

# Exploring the Link between Moldovan Communities Abroad (MCA) and Moldova, including Possibilities for Out-of-Country Voting

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## **Executive Summary**

### Introduction

Underlying this particular research effort is the goal of assisting the authorities in Moldova to formulate a series of policies that will strengthen the ties between migrants and their homeland. The data collection for this research, consisting of a review of the relevant literature, formal interviews, informal meetings and limited on-line correspondence, commenced with my visit to Moldova in September, 2006 and included visits to Italy (December, 2006) and Moscow (February, 2007). In addition, a concurrent series of interviews was conducted over a 4 month period here in Israel. In each of the settings, interviews and informal meetings were conducted with migrants (rank and file as well as communal leaders) and other key stakeholders (from government and civil society).

This report is loosely structured along the lines of a SWOT analysis, entailing an examination of the phenomenon under study consisting of its perceived Strengths and Weaknesses along with the Opportunities and Threats that are brought to bear on it. While the (SWOT) structure of this document is not necessarily the ideal conceptual prism through which to analyze this phenomenon, it will ideally stimulate discussion, which in turn will sensitize policy makers to the needs and sensibilities of migrants and assist them in crafting a more effective and migrant/diaspora-friendly set of policies.

Initially, the terms used in this research - "diaspora" and "Moldovan Communities Abroad" (MCA) - are clarified with special emphasis placed on the relevance of each for the Moldovan context.

### Findings

The perceived strengths of the MCAs studied include: their large numbers and geographic concentration in certain large urban centers (i.e. Moscow); the image of Moldovans as adaptive, reliable and motivated workers; the organic nature of their link with the homeland; the existence of voluntary individual/community initiatives designed to improve the plight of MCA; and the active role of the church. The weaknesses identified included: the insecurity inherent in the vagaries of the legal status of most Moldovan migrants abroad; the relatively low level of social cohesion among veteran and recent Moldovan migrants; the insufficient deployment and perceived indifference of Moldovan diplomatic missions; the absence of an Italian Embassy in Chisinau; the very limited use of remittances (restricted almost exclusively to the personal consumption of families back home); the lack of regular and reliable means through which Moldovan migrants may receive information from the homeland.

Several opportunities which could potentially serve efforts to forge a stronger MCA-Moldovan link were identified. These include: a greater awareness on the part of the government in Moldova to MCA needs and concerns; shifting policies in certain host countries that suggest a simplification of the regulations governing migration and a greater sensitivity towards those migrants already residing therein; socio-political conditions prevailing in some of the host countries that afford certain opportunities involving both central and/or local governments as well as NGOs; certain possibilities

in the realm of communications technology; the tendency of many Moldovan migrants to periodically visit Moldova; and the potentially positive role played by personnel agencies. Among the threats confronting efforts to strengthen ties between Moldova and MCA are: the ambiguous legal framework in host countries governing migration; the linguistic/cultural divide within MCA, which addresses the very essence of "Moldovan national identity"; and the increasingly tenuous link of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants to the homeland.

#### Emerging recommendations

The recommendations contained in this report are neither comprehensive nor systematic, but do provide the basis for a thorough reconsideration of existing policy. They are also, in some cases, consistent with the recommendations appearing in the National Action Plan formulated by the BIR.

In the realm of Bi-lateral agreements:

The Moldovan government, in the context of its bi-lateral relations with MCA host countries, should seek agreements to:

- Safeguard the basic human rights of migrants
- Legalizing or "regularize" their status
- Establish a "grace period" during which migrants would be able to work and concurrently be free to sort out their status
- Recognize the professional qualification/credentials of certain skilled/educated migrants.

In the realm of the functioning of Moldovan diplomatic missions, the Moldovan authorities are advised to:

- Factor into decisions of deploying consular personnel the demographic distribution of migrants in host countries
- Dispatch specially trained labor attaches to certain key destination cities
- Lobby for the opening of an Italian Embassy in Moldova
- Empower diplomatic personnel with the necessary skills and resources to undertake the types of programs that could meaningfully impact the link between MCA and homeland
- Allocate sums for the organizing of socio-cultural events in destination countries for Moldovan nationals

In the realm of communications, it is recommended that the relevant authorities consider the:

- Possibilities of harnessing cell phone technology for the purpose of enhancing the information link between MCA and Moldova
- Publication of a Moldovan community newspaper in destination countries, drawing on external institutional support as well as internal community resources

The embassies and consulates could also take a more active role by gathering, simplifying, clarifying, disseminating and updating the myriad information pertinent to the lives of migrants in the countries in which they serve.

Another institution which could play a constructive role in facilitating the reciprocal flow of information between homeland and MCA is the commercial agencies that are increasingly patronized by migrants for the transfer of remittances

#### Returning to Moldova

With respect to the temporary or permanent return of Moldovans to Moldova, the following recommendations are offered.

- Steps should be taken at this early stage to put in place a system for cultivating among MCA a stronger link to and appreciation of Moldova, which could take the form of formal and informal educational frameworks, cultural emissaries, structured visits to the homeland, etc.
- Study opportunities in Moldova for young Moldovans residing abroad should be explored, as should various forms of volunteering, organized touring, social activities etc. This would seem to constitute a worthy endeavor, even if the goal is not their permanent return.

#### Out of Country Voting - OCV

The underlying concern of this research with respect to OCV is the symbolic import it offers in strengthening the link between Moldovan diaspora/migrant communities and their homeland. This research uncovered widespread dissatisfaction among migrants with the implementation of OCV in recent years. In the eyes of many, the Moldovan political process is perceived as all but indifferent to what constitutes a significant portion of the Moldovan electorate. Perhaps the most common explanation offered for the ineffectiveness of OCV is the perceived (electoral) disincentive on the part of the Moldovan government in facilitating a high OCV participation. If this assessment is even partially accurate, it is certainly questionable whether the current government would make a concerted effort to facilitate a high voter turn-out among migrants.

#### OCV Recommendations

- One fairly obvious step that should be taken is an extensive non-partisan information campaign aimed at encouraging Moldovan migrants to exercise their right to vote.
- Ultimately, what is even more crucial than an information campaign to increase voter turnout is the commitment of the entire Moldovan body politic to the importance and the integrity of OCV.

## **Acknowledgments**

This report represents the fruits of my research on Moldovan Communities Abroad (MCA) over the past number of months. While the material and insights contained herein are the sole responsibility of the author, a number of institutions and individuals played a critical role in making this research possible. Firstly, the leading role of the IOM Office in Moldova in commissioning this research, guiding its conceptual and methodological underpinnings and facilitating the myriad logistical and technical arrangements must be recognized. Specifically, I thank IOM staff members Martin Wyss, Simion Terzioglo, George Gigauri, and most particularly Andreas Pettersson, each of whom demonstrated patience, flexibility and thoughtfulness throughout the course of this project. Ilan Cohn, a staff member of IOM Moldova and later of CIMI was also of considerable assistance. My research efforts in Italy, Russia and here in Israel could not have been completed without the persistence and professionalism of a few individuals. These include Raffaella Greco (IOM Rome), Anna Rubtsova (IOM Moscow), Piotr Dmitriyevsky (interpreter in Moscow) and Anastasia Zabrodina (my research assistant in Israel). I am deeply grateful to my colleagues at CIMI (Randi Garber, Noa Roth, Danny Pins and Arnon Mantver) for their support and guidance during the implementation of this research project. Lastly, I am most indebted to the countless migrants who gave generously of their time and whose insights inform the core of this research. Most of those with whom I met were extremely gracious and exhibited a dignity that was truly awe inspiring. Meeting with and interviewing them was a most humbling experience for me and it is my sincere hope that this research will make even a small contribution to the deliberations among state and non-state players that affect their lives.

## **Introduction**

### Backdrop

Presently, approximately one quarter of the economically active population of Moldova is located abroad. According to the Labor Force Survey (LFS) compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of migrants grew from less than 100,000 in 1999 to more than 400,000 at the end of 2005. The majority of Moldovan migrants (some 59%) are found in Russia, most of whom are men employed in construction. Italy is also a significant destination for Moldovan migrants (approx. 17%) as are, to a lesser extent, the other "Latin" countries of Portugal and Spain. Other destinations include Ukraine France, Greece, Israel, Turkey, Cyprus and Romania (Lucke et al, 2007). The precise figures for Moldovan migration are rather elusive. Specifically, monitoring the flow of those migrants who are not legal (i.e. legal or "registered" in their host country) is all but impossible. It has been claimed that in some host countries, the number of Moldovan migrants residing there illegally is almost twice that of the legal variety. Not surprisingly then, estimates of migrants vary dramatically. For example, the LFS estimate of Moldovan migrants in 2004 stood at 354,000, while that of the Moldovan population census was considerably lower at 242,000. Some estimates of the total number of Moldovan migrants abroad exceed 800,000. So predominant is the trend of migration that roughly one third of that country's gross domestic product is derived from the remittances sent by migrant workers to their families in Moldova. The number of migrants as well as remittances has grown steadily since 1999 with no indication yet that this trend might be reversed (Lucke et al, 2007).

Indeed, the challenges posed by these trends are substantial and far-reaching. Underlying this particular research effort is the goal of assisting the authorities in Moldova to formulate a series of policies that will strengthen the ties between migrants and their homeland. It is assumed that a more substantive, multi-layered and sustained interface between Moldovan migrants and their homeland will ultimately benefit both. As Gigauri notes, "it is important for the policy makers in Moldova to understand that migration is... simply a fact of a globalizing economy. A realistic response [therefore] requires... a sound diaspora management model which integrates past and present citizens into a web of rights and obligations in the extended community with the home country being the centre" (2006).

Although a comprehensive treatment of the policy environment is beyond the purview of this research, it is nonetheless worth mentioning that since the commencement of this research, Moldovan government policy with respect to migration appears to have grown increasingly restrictive. Explanations for this vary, though it seems clear that one external factor is the recent ascension of Romania to the EU and the massive increase of Moldovans seeking Romanian citizenship. Internal factors that may explain this gradual policy shift are the far reaching social ramifications of so many citizens working abroad. These include the shockingly high number of children left with either one parent or without both parents (estimated by the former mayor of Chisinau at 56,000 and 26,000 respectively).

### Clarification of Terms

It is necessary to clarify the terms used in this report as they are not only of conceptual significance but are also pregnant with political implications. We have chosen to refer to the subject of our study as "Moldovan Communities Abroad" (MCA), rather than as a "diaspora". The latter is a term that has gained increasing currency in the discourses not only of nationalism, ethnicity, and identity, but also of globalization and international relations. However, as an evolving concept, "diaspora" has yet to provide analytical precision or clarity. Broadly speaking, "diaspora" may be understood as: "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links to their countries of origin – their homelands" (Sheffer, 1986). Shain reminds us that "homeland" may be real or imagined, independent or occupied and that no less important than the conscious association of diaspora members with their homelands is that they are regarded as such by others in host countries, homelands and elsewhere (1999). Clifford posits that by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, all or most communities feature diasporic dimensions, which he characterizes as "moments, tactics, practices, and articulations". While diasporas may defy sharp definition, it is possible to discern a "loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement" (Clifford, 1997). Implied here is that diaspora is both an objective and subjective concept.

