy prifrontovoi polosy*; 51, 2, 47, 67–69, *Postanovlenie*

were taken, even though the exact results are unknown.²⁷ In other incidents, the Red Army's notorious counterintelligence department, the SMERSH, interrogated several transgressors involved in robbery of local peasants.²⁸ However, these actions were the exception rather than the rule.

Most of the Red Army's criminal behaviour toward the local population remained unpunished. The disdainful attitude of the Red Army toward the local communities was far from unique, nor was it limited to Bessarabia or the non-Russian areas as a whole. Stalin himself was known to be rather lenient toward crimes committed by his soldiers.²⁹ What was peculiar about crossing the Dniester into Bessarabia was that, for the first time, the Red Army entered the territory of a Nazi ally who fought against the Soviet Union. Special orders were given to the Red Army before entering Bessarabia, asking the military to behave appropriately. However, this did not make much of a difference.³⁰

One of the reasons behind these opposing institutional approaches in 1944 was that the party authorities did not want to alienate further the population than was already the case. Simultaneously, the military had its priorities and did not feel bound to consider the population's susceptibilities. Thus, the republic's party institution, as well as its civil police, cared to a much greater extent about the local population's perception of the incoming Soviet regime than did the Red Army officials, who did not feel connected to any particular territory. Regarding the crimes perpetrated by the Red Army, the NKVD shared the local party's position.³¹ The latter would become, however, antagonistic to the party on other issues after the capital Chișinău was taken from German forces later that summer for reasons that will be explained further.

The return of Soviet authorities in 1944 led to the emergence of tensions between civil police on the one hand, and republican party institutions and Chișinău's *Gorispolkom* (city government) on the other. After the successful conclusion of the Jassy-Chișinău operation in late August 1944, the first arrivals to Soviet Moldavia's capital following the Red Army units were the NKVD staff, while the NKGB reached county and district centres. The party leadership arrived in the capital city a week and a half later. Better equipped with transport means, the NKVD came earlier and seized entire streets in the downtown area, not allowing the representatives of other institutions to get in, including high party officials looking for apartments. More or less sophisticated negotiations, and at times mutual threats involving armed guards on both sides, were employed to reach a compromise. An official from the city military commissariat, for instance, was desperate to get a piano, which had already been inventoried by the financial organs. To this end, he used two armed guards, but ultimately the militia resorted to force to confiscate the piano and returned it to city officials.³² The illegal confiscation of property and apartments from the evacuated population reached a massive scale. The political police would frequently threaten residents outright to give up their goods, such as furniture, carpets, and sometimes their own houses. The redistribution of the living spaces especially in the urban areas was an intrinsic and essential part of reshaping the power relations after the October 1917 Revolution

no. 037 Voennogo Soveta 3-go Ukrainского Fronta 'Ob otselenii grazhdanskogo naseleniia iz 25-ti prifrontovoi polosy' ot 5 maia 1944 g.'

²⁷ Khaustov et al., eds., *Lubyanka, mart 1939–mart 1946*, 441.

²⁸ Alexandr Livshits, Igor' Orlov eds., *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoye soznanie, 1939–1945* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), 386.

²⁹ Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London: Penguin, 1967), 70–3; Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (London: Viking, 2002), 24–38.

³⁰ Iz'yaslav Levit et al., eds., *Moldavskaia SSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soyuz, 1941–1945*, vol. 1 (Chișinău: Știința, 1975), 328.

³¹ The NKGB seemingly sided with the Red Army on this issue, albeit striving to combat various crimes amongst its own ranks. ASISRM-KGB [The Archive of the Service for Information and Security of the Republic of Moldova, ex-KGB of MSSR], *Delo s Direktivami NKGB MSSR za 1944 g.*, 6, 1, 17, [Prikaz narodnogo komissara gosbezopasnosti Moldavskoi SSR/Mordovets/ o inventarizatsii imushchestva], 29.05.1944; *Delo s Sovershenno Sekretnymi i po lichnomu sostavu prikazy NKGB MSSR za 1944 g.*, 8, 27, 22–23, *Prikaz NKGB MSSR 'O sneatii s raboty i predaniia sudu starshego sledovatelea Sledstvennogo Otdela NKGB Sheimana E. Ia.'*, 30.05.1944.

³² AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 23–31, *Spravka o narushenii postanovleniia Kishinevskogo Gorispolkoma i Gorkoma KP(b) Moldavii ot 25 avgusta 1944 goda po zaniatiiu pomeschenii dlya uchrezhdenii i zhilykh domov.*

and again in 1944 and the following years, especially in the newly annexed Soviet territories.³³ As more than half of the housing in Chişinău had been destroyed by the war, the struggle for a living space was marked by stiff competition.³⁴

By these brutal actions, the NKVD and the NKGB disregarded the joint decision of the Chişinău *Gorispolkom* and *Gorkom* (city party organisation) issued on 25 August 1944, concerning the distribution of available housing. That seems like a contradiction to the way the NKVD (as mentioned above) sided with party leadership in 1944 in combatting Red Army crimes, including robberies, theft and destruction of homes belonging to the local peasants. The explanation could be that the NKVD as an institution was not interested in seizing peasant property in the spring and summer of 1944, but arriving in the capital late August–early September, it became keenly interested in seizing as much property as possible in order to satisfy the needs of its own cadres.³⁵

The Moldavian Central Committee (CC) tried to act as an arbiter in this delicate situation when every institution was striving to provide its employees with the best possible living conditions in a conquered city. The party depicted the NKVD as the main culprit since the latter's attitude was deemed provocative toward the city authorities and financial organs and concerning the high party officials. Markeyev, the local NKVD head, ignored and rejected his subordination to both state and party decisions. He prohibited the NKVD party secretary, Kabluk – a Gogolian name – from summoning a meeting at the NKVD headquarters meant to discuss the transgressions revealed by the *Gorispolkom* and *Gorkom*. Given the situation, Salogor, the *ad interim* republican party first secretary, decided to dismiss Markeyev from his position. A number of his subordinates were fired and reprimanded, while others were expelled from the party. Markeyev probably enjoyed powerful protection in Moscow and thus would remain in office for more than a year. In March 1946, he was transferred to a less prestigious position, the same post in the Mari ASSR, where he stayed until 1949. Ultimately, demoted and appointed as deputy head of a GULAG camp meant a humiliation in his career.³⁶ Markeyev's fate might have signaled other quarrelsome local leaders about the power that the party chief enjoyed despite all odds. It might well have urged Mordovets, Soviet Moldavia's MGB chief, to gather *kompromat*³⁷ on Salogor, as one day the latter could ask for his demotion too.

