

EVS Volunteer's Guidebook to Moldova



Author: Malgorzata Juchniewicz, EVS Volunteer at the Association "MOTIVAȚIE" from Moldova (AMM)

Chisinau, August 2012



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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My project in Moldova would not be so enriching without the cooperation with other staff members of "MOTIVAȚIE". Despite the inevitable language barrier at the beginning, I we managed to establish friendly and positive relationships at work. Last but not least, I am heartily grateful to my parents, my sister, my boyfriend and my great friends, who have continuously supported and encouraged me during the completion of my European Voluntary Service in Moldova.

INTRODUCTION

Why this guidebook?

The purpose of this work is to present the project at Association “MOTIVAȚIE” and my overall Moldovan experience as EVS Volunteer from Poland in the period April-August 2012. This guidebook aims not only to illustrate the idea of European Voluntary Service and the characteristics of working and living in Moldova, but more importantly it strives to demonstrate progress, activities and outcomes of the volunteering project in Vadul lui Voda and Chisinau. I hope that the EVS Volunteer’s Guidebook to Moldova would become a helpful source of information for future volunteers coming to work both at Association “MOTIVAȚIE”, as well as other projects. The historical, political and cultural part of this publication serves to familiarise the reader with this still very much unknown Eastern European country.

Few words about myself

My name is Malgorzata Juchniewicz (however, I go by my short name – Gosia, as it is easier for everyone, particularly non-Polish speakers) and I am 25 years old. I come from the seventh biggest city in Poland, Szczecin, in the north-western part of the country, directly on the border with Germany. For the past 5.5 years I have lived and travelled to many countries of the world – Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Monaco, Germany, Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Australia, New Zealand, Peru and USA. Apart from my motherland, two countries have played a particular role in my early adult life – Scotland and United States. I spent four years in Scotland and one and a half in the USA, studying, working and living. I graduated in June 2010 from MA in European Studies and International Relations at the University of Dundee (with a year-long exchange on my second year at the University of South Carolina) and in November 2011 from MLitt in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of St Andrews. I completed my postgraduate degree with a distinction from my final dissertation, entitled *Analysis of the main factors that have contributed to the protracted process of conflict resolution in Moldova*. Thanks to this research and multiple stories that I have heard from people involved in my

academic life, I have made a decision that one day I will go, visit and spend some time in the country of my interest. That day came sooner than expected and when browsing through different job, internship and volunteering opportunities in January 2012 I found an offer of EVS project in Moldova, I knew that this could be the chance to fulfil one of my dreams. After several stages of application, initial rejection and final acceptance, I arrived on 3 April at Chisinau International Airport and that is how my big Moldovan adventure began. These following pages will shed more light on the project that I undertook at the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova and present the overall experience I have had during five months of living in this sunny and wine-flowing country.

Structure of the guidebook

I decided to divide this publication into four most important parts. First, I will present the idea of European Voluntary Service (EVS). I will explain the concept, objectives, philosophy and basic structure of projects, as well as I will provide additional resources for volunteers looking for inspiration and more information. Secondly, I will describe some characteristics of EVS in Moldova. I will present the structure of volunteering, brief on the main accredited organisations accepting EVS volunteers, as well as I will attach their contact details if available. Third and perhaps most importantly, I will present my personal project at Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova. I will start with some information about my hosting organisation, its mission, values and goals, target groups and the structure of its work: projects, activities etc. I will then move on to describing my personal involvement and outcomes of different initiatives I undertook during my project in Moldova. Last but not least, I would like to familiarise the reader of this guidebook with the hosting country itself. Therefore, I decided to include some concise geographical, historical, political, cultural and touristic information about Moldova and its inhabitants.

1. WHAT IS EVS?

1.1. Explanation of the concept

European Voluntary Service (EVS) falls under action 2 of the bigger framework of the European Commission's Department of Education and Culture (EAC) in the area of Youth, called **Youth in Action Programme**.¹

The Youth in Action Programme aims to achieve the following general objectives:

- promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular;
- develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union;
- foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;
- contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field;
- promote European cooperation in the youth field.²

With a total budget of 885 million EUR for seven years (2007-2013), the Programme supports a large variety of activities for young people and youth workers through five Actions:

Action 1 - Youth for Europe

Action 2 - European Voluntary Service

Action 3 – Youth in the World

Action 4 – Youth Support Systems

Action 5 – Support for European Co-operation in the Youth Field

This guidebook will present in details only the Action 2 of the Youth in Action Programme, as this was my project in Moldova.