Diasporas tend to develop and maintain multilateral connections with a variety of political, social and cultural institutions in their host countries and homelands. In pursuit of their aims, diasporas generally consist of three main constituencies which may be conceptualized as: "core members", consisting of the elites whose involvement in diaspora affairs is central; "rear guard members", the previous generation of diaspora activists who are less prominent in day to day activity but who represent a significant repository of community memory; and "silent members", that much larger reservoir of potential recruits for diasporic politics (Iwanska in Shain, 1999).

How diaspora is defined impacts the manner in which it is classified, registered, and measured, as well as the policies formulated to address it. Homeland nations adopt different ways of delineating their "diasporas". Differing terms are used to address the multiple scenarios of: people settled in a host country on a permanent basis; labor migrants based abroad for a period of time; dual citizens; ethnic diasporas; citizens of the host country or second-generation groupings. India for example established a legal distinction for its diaspora members consisting of *Non-Resident Indians* (Indian citizens holding an Indian passport and residing abroad for an indefinite period) on the one hand and *People of Indian Origin* (foreign citizens of Indian origin or descent, including second and subsequent generations) on the other. By distinguishing between two distinct diaspora categories, India effectively prescribes the relations and contributions of diasporas with very different backgrounds (Ionescu, 2006).

As mentioned previously, the very definition of diaspora is not without certain political ramifications and it must therefore be understood as a fundamentally contextual abstraction that takes into account concrete dimensions (citizenship, length of stay, rights) as well as more expressive ones (feeling of identity, perceptions, trust). Similarly, there are collective and individual dimensions of diaspora existence with important implications for policy development. Policies aimed at the collective level may result in programs such as fostering scientific diaspora networks or channeling

collective funds into community projects, while those directed at the individual level could encompass areas such as lowering transfer costs, providing scholarships, simplifying citizenship regulations and offering tax breaks (Ionescu, 2006).

One of the issues explored in this research is the potential for MCA to organize and mobilize on behalf of their collective interests. In seeking to explain the scope and intensity of diaspora mobilization, Esman cites the importance of the material, cultural and organizational resources available to diasporas, the opportunity structures in the host country; and their motivation and capability to maintain cohesion and exert group influence (1986). Ethnic cohesion, according to Shain, increases through frequent and non-conflictual interaction among ethnic group members (1999).

The varying patterns of diaspora-homeland interface may be conceived of as existing along a continuum. On one end are examples such as Israel and Armenia which feature very established diaspora communities that provide strategically vital political and financial assets to the homeland countries. On the other end are India, the Philippines, and others which feature more recent migrant communities that typically send remittances to family members back home. The Moldovan experience is clearly more consistent with the latter model, given its relatively brief history of migration and its lack of institutionalized mechanisms for accessing and mobilizing its migrants. For this reason, the term Moldovan Communities Abroad is preferred over that of diaspora. However, as this report elucidates the findings of the research conducted, it will become clear that the concept "diaspora" does nevertheless have resonance for the Moldovan experience. Hence, it is argued here that a Moldovan diaspora and MCA should not be conceived of as two discrete entities, each begging a concomitant set of policies, but rather as constituent parts of a larger phenomenon.

### Methodological Note

The data collection for this research, consisting of a review of the relevant literature, formal interviews, informal meetings and limited on-line correspondence, commenced with my visit to Moldova in September, 2006 and included visits to Italy (December, 2006) and Moscow (February, 2007). In addition, a concurrent series of interviews was conducted over a 4 month period here in Israel. In each of the settings, interviews and informal meetings were conducted with migrants (rank and file as well as communal leaders) and other key stakeholders (from government and civil society). The perspective of the latter was intended to add depth to the data gathered from migrant sources. For a detailed list of the interviews and meetings conducted, see Appendix A.

### Structure of Report

This report is loosely structured along the lines of a SWOT analysis, entailing an examination of the phenomenon under study consisting of its perceived Strengths and Weaknesses along with the Opportunities and Threats that are brought to bear on it. Strengths and weaknesses are conceived of as primarily "endogenous", that is, factors internal to the Moldovan migrant community which may be harnessed in the attempts to build a stronger, more effective and sustained link with the homeland. Opportunities and threats for our purposes refer to the "exogenous" or environmental

factors that prevail in the settings in which Moldovan migrants reside. While the (SWOT) structure of this document is not necessarily the ideal conceptual prism through which to analyze this phenomenon, it will ideally stimulate discussion, which in turn will sensitize policy makers to the needs and sensibilities of migrants and assist them in crafting a more effective and migrant/diaspora-friendly set of policies.

## **Strengths**

### Demographic and Geographic Concentration

While accurate figures are very difficult to come by for the reasons mentioned previously, it is clear that the numbers of Moldovan migrants in Italy and in Russia are considerable. Furthermore, in the case of Russia, the overwhelming majority of migrants are concentrated in Moscow and the surrounding area. In Italy, while many migrants are located in greater Rome, the majority are situated in the northern part of the country and to a lesser extent the southern part. The sheer number of Moldovan migrants in these two countries, coupled with their tendency to be clustered in certain major cities (more pronounced in Russia), represent a resource upon which to build when formulating any kind of strategy or intervention. Needless to say, the propensity of these communities to feature social cohesion (addressed in "Weaknesses") is an important factor, but the fact remains that there already exists a critical mass or a "strength in numbers" which must not be underestimated.

### Characteristics of Moldovan Migrant Communities

It was reported by a number of the non-Moldovan stakeholders interviewed that Moldovans abroad tend to adapt to the culture and language of their host societies with relative ease and effectiveness. The bi-lingual tradition of Moldova has evidently played a role in this, as is borne out in the migrant experience in Russia and Italy (and presumably in other countries with a Latin linguistic tradition). In addition, Moldovans were roundly regarded as qualified, reliable and motivated workers – both in the domestic and the construction sectors. In Moscow, we were told on more than one occasion that Moldovan women working in retail (typically in markets and kiosks) are considered more customer-friendly and efficient than native Russians. Similarly, in Italy it was reported that Moldovan women are highly regarded and trusted as caregivers – even more so than Filipinas.

While the positive estimations of Moldovans referred to above are based on generalizations – or perhaps the *essentialization* what it is to be "Moldovan" – they nevertheless resonate among those with whom Moldovans interface and as such, should be regarded as strengths. As outlined earlier, a community or diaspora consciousness is not only propagated endogenously, but also a function of the host societies viewing them as a distinct collective.

## Link to Moldova

What was evident in all of our formal and informal meetings with Moldovans in each locale was that virtually all of them maintain a very durable and tangible connection to Moldova. And although when probed, this link is primarily traced to family ties, rather than to a larger collective identity, it nevertheless represents an important feature of these communities with important implications for mobilization. It must be noted of course that for the overwhelming majority of migrants in Italy (whose status is not legal) and in Moscow (most of whom are presumed not formally registered as prescribed by law), the link to Moldova is a very real one, if for no other reason than most will return, whether they want to or not. Consequently, for these migrants, the link with Moldova has a certain taken-for-granted quality. A number of them in Moscow for example travel back and forth quite regularly – both in order to visit family as well as to avoid becoming "unregulated" (until recently, they enjoyed a 90-day period within which to regulate their status).

With that said, the examination of Moldovan migrants and their link with Moldova in these and other countries must not be restricted exclusively to (legal and undocumented) labor migrants. Most prominently in Moscow, but also to a lesser extent in Israel, there does exist a community of Moldovans whose presence is permanent and established and whose existential state may aptly be referred to as "Diaspora". These would be consistent with what was referred to previously as "core members". It must be stressed that the discourse on "diaspora", for our purposes, is not merely semantic. Countries that are home to an established Moldovan immigrant community (like Russia, Israel and perhaps Germany as well) are qualitatively different from those which feature almost exclusively labor migrants. The presence of an established diaspora community - with varying degrees of social cohesion, economic prosperity and political clout – could represent a potential anchor for the type of comprehensive, sustained diaspora-homeland interface explored in this research. That it has not yet been harnessed – or even recognized as such – is no reason for it to be overlooked in the future, when contemplating this issue.

The feature of the MCA in Russia and Israel described above underscores the conceptual validity of the term "diaspora" as used in this research and also offers a certain explanatory power. Nonetheless, in various meetings we conducted, the term "diaspora" was met with some skepticism and not a small degree of confusion and, as mentioned previously, is somewhat politically charged. One Moldovan in Italy noted: "[Diaspora] is something that was invented in Chisinau because of the income [remittances] it provides to the country and for certain political reasons such as a desire for votes". Hence, while I maintain that the term has relevance and a resonance for our research, I recommend it be used judiciously.

## Individual/Community-based initiatives

The conventional wisdom surrounding Moldovan migrants abroad is that they are so consumed with ensuring their basic survival and livelihood, that almost no time or energy is available for (volunteer) community activity. And while there is certainly

some truth to this notion, examples of individual and collective initiatives, designed to improve the plight of Moldovan migrant communities at large, are discernible. One such example involved a migrant in Rome, a physician by training, who gained exposure and experience, through his close contacts with an Italian family and through volunteering in a medical association against cancer. He eventually established a website to provide information about the obtaining of proper documentation for other migrants. This in turn led to the founding of a voluntary association to assist other Moldovan migrants in acquiring the myriad of documents required to either legalize their status or, in rare instances, to be granted Italian citizenship. Another was the founding of an association to provide Moldovans in Trieste (northern Italy) with various forms of legal assistance, primarily targeting women. In both instances, the Moldovan social entrepreneurs behind these initiatives were relatively socially and economically established and had resided in Italy for a considerable period of time. Not surprisingly, both were there legally.

Examples like the ones above were mirrored in the Moscow and Israeli contexts as well. In Moscow (and in other parts of the Russian Federation) one population subgroup of Moldovan migrants that seems to exhibit an impressive capacity for social capital is that of students. One group of students with which I met in Moscow sought to "keep Moldovan traditions and festivals by attending events organized by the embassy, in addition to planning some of our own... We also take part in intercultural events in Moscow in an attempt to represent Moldova to other groups; we are very concerned with our collective image". The comments of these students underscored the notion that the conceptual distinction between "diaspora" and "migrant community" is a very fluid one. One of these students noted presciently: "I realize that most of our group's members will remain in Russia after graduation, so one of our goals is to begin to lay the groundwork for a real Diaspora".

Interestingly, in Israel there is a community organization for Moldovans that might very plausibly be considered "pre-Moldovan", having been established many decades ago for immigrants arriving to Israel (before and after the establishment of the state in 1948) who referred to themselves as "Bessarabian Jews". The organization, appropriately called the Association of Bessarabian Jews in Israel, has nevertheless managed to recruit to its ranks some of the more recent arrivals from Moldova (from the late 1980s through the mid 1990s). There are active branches in areas with large concentrations of recent immigrants, though it was conceded that those who take more of an interest in the association's aims are members of prior waves of immigration from Moldova.

However, there were also some examples of initiatives undertaken by those with significantly less seniority and fewer socio-economic resources, as evinced in the modest example of a band formed in Bologna that performs traditional Moldovan music – primarily for other Moldovans. This band, which clearly appeared more culturally than commercially motivated, was plagued by all of the obvious constraints to which recent labor migrants are subject. It does suggest though, that initiatives intended to improve the life of Moldovan migrant communities are not the sole domain of veteran diaspora or "core" members.