In trying to reassess the leading role of the party, Salogor identified certain individuals in the republican government deemed responsible for the recent crisis linked to the mass confiscation of property. He mainly targeted Tikhon Constantinov, the chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars, and the latter's deputy, Il'in. Salogor pointed to the government's decision, addressed to the People's Commissariats and republican-level agencies and organisations, instructing them to confiscate furniture and other goods from houses left behind by their evacuated owners (*brosovye doma*). According to Salogor, this decision triggered widespread looting and plundering of state, public and private property.³⁸ It was this criticism, among others, that triggered Constantinov's removal from the head of the Soviet Moldavia government in July 1945 and his replacement with Nicolae

³³ It was also a way to punish those who belonged to the wealthier classes or, after 1944–5, war collaborators. See more in Mark Meerovich, *Nakazanie zhilishcem. Zhilishchnaia politika v SSSR ka sredstvo upravleniia liudmi, 1917–1937* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008). For the post-war, see Rebecca Manley, '“Where Should We Resettle the Comrade Next?” The Adjudication of Housing Claims and the Construction of the Post-war Order', in Julianne Fürst, ed., *Late Stalinist Russia. Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London: Routledge, 2006), 233–45; Vanessa Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres. L'épuration soviétique, 1941–1955* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015), 289, 293, 437, 438, 443–8.

³⁴ AOSPRM, F. 51, op. 2, 62, 23–31.

³⁵ The fact that Chişinău was one of the most destroyed cities due to war operations made the competition for housing among the elites the more stringent. AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 36, *Postanovleniia Kishinevskogo Gorispolkoma i Gorkoma KP(b) Moldavii ot 25 avgusta 1944*; Nauchnyi Arkhiv Instituta Istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk [Scientific Archive of the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences], hereafter NA IRI RAN, 2, razd. IV, 21, 13, 5–6.

³⁶ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 50–5, *O narushenii postanovleniia TsK KP(b) Moldavii o poryadke perezda iz g. Soroki v g. Kishinev*; Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil*, 325–6.

³⁷ Compromising information collected for use in blackmailing, discrediting, or manipulating someone, typically for political purposes.

³⁸ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 52, *O narushenii...*

Coval.³⁹ Ironically, the latter would become Salogor's nemesis and substitute in the republican party leadership a year later, in mid-summer 1946.

Salogor informed Georgi Malenkov, Stalin's lieutenant at the all-Union party headquarters, responsible for coordinating republican and regional party organisations, about all these events in detail, including the institutions and officials involved. However, the Moldavian *ad interim* party leader remained silent about the republican NKGB transgressions, probably because he did not want to antagonise the republican political police's chief and because he needed the latter's support in enforcing the party's orders.⁴⁰ Besides, in contrast to Markeyev, Iosif Mordovets, the NKGB head, promised to look into the allegations concerning his subordinates and, in general, showed more understanding toward the party's concerns. Simultaneously, for very practical reasons, Mordovets was aware that, during the disorders and mayhem of the post-war period, solving crucial issues relating to the smooth functioning of his institution, such as securing electricity supply, needed the party's support.⁴¹ The political police claimed hegemony over the party but did try to be co-operant since the party was officially the leading institution.

In fact, however, the MGB leadership maintained a peculiar attitude toward the party, at times imitating subordination while simultaneously challenging the party's authority. In April 1944–January 1945, the local party and the party's youth organisation (the Komsomol) recommended many individuals to be recruited by the NKGB, but only five of them were accepted.⁴² Mordovets, NKGB local chief, himself a former SMERSH officer during the war, would prefer to hire the likes of him, or, in any case, officers with experience in the political police.⁴³ That was an affront to the republican party organisation and its leader.

Markeyev, the local NKVD head, in his turn was at times more overtly antagonistic, even though his institution was, in many respects, closer to the position of the party. Many of the skirmishes involving the latter stemmed from the division of confiscated property. Tensions were compounded by Markeyev's extravagant taste. Like most of his contemporaries placed in high positions (Zhukov and others included), he enriched himself from trophies of war. He came to Chișinău in late August 1944 from Soroca (Soviet Moldavia's temporary capital since March) with several trucks loaded with various goods.⁴⁴ Initially a *chekist* (since 1929) and placed in charge of the NKVD in the Moldavian SSR since April 1944, Markeyev was seemingly a proponent of softer methods fighting *kulaks* (rich peasants)⁴⁵ and all kinds of internal enemies. After reading the reports sent by his subordinates in the provinces, he left comments on the margins that do not resemble the 'iron' Bolshevik determination required of a Stalinist. For instance, in August 1945, an NKVD report from Orhei county criticised the local party and state authorities for not exerting enough pressure on the peasantry in fulfilling the grain collection plan. Bad weather reduced the harvest for cereals to only 2–5 quintals per hectare. *Kulaks* and other anti-Soviet elements allegedly embarked on sabotage of the state plan and, thus, had to be punished. Markeyev, however, disagreed with his subordinate, commenting that the latter was wrong and, given the circumstances, 'even a great patriot could do nothing' to

³⁹ Constantinov was criticised also by Fyodor Butov, the chief of Moscow Bureau in Soviet Moldavia. Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 157–8.

⁴⁰ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 62–9, *Dokladnaia zapiska sekretariu TsK VKP(b) tovarishchu Malenkovu*; 24–5, 33, *Spavka o narushenii...*

⁴¹ AOSPRM, 51, 2, 45, 18, 23, [*Soobshchenie*] Mordovets [NKGB] Salogoru[TsK KP(b)M], 21.09.1944; 01.11.1944.

⁴² Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 185.

⁴³ ASISRM, *Priказы po lichnomu sostavu za 1945 g.*, 8, 1, 14, 36, 86, 113, 120–1, 178, 135–6, 150–2, 158, 163–4, 173, 175–83, 195–7, 213; *Priказы po lichnomu sostavu za 1946 g.*, 6, 5, 164–94; *Priказы po lichnomu sostavu za 1947 g.*, 8, 9, 2, 6–10, 30–43, 51–2, 56, 59–60, 69–70, 87, 97–8, 110–6, 124–31.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's General: Georgy Zhukov* (New York: Random House, 2012), 22, 221; Nikita Petrov, *Ivan Serov. Pervyi predsedatel' KGB* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 67–70; AOSPRM, 51, 2, 62, 33–4, *Dokladnaia zapiska [o zapreshchenii vyvoza za predely g. Soroki mebeli]*; 59–61, *Dokladnaia zapiska [o faktov grubeshiego narusheniia zakonnosti rabotnikami NKVD]*.

⁴⁵ Moshe Lewin, 'Who Was the Soviet Kulak?', Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System. Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: The New Press, 1985), 121–41.

improve the situation regarding the grain collection.⁴⁶ In a report to the *ad interim* first secretary of the CC of the Communist Party of Moldavia that Nikita Salogor sent a few weeks later, Markeyev assumed the attitude of a 'true' Bolshevik regarding the crimes committed by the party-state elites. Markeyev left the final decision as to the measures to be taken in this regard to the Central Committee.⁴⁷ In this and many other instances, the *militia* head perceived the party as the hegemonic institution. During the famine years, this relationship would undergo some changes and variations.

