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WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF DALLAS/FORT WORTH

JWAC Lesson Plan

Moldova vs. Transnistria: Language as an Identity

By: Josh Meaders, March 2018

Warm up: *Have you heard of Moldova? Where is Moldova located? What do you know about the history of Moldova? What do you know about Transnistria?*

Fast Facts:

- Moldova boasts the Guinness World Record for the largest wine cellar in the world, holding 1.5 million bottles of wine
- Moldova is home to archaeological sites that date back over 1.2 million years
- Moldova has some of the fastest internet speeds, ranking third in the world in 2014
- Transnistria is a breakaway state that is recognized by 3 other entities, all of which are also breakaway states
- Moldova and Transnistria are home to the largest radioactive material black market

Discussion: Like many other Post-Soviet Republics in Eastern Europe, Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Following independence, a string of events occurred which led to the Transnistria War, all of which stemmed from the fact that Moldova is a multiethnic country. During the times of the Soviet Union, the population of ethnically Russian and Ukrainian citizens rose in Moldova due to migration within the Soviet Union. This forced migration and focus on the Russian language education during the Soviet Union has led to issues since the fall of the Soviet Union, specifically language identity. There are two main languages spoken in Moldova: Russian and Moldovan (Romanian).

Case Study: The Transnistria War

Background: Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Transnistrian rebels, backed by Russia, and Moldovan forces, backed by Romania, engaged in a bloody four-month civil war over the status of the eastern region of Transnistria. A ceasefire, signed in 1992, was meant to be a temporary fix and lead to a more permanent solution, but has led the conflict to become "frozen". Frozen conflicts are armed conflicts that are brought to end by a ceasefire, but have no formal treaty or framework that end them officially. Currently, there are seven frozen conflicts in the Post-Soviet republics.

Activity: Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf51T7xDieQ&t>



Brain Dump:

Following the video, give everyone a section of a chalkboard/whiteboard and have the participants write down as many main ideas and points from the video as they remember in 2-3 minutes. After the time is up, have everyone sit back down and discuss what the students believe are the main ideas of the video and how these main ideas relate to other regions or global ideas. Try to have students relate the issues facing Moldova to current issues we are facing in the United States.

Discussion:

How might language further hinder the peace process in Transnistria? Do you think that the current situation in Eastern Europe with the Ukrainian conflict will lead to greater tensions in Moldova and Transnistria? Do you think language is the main identifying factor between Moldova and Transnistria?

Recap and Reaching Further: The use of language as an identity is one of the most misunderstood concepts of identity. Many people assume everyone in a country speaks the same language. Take for example Italy: many people assume that all of Italy speaks Italian as their first and primary language. In reality, 90% of the country speaks Italian but over 50% of citizens also speaking a regional language at home. *How might the use of regional languages lead to conflict?*

Some of the most tumultuous conflicts in the past several decades have been the result of language identity conflicts. The Tamils of Sri Lanka, Albanians (now Kosovan) of Serbia, and the Basques of Spain are some of the most recent examples of how a difference in language can lead to tension and eventual conflict within a country. *How is language one of the leading factors in ethnic conflict?*

Call to Action: Educate yourself on the importance of language and enroll in foreign language courses! Only about 20% of students in the United States are enrolled in foreign language classes. Not only will you have a greater understanding of different cultures, but also learning a second language is shown to decrease the risk of Alzheimer's and improve memory. If your school does not currently offer a foreign language that interests you, look into self-study or summer programs. There are many low-cost or free opportunities to learn less commonly taught languages like Russian, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, etc.



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Foreign Language Acquisition Resources:

- [STARTALK Programs](#)
 - STARTALK offers free summer language programs for K-16 students across the country to learn languages that are critical to our national security. Languages include Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu.
- [The National Security Language Initiative of Youth \(NSLI-Y\)](#)
 - NSLI-Y provides merit based scholarships to high school students to participate in summer and academic year immersion programs. Languages include Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Russian, and Turkish
- [Duolingo](#), [Memrise](#), and [Babbel](#)
 - These are free (Duolingo and Memrise) or low-cost (Babbel), internet-based language learning programs that offer a wide variety of languages.



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