## The Church

In both Italy and Moscow, the role of the church not only in assisting Moldovan migrant communities but also in actually delimiting them, was significant. Anecdotal evidence was also found suggesting that in Jerusalem as well, the church constitutes an important meeting ground for Moldovan migrants. In the larger cities of Rome and Moscow, the presence of the church is more diffuse and consequently less resonant. In both cases, "the church" is essentially represented in the person of one or a few clergymen rather than institutionally. Other than the periodic use of embassy premises and a neighborhood elementary school, virtually no institutional church presence was manifest. This suggests that the role of the individual priest is all the more noteworthy. According to the priests interviewed, Moldovan migrants in their first 1-3 years approach the church with needs of a decidedly material nature and the Church tries as much as possible, with its limited resources, to provide help. But after a few years, migrants are said to experience other problems of a more spiritual, psychological nature and as one priest noted, "these issues are ultimately more fundamental and more pressing than the material ones".

For the Moldovan migrant community in Bologna, the church appears to play a more prominent role. One community member reported, "We have 2 orthodox churches and on Sundays, one may find almost everyone [in our community] at mass. [The church] is the main – if not the sole – address for seeking help in settling down and starting a life here. The priest has been an enormous help with finding employment, a place to live, etc."

## **Weaknesses**

### Insecurity Emanating from the Illegal Status of Migrants

As mentioned previously, the overwhelming majority of migrants in Italy, Russia and many other host countries as well do not enjoy a legalized status. Consequently, these migrants do not enjoy full access to services provided by the Moldovan Embassies/consulates. Similarly, they seem, more often than not, alienated from and or ignored by the established Moldovan diaspora community in those countries in which the latter is present. Hence, their existence is necessarily a rather precarious one which, for a myriad of reasons, serves as a disincentive for community organization along cultural, social or economic lines. As long as "illegality" remains the predicament of the overwhelming majority of Moldovan migrants, there is little reason to believe that significant numbers of them will be amenable to any kind of systematic effort to draw them closer to the homeland – be this in the form of voluntary community involvement or in its more formal, structured manifestation of Out of Country Voting (OCV).

### Perceived Weakness of Moldovan Diasporas/Migrant Communities

By all accounts, the Moldovan Diaspora in Russia is characterized by a relatively low level of social cohesion, as evinced by its extremely undeveloped communal structure. As one of the students interviewed noted: "It's been impossible to find any structure – no individual and no committee. The elders who came to Russia long ago did try to create something, but I see no such enthusiasm among the middle age generation. In fact, there is a vacuum of middle aged Diaspora leadership".

A partial explanation for the low level of community organization among Moldovan migrants may be traced to the rather stark disconnect between veteran Diaspora members and more recent migrants. Although it was pointed out previously that there is a certain degree of fluidity between these two categories, the fact remains that in Russia (this pattern is likely replicated in other countries featuring both types of Moldovan migrants) these two social categories or sub-groups remain very distinct from one another – materially, socially and spiritually. In the Russian context, the established Moldovan Diaspora is roughly comprised of those who arrived in the decades prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and their descendants. These often include families in which only one partner is Moldovan. Some arrived in Russia as students, others came to pursue careers as scientists, academics, journalists and some came through the Communist Party apparatus.

Despite the chronological gap separating them, Moldovan students currently in Russia more closely resemble these early Moldovan immigrants than they do their labor migrant contemporaries. They are scattered throughout the Russian Federation, as the Russian government distributes foreign students according to a particular quota, thereby laying the nucleus for community activists/entrepreneurs in places other than Moscow. The commonality between the veteran diaspora members and the more recent student arrivals finds expression in certain community events in which both groups take part such as the traditional March 1 celebration for the ushering in of

spring. This event in particular, in the words of one diaspora member, is viewed as "a central spiritual and emotional event in the life of the community". The celebration of this event is mirrored in the Israeli context, though here the celebration also features the attendance of at least some Moldovan migrant laborers. In Israel, while there is a clear-cut bifurcation of the Moldovan community with respect to legal status, there appear to be several instances of social interaction among members of both sub-groups. It is important to bear in mind then, that when mapping the infrastructure of a Moldovan diaspora in Moscow (or elsewhere for that matter), chronology is not the sole defining feature. This has what could be far reaching conceptual as well as methodological implications.

The distinction between veteran Diaspora and migrant Moldovans in Moscow is underscored by the comments of one veteran immigrant (who had long since forfeited his Moldovan citizenship): "The main difference between our Diaspora and the migrants is that our goal is to preserve our [Moldovan] identity, while theirs is to earn money; they have no fear of losing their identity. Our [diaspora] community can be thought of as a community of "dreamers" – a romantic notion of a people seeking to preserve a link to their historic homeland".

One Moscow-based representative of an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) assisting youth at risk offered a partial explanation for the seeming weakness of the Moldovan diaspora in that country: "Recently, on a talk show in Moldova, they discussed how there is actually something in the Moldovan identity that allows this to happen. Their national identity is a very weak one, perhaps as a result of centuries of occupation by outside forces. The lack of social solidarity among Moldovans may also be a factor in the relatively high vulnerability of Moldovan children".

When examining the link of Moldovan migrants to Moldova, the factors that typically serve as the glue binding migrant to communities to their homelands (common history, territory and language) seem, in this case, to be quite nebulous. History does not appear to play an important role and language is also much less salient given the absence of a single, distinct national language. Many of those interviewed contrasted this sense of collective deficiency with the relative strength, cohesiveness and capacity for collective action of the Armenian Diaspora, followed by those of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Georgia. These diaspora communities in Moscow were said to maintain a stronger tie with the newer waves of migrants from those same countries, whereas for the Moldovans, the embassy, in the words of one migrant, "is the only common ground between veterans and new comers".

The importance of social cohesion and a fundamental sense of mutual trust among migrants in the same host country was underscored in the comments of a Filipina migrant working as a caregiver in Israel for the past 9 years. "We [Filipinos] routinely lend significant amounts of money to one another when asked. Also, there is a remittance center inside the [Tel Aviv] Central Bus Station that when I call and ask them to send money to my family, they do it immediately even if I haven't yet handed over the money. There are also some [Filipino] workers who sell goods on an installment basis, letting you pay monthly however much you are able to pay, as long as you promise to pay. They do that even if they don't really know you. If they know that you are a friend of a friend of a friend, then you can be trusted". In my repeated

formal and informal encounters with Moldovan migrants, evidence for the type of mutual trust described above was not in abundance.

### Moldovan Diplomatic Presence

It was made rather clear through the many interviews conducted in the course of this research, as well as in previous research efforts, that for most Moldovan migrants, the Moldovan Embassy and Consulate represent the primary and most concrete expression of their link to the homeland. Not surprisingly, this is especially true of Moldovan migrants living in the capital cities. Generally speaking, the embassy services Moldovans who reside legally in their respective countries, while the consulate, in addition to catering to their consular needs may also interface with those there illegally.

What appears evident is that the size and deployment of diplomatic staff (particularly that of the consulates) are woefully insufficient to effectively serve the large numbers of Moldovans residing in the Italy and Russia. Anecdotally, when we met with the Moldovan Embassy staff in Rome, we were forced to weave our way through a visibly agitated throng of people on our way into the ambassador's office. The relaxed, cordial atmosphere of our meeting with the senior embassy staff stood in sharp contrast to the uneasy atmosphere that prevailed outside and in the corridor. I would argue that this serves as something of a metaphor for the ambivalent relationship between Moldovans and their country/government, as embodied by the embassy. And if this is at all reflective of Moldovans in Rome, one can only assume that this is even more pronounced among those living far north or south of the capital. As one migrant living in Bologna argued: "The government has serious problems dealing with [Moldovans outside Rome] and though they are trying to have representatives in [outlying areas], the high volume of services they are supposed to provide requires a number of staff that for them is ridiculously beyond their ability".

But beyond the perceived inadequacy on an administrative level, the embassy is also viewed as removed from the day to day lives of the very nationals they purport to represent. The same migrant in Bologna complained: "The embassy doesn't represent us at all. There are always problems in front of the embassy [complex]... The embassy [is] at best a facility to get documents but it really doesn't represent us Moldovans".

The embassies in Moscow and Rome both reported working with certain Moldovan community associations. This was substantiated by one of the community activists in Rome who claimed that the embassy had been very helpful, adding that it's been very easy to get an appointment to meet the ambassador. But in discussions with other activists and with embassy officials, it seemed that this approach to working with community associations was a rather selective one. In both cases there were migrant associations/groupings which aroused a palpable distrust or at least skepticism among the embassy staff.

With respect to the Moldovan community in Italy, one very severe weakness is the absence of an Italian Embassy in Chisinau. As a result, those Moldovans seeking to

enter Italy legally are usually forced to travel to the Italian Embassy in Bucharest, a very expensive and inconvenient proposition. One migrant interviewee claimed that underlying this status quo were vested (economic) interests on the part of Italy.

### Remittances

The issue of remittances, like that of trafficking, is one that has generated a considerable amount of research and popular attention. Despite the centrality of these two issues to the Moldovan migrant experience, they are beyond the purview of this research. To be sure, much has been written about the economic scope of the remittances of Moldovan migrants and their implications for the Moldovan economy. It has also been widely lamented that while remittances to Moldova constitute a significant portion of the GNP, they are almost never channeled beyond personal consumption, for example into schemes for economic development (i.e. micro-financing).

What is important to mention here is the symbolic significance attached to the issue of remittances by migrants and by official Moldova. Remittances are, after all, the principle means through which Moldovan migrants express their enduring link to Moldova, albeit focused chiefly on family members. In our discussions with migrants, remittances are often interpreted as, among other things, their contribution to the economic well being of Moldova. At the same time, many argue that these same remittances arouse more empathy and interest in Moldovan government quarters than do migrants themselves. Many spoke of a government that is at best indifferent to the plight of migrants and worse, outright callous. In sharp contrast to the very considerable sums of money flowing into Moldova in the form of remittances, funds at the disposal of the Moldovan government are, by all accounts, rather paltry. Thus, its extremely limited economic wherewithal makes any kind of meaningful, sustained government intervention on behalf of migrants unlikely – even in the event that such political will actually existed.

One contribution this research can ideally make is to introduce into the ongoing discourse on contemporary migration the symbolic significance of remittances and related issues. Indeed, its symbolic import must not be underestimated, for when contemplating the multi-layered dynamic between migrant community/diaspora and homeland, subjective dimensions such as identity, sense of belonging and perceived sensitivity are very much intertwined with the more structural factors of remittances, OCV, patterns of communication, travel, etc.

### Moldovan Predisposition to Romania and Romanians

Interestingly, many of the Moldovans surveyed expressed an unmistakable ambivalence with regard to Romania and Romanians. One municipal official in Rome noted that Moldovan males, working primarily in construction, often prefer to present themselves as Romanians. The explanation offered was that "Romanian" nationality resonates more among Italians than does that of Moldova. This was substantiated in the observations of a doctor in Bologna whose patients included many migrants.

"Moldovans often introduce themselves as Romanians, assuming few [Italians] know where Moldova is".

While most of those interviewed unhesitatingly identified themselves and the language they speak as "Moldovan", there was a minority opinion expressed, according to which the distinction between "Moldovan" and "Romanian" was largely false and stemmed from either ignorance or political considerations. In the words of one of the interviewees, "I see myself as a Romanian who was born and raised inside Moldova. I speak Romanian – I don't refer to this as 'Moldovan'... I think that many Moldovans don't really know their history... Where do such people think St. Stephan lived and where is his tomb? He lived and is buried in Romania but he is still considered the King of Moldova. I think unification with Romania is inevitable and is a positive step. Life in Moldova is very difficult now so I think their joining a larger stronger country is inevitable".