The 1946–7 Famine and Its Impact on Institutional Hierarchies

The post-war Soviet famine has received little attention in post-Soviet and Western historiography alike. Triggered by several factors, such as the consequences of the war, a severe drought and state policies, it took the life of at least 1.2 million people. The famine hit Soviet Moldavia the hardest, registering the highest death toll, proportionally, among the Soviet republics (4.5 per cent, while Ukraine and Russia had lost 1 per cent and, respectively, 0.6 per cent of their population).⁴⁸ One of the reasons for the high rate of excess deaths was indifference to early signs of the coming mass human catastrophe. A clear-cut example of the state's failure during the pre-famine months was how the authorities dealt with hunger riots. In the spring of 1946, twenty-three documented cases of starving mobs attacking local state granaries were registered. The protesters aimed at getting grain by employing mostly non-violent means. They acted during daylight, with women dominating the protests. The phenomenon was similar to those recorded in the early 1930s in the context of collectivisation and conceptualised by Lynne Viola as *bab'y bunty* (women's riots).⁴⁹ While it is clear that the authorities, as a whole, failed to address the crisis adequately, the attitude of various institutions and officials inside these institutions toward the food riots varied substantially. In the end, the view of MGB and party hard-liners prevailed.⁵⁰

The MVD, under the new interior minister appointed in March 1946,⁵¹ Fyodor Tutushkin, like his predecessor Markeyev, continued to perceive the situation through a less ideological lens. In reports sent to Salogor, Tutushkin urged the party leadership to address the causes of the food riots, not the effects. In other words, he was insisting that one should not look exclusively for class enemies as the instigators of these incidents, but rather understand the underlying reasons and solve them – not identifying scapegoats. To be sure, Tutushkin stressed the fact that *kulaks* and other anti-Soviet elements participated as instigators in some cases, but by no means in all hunger riots. Tutushkin reported some incidents to his direct boss in Moscow, Sergei Kruglov. Still, the first and second-trimester reports on the dynamics of crime in Soviet Moldavia, sent to the MVD of the Soviet Union, do not mention anything at all about open non-violent attacks on grain storehouses.⁵² Thus, the militia seemed to convey the idea that hunger riots were illegal, but not outright criminal actions and hence did not have to be included in an overview of criminal activities. By emphasising this specific position concerning the food riots, Tutushkin predicted the transformation of open, non-violent protests into the underground, violent and criminal actions that would cause a lot of trouble for him and his subordinates on the ground. Both his approach and institutional agency explain his softer attitude toward the rioters. Tutushkin's premonitions came true later in the summer and fall of 1946 when he reported that 96.8 per cent of the 'new criminals' were

⁴⁶ AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 39, 132–3, *Dokladnaia zapiska o khode obmolota kolosovykh i vypolnenii plana khlebopostavok edinolichnym sektorom v Orgeevskom uезде na 20.08.1945.*

⁴⁷ AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 39, 151–2, *Dokladnaia zapiska o khode khlebozagotovok po Kagul'skomu uезdu na 05.09.1945.*

⁴⁸ Michael Ellman, 'The 1947 Soviet Famine and the Entitlement Approach to Famines', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 24, 5 (2000), 613.

⁴⁹ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 181–204.

⁵⁰ Valeriu Pasat, ed., *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldavii, 1940-e–1950-e* (Moscow: Terra, 1994), Document no. 6, *On the speech delivered at the meeting of MGB-MVD of MSSR officers [by N. Golubev]*, 231–3.

⁵¹ In March 1946, both all-Union and republican commissariats were renamed into ministries.

⁵² AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 26, 28–9, *Zapiska po VCh Ministru MVD SSSR tovarishchu Kruglovu, 03.05.1946*; 33, *Otchetnyi doklad MVD MSSR za pervyi kvartal 1946 g.*; 34, *Otchetnyi doklad MVD MSSR za vtoroi kvartal 1946 g.*

not recidivists, which meant that these people resorted to crime and violence because of food shortages.⁵³

The attitude of the top party leader toward the food riots was also lenient. In at least one instance, Salogor empathised directly with the rioters. He commented on the margins of an MVD report that people did not have any other choice but to rebel in the face of an approaching famine. In this case, the *ad interim* republican party head spoke in an un-Bolshevik⁵⁴ manner. In conjunction with other factors, this attitude contributed to his demotion in mid-July 1946. Salogor was never to return to a prominent party position, even at a district level. He received separate reports on the food riots from the political police, as well. These documents were returned to the MGB immediately and then sent to the institution's archive.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, however, these reports were destroyed in 1994, so it is impossible to recover Salogor's comments. Still, one can assume that he expressed the same position to the MGB as he did in the case of the MVD. If that was the case, the MGB and Mordovets personally could have been behind his demotion since the MGB's hard line on the food riots was radically different from Salogor's lenient approach. Besides, as noted above, Mordovets both loathed and feared Salogor as he might ask Moscow for his removal the way he asked earlier for Markeyev's. Another factor that might have triggered Salogor's demise was a memo sent to Stalin just three weeks before his demotion asking for territorial rearrangement with Ukraine, suggesting the local economy was disrupted by the November 1940 border settlement. Salogor argued, among others, that Soviet Moldavia lost the Black Sea shores and the Danube mouth areas delivering historically up to 40 per cent of the province's grain. This memo has been characterised as a manifestation of national communism. It was a symptom of the growing Soviet Moldavian nationalism acceptable to an extent if directed against the Romanian nationalism, but not the Ukrainian one. It seemed that Salogor was not very aware of those sensibilities to be raised in both Kiev and Moscow.⁵⁶ He also neglected the fact that Mordovets was Ukrainian and could sympathise with the Ukrainian cause rather than the Moldavian one.

Salogor's deviation from 'Bolshevik speak', and his border rearrangement issue with both Ukraine and Romania, was rather a good occasion for Mordovets to compromise him and trigger his removal. In a report sent in late April 1946 to Nikolai Golubev, the Moscow MGB-MVD representative, Mordovets criticised Salogor's passive approach to the food riots. He asked Golubev to exert some pressure on Salogor and the party leadership as a whole, via the Orgburo of the all-Union CC.⁵⁷ This instance unveils another mode of pressure exerted by the republican political police on its rival, the local party, involving the all-Union party institution. At the same time, no charge of nationalism was made against Salogor. In January 1947, half a year after his demotion, he still insistently asked his Moscow bosses to tell him why he was fired and so harshly downgraded in his status. The answer never came.⁵⁸

⁵³ AMAIRM-MVD), 16, 1, 39, 295, *Spetssoobshchenie o popytkakh razgrableniia skladov Zagotzerno v Orgeevskom in Benderskom uezdakh*, 02.05.1946; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 269–73.