It was not uncommon to uncover a much less sanguine view of Romania on a more inter-personal level. In a church-sponsored soup kitchen/health clinic in Padua, one Moldovan client claimed that her Romanian counterparts in Italy were "mostly Gypsies" and that Moldovans tended not to socialize with – or trust – them. This sentiment was confirmed by one of the Italian staffers of the health clinic who serves the migrant population.

The varied and nuanced attitudes of Moldovans with respect to Romania and Romanians served as an interesting prism through which to further explore the very complex nature of Moldovan national identity. What might be theoretically fruitful to examine would be how the attitudes about Romania among citizens inside Moldova differ from those of the migrants.

#### Communication with and from Moldova

One of the more salient findings of this research was the patent lack of regular and reliable means through which Moldovan migrants may receive information from the homeland. To date, no Moldovan newspapers are published in either Italy or Russia. The availability of newspapers printed in Moldova is irregular at best and when they are available, these newspapers/magazines are chronically dated ("often a week to 10 days old"). Countless comments were made lamenting the lack of a steady flow of information. One migrant from Bologna highlighted this by asking, "[Can you] imagine living somewhere and having no information about your country for six months and doing your best to get information from this friend and that friend?" This same individual spoke with a representative from the local Trade Union in order to start a Moldovan daily, but nothing ever materialized. Another migrant, also from Bologna, went as far as saying, "The lack of information regarding Moldova and Italy is our worst problem [particularly considering that] access to information can play a major role in resolving problems".

The previous remarks indicate that the flow of vital information is not only problematic when originating in Moldova. Migrants also bemoaned the difficulty in accessing important information in Italy – a function not only of language but of other factors as well such as limited distribution. Not surprisingly, one of the main

functions of Moldovan migrant associations is to disseminate otherwise inaccessible vital information. This was affirmed by the director of a Moldovan association in northern Italy: "The main issue for migrants is the ignorance about Italian legislation; they get in touch with [our] organization in order to get legal assistance".

Another medium through which migrants may learn of goings on in the homeland is satellite television. In Italy for example, Russian, Ukrainian satellite channels were available as was one from Moldova. While most migrants are not satellite subscribers, a few in any given locale likely are and, according to one migrant in Bologna, their homes serve as a weekly meeting point for other migrants.

Another medium with far larger potential for the widespread transmission of information and facilitation of communication is the internet. Indeed, a visit to an internet café in any major metropolis will usually reveal a conspicuous presence of foreigners (i.e. tourists, students, migrants, etc.) Some migrant communities (Filipinos for example) not only use the net to communicate with family and friends back home, but also employ this medium to connect with overseas workers in their host country and in other countries as well. As one Filipina migrant told me, "I keep informed of what's happening back home primarily thru internet. I have saved on my favorites all the websites that convey Philippine news and I check these sites daily". Interestingly, contrary to the high degree of internet use and connectivity among Filipinos and certain other migrant communities, the utilization of this medium by Moldovans is far less extensive.

## **Opportunities**

### Moldovan Government Policy

It has been widely reported that the government in Moldova, while seeking to curtail the flow of out-migration, is increasingly mindful of and sensitive to the needs and concerns of the hundreds of thousands of Moldovans currently living/working abroad. If this is substantiated and the trend continues, it would represent a qualitative shift in the attitude of successive governments and may therefore constitute a significant opportunity. There are indeed indications that a greater awareness exists among the powers that be in Moldova regarding the plight of migrants. One example, an "action plan" for Diaspora Management, formulated by the Bureau of Interethnic Relations (BIR), would appear to herald such an awareness. Various pronouncements by government sources and certain high profile deliberations on the issue have also served as hints of such a policy reorientation.

Others however have critiqued the action plan as embodying too "Soviet" an orientation, i.e. informed primarily by the experience of migrants in Russia and other former Soviet republics and "stressing the importance of ethnicity". These same critics also argued that a government exhibiting a heightened concern for migration and migrants could hardly be expected to dismantle a government bureau (a reference to the now defunct National Migration Bureau) whose explicit mandate is migration. Hence, it is probably early to definitively assert that the government has adopted a substantial shift in its thinking/policy with respect to migration.

### Vicissitudes of the Legal Status of Moldovans in Foreign Countries

There is much ambiguity surrounding the laws and regulations governing the status of migrants in the countries included in this analysis. The threats inherent in such a situation are addressed in the next section. With that said, it should be noted that the overall trends in Italy, Israel and to a lesser extent in Russia appear to be towards a simplification of the regulations governing migration and a greater sensitivity towards those migrants already residing therein. These trends are generally manifest at the level of central government. The Italian government has issued a series of amnesties during the past few years, granting significant numbers of migrants a legalized status. The impetus for such amnesties is multi-faceted. It seems likely that part of the motivation may be traced to pressure from a variety of external bodies, such as foreign governments, local and international NGOs. Be that as it may, Italy is perceived by many of the migrants we met as relatively more hospitable than certain other European countries and also more hospitable than it had been in previous years. Israel also legislated more stringent regulations with respect to labor migrants and while the aggregate numbers have decreased, those who remain are by and large more protected, better compensated and treated more equitably than their forerunners a few years earlier.

In Russia too, the regulations governing the rights of Moldovan migrants have undergone many permutations, nevertheless, the fact remains that no visa is required

for entry. Interestingly, one of the implicit hypotheses that informed this research project was that the choice of large numbers of Moldovans to migrate to Russia did not necessarily reflect a preference for that country over alternatives in the West. Rather, it was assumed that Russia was a "default destination" by virtue of the absence of visa requirements and perhaps due also to its geographic proximity to Moldova. An additional assumption was that Russia served as a convenient way-station for many migrants in their quest to work in more prosperous Western countries. A closer examination of the Moldovan migrant experience in Russia reveals a much more nuanced set of motivations and incentives. On a practical level, the ability to enter Russia without the need for a visa is a consideration the importance of which cannot be underestimated. And though the more recent registration requirement has introduced a degree of uncertainty and fear among many migrants, it is still far less restricting than the visa requirements of all other destination countries, excepting Ukraine. Furthermore, most would argue that migrating to Russia requires a small initial financial outlay (as compared with the West) and also affords a relatively easy early accumulation of capital. On an affective level, that country's linguistic/cultural familiarity and the current allure of Moscow as a hub of economic growth and opportunity make Russia more than simply a choice of convenience.

The issue of legal status is no doubt one of the critical ingredients in the migrant's quest for stability and economic/psychological security. In Italy at least, an increasing number of Moldovans have achieved a legalized status and the requisite material and psychic benefits engendered by it. For migrants to take part in (much less initiate) activity designed to foster community cohesion and links to the homeland, this is nothing less than a prerequisite.

### Political Opportunities in Host Countries

The nature and the degree of restrictions to which citizens and migrants in a particular country are subject is, to a certain extent, a function of the structure of the polity in question. But the manner in which a polity is structured not only imposes certain restrictions on those living therein, but usually affords certain opportunities as well. I discussed previously a few of the restrictions and opportunities – specifically in the context of the legal status of migrants – manifest at the level of central government. Parallel restrictions and opportunities may also exist at the local level government, i.e. municipal and regional government. In the realm of migration, an argument could be made, based primarily on our research in Italy, for local government acting in a more coherent, judicious and sensitive fashion than central government.

The Rome Municipality for example, has played an increasingly active role in facilitating greater communication with migrant communities and in addressing their needs. According to the Councilor for Social Policies and Migration at the Rome Municipality, "The current Mayor of Rome has adopted a policy of inclusive dialogue with all of the ethnic/migrant communities of Rome. He is also an advocate for changing the current migration system so as to help legalizing all migrants". One means through which this dialogue is conducted is the "cultural mediator", members of ethnic/national minorities who are enlisted and trained by the municipality to assess and address the needs of migrants. We were told that by January 2007, a

comprehensive registry of all migrants working as mediators would be prepared. This is considered a vital priority of the Municipality and a line for this purpose appears in the municipal budget, which the Councilor assured us "no one would dare touch". In addition, "joint counselors" are elected by their respective migrant communities to serve in an advisory capacity on a municipal level. There are four joint counselors presently serving in the Rome Municipality and one in each "sub-municipal unit". Joint counselors do not vote, but they are able to offer suggestions. The symbolic import of such a function at the level of local government cannot be overstated, for it signals to the migrant that his/her voice is not only welcome in the ongoing deliberations on the state of Rome but actually solicited. As the Councilor suggested, "this is a way to give them a chance to vote and elect someone who can speak on their behalf – even though they are not citizens".

Evidence of active local government involvement in meeting the needs of migrants was also found in Bologna. The municipality there for example plays an active role in fostering the distinct cultural heritage of the various migrant groups residing there. One migrant there took great pains to add, "Every year we have a Moldovan festival with music and information sharing here in Bologna. While our embassy doesn't take part, the Bologna Municipality did help in arranging this festival and all Moldovans were invited". The same migrant quoted above informed us that the Bologna Municipality is also involved in programs designed to assist victims of trafficking". In Padua as well, a formalized mechanism for the political expression of migrants was in effect. One of the migrants interviewed there served in an official capacity in that city's government apparatus. As he recounted, "The Municipality of Padua nominated me five years ago to represent migrants through a formal election process and so I stood for election. We were divided according to six geographical areas internationally. I was the candidate for Eastern and Central Europe".

In Russia as well, certain institutionalized avenues of expression were made available to Moldovan migrants – but these were of the established diaspora, rather than the more transient labor variety. One of the representatives of the former with whom we met in Moscow served in the capacity of Moldovan Diaspora Representative on the Russian Parliamentary Committee on CIS Affairs and had previously sat on a committee for Interethnic Relations. Access to the political process for Moldovan migrants need not only be in the form of formalized functions or offices. Moldovan students in Russia (who, as mentioned previously, may be more accurately classified as veteran diaspora immigrants) also spoke of a smooth entry into that country's political system. In this case, the access stemmed from their status as students, a social category to which the state still attaches prestige and importance. In addition, among those Moldovans studying in Russia are those whose parents are high-ranking officials back in Moldova.

Although there may be a tendency to view migrants, particularly those who are not legal, as void of any agency, the findings presented above suggest a more nuanced reality. Accordingly, the social/political space within which migrants may act – individually and collectively – is a function of many factors not the least of which is the structure of the polity in question. Other factors as well will condition the extent to which migrants may be offered political opportunities and the extent to which they will be seized. The Moldovan migrant experience is instructive, for it demonstrates

that in some societies and under certain circumstances, non-citizen migrants may enjoy greater political expression in their host countries than in their homeland.

### Active NGO community/support for migrants

Discussed earlier was the role central and local government may play in encouraging or discouraging and increasing or reducing the angst experienced by migrants in the face of legal uncertainty and economic/social vulnerability. Another significant arena that has helped shape the social, economic and political environment migrants inhabit is that of civil society. Most notably, the work of NGOs, particularly those active in the realm of human/labor rights, is striking. The influence of Italian civil society, known for its diversity and vibrancy, was very evident when examining the plight of Moldovan migrants in that country. As one interviewee from the Rome Municipality observed, "NGOs and other associations [active here] are typically Italian in style, through creating a strong network that seeks to resolve/contain social problems that arise". He added that local government often works in tandem with civil society, "the municipality [sets] a policy line and coordinates with the activities of these associations".

However, civil society is inhabited by organizations of many different forms and many different orientations. Not all NGOs willingly work hand in hand with government and certainly not in Italy; some act as ideological adversaries of the state. One vivid illustration of this, to which we were exposed, was the case of an abandoned building in a Rome neighborhood occupied by Moldovan migrants (squatters). An extremely activist Italian NGO assumed the role of advocate for these migrants and repeatedly defied the orders of the Rome municipality. Ultimately, through the work of this NGO, and through negotiation with the authorities, the migrant squatters were granted permission to remain in the disputed structure. But the activist role of NGOs in advocating on behalf of migrants is by no means limited to Italy. In Israel as well, a host of NGOs were mobilized in order to secure and defend the rights of migrant laborers. The work of two such NGOs in particular was praised by the Moldovan consul in Tel Aviv, who on numerous occasions referred to them Moldovan nationals experiencing legal problems. Not surprisingly, the mechanisms afforded either by government (at any level) or civil society in the Russian Federation to ease the plight of Moldovan migrants seemed few and far between. This is clearly a reflection of the nature of the Russian polity and represents a considerable and qualitative departure from the socio-political conditions experienced by migrants residing in countries of the west.

It is necessary to point out that for migrants to be able to avail themselves of the services provided by (central or local) government or by civil society, the necessary infrastructure for formal and informal communications must be in place. Very few of the migrants with whom we met informally in the city squares of Rome for example, were aware of the "joint counselors" in formal municipal forums ostensibly speaking in their name. When considering the relative hospitality or socio-political openness of a given society for migrants, it is also necessary to take into account the means – formal and informal – through which these migrants may access the same individuals, organizations and institutions that exist in order to improve their quality of life.

### Communications

Much has been said this far about the limitations experienced by migrants in accessing information about the countries in which they reside (specifically legal information), about their country of origin and even about the migrant community in which they reside. The lack of printed media and the disinclination of most Moldovan migrants to access the internet represent serious shortcomings when considering the ability of these migrants to access relevant information. The lives of large numbers of migrants – particularly women living with families as domestics or caregivers – are characterized by a pronounced social isolation, conditions which do not easily facilitate access to media of mass communication, even if those are in great abundance.

One medium however, which may offer a slightly enhanced potential for improving information access among migrants is satellite television. We were informed that in Bologna, migrants had access to a new Moldovan satellite channel as well as to Russian and Ukrainian ones. Although a relatively small number actually subscribed, through them, others were able to access this extensive source of information. Migrant women working as domestics or caregivers may reside in homes subscribed to satellite television. Whether the Moldovan channel (or those of Russia, Ukraine or Romania for that matter) is among those included in the satellite package of employers with whom migrants live was not clear. It may be worthwhile looking into ways in which employers with satellite television could be induced to include such channels in their satellite package.

### Transportation to Moldova

A certain proportion of the migrants in each of the three countries under consideration make trips to Moldova – the frequency and durations of which vary. In Israel, a number of Moldovan immigrants travel to Moldova in order to visit cemeteries. It was reported that older people tend to travel more frequently than their younger counterparts to see friends, relatives etc. Also traveling there from Israel are Moldovan immigrant business people with certain commercial interests back in the homeland. These travel patterns are obviously more indicative of established diaspora [Jewish] migrants than of the more temporary labor variety.

Migrants traveling to Moldova from Russia tend to use the train; those from Israel fly; and those in Italy reported flying, using trains and buses and driving private cars. It has been documented how buses and trains in particular also serve as conduits for the informal transfer of remittances. Buses, trains and planes all represent opportunities to reach Moldovan migrants in transit. For example, in Bologna, it was reported that, "there are new airline routes - one is Romanian and the other Moldovan - that have a toll-free phone line that we use to book flights". It would seem feasible to introduce to these toll-free lines relevant public service announcements intended for Moldovan migrant callers as they wait to be connected with a representative.

## Personnel Agencies

In Israel in particular, one of the significant stakeholders with which we met was a personnel agency. A number of interviewees noted that, in the case of Israel at least, personnel agencies have played a constructive role in reducing the abuses inherent in large scale labor migration and in improving the conditions of migrant workers. The empowering of these agencies, through legislation, helped to curb at least some of the exploitation of migrants at the hands of private contractors. In fact, according to one Moldovan official serving in Tel Aviv, [the more established] personnel agencies have, in some cases, been more cooperative than the Israeli government. Furthermore, these agencies typically contract with or hire local representatives in the countries supplying laborers and therefore potentially allow for greater coordination of and stability in the flow of labor migrants. In the other countries visited, it did not appear as if the personnel agencies were as central to the labor migration process as they were in Israel.

The role of Israeli personnel agencies supplying foreign labor was far more pronounced with respect to male migrants working almost exclusively in construction. In the case of female migrant workers, working primarily as nannies or caregivers for the elderly, personnel agencies are smaller and more numerous and therefore more diffuse. This, coupled with the isolated nature of the labor performed by women, makes the task of contacting them for research purposes considerably more challenging than their male counterparts.

Lest the assessment of the role played by personnel agencies sound too sanguine, one Israeli NGO official criticized their role in the formation and implementation of Israel's migration policy. In her opinion, this policy is essentially driven by pressure from employers who want to keep importing labor while regularly sending back previous employees through the Immigration Department. In so doing, they succeed in keeping new workers in a weak position vis-à-vis their employers and impede the development of a cohort of seasoned and potentially politically active laborers. Accordingly, personnel agencies, a critical link in this chain of labor supply, are complicit in this social control, intended to serve the interests of employers. Furthermore, it was reported that although mechanisms are in place to regulate the fees paid by migrants to the agencies, these are routinely violated. The result is that migrants, instead of paying a fee of less than \$1000, are often forced to pay thousands of dollars, despite the fact that this practice is illegal both in Moldova and Israel.

## Using Diaspora community to petition host government

A few interesting examples emerged in which migrant communities were actively enlisted by the host government in an attempt to influence the policy of the homeland government or vice versa. An example of the latter was the efforts of the Moldovan government, under the auspices of the BIR, to mobilize veteran Moldovan residents of Russia to lobby the Russian government on issues of concern to Moldova, i.e. the Russian government's boycott of Moldovan wines. An example of political action of migrants directed at the homeland government was, as relayed to us by one of the

Moldovan priests interviewed, when the Moldovan president met, during a state visit to Israel, with Moldovan residents there who appealed to him to amend the law prohibiting double citizenship, which subsequently came to pass.

## Threats

### Ambiguous legal framework governing Migration

In the previous section, it was described how the ambiguity that prevails (primarily in Italy and Russia) with regard to the requirements for residing and working legally may be conceived of as an opportunity. To be sure, the very fact that Italy and Russia together contain the overwhelming majority of Moldovan migrants globally attests to the ability of these migrants to successfully adapt to or circumvent these confusing, and at times conflicting regulations. As a representative of Amnesty International in Rome explained, "The lack of legal ways to enter Italy plays a large role for the many undocumented migrants living there... In 1998, a comprehensive law on migration was enacted and implemented in 2001. The law is not actually very comprehensive or clear and therefore results in much anxiety among migrants with respect to their status and their future in Italy".

In Russia too, the laws concerning migrant laborers are constantly changing. As mentioned previously, a visa is not required to enter but migrants must be registered somewhere – at either a hotel or home. This isn't easy to obtain and the employers who are supposed to arrange this don't usually do so. The situation results in some 90% of Moldovans being in Russia illegally. Until relatively recently, migrants had 90 days to comply with the regulation to register. According to a veteran Moldovan living in Moscow who engages in outreach to recent migrants, "Some would actually enter for 89 days and go home only to re-enter – all this in order not to have to register. The attitude of the police is often very negative towards migrants – especially towards those with no documents and they can often be humiliating and can demand money. Generally speaking, there is a problem with official registration". As untenable as that situation seems, it was far preferable and easy to negotiate than the current one in which migrants must register within three days of arriving. As the Moldovan priest in Moscow with whom we spoke noted wistfully, "For the Moldovans in Moscow, the main dream is to see to it that the previous system of registration is restored... for Ukrainians, an exception was made and they are still allowed to remain 90 days".

It may be concluded that the legal ambiguity in both Italy and Russia is very much a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it does provide a loophole of sorts which countless Moldovans have managed to exploit. On the other hand, this same ambiguity is a constant source of anxiety and, as mentioned previously, will likely preclude, for the foreseeable future, any meaningful interventions aimed at fostering community cohesion and stronger links to the homeland among undocumented migrants.

### Linguistic/Cultural Divide

In our discussions with various officials in Moldova, the question of that country's linguistic/cultural divide was stealthily avoided. The impression given was that the two cultural traditions coexist within Moldova in relative harmony. And while on a

practical level this does appear to be the case, when discussing this with a number of the migrants (based in Italy), a different image was portrayed. Two of those interviewed recalled popular protest and public agitation that ultimately led to "Moldovan" (i.e. Romanian) being established in 1991 as the official national language. "We even slept in front of the parliament to achieve this goal and for some 7-8 years, we managed to shift everything to Romanian. But then, when [the current leadership] came to power, tremendous amounts of money were invested to reverse everything back to Russian... so in the end, most of the country's resources seemed to be diverted to reversing something we had struggled for years to achieve". Conversely, a 25 year old (Russian speaking) Moldovan migrant living in Israel suggested she would return to Moldova, "if Russia was the official language and I could find work with a decent salary".

An undercurrent of estrangement between Russian and Romanian speaking Moldovans was discernible in the remarks of some of the (Russian-speaking) students in Moscow and also found expression in the existence of an exclusively Russian-language website [www.kishinev.ru](http://www.kishinev.ru), catering to Moldovans residing in Israel, Germany, Canada and the US. This site provides updated information on Chisinau and is devoted primarily to those originating from that city seeking to connect with people and in some cases institutions (i.e. schools they had attended).

While the presumed latent rift between Russian and Romanian speaking Moldovans does not lie at the core of our inquiry, it nonetheless has implications for the questions/assumptions guiding this research. If after all, the attempts to forge stronger, more substantive and sustainable links between communities of Moldovan migrants overseas and their homeland, presuppose a single coherent and meaningful Moldovan identity, the degree to which this identity resonates for Moldovans of both linguistic backgrounds is of critical importance. The impression that emerges in discussions with Moldovans of both linguistic/cultural backgrounds is that this question has heretofore remained unresolved. One young person offered the following observation in the context of a chat forum initiated by my research assistant on the subject, "A Moldovan national identity as such does not exist, because there isn't really a Moldovan nation – only a very divided Moldovan society. It will be a very long process before it achieves the status of 'national identity'".

Moreover, the very issue of what constitutes Moldovan national identity is implicitly laden with certain political hues, according to which Moldovans may increasingly see their collective political future through a cultural/linguistic lens. Such a hypothetical scenario – admittedly extreme – would have far reaching ramifications for Moldovans overseas and the efforts to galvanize them around a coherent notion of homeland.

### [Link to Moldova and Moldovans](#)

Although the Moldovan labor migration is a relatively recent phenomenon, many of the migrants with whom we spoke do ponder the nature of the link to Moldova that will embody the next generation. Indeed, as the second generation of Moldovan migrants is being born overseas, the already problematic link of Moldovans to their homeland runs the risk of becoming even weaker and more diffuse.