⁵⁴ On speaking Bolshevik, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University Press of California, 1995), 198–237.

⁵⁵ AMAIRM-MVD), 16, 1, 39, 295, *Spetssoobshchenie o popytkakh razgrableniia skladov Zagotzerno v Orgeevskom in Benderskom uezdakh*, 02.05.1946; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 269–73.

⁵⁶ See more in Igor Cașu, Virgiliu Păslariuc, 'Moldavian SSR's Border Revision Question: From the Project of Greater Bessarabia to project "Greater Moldavia" and the Causes of Its Failure (1946)', *Archiva Moldaviae*, II (2010), 275–370 (documents in original Russian and Romanian translation, twenty-page introduction in Romanian and two-page summary in English). Salogor's stance resembles to a certain extent the position taken in the interwar years by other national-communists, such as Mir Said Sultan-Galiev and Mykola Skrypyuk. See more in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 229–30, 256, 307; 141, 147, 364, 371, 433–34.

⁵⁷ Pasat, *Trudnye*, 226–9.

⁵⁸ AOSPRM, 5, 5, 61, 85–6. The document represents a letter sent by Salogor to A. A. Kuznetsov, VKP(b)'s responsible for cadres' policy. Back in 2011, the late Moldovan historian Anton Moraru told me he asked Salogor personally why he was demoted in 1946. The answer was that the moustache-man, coded reference to Stalin, did not approve of him. The question why remains open.

The MVD itself had a different view on the food riots. Tutushkin, Markeyev's replacement at the MVD, insisted that criminality would increase if neglect of the food shortage issue continued. Indeed, criminal activity grew, not only among the destitute but also among the local party-state representatives.⁵⁹ According to some explicit evidence, arrests by the MVD of party members, including of those who stole in significant quantities, could not be enforced without the prior permission from the republican Party Central Committee and, usually, from the first secretary himself. It was a standard informal practice introduced in 1938 after the Great Terror and survived until at least the mid-1960s.⁶⁰ However, an exception to this rule applied for most of 1946 and 1947, at least on the local level. During these two years, the MVD made the fight against pilfering and stealing essential foodstuffs a top priority. Usually, reports sent to the first secretary of the party in this period are more informative and less reverent than during 'normal' years. In these dire straits, the chief of the civil police simply informed the party leadership about what was happening on the ground, without the usual questions or recommendations to the party regarding the arrest of a given offender, especially when somebody with a party card was involved. The MVD reports sent to the republican CC in 1946–7 also differ in other respects from the previous and following years. Besides, the local party chief, Nicolae Coval, who had been in office since mid-July 1946, was apparently never given timely updates on sensitive issues during the growing dearth and food shortages. For instance, only months after the fact was the republican party leadership informed by the military *prokuratura* (prosecutor) about the use of execution against people trying to cross into Romania during the height of the famine by border guards – under MVD authority.⁶¹ Here one sees then that the famine empowered the MVD. Rather than asking the advice of the party, they simply acted. Such was also the case during the Soviet famine of the late 1920s–early 1930s.⁶²

If the power of police, both civil and political, rose during the famine years, the party's declined. Officially the most important institution, the party struggled mightily to prove and defend that claim not only in regard to the police, but also to other powerful ministries that had dual oversight, one at the republican level, the other all-Union. For instance, as the famine unfolded, more and more parents left their children on the streets, hoping that the state would take care of them. To tackle this issue, the bureau of the CC adopted a decision to increase the number of orphanages (*detdoma*) and ordered the Ministry of Trade to secure the necessary amounts of food and other goods. However, the latter did not react for months, explaining that the all-Union Ministry had established strict limits on consumption. These orders came directly from the Kremlin and Stalin personally.⁶³ This case reflects the new institutional hierarchy that came into being as a result of the mounting crisis. Moldavia's Ministry of Trade took on a central role in determining the distribution of food according to the

⁵⁹ ANRM [The National Archive of the Republic of Moldova], R-1936, 1, 14, 412–5, *O razbazarivanii, khishcheniakh i porche khleba na zagotovitel'nykh punktakh Moldavskoi respublikanskoi kontory Iugotzerno Ministerstva Zagotovok Soiuzu SSR*. On the same phenomenon in other parts of the Soviet Union, see RGASPI [The Russian State Archive of Social-Political Organizations, ex-party archive of CPSU], 17, 122, 169, 1–13, *O zloupotrebleniakh na Borovskoi tekstil'noi fabrike Krasnyi Okt'iabr' Kaluzhskoi oblasti*, 33–35, *Spavka o proverke rabotnitsy Kushchevskogo zernozavoda Mikhailovoi Iu. N.*, 12.06.1946; 70–97, *O rezul'tatakh proverki zaiavlenii demobilizovavshikhsea*, 27.07.1946.

⁶⁰ AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 41, 74–76, *Spetssoobshchenie [o krazhakh rabotnikami Tiraspol'skogo konservnogo zavoda imeni 1 maia]*, 13.06.1946; AOSPRM, 51, 23, 319, 6–7, *Dokladnaia zapiska 'O sostoianii bor'by s prestupnost'iu i narushenii zakonnosti za 1-e polugodie 1963 goda [v Moldavskoi SSR]'*. On corruption broadly defined in late Stalinist period, see James Heinzen, *The Art of Bribe. Corruption under Stalin 1943–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁶¹ AOSPRM, 51, 5, 84, 85–91, *Informatsionnoe pis'mo [voennogo prokurora Voisk MVD MSSR]*; AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 59, 31–2, *Spetssoobshchenie o narushenii revoliutsionnoi zakonnosti nachal'nikom 22-go pogranichnogo otreada*, 11.03.1947; 40, *O vyborakh v Verkhovnyi Sovet Moldavskoi SSR*, 17.02.1947.

⁶² Robert W. Davies, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger. Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 144–81; Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe. Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 97–122; Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police*, 48–88; Shearer, *Policing*, 19–63.