This trend may be unwittingly exacerbated by certain developments inside Moldova. One of these is the economic reality that has emerged in recent years, whereby Moldovan families with relatives abroad enjoy an enhanced purchasing power. One result of this is that those with relatives abroad are more able to afford property in Moldova than their neighbors without such an economic advantage. This in turn has prompted what some would term an "artificial" upsurge in the price of real estate. Some expressed the concern that this could produce resentment (and even social unrest) in the homeland, which would serve to drive a wedge of sorts between those with relatives abroad and those without. Perhaps one of the manifestations of this resentment is reflected in the sentiments of one of the migrants in Italy we interviewed: "Many of our own people in Moldova do not imagine we have such a difficult life here; when they think of us, they assume that since we are working here overseas, we must be financially successful and have no problems. I am not just talking about politicians – who don't know and don't want to know - but about ordinary Moldovans as well". In the absence of a unifying Moldovan identity, the increasing divisiveness between Moldovans abroad and those in the homeland could have very detrimental effects for the aims underlying this research effort.

## **Emerging recommendations**

The recommendations contained herein are neither comprehensive nor systematic, but they do provide the basis for a thorough reconsideration of existing policy. It should be pointed out that the recommendations that follow are, in some cases, consistent with some of those appearing in the National Action Plan formulated by the BIR and as such, could conceivably be integrated in future plans to facilitate follow-up and implementation of the latter.

Because this research is ultimately geared towards policy makers and practitioners, i.e. those who operate in an arena that is necessarily politicized, these recommendations must take into account and be sensitive to the terrain on which they are ostensibly to be applied. The points that follow should therefore be read and interpreted with the requisite degree of caution, tentativeness and critical reflection.

### Bi-lateral agreements

A number of the embryonic recommendations that emerge from the interview data belong, in one way or another, to the purview of the bi-lateral relations between Moldova and countries in which migrants reside. While the goal in most cases may entail the ratification of bi-lateral agreements, this must first commence with a process of dialogue. Among the areas that would presumably fall under bi-lateral relations or agreements is the safeguarding of the basic human rights of migrants in host countries. Information and recommendations in this specific area are plentiful. This research focused on other areas. Chief among these was the ubiquitous issue of legalizing or "regularizing" the status of the overwhelming majority of Moldovan migrants – whether this refers specifically to an illegal status (the reality for most of those in Italy) or the absence of registration (the lot of most of those in Russia).

One simple recommendation which could be addressed as part of a more comprehensive bi-lateral agreement between Moldova and the relevant countries is the granting of a "grace period" of sorts (the duration of which would be open to negotiation) during which migrants would be able to work and concurrently be free to sort out their status. Such an agreement could also include provisions for offering assistance with accessing, understanding and completing documentation. From the many interviews conducted with migrants and officials, it seemed quite obvious that little deliberation takes place between the governments around these issues. Movement towards the implementation of this fairly simple and straight-forward recommendation would seem to be a very positive step in the right direction.

The need for such a comprehensive bi-lateral agreement was also reflected in the remarks of Moldova's ambassador in Tel Aviv: "We usually only see those Moldovans here illegally when they get into some kind of trouble and need our help – typically to leave the country. The existence of a comprehensive legal framework governing the treatment of workers, migration, trafficking, which Israel has thus far rejected, would allow us to deal with all Moldovans – including the illegal ones".

Another area which could conceivably be addressed in the context of bi-lateral agreements is the issue of migrants' professional qualification/credentials. In a number of interviews conducted, it emerged that migrants often possess certain skills, beyond those of construction and care-giving (health care, education, music etc.), that could

potentially benefit their host societies. One migrant in Bologna spoke passionately to this very issue: "My mother has worked for years in her field and is overqualified in Moldova; but when she came to Italy, she couldn't find a job in even the most basic health care facility since her degree wasn't recognized... I would ask that our government work to have our [academic/professional] degrees recognized here. This would improve our chances of being productive, fulfilled individuals".

Incidentally, bi-lateral agreements around issues relating to migration need not be exclusively between central governments. In our research, we uncovered certain instances in which cooperation between government structures was devolved to a more local level. For example, an agreement was reached between Moscow and Chisinau, according to which a school for Moldovan children would operate in Moscow and vice versa.

### The Role of Moldovan Diplomatic Missions

Past research has indicated that for most Moldovans abroad, the Moldovan Embassy and consulate represent the primary address, not only for matters related to documentation etc., but also for help during times of crisis. Not surprisingly, this is truer for those migrants living in closer proximity to the embassy/consulate. For those located in outlying regions, the lack of access to official Moldova is most definitely a shortcoming. If the Moldovan authorities are genuinely interested in a stronger, more dynamic link with their migrant communities abroad, they must contemplate the redeployment of consular personnel in a manner that would take into account the distribution of migrants in a given country. Such a redeployment would require additional personnel and would no doubt be a costly endeavor. But the long term gain afforded by a more demographically sensitive consular configuration, particularly given the alarming proportion of Moldovans living and working overseas, would seem worth the investment. A number of migrants located in northern Italy expressed the desire for additional consulates to be opened that region of the country. This idea has actually been floated in official circles, but to date, no discernible progress has been made. No less important would be the dispatching of specially trained labor attaches to certain key destination cities, whose responsibilities would include monitoring and protecting the rights of Moldovan nationals working there legally AND illegally. An instructive example from the Filipino experience is the inclusion of a Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Resource Center in many of their diplomatic missions. These centers provide counseling, welfare assistance, information, gender-specific programs, and registration (Newland & Patrick, 2004).

Another gaping hole in diplomatic deployment is the very conspicuous absence of an Italian Embassy in Moldova, as mentioned previously. Although the responsible party in this case is the Italian Foreign Ministry, this should be an agenda item that Moldova raises in every set of bi-lateral deliberations with Italy. One of the Rome-based migrants wistfully expressed the hope that all the Moldovan associations in Italy could mobilize to pressure the government there to open an embassy in Chisinau. It is rather obvious that these associations are neither established nor strong enough to mount such a campaign. But if a few of these groups were to work in tandem with, and with the support of, the relevant authorities in Moldova, it's possible that some movement on this front could be achieved. The benefit of such cooperation would not

only be material (saving much time and money for Moldovan citizens seeking entry into Italy) but also in exemplifying precisely the type of diaspora-homeland cooperation Moldova ostensibly seeks.

One very severe shortcoming with regard to consular representation is that Moldovan consuls appear to be chronically overburdened and have precious few resources at their disposal to direct towards activity that goes beyond the strictly consular needs of migrants. In an IOM workshop for Moldovan consular officials facilitated by CIMI in September of last year, participants were asked to devise outreach strategies for engaging migrants and strengthening their ties to Moldova through the embassy/consulate. What became patently clear during this workshop was that, despite the genuine desire on the part of at least a number of consuls to undertake earnest efforts to forge a stronger link between Moldovan migrants and their homeland, virtually no funds were available for such purposes. When the implementation of some of the programmatic ideas raised was eventually discussed, even the seemingly paltry sum of a few hundred US dollars seemed prohibitive for most of those in attendance. One of the rather obvious conclusions of this research effort is that, as long as the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains the primary address for the forging of such a link between MCA and homeland, its personnel must be empowered with the requisite skills and resources to undertake the types of programs that could make any kind of meaningful difference. Consequently, it is recommended that budgetary allocations be secured for embassies in key destination countries for the purpose of organizing socio-cultural events on national holidays for Moldovan nationals and not merely for diplomatic colleagues. Such gatherings could also facilitate informal registration, improvement of communications and information sharing and other opportunities.

### Communication

As elucidated earlier (in "Weaknesses"), perhaps the most serious shortcoming in the attempt to forge stronger links between Moldova and its migrants overseas is the glaring lack of regular and reliable channels for the exchange of information. Moldovan migrants tend to rely much more on mobile phones than on the internet for communication with family back home. This pattern is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it might be worthwhile considering possibilities of harnessing cell phone technology for the purpose of informing Moldovan migrants with respect to goings on back home as well as important community events/developments. Whether through orchestrating the mass dispatching of pertinent text messages or negotiating with mobile phone providers for special rates and/or services for migrants, the Moldovan authorities would do well to look into the potential that inheres in this particular mode of communication. Such a service is already underway in other countries, as exemplified in the comments of a Filipina migrant in Israel, "my cell phone provider sends [to its subscribers] periodic text messages informing us about the latest news in the Philippines".

One of the more illuminating meetings conducted in Italy was with the founder and editor of a weekly newspaper in Romanian, targeting the extremely large Romanian migrant community in that country. The initial goal of this initiative was to inform

readers of current events, locally and in Romania. It gradually earned legitimacy among its readership, among other reasons, because it publicly criticized the Romanian government for the lack of consular services provided to their citizens in Italy. It proved to be a financially viable enterprise, due to both its affiliation with a chain of community newspapers, sponsored by a large communications conglomerate, and its success in garnering advertisements. The editor gradually discovered that this newspaper also functioned – no less importantly – as a vehicle for promoting social cohesion within that migrant community. Eventually, the "Association for Romanians in Italy" was established, which emerged as an outgrowth of the weekly. This chain of events demonstrates the powerful potential of a community-based newspaper, provided it is deemed to embody independence and integrity. The lack of a comparable Moldovan weekly is likely a function of a readership that is much smaller by comparison. But with a modicum of institutional support and the presence of a single social/journalistic entrepreneur, it is certainly possible that such a venture could be initiated – either as an independent organ or as a periodic supplement in the Romanian newspaper (or a Russian-language equivalent). Another lesson of this Romanian journalistic venture is that without harnessing the resources of the local community and able individuals therein, no degree of institutional support from without will affect meaningful, lasting social change.

One of NGO staff members interviewed in Rome proposed that information regarding the necessary documents for attaining and retaining legalized status should be disseminated through mass media. This might reach Italian readers, but it is very questionable whether the intended target audience (migrants) would be effectively reached. This underscores the need for some type of medium that is oriented towards the Moldovan migrant population through its content, language, and distribution.

The embassies and consulates could take a more active role in serving as conveyors of vital information. What this would require is a policy to be adopted whereby consular representatives would be entrusted with gathering, simplifying, clarifying, disseminating and updating all the pertinent information relating to the lives of migrants in the countries in which they serve. This would include information relating to legalization in addition to materials describing the network of human services available to migrants and their families. If such a service was undertaken effectively and in earnest, this would likely improve the image of official Moldova in the eyes of many migrants. Moreover, embassies and consulates could also disseminate information relating to socio-economic issues within Moldova, specifically the dire economic straits affecting many of those remaining behind. This kind of information could potentially generate interest in the socio-economic state of Moldova and perhaps even stimulate an interest among some in opportunities for investment in the home country.

Diplomatic missions, working in conjunction with the Moldovan government (and if necessary the national and/or local host government), may also initiate other steps intended to promote and strengthen ties between MCA and their homeland. Examples from the Filipino experience include arranging overseas tours of Filipino entertainers, providing psychological counseling services that emphasize the maintenance of "Filipino values", and establishing schools in areas with high concentrations of Filipino migrants (Newland & Patrick, 2004). The latter programmatic idea has actually been put into practice in Moscow in the form of School #164, an elementary

school featuring not only a sizeable presence of Moldovan pupils but also a "Moldova Room" containing Moldovan cultural artifacts and offering Moldovan language instruction.

One gets the inescapable impression that part of the reason for the woefully inadequate communications between official Moldova and its migrant communities overseas may be traced to the configuration of governmental structures designed to address the issue of migration. Until recently, there existed a National Migration Bureau (NMB), almost comparable in status to a government ministry. At one point, the NMB had planned to study the possibility of establishing more formal channels of communication with migrant communities and disseminating informational materials for potential migrants inside Moldova. This bureau was subsequently dismantled – for reasons which remain unclear – and established in its wake was the BIR - Bureau of Interethnic Relations. The mandate of the latter differs in a variety of ways from its predecessor, as it focuses more on ethnic minorities within Moldova and on veteran Diaspora communities abroad. Nevertheless, in the absence of NMB, BIR naturally assumes a number of the functions that were part of the purview of the former.

It may be instructive to contrast the structural response of Moldovan governments to the challenges posed by migration with that of the Philippines. Specifically, two institutions were established, both housed in the Department of Labor and Employment - The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). The former seeks to optimize the benefits of the country's overseas employment program and monitor the overseas employment of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), while the latter focuses on protecting and promoting their welfare and well-being. For a more detailed description of these agencies, see Appendix B. For our purposes, the real significance of this example is less in the specific activities undertaken by these agencies or their respective effectiveness but in their very existence. For what they would seem to represent is nothing less than the concrete acknowledgement on the part of the Filipino authorities of the all-important role played by OFWs in the development of their country. This represents but one example of the type of governmental mechanisms established to cope with large scale migration that seem conspicuously absent from the Moldovan context.

Discussed heretofore are the formal, institutionalized channels of ongoing communication between official Moldova and its migrant communities overseas. Crises and emergencies are also moments during which the homeland and its diaspora/migrant communities may express their sense of shared destiny and extend mutual aid. An interesting example of communications under conditions of crisis was the experience of the Moldovan Embassy in Tel Aviv during the summer of 2006, when Israel battled the Hezbollah militia in Southern Lebanon. During the weeks of that war, missiles struck indiscriminately at the cities and towns in Israel's north. According to the ambassador, "The Moldovan Embassy saw as its obligation the monitoring of its *diaspora community* (sic.), specifically those in the north, in the event there were those in need. There was a hot-line opened here and we advertised that we'd be willing to help anyone - legal or undocumented - free of charge. In fact, there were a few undocumented migrants who availed themselves of this service. We provided information around the clock and were approached repeatedly by the media in Moldova. I was pleased to inform the media and the Jewish community there that

no one from the Moldovan community here was injured". It is recommended that the Moldovan authorities devote thought to an emergency regimen for the various forms of natural and man-made disasters that could potentially strike migrants overseas, especially those located in countries subject to significant political violence and/or instability.

Although this research did not focus on the multi-layered issue of remittances, what became clear from our interviews and from the findings of previous research efforts was that migrants increasingly use formal commercial agencies for the transfer of remittances, relying less on the various informal methods. This entails a sustained, institutionalized interface between migrant and an institution that could potentially offer additional opportunities, particularly in the realm of information sharing. These private sector agencies typically undertake research in order to maximize their share of the migrant market. They also routinely distribute pamphlets for informational and promotional purposes. It is recommended that the Moldovan authorities and interested international bodies explore possibilities for collaborating with these commercial agencies in an attempt to achieve more effective and extensive outreach to migrants in a whole host of areas such as medical, legal and cultural information etc.

### Returning to Moldova

For the vast majority of Moldovan migrants abroad, certainly those who are undocumented, the return to Moldova is essentially a foregone conclusion. Consequently, the government has little incentive to adopt policy or undertake actions designed to actively induce their return. But the manner in which returning migrants are received – officially and unofficially – may have important ramifications for their future integration into Moldovan society and their contribution to it. Many of those interviewed pointed to the positive contribution many would likely make, as a result of their experience living in more developed countries. Specifically, their exposure to the active civil society that characterizes at least some of the host countries could significantly impact Moldovan society politically, socially and culturally. As one migrant succinctly put it, "Moldova will definitely change due to the eventual return of many migrants as retirees to Moldova".

But not a small number of migrants interviewed expressed the apprehension that they may be viewed back home as foreigners. One young mother in northern Italy feared that her daughter would face systematic educational and occupational discrimination if and when her family was to return to Moldova. She hypothesized that this discrimination would likely have structural as well as attitudinal underpinnings. This situation begs the undertaking of some form of public information campaign inside Moldova aimed at sensitizing the general population and decision makers to the plight of migrants abroad and to the need to absorb the returnees among them in a welcoming and effective fashion.

In virtually every informal meeting we conducted in all three countries, Moldovan migrants routinely denounced what they claimed was rampant corruption in Moldova as well as the extremely limited economic opportunities. As one student from Chisinau wrote in an on line chat: "There is definitely a reason to leave Moldova; here is one country that creates all the conditions for encouraging us to leave and other

countries that [create all the conditions] for us to come and work. Why then should we not immigrate?!" While it would appear pretentious and inappropriate for a research project of this sort to recommend taking steps to reduce corruption and stimulate jobs and economic development, it is important to establish that these issues are no doubt correlated with out-migration and return-migration. Similarly, a Moldova committed to serious economic reform, increased democratization, accountability, transparency, etc. will not only impact the propensity of Moldovan migrants to identify with and ultimately return to Moldova, but may also influence other external players such as foreign investors, who in turn could play a constructive role in the development of Moldova.

Although most Moldovans will eventually return home, a second generation of labor migrants is gradually emerging in countries which allow (de jure or de facto) a certain proportion of migrants to remain legally. Members of the second generation vary considerably in the degree to which they are culturally, socially and psychologically linked to Moldova. What is very likely is that a significant proportion of this population will remain in their host countries. Hence, although this generation has yet to come of age, steps should be taken at this early stage to put in place a system for cultivating among them a stronger link to and appreciation of Moldova. The programmatic expression of such a system could take the form of formal and informal educational frameworks, cultural emissaries, structured visits to the homeland, etc. Examples of such projects have been pioneered and developed through the experiences of other Diaspora communities as they interface with their respective homelands.

Interestingly, preliminary evidence was uncovered suggesting that Moldova does offer to at least some young Moldovans certain opportunities for which they might consider returning – if not permanently, at least temporarily. One such opportunity takes the form of higher education. As one young woman who left Moldova 7 years ago told us: "Getting a [college] degree in Moldova is worthwhile. [Studies in Moldova] are less expensive and are in a language that's understandable". In the ongoing interface between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, higher education in Israel (even if for just a semester) has played a pivotal role in bringing young Jews and their families closer to Israel. Hence, this would seem to constitute an avenue worth exploring, even if the goal is not the permanent return of skilled and educated young Moldovans to Moldova.

Another finding related to the link between young Moldovan migrants and their homeland, which seemed somewhat counter-intuitive, was the tendency of some to see in Moldova a potential venue for entertainment/recreation. Indeed, a number of young Moldovans overseas with whom we spoke on line portrayed Moldova as a preferred destination for travel. As one 27 year old living in Germany claimed, "50 grams of vodka here and a whole bottle of vodka there [Moldova] cost the same. Also, in Chisinau, I'm able to travel in taxis all the time. On \$100 a week, I live like a king". These sentiments were echoed by others as well. And while "partying" may not strike one as the stuff from which the link between homeland and diaspora is built, its importance should not be dismissed out of hand. If increasing numbers of young Moldovans overseas decide to travel to Moldova for a good time, this could result in the creation of a link upon which other forms of engagement may be built. These could include not only study programs of various kinds but also some form of

volunteering, organized touring, social activities etc. Young Moldovans could be recruited for such programs through consulates overseas and also among those already visiting with family members in Moldova. Efforts on the part of consulates overseas to reach out to and engage young Moldovans should explore developing and promoting such travel opportunities and also facilitate events geared towards young migrant community members such as Moldova Independence Day.

As mentioned previously in the section on "Threats", one of the issues that complicate the formulation of a meaningful, comprehensive strategy to strengthen the links between Moldova and its migrant communities abroad is the perceived absence of a unifying Moldovan identity. I would submit that an active energetic plan to engage the second generation of Moldovans abroad could potentially contribute to creating a living and a metaphorical bridge between Moldovans abroad and those in the homeland. In so doing, it may also help foster a Moldovan identity that is more consonant with the needs and sensibilities of young Moldovans. Such a goal, considered in the Moldovan context, may strike one as premature and overly lofty, but the experience of other settings has taught that this is often a critical ingredient in the ongoing interface between diaspora communities and homeland nations.

## **Out of Country Voting (OCV)**

If the remittances sent by Moldovan migrants to Moldova is the primary expression of their practical, economic and familial link to their homeland, then OCV is the principle (if not sole) expression of their political engagement in the political process of Moldova. From the perspective of political theory, a case could be made, according to which the inadequate participation of migrants in Moldovan elections – given their substantial proportion of the population at large – is nothing less than a distortion of the democratic process. But the underlying concern of this research with respect to OCV is the symbolic import it offers in strengthening the link between Moldovan diaspora/migrant communities and homeland.

In most our discussions with migrants and with a number of officials, the inadequate execution of OCV was repeatedly bemoaned. Among the grievances voiced was that there were not enough polling stations to accommodate even a small portion of the number of migrants that could potentially have exercised their right to vote. As one community activist in Moscow reported, "When I sought to increase voter turnout, there was only one polling station with a huge line and many who wanted to vote. Not everyone had enough time to vote. I think it is primarily due to poor organization. Perhaps more space could be used to set up more stations". One of the opposition politicians we spoke with in Moldova complained there was also a shortage of ballot slips in a number of the polling stations.

Another problem identified was the considerable distance many of the migrants would have to travel in order to vote. As one of the migrants living in Bologna reminded us: "Our government should pay more attention to us if they want us to maintain our links with our country. For example during the last election, they could have arranged buses for us Moldovans living outside of Rome in order to assist us in participating in the election... it's very costly for us to travel to Rome or stay there". A leader of a community organization in Trieste proposed that the Moldovan authorities open polling stations outside Rome in order to cater to the large migrant presence in northern Italy. She expressed her profound indignation with what she claimed was the loss of close to one million votes in the most recent elections. Even if this number is inflated, it does seem to adequately reflect the widespread disappointment with what is perceived as a political process that is all but indifferent to such a large portion of the Moldovan electorate.

In Israel, the Moldovan male (construction) workers we interviewed reported that, "during the 2005 elections, our building company arranged for transportation to the embassy in Tel Aviv after our work day in order for us to be able to vote". I believe it was actually the personnel agency and not the construction company that arranged transportation, but the fact remains, the effort was made and the significance of this clearly did not escape these migrants.

Even in Russia, where the lion's share of Moldovan migrants is concentrated in the greater Moscow area, accessibility was a problem. In addition, that many of the migrants there (and in Italy for that matter) do not enjoy legal status and fear exposing themselves to the local authorities was also said to be a factor in the very low voter turnout during past elections. Similarly, it was intimated that the Russian government

has and might in the future exert various forms of pressure on the Moldovan migrant community there, so as to influence voting patterns, i.e. in favor of the ruling Communist Party. The current Russian boycott of Moldovan wine was cited as a vivid example of this kind of intervention. Another manifestation of perceived Russian interference in OCV is the agitation of an organization called *Patria Moldova*. Active in campaigning during the most recent elections, *Patria Moldova* decried what it considered was the "anti-Russian policy" of President Veronin, blaming the latter for all of the ills plaguing Moldova. While the phenomenon of *Patria Moldova* may accurately be interpreted as an extremely (and unabashedly) partisan development among the Moldovan migrant community in Russia, it is nevertheless a potential harbinger of the increased political mobilization of MCA on behalf of homeland politics.