⁶³ A. Țăranu et al., eds, *Golod v Moldove, 1946–1947* (Chișinău: Știința, 1993), 245–51; Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946–1947 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 32; Khlevniuk et al., *Politburo*, 221–5.

available amounts approved by all-Union Ministry, while the will of the local bureau of the CC was visibly downgraded. Likewise at the all-Union level, the famine years led to the diminution of the Council of Ministries' prerogatives, in favour of some of its constituents, like the Ministry of Food Reserves and the Ministry of Trade.⁶⁴

According to the number of rations each institution received, the famine also revealed the real hierarchy of institutions. Rations were not provided to the MVD. Tutushkin asked Moscow for an amount equivalent to the military. The MGB, in turn, had secured higher food rations for its employees before the famine started in the fall of 1946. As in the 1930s, the political police held a privileged position with regard to their civil police counterparts.⁶⁵ The party, for its part, did formally determine rations for state institutions and its nomenklatura. However, at the district level, these privileges were on paper alone. In reality, they too needed to fend for themselves in identifying provisions. Hence, the number of so-called excesses increased exponentially during the famine.⁶⁶

To make things more complicated, the republican MGB chief did not get along very well with the person appointed by Moscow to oversee the security issues in the all-Union Bureau for Moldavia. Indeed, relations between Mordovets and Golubev were far from harmonious and they clashed often. However, the disagreements were not related to policy but instead reflected personal animosities arising from the thorny question of who determined MVD-MGB policies in Soviet Moldavia. A case in point is the food riots, which Golubev blamed on the MGB's lack of preparedness and the sloppiness of its personnel, as well as on the machinations of class enemies, including *kulaks*, Moldo-Romanian nationalists and other anti-Soviet elements.⁶⁷ Yet, it was not Mordovets who was scapegoated for the food riots, but Salogor, the republican *ad-interim* party leader.

Collectivisation and the Mass Deportations of 1949

The collectivisation campaign and the mass deportations of 1949 are another critical instance where one can observe tensions between the party-state and the civil-political police, as well as their competing views, practices and their professional and institutional ethos.

The first document, implying that the *kulaks* of Soviet Moldavia would follow the same fate as their old Soviet counterparts two decades before, was adopted in mid-August 1947 by the Politburo in Moscow. Two weeks later, on 30 August 1947, it was copy-pasted by the Moldavian Council of Ministers and bureau of the CC. The decision decreed that peasants labelled as *kulaks* (according to purportedly objective and measurable criteria) were to pay increased taxes, aiming at destroying their economic independence and anticipating their subsequent liquidation as an inimical class.⁶⁸

Until the spring of 1949, on the eve of the deportations, the party and government focused on creating collective farms voluntarily. Formally, they were to avoid the use of coercive means. The peasants, however, did not rush to enter the *kolkhozes*. Some of them hoped a regime change was still possible,⁶⁹ others wanted to wait until the superior efficiency of the collective farm was proven rather than merely promised. Ad hoc squads on the district level, comprised of MVD, MGB, *prokuratura* and

⁶⁴ Ganson, *The Soviet Famine*, 33, 58.

⁶⁵ Shearer, *Policing*, 67; AOSPRM, 51, 4, 427, 25–27, *Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov MSSR i Biuro TsK KP(b) Moldavii 'Ob utverzhenii raspredeliia dopol'nitel'nogo pitaniia sovpartaktiva na 2-i kvartal i limitnykh promptovarnykh knizhek na 1946 g.'*; 46, *Rasporeazhenie no. 2703-r-s Soveta Ministrov MSSR 'Ob utverzhenii raspredeliia dopol'nitel'nogo pitaniia sovpartaktiva na dekabr' 1946 g.'*; 49–51, *Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov MSSR 'Ob utverzhenii raspredeliia dopol'nitel'nogo pitaniia sovpartaktiva na 1-i kvartal 1947 goda'*.

⁶⁶ Țăranu et al., *Golod v Moldove*, 311–3, 379–81.

⁶⁷ Pasat, *Trudnye*, 231–3, 228. For more on that see Igor Cașu, 'Do Starving People Rebel? Hunger Riots as Bab'y Bunty in Spring 1946 Soviet Moldavia and the Resistance Debate', *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2021, 3–47.

⁶⁸ AOSPRM, 51, 5, 22, 396–7, *O vyivlenii kulatskikh khoziaistv v uezdakh Moldavskoi SSR i oblozhenii ikh nalogami*, 30.08.1947.

⁶⁹ ASISRM-KGB, Delo po operatsii IUG, 100–1.

party representatives, similar to those previously employed during the grain collection campaigns, were sent to the villages to boost the rhythm of 'voluntary' collectivisation. Because forceful collectivisation was not on the agenda at the time, the central authorities did, in fact, react to the most outrageous incidents, often intervening on the victims' side. The Council of Ministers sent inspectors to document cases and punish perpetrators.⁷⁰

The first institution to openly raise the issue of collectivisation was the MVD. Tutushkin first sent a letter to Viktor Ivanov, the chairman of the bureau of the all-Union C(b)P for Moldavia, in early September 1948. The 'Moldo-Romanian *kulak* elements and speculators', he stated, 'intensified their violent activities against the party and government measures in the countryside during the recent period'. The MVD chief also stressed that attempts by authorities to kill such activists had increased during the voluntary collectivisation drive.⁷¹ A month later, Tutushkin sent a letter with almost the same text to his boss in Moscow, Kruglov. He mentioned about 15,000 *kulak* families and recommended that a third of them be deported for the collectivisation to succeed.⁷²

Mordovets, the MGB head, in turn, sent a letter to his direct superior, Viktor Abakumov, informing him that there was an agreement between the Moldavian bureau of the CC and the Politburo in Moscow to deport 8,000 families of *kulaks* and anti-Soviet elements from Soviet Moldavia. According to his estimates, this figure should have been higher, amounting to 9,259 families, i.e. 33,640 individuals in total. In fact, this number is a bit higher than the figure put forward by the republican party organisation and almost double compared to that of the MVD. The local bureau and the Politburo in Moscow endorsed the latter figure. Ultimately, it was to increase to 11,253 deported families, amounting to a total of 35,796 individuals, out of which 14,033 were women and 11,899 were children. The great bulk of those forcefully removed to Siberia and Kazakhstan were the *kulaks*, perceived as an obstacle in the radical, socialist reconstruction of the rural space. Sometimes the same *kulaks* were charged with nationalism and/or war collaboration with the enemy, Germans or Romanians. By removing the pan-Romanian elements, the Soviet regime embarked on creating new elites for the new would-be nation, Moldavia, different from and antagonistic to Romanians and close to Russians.⁷³

The differences between the MVD and MGB approach to deportations did not stop there. The heads of both police institutions blamed each other for the failures in carrying out instructions related to preparing and implementing the campaign. Indeed, the organisation and the execution of the entire operation were matters of contention. Particular emphasis was placed on the strict adherence to secrecy (*konspiratsiia*) so as not to tip anyone off to the coming operation, which would allow *kulaks* to evade forceful displacement.⁷⁴

All four leading institutions discussed in this article participated in the preparations and execution of the deportation campaigns. On paper, each institution had clearly defined responsibilities. In practice, however, things were more complicated. The identification, arrest, and transportation to railway stations of people to be deported on 6 July 1949 fell under the purview of the MGB. The MVD personnel were responsible for getting them onto railway cars, securing water barrels, collecting and gathering the axes and wood saws in the special luggage cars, transporting the deportees and feeding them until they reached their destination. These included the regions of Kurgan, Tyumen, Tomsk, Amur and Khabarovsk in Siberia and Djambul and Aktiubinsk in South Kazakhstan. The MGB coordinated the identification stage. The developing of deportees' lists was a complicated process, involving the

⁷⁰ Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 311. It was important for the collectivisation to start at the same time in all the newly annexed territories. Andrei Zhdanov, a secretary of all-Union CC, for instance, criticised the Estonian party organisation in February 1947 for starting collectivisation on their own. Zubkova, *Pribaltika*, 169.