The notion that members of the more established Moldovan Diaspora in Russia could play a more active role in bringing out the vote was complicated by the fact that many of these are not eligible to vote, having long since forfeited their Moldovan citizenship. One of the veteran community activists there proposed that, "They should have looked more seriously into the location of Moldovans, where they live and work... maybe buses could have been arranged to transport them to polling stations". Presumably when she said "they", she was referring to the Moldovan authorities or the embassy staff; however just who constitutes "they" is a question of fundamental importance. Is this a matter that could enlist the active engagement of: grassroots community organizations? Local and or international NGOs concerned with issues of democratization? Local government in host countries? Personnel agencies and/or large employers? This of course is an open question, but one that begs further probing, for it seems clear that Moldovans are not the only ones who stand to gain in the long term from a more extensive and effectively implemented OCV.

A cursory comparative look at OCV conducted inside Russia reveals that Belarusian migrants for example exhibited a much higher turnout than Moldovans. One interviewee suggested that this was due to the close relationship between that country and Russia, resulting in migrants from Belarus enjoying more or less the same rights and obligations (paying taxes) as native Russians.

The person currently serving as Minister-Counselor at the Moldovan Embassy was posted at the Moldovan Embassy in Romania during the 2005 elections and was responsible at the time for organizing OCV efforts. He recounted: "On that day, we arranged the voting for 3,332 people at a rate 1.5 minute per voter. There was an elaborate training/preparation conducted prior to that day for making this as efficient as possible. At the time, we were still interested in relations with the EU and for this to happen, it was necessary to conduct orderly and democratic voting. This militated against election fraud – even where it might have been tempting to violate this... Several opposition parties organized buses within Romania to facilitate a higher voter turn out [and] many Romanian media outlets monitored the voting process... I can proudly state that every person who arrived was able to exercise his/her right to vote". Whether the OCV in this case was as effective and as problem-free as reported would require further examination and a triangulation of sources. What does seem clear from the example provided however was that the concern with Moldova's image among European nations and the scrutiny of other elements did seem to engender a more successful application of OCV.

Perhaps the most common explanation offered for the ineffectiveness of OCV over the past few years is, in effect, a critique of the current Moldovan government. It was claimed by a number of those interviewed that the majority of migrants tend to be young, more reform-minded and democratically oriented and are therefore negatively predisposed to the ruling communist party. Conversely, those remaining behind in Moldova are disproportionately comprised of older pensioners, who tend to be more conservative, a population more consistent with the ruling party's main voter base. If this assessment is even partially accurate, it is certainly questionable whether the current government would make a concerted effort to facilitate a high voter turn-out among migrants.

### Preliminary Recommendations

One fairly obvious step that should be taken is an extensive information campaign aimed at encouraging Moldovan migrants to exercise their right to vote. The organizers of such a campaign would have to take great pains to ensure that the information disseminated was free of political party sponsorship of any kind and instead reflected the overarching non-partisan objective of engaging Moldovans in their nation's political process. The means of communication to be employed in such a campaign could draw from the recommendations in the previous section concerning "Communications". The thrust of such a campaign would be to underscore the notion that Out of Country Voting is a tangible means of maintaining a link to the homeland. At the risk of sounding polemical, when a Moldovan votes in national elections, it is a vote for a political party; but when a migrant votes in these same elections, it is a vote for Moldova and the link to his/her homeland. The symbolic importance of OCV as a manifestation of a link to homeland is underscored in the remarks of the Filipina migrant in Israel: "I did vote in these most recent elections [held on May 14]. After filling out [the necessary documentation] for voting, I mailed it to the Philippine Embassy in Tel Aviv. At first, I didn't feel like voting because I wasn't sure if it would be counted... but then I decided to do it because it is one of my responsibilities as a Filipino".

More crucial than an information campaign to increase voter turnout would be the commitment of the entire Moldovan body politic to the importance and the integrity of OCV. Without the buy-in of the major political parties in Moldova to the idea that the voting of migrants has a value beyond its electoral significance, OCV will likely remain a largely untapped resource for strengthening the Diaspora-homeland interface. And under those circumstances, it is entirely possible that the decision not to conduct OCV may, in the long run, be less destructive than its implementation in a manner that is perceived by large numbers of Moldovan migrants as half-hearted and/or heavy-handed.

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## Appendix A

### Interviews

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>
Oleg Tsulea	MP	Chisinau	Sept. 6 2006
Serafim Urecheanu	MP and Former Chisinau Mayor	Chisinau	Sept. 6 2006
Arcadie Barbarosie	Public Policy Institute	Chisinau	Sept. 6 2006
Olga Poalelungie	National Bureau of Migration (defunct)	Chisinau	Sept. 8 2006
Olga Gonciarova	Bureau of Interethnic Relations	Chisinau	Sept. 8, 2006
Matthias Lucke and Toman Omar Mahmoud	Kiel Institute	Chisinau	Sept. 8, 2006
Ion Jigau	Gallup International	Chisinau	Sept. 8, 2006
Amb. Larisa Miculet	Moldovan Embassy	Tel Aviv	Nov. 2, 2006
Father Pavel	Orthodox Church	Rome	Nov. 28, 2006
Doyna Babenko	Association of Moldovan Women	Trieste (by phone)	Nov. 28, 2006
Ambassador and staff	Moldovan Embassy	Rome	Nov. 28, 2006
Eduard Gherciu	Moldovan Citizens Association	Rome	Nov. 29, 2006
Sorin Cehan	Gazeta Romananeasea Newspaper	Rome	Nov. 29, 2006
Giusy Dalconzo	Amnesty International	Rome	Nov. 30, 2006
Maurizio Saggion	Rome Municipality	Rome	Nov. 30, 2006
Alla Ungurane	Migrant/community activist	Bologna	Dec. 1, 2006
Notella Coitan	CGIL-Main Labour Federation	Bologna	Dec. 1, 2006
Dr. Anonietta D'Antuono	Sant Orsola Hospital	Bologna	Dec. 1, 2006
Pavel & Vladimir	Migrants	Bologna	Dec. 1, 2006
Antonio (Anatoly) + wife	Migrant	Padua	Dec. 2, 2006
Alexandr Marcinschi	Community activist	Padua	Dec. 2, 2006
Lev Prince	Ortal Personnel Co.	Tel Aviv	January 7, 2007
Olga Vilkul & Natalia Kolbasina	LEADER, Banking Transfers company	Moscow	Feb. 7, 2007
Lydia Mikheeva	"Speranza" Moldovan Cultural and Educational Society	Moscow	Feb. 7, 2007
Vasiliev Pavel Vassilievich	Air Moldova	Moscow (by phone)	Feb. 8, 2007
Mikhailuk Ivan Federovich	Moldovan Diaspora representative, Parliamentary Committee on CIS Affairs	Moscow	Feb. 8, 2007
Victor Ziacevschi	Moldovan Embassy	Moscow	Feb. 8, 2007
Elena Dolgikh	Institute of Urban Economy	Moscow	Feb. 9, 2007
Father Irineu	Moldovan Orthodox Church	Moscow	Feb. 9, 2007
Omar Gamdullaev & Ilyina Kseniya	"Terres Des Homes", Child Welfare NGO	Moscow	Feb. 9, 2007
Valentina Plesh	Moldovan Cultural Center, School #164	Moscow	Feb. 10, 2007
Sergey Mordanov, Olga	Moldovan Youth in	Moscow	Feb. 10, 2007

Zhbanova & Milan Ursachi	Russian Federation		
Shmuel Roitman	Moldova Flying Tour, Ltd. & Honorary Consul of Moldova	Tel Aviv	Feb. 20, 2007
Danny Korn	Association of Jews from Bessarabia	Tel Aviv	Feb. 20, 2007
Pavel Jalba, Consul	Moldovan Embassy	Tel Aviv	March 20, 2007
N.H.	Filipina worker	Tel Aviv	May 15, 2007

### Informal Meetings

<b>Persons</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Date</b>
Labor migrants	Building site	Nes Ziona, Israel	Nov. 14, 2006
Labor migrants	Termini Station	Rome	Nov. 28, 2006
Migrants/squatters	Religious seminary	Rome	Nov. 30, 2006
Labor migrants	City Park	Padua	Dec. 2, 2007
Labor migrants	Candy kiosk and food markets	Moscow	Feb. 8, 2007
Moldovan children	School #164	Moscow	Feb. 10, 2007
Moldovan migrants	Various internet forums	(Conducted from Tel Aviv)	Ongoing

## **Appendix B**

### **PHILIPPINE OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT ADMINISTRATION (POEA)**

(<http://www.poea.gov.ph/>)

#### **About POEA**

##### **Mandate**

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration or POEA is the government agency, which is responsible for optimizing the benefits of the country's overseas employment program. This agency was created in 1982 through Executive Order 797 to promote and to monitor the overseas employment of Filipino workers.

In 1987, through Executive Order 247, POEA was reorganized to include the following expanded functions:

- To respond to changing markets and economic condition; and
- To strengthen the workers protection and regulatory components of the overseas employment program.

In 1995, Republic Act 8042 defined specific policy thrusts for POEA in the light of emerging issues. These include:

- Guarantee of migrant workers rights
  - Deregulation of POEA regulatory functions
- Stricter rules on illegal recruitment activities and the corresponding penalties
- Selective deployment
- Repatriation of workers
- Reintegration program
- Shared government information systems on migration and other basic assistance to OFWs and their families
- Use of information technology to facilitate dissemination of labor market information
- Expanded grassroots outreach education program to enable potential OFWs to arrive at informed decisions
- One-country team approach to synergize services to Filipino overseas
- Restructuring of systems for disposition of adjudication cases relating to overseas employment

## **THE OVERSEAS WORKERS WELFARE ADMINISTRATION (OWWA)**

(<http://www.owwa.gov.ph/>)

### **ABOUT OWWA**

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), an attached agency of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), is the lead government agency tasked to protect and promote the welfare and well-being of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their dependents.

### **OWWA MANDATE**

The agency has two-fold mandate:

- a. Delivery of welfare services and benefits; and
- b. Ensuring capital build-up and fund viability

### **OBJECTIVES**

- a. Protect the interest and promote the welfare of OFWs in recognition of their valuable contribution to the overall development effort;
- b. Facilitate the implementation of the provisions of the Labor Code concerning the responsibility of the government to promote the well-being of OFWs;
- c. Provide social and welfare services to OFWs, including insurance, social work assistance, legal assistance, cultural services, and remittance services;
- d. Ensure the efficiency of collection and the viability and sustainability of the fund through sound and judicious investment and fund management policies;
- e. Undertake studies and researches for the enhancement of their social, economic and cultural well-being;
- f. Develop, support and finance specific projects for the welfare of OFWs.

### **FUND SOURCE**

OWWA fund is a single trust fund pooled from the US\$25.00 membership contributions of foreign employers, land-based and sea-based workers, investment and interest income, and income from other sources.

### **VISION, MISSION STATEMENTS & CORE VALUES**

OWWA develops and implements responsive programs and services while ensuring fund viability towards the protection of the interest and promotion of the welfare of its member-OFWs.

OWWA is the lead membership welfare institution that serves the interest and welfare of member-Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs).

OWWA commits to a fund stewardship that is transparent, judicious, and responsive to the requirements of the member-OFWs.