⁷¹ AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 72, 53–4, *Dokladnaia zapiska 'Ob operativnoi deiatel'nosti Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del Moldavskoi SSR za 1946–1948 gody'*, 05.09.1948.

⁷² AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 72, 185–94, *Dokladnaia zapiska 'Ob aktivizatsii antisovetskoi podryvnoi deiatel'nosti kulachestva v Moldavskoi SSR i neobkhodimosti, v sveazi s etim, izoleatsii ego'*, 12.10.1948; Pasat, *Trudnye*, 327–333; King, *The Moldovans*, 63–119.

⁷³ ASISRM-KGB, Delo po operatsii IUG, 256–7, 314.

⁷⁴ ASISRM-KGB, Delo po operatsii IUG, 75–83.

participation of other institutions. Financial organs determined one's property, which was crucial since the property was one of the main determining criteria of class; hence, one's eligibility for deportation (in most of the cases, albeit by no means in all). In the cities, both civil and political police enlisted the landlord's assistance in documenting their tenants' identity and occupation. Finally, district executive committees delivered lists to be approved by Soviet Moldavia's government.⁷⁵

The MGB and the MVD each developed their own, divergent narratives on the 1949 deportation. These differing and contradictory views and assessments stemmed from personal and bureaucratic conflicts.⁷⁶ The MGB concluded that, notwithstanding some errors, the operation was successful. The MVD, in contrast, stated that the deportation campaign was a failure since several thousand people initially selected for forced displacement escaped deportation. At the same time, Tutushkin accused Mordovets' institution of inhuman treatment of deportees by preventing them from getting bread and other goods that were allowed by the instructions.⁷⁷ In the short run, it seemed that the MGB had defeated the MVD. Tutushkin was severely criticised in 1950 and then removed from office in the next year. Like his predecessor, Markeyev, he was expelled from the party. Even more, he was utterly humiliated and ended up as deputy head of a GULAG camp, as was the case for Markeyev earlier.⁷⁸

The MGB was not omnipotent even though, as a whole, the republican political police and its seemingly invincible chief, Mordovets, had prevailed over party and MVD tensions. Partially it was because the political police factored more heavily in the Stalinist structure of power, being subordinated to the Politburo outside the standard legal framework, according to Khaustov.⁷⁹ Personal agency had also played a role. However, there were cases in which Mordovets was vulnerable and sought the protection of government institutions under his surveillance. Anonymous letters were a powerful tool to make high officials more pliable, mainly by instilling some fear of reprimands or harassment. In 1949, an anonymous letter reached Moscow, alleging that Mordovets illegally possessed a house in downtown Chișinău. The *Gorispolkom* had promised him to legalise his possession of the house, but, for some reason, did not. Under these circumstances, Mordovets appealed to Gherasim Rudi, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Soviet Moldavia. He asked Rudi to give him an official confirmation that would prove that he possessed the house legally. Rudi helped him immediately.⁸⁰ This outcome was not accidental because Mordovets had *kompromat* on Rudi, regarding illegal dealings involving Rudi's brother-in-law, Shulim Garber. The latter used to sell large amounts of goods in Moscow, using Rudi's railway car during his business trips to the Soviet capital. These illegal trade operations spread as far as Estonia.⁸¹ Indeed, as subsequent post-Stalin investigations revealed, Mordovets gathered *kompromat* on many local party and state leaders well beyond his prerogatives as republican MGB's chief.⁸² This was a strong tool to strengthen his own interests and maintain his status as irreplaceable chief of the political police for more than a decade, both under Stalin and after his death. In this, Gorlizki and Khlevniuk are right, that 'dictatorships consist not only of

⁷⁵ Pasat, *Trudnye*, 431–3.

⁷⁶ The conflicts continued after the deportation. AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 200, 15, [*Spetssoobshchenie i.o. Ministra MVD MSSR Babushkina Ministru MGB MSSR Mordovtsu*], 21.06.1950.

⁷⁷ AMAIRM-MVD, 16, 1, 105, 110, *Informatsionnaia svodka no. 1*, 06.07.1949; 149, *Dokladnaia zapiska 'Ob itogakh raboty po priyomu ot organov MGB i otpravke vyselentsev iz Moldavskoi SSR'*, 145–57 (156), 12.07.1949; ASISRM-KGB, *Delo po operatsii IUG*, 240.

⁷⁸ Nikita Petrov, *Kto rukovodil organami gosbezopasnosti, 1941–1954* (Moscow: Zven'a, 2010), 356–7; Igor Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă. Violență, represiuni politice și rezistență în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924–1956* (Chișinău: Cartier, 2014), 278; AOSPRM, 51, 68 (Osobaia Papka), 16, 1–14, *Osoboe reshenie Biuro TsK KP(b) M o tov. Tutushkine*, 17.01.1950. Markeyev repeated Tutushkin's fate only after serving as MVD chief in Mari ASSR (1946–1949).

⁷⁹ Khaustov, 'Razvitie', 358–9.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, 573 [Biuro TsK VKP(b) po Moldavii] 1, 43, 24 [*Pismo Rud'ia G. Ia. sekretariu Partkolegii pri TsK KP(b) Moldavii tov. Kozyrevu*], 04.11.1949.

⁸¹ RGASPI, 573, 1, 43, 18–64 (18–20), *O nekotorykh faktakh zloupotreblenii sluzhebnykh polozheniem predsedatelea Soveta Ministrov Moldavskoi SSR t. Rud' G. Ia.*, 18.01.1950.

⁸² AOSPRM, 51, 34, 77, 209.

institutions but also of people and their lived experiences'.⁸³ Mordovets lived through the Great Terror, the Second World War and SMERSH and was shrewd enough to avoid being associated with Abakumov or Beria when both fell into disgrace and were executed.⁸⁴

Toward an Institutional Equilibrium: The Brezhnev Years, 1950–2

Indirectly, the political police had a grip on the party as well. In 1950 the first secretary of the Moldavian CC was demoted, and Leonid Brezhnev, the future General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, was sent in as the new party leader. Nicolae Coval, an ethnic Moldavian/Romanian from the Moldavian ASSR (part of Ukraine, 1924–40), lost his position due to a report sent to Malenkov by Mikhail Turkin, the plenipotentiary of the CC of the C(b)PSU in the Moldavian SSR. Coval was charged with several errors and mistakes. He was accused, among other things, of tolerating 'Moldavian-Romanian nationalists', particularly in the higher education institutions based in Chişinău, the capital, and Bălţi, the second-largest city, in the north.⁸⁵ Certain details included in the report, such as a thorough knowledge of personal conversations, suggest that the political police, and Mordovets in particular, played a role in these events even though one might admit that he was not personally interested in the appointment of a stronger party leader. It is also indirect proof that MGB agents and informant networks could effectively target at will different institutions.⁸⁶ Appointing Brezhnev, an outsider not connected to Moldavia either in terms of birth, ethnicity, or previous experience, as party head demonstrates that Moscow took seriously the alarmist reports sent from Chişinău. In the immediate context of the year 1950, nationalism was not out of the question considering the Estonian, Mingrelian and Leningrad affairs.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, neither Brezhnev nor his immediate successors initiated a purge based on the information presented in the report concerning the mistakes made by his predecessor.⁸⁸ One wonders why Coval was charged with nationalism but never punished as such, while Salogor, who was not incriminated officially, was downgraded, reminiscent of a harsh punishment. This issue also deserves further research.

Brezhnev introduced a new style of leadership in Soviet Moldavia. He was more informal with his subordinates than any other first secretary before or after him. During the bureau meetings, party plenary sessions and congresses, he was addressed with the more familiar Leonid Il'ich, rather than the more formal version, *comrade Brezhnev*. He pursued a soft line on cadres and seemed sympathetic toward the local peasants, with whom he spoke during his frequent visits to the countryside. Due to his authority and Moscow's trust, Brezhnev was the first leader in Soviet Moldavia to establish the party as an effectively quasi-hegemonic institution within the hierarchy of local power relations. Mordovets, the powerful MGB chief, remained in office, but his influence and the power associated with his position somewhat decreased. To that end, Brezhnev named one of his relatives, Semyon Tsvigun, deputy minister of the MGB. Tsvigun was later to become Andropov's deputy after 1967. No previous party boss could even consider such a move. Even Moscow's representative for the MGB and the MVD, Nikolai Golubev (1945–7), had failed to keep Mordovets' authority under control. The same was true about

⁸³ Grolizki and Khlevniuk, *Substate*, 8.

⁸⁴ Instead, he was appointed as member of the State Commission for the Revision of the Counterrevolutionary Files in July 1954, i.e. to revise his own deeds before 1953. AOSPRM, 51, 68, 21, 23–4.

⁸⁵ AOSPRM, 51, 9, 3, 92–110.

⁸⁶ The proof that Mordovets was behind or at least influenced Coval's removal is the fact Turkin quotes often MGB's chief reports on sensitive issues, including those built on *kompromat*. RGASPI, 573, 1, 43, 20. At the same time, among charges directed against him in 1955 upon his removal as the MSSR KGB chief is the fact Mordovets used illegal surveillance of the local party personnel. AOSPRM, 51, 34, 77, 209.

⁸⁷ Khlevniuk et al., eds., *TsK VKP(b)* 185–97, 248–51, 252–9; Zubkova, *Pribaltika*, 300–20; David Brandenberger, *Stalinskii russotsentrizm. Sovetskaia massovaia kul'tura i formirovanie russkogo natsional'nogo samosoznaniia, 1931–1956* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2017), 261–74.

⁸⁸ On Brezhnev in Soviet Moldavia, see Mark Sandle and Igor Caşu, 'Leonid Brezhnev in Soviet Moldavia, 1950–1952: the Making of a GenSek?', *Plural. History, Culture and Society*, 4, 2 (2016), 122–55; Susanne Shattenberg, *Leonid Brezhnev. Velichie i tragediia cheloveka i strany* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2019), 149–82.

Coval, Brezhnev's predecessor, but still he retained a great deal of influence as he did not have significant tensions with the Council of Ministers, led by Gherasim Rudi. Indeed, Rudi was part of Coval's patronage network. Brezhnev decided not to embark on radical personnel changes but rather to control the government's incumbent chairman by proxies, choosing to appoint one of his men, Nikolai Shchelokov, as Rudi's deputy.⁸⁹

Similarly, in Lithuania, Sniečkus succeeded in appointing one of his men, a Lithuanian, as deputy minister of the local MGB in 1947. The Lithuanian MGB chief, Dmitry Yefimov, informed Abakumov how it happened. During a bureau meeting of the Lithuanian CC, Sniečkus raised the issue for the first time, to the surprise of Yefimov, who had little choice but to accept it.⁹⁰ In Moldavia, one could imagine a similar move under Brezhnev's rule, i.e. a more assertive and more authoritative republican party leader. This shows that although political police had significant leverage on party institutions at the republican level, agency is essential in making the party rule preeminent if not hegemonic. The same phenomena were seen at this time with strong first secretaries in such places as Sverdlovsk, Pskov and Chelyabinsk in Russia, who subdued their political police chiefs. In this, Gorlizki and Khlevniuk are right. While evidence of a shift in initiative to regional and republican party leaders was unmistakable after Stalin's death, this process had in fact been long underway since the late 1940s.⁹¹ Empowering republican/regional first secretaries contributed to extending the party's grip over the government agencies, including the political and civil police that for so long had acted as strongmen in power relations due to their structural advantages as well as their dual subordination, that is, their ability to go over the heads of local party leadership with a direct appeal to their all-Union boss.

The tendency toward minimising the political police's grasp on the republican party continued after Stalin's death with the downfall of Beria in June 1953. Mordovets would retain his position for a time as he succeeded in confuting the allegations that he was Beria's man in Soviet Moldavia. Finally, he was criticised by the Moldavian bureau in July 1954 for 'breaching revolutionary legality' before 1953,⁹² which was a coded reference to the use of excessive violence and the exaggeration of the number of class enemies. The MGB chief was also charged with nepotism, the promotion of cadres according to personal loyalty rather than their professional credentials and illegal surveillance of the local party personnel. Mordovets was exonerated in 1973, three years before his death, by the then first secretary of the Moldavian party, Ivan Bodiul, a member of Brezhnev's team in the Moldavian SSR.⁹³ Bodiul could not do this without formal approval from his Moscow patron. Brezhnev's choice of Yuri Andropov⁹⁴ as KGB chief in 1967 illustrates that the General Secretary endorsed, to a certain extent, the role played by the political police under Stalin.⁹⁵ The 'Moldavian Beria', Mordovets, succeeded in evading consequences for his 'breaches of revolutionary legality', unlike his all-Union namesake. Not only that, but he succeeded in lobbying for his son to become KGB boss in 1967 of Tiraspol, the third most important city in Soviet Moldavia.⁹⁶ Iosif Mordovets was not the only high police official in post-war Soviet Moldavia to escape real punishment. So too did Colonel Vladimir Ashakhmanov, the chief of the twenty-second Moldavian Border Guard Detachment, who ordered the extra-legal executions at the Soviet-Romanian border at the height of

⁸⁹ Shattenberg, *Brezhnev*, 154–6, 169–73; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească*, 196–7; Nikolai Anisimovich Shchelokov was to become later the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union (1966–83).

⁹⁰ Pocius, *Lietuvos*, 169–71.

⁹¹ Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Substate*, 48–9, 36.

⁹² AOSPRM, 51, 13, 335, 4, *Vopros o rabote Komiteta Gosbezopasnosti pri Sovete Ministrov MSSR*, 13.10.1954; 68 (Osobaia papka), 21, 27–8, *O nedostatkakh v rabote Komiteta gosbezopasnosti pri Sovete Ministrov Moldavskoi SSR*, 14.07.1954.

⁹³ ASOPRM, 51, 34, 77, 209, *Personal'nye dela kommunistov. O Mordovtse I. L.*; 56, 220, *Khodataistvo Frunzenskogo raikoma KP Moldavii o sneatii partiinogo vzyskaniia c Mordovtsoa Iosifa Lavrent'evicha*, 04.09.1973.

⁹⁴ Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov (1914–84) was the chief of the KGB from 1967 to 1982, serving as CPSU's Secretary General (1982–4) after Brezhnev's death.

⁹⁵ Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace. Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171.

⁹⁶ AOSPRM, 51, Opus 28, 48, 149.

the 1946–7 famine.⁹⁷ That proves that not only Mordovets but other high ranking police officials enjoyed preferential treatment for their contributions to the Soviet Fatherland in a contested Soviet-Romanian borderland during the Stalin years and beyond.

Conclusion

During the interwar years, relations between local party leadership and the civil and political police closely tracked changes in power relations at the all-Union level. During the NEP, the OGPU and NKVD witnessed their prerogatives, budget and influence dramatically reduced. The influence of both the civil and political police ballooned as a result of Stalin's Great Turn (1929–33) at the expense of party structures and soviets (government). This demotion was mirrored on the local level. Between 1934 and early 1937, there was a relative institutional balance between the NKVD (civil and political police merging in 1934) and party and regional executives. In late 1938–early 1939, by signalling the Great Terror's end, Stalin ordered the political police's resubmission to party institutions at the central, republican and local levels. This shift was interrupted by the Second World War, which again saw the growing influence of the police. After the victory over Nazi Germany and its satellites, the post-1938 trend resumed slowly but firmly, aiming at establishing an institutional balance. There were, however, exceptions in areas like the Moldavian SSR, where feeble party leadership allowed for the more authoritative and well-connected MGB leader to exert a growing and disproportionate influence on local power relations. The local party tried to overturn this reality, but it failed for most of the period between 1944 and 1952. That was especially true from 1944 to 1950, due to several relatively weak party leaders. This situation only changed under Brezhnev, who was more experienced in high-level Soviet politics and better connected to the all-Union patronage system and thus succeeded in establishing some degree of institutional balance. We can understand Moscow's appointment of Brezhnev, an outsider, as their attempt to establish party hegemony at the republican level and signalling the end of a transitional period when the political police dominated the local power relation. We find it in Lithuania, but also in a series of Russian regions such as Sverdlovsk, Pskov and Chelyabinsk, where a more authoritative party leader during the immediate post-war years allowed the party-state institutions to play a more significant role in major policy decisions and policy-making earlier than in Soviet Moldavia. A particular case is represented by Bagirov in Azerbaidjan, who was supported at a specific moment by Stalin in a conflict with Mekhlis, the mighty and dreaded all-Union Minister of State Control. Bagirov's credentials as a *chekist* before becoming a party leader determined his pre-eminent role in republican power relations.⁹⁸

Both political and civil police and party-state institutions were involved in managing the food crisis, the Sovietisation of the countryside and the mass deportations in Soviet Moldavia. However, they displayed notable differences in policy implementation. During 1946–7, these differences concerned competing interpretations of the causes of, and dealing with, the famine. In turn, during the forced displacement of 1949, the most visible institutional differences involved calculating the total number of class enemies eligible for extraction (*iz'yatie*), i.e. the scale of the terror. These differences also affected the organisation and results of the deportations.

The civil police sided with the party (against the Red Army) in 1944 and in the wake of the famine of 1946–7. In contrast, the political police embarked on a more challenging position in the immediate post-war years and during the famine, labelling, for instance, the participants in the food riots of spring 1946 as class enemies while the civil police took a less antagonistic tone. However, during the mass deportation of 1949, it is the MVD's turn to become more challenging than the MGB by

⁹⁷ For more on that, see Igor Cașu, 'Why Shoot Starving People? Policing the Soviet-Romanian Border during the Post-War Famine, 1946–1947' (Spring 2022, forthcoming). According to Nikita Petrov and Amir Weiner, the two important historians of the Soviet political police, whom I talked to, both Mordovets' and Ashakhmanov's fate are the exception rather than the rule.

⁹⁸ Khlevniuk et al., eds., *TsK VKP(b)*, 8–9, 115–17; Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Substate*, 36.

insisting on a larger scale of repression. Much of these variations in strategies and approaches stemmed from personal and bureaucratic conflicts. In other words, these tensions did not refer to the core communist policies and practices implemented in Soviet Moldavia in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The political police seemingly played a particular role in the demotion of two local Moldavian party leaders, in 1946 and 1950, both accused of displaying a lenient attitude toward anti-Soviet elements. NKGB-MGB's dual oversight from Moscow and the local party organisation, coupled with the astute actions of its shrewd, authoritative and well-connected chief, Iosif Mordovets, made him the most influential local official for most of the late Stalinist period. The Stalinist institutional design, in place since the late 1920s–early 1930s, gave the political police significant leverage over the republican and regional party and government institutions. The post-1938 and post-Second World War developments offered the local party, at least in principle, an opportunity to become the hegemonic institution in the power hierarchy at the regional and republican level. To come true, however, the claim of party supremacy in the Soviet peripheries was dependent on the agency of the party leader as well as of the local political police's chief. This article argues that it was the sensitivity of a recently-annexed borderland, Soviet Moldavia, a potentially irredentist region belonging historically, ethnically and linguistically to neighbouring Romania,⁹⁹ that allowed for the prerogatives of the political police to prevail over the party. *Last but not least*, the substate dictator in Soviet Moldavia for most of the late Stalinist period was the chief of the political police and not the republican party leader.

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⁹⁹ Even though Romania became a Sovietised country after the Second World War, the interwar dispute over Bessarabia erupted again in the early 1960s and played an important role in Soviet-Romanian relations. See more in King, *The Moldovans*, 103–6.

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