¹ More information can be found on the website: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/overview_en.htm

² Youth in Action programme – Programme Actions. http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/actions_en.htm [Accessed on 3.06.2012]

1.2. What is EVS about?

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a programme that provides young Europeans with the unique opportunity to participate in an unpaid (although costs of accommodation, food, local transport, insurance and even some pocket money are covered by the European Commission, as well as 90% of travel cost to and from the project) and full time volunteering projects in a foreign country in the EU or beyond. In this way, it aims to “develop solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance among young people, thus contributing to reinforcing social cohesion in the European Union and to promoting young people’s active citizenship.”³

EVS is open to all young people aged 18 to 30, who apart from wishing to make a change in the local communities they work, would like to develop new skills, and thus reinforcing their personal, educational and professional portfolio through taking part in projects lasting from two months up to twelve. All volunteers take part in a pre-departure training, organised by their sending organisation (in most cases located in the country of origin of the volunteer), on-arrival training (usually few weeks after the arrival on the project), mid-term training (for those doing long-term projects for more than 6 months), as well as in the final evaluation at the end of the project. Non-formal learning experience of each volunteer is officially recognised through a Youthpass, a certificate presenting and explaining all the skills and abilities achieved during the duration of volunteering project.

Each EVS project is based on the cooperation between at least three key players: sending organisation, hosting organisation (sometimes also coordinating organisation, as in the case of ADVIT⁴ in Moldova) and the volunteer of course, which together ensure that the project runs smoothly from the moment of application for the EU grant to the moment of arrival of the volunteer back in his/her home country. There is a wide range of activities that can be undertaken as an EVS project and include among other areas, such as: culture, youth, sports, disabilities, social care, cultural heritage, arts, civil protection, care of animals, environment, development co-operation etc. The common characteristic of all

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ About volunteering in Moldova. <http://www.voluntariat.md/> [Accessed on 3.06.2012]

these actions is a clear European and intercultural learning dimension, where every party involved benefits from the exchange of ideas, culture, values etc.

1.3. Additional resources

More information on different EVS projects, accredited organisations and other useful tips can be found on following websites:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/evs-charter_en.pdf - EVS Charter

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/how-to-participate_en.htm - How to participate in an EVS project?

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_en.cfm - Database of Accredited Organisations

<http://www.salto-youth.net/> - SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centre

2. EVS IN MOLDOVA

2.1. Organisation of EVS in Moldova

Coordination and supervision of most EVS projects in Moldova is undertaken by ADVIT Moldova. The name of the organisation stays for Association for Development, Voluntary Service and Information for Youth. The phrase "Without borders" is often added and it means "no boundaries" and also "without limits". "ADVIT is a non-political, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, started by and for young people, to involve Moldovan young people, with and without professional experience, into programmes at national and international levels in the fields of education, culture, ecology, historical heritage protection and helping disadvantaged people, by contributing to the development of a more peaceful society, to the decrease of social injustice."⁵

ADVIT started operating in 2002 as an initiator of weekend work camps that involved young Moldovans from disadvantaged backgrounds and some international volunteers. In 2002 it was officially registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova and in January 2007 it was officially acknowledged as a non-profit organisation. In 2007 it joined International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) Federation as an Associate Member, an international non-profit youth exchange organisation, which promotes youth mobility, intercultural learning and international volunteering. ADVIT Moldova staff is made up of permanent and part-time employees and volunteers, including programme coordinator, hosting and sending coordinators, hosting assistants and accountant.

The main goals of ADVIT are following:

- Promotion of dialogue and contact between youth from all over the world;
- Creation of favourable conditions for cooperation between young people from different cultural and national backgrounds;

⁵ About ADVIT. <http://www.voluntariat.md/advit.html> [Accessed on 3.06.2012]

- Development of the spirit of volunteerism among youth;
- Provision of information and youth education on current European issues;
- Informing youth in areas, such as: education, culture and social activities;
- Creation and coordination of youth exchange programmes;
- Increasing knowledge on national-cultural history of Moldova;
- Promotion of healthy lifestyle among young people;
- Development of youth mobility tourism.⁶

2.2. Examples of EVS projects in Moldova

ADVIT plays a role of "contact point for EVS" for following Moldovan hosting organisations⁷:

1. Charity Centre for Refugees, <http://charity-centre.blogspot.com/>
2. Promo-LEX Association, <http://promolex.md/index.php?module=main>
3. Moldovan Institute for Human Rights – IDOM,
<http://www.idom.md/index.php?lang=en>
4. Centre of Active Recovery and Social Reintegration of the Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities – CCCT,
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_form_en.cfm?EID=58000910804
5. Centre for Assistance and Protection for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings – CAP,
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_form_en.cfm?EID=58000910826
6. Independent Journalism Centre, <http://www.ijc.md/eng/>
7. Municipal Directorate for the Protection of Children's Rights- Animation Centre for Youth and Children,
8. National Museum of Archaeology and History of Moldova,
<http://www.nationalmuseum.md/en/>
9. Small Group Homes,
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_form_en.cfm?EID=58001182102

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ The information was valid as of August 2012.

10. Ave Copiii (ex. Casa Aschiuta),
11. The Rehabilitation Centre of Torture Victims "Memoria",
<http://www.memoria.md/>
12. Foundation "People That Care"
13. Association "Children's Friends",
http://www.prietenicopiilor.md/despre_en.htm
14. National Roma Centre, <http://www.roma.md/index.php?lang=en>
15. Day Care Centre Dorinta
16. Association for the Protection of Homeless Animals – ALGA,
<http://www.alga.md/>
17. **Association "MOTIVAȚIE" from Moldova, <http://motivation-md.org/>**
18. Casa Gavroche,
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_form_en.cfm?EID=58000947953
19. Charity Association "New Life",
<http://aids.md/aids/index.php?cmd=item&id=221>
20. "Angelus Moldova" Foundation,
<http://www.hospiceangelus.md/en/main.html>
21. International Organization for Migration (IOM),
<http://www.iom.md/index.php/en>
22. International Centre for Protection and Promotion of Women Rights "La Strada", <http://www.lastrada.md/aboutus/en.html>⁸

Contact Information to ADVIT Moldova:

Address: Bd. Decebal 99, office: 618, Chisinau, MD-2038, Republic of Moldova

Tel/Fax: (+373 22) 89 03 42

E-mail: advit_team@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.voluntariat.md/>

⁸ EVS Accredited Organisation in Moldova – ADVIT.
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_form_en.cfm?EID=58000908825 [Accessed on 3.06.2012]

3. MY PROJECT IN MOLDOVA

3.1. Few Words of Introduction

As a long-term EVS volunteer in Moldova, I have had a chance to be actively involved in all aspects of work of my hosting organisation. Despite the inevitable language barrier with some of my colleagues from Association “MOTIVAȚIE”, I have worked hard on developing my language skills in both Romanian and Russian and on establishing friendly relations at my work place. I believe that my positive attitude to life, enthusiasm and openness towards other people, cultures and languages helped me overcoming unavoidable obstacles and difficulties. This would not be of course possible without the warm welcome and friendliness of the colleagues at my hosting organisation. I am very grateful for their help, assistance and good working atmosphere that was present during our daily activities.

Before presenting in details the mission, goals and activities of my hosting organisation and further my personal involvement, it is important to briefly describe the situation of disabled people in the Republic of Moldova, as this issue is inextricably linked with the work of “MOTIVAȚIE”.

3.1.1. Situation of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova

According to statistics, at present, out of the entire population of the Republic of Moldova, the total number of people with disabilities is estimated to be more than 170.000. The exact number of people with motor disabilities is unknown, due to the fact that there is no database that would contain such information.

The range of problems and difficulties faced by this group of people is of the following nature:

- **social** (marginalisation, exclusion, neglect by authorities, improper attitudes, limited physical access, both on streets and to different public services and spaces);

- **educational** (unfriendly and unprepared for inclusion environment, discriminatory policies);
- **economic** (inaccessible or non-existent jobs, poor social services);
- **social policies** (legislation requires many changes under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, often discriminatory policies);
- **medical** (inaccessible rehabilitation services, poor medical assistance).

3.2. Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova (AMM)



3.2.1. Brief history

Association „MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova (AMM) was initiated by a group of volunteers that aimed at supporting children and young people with motor disabilities. Support for creating the organisation came from the Centre for Information and Documentation on the Rights of Children, Foundation Motivation Romania and the Department for Protection of the Rights of Children (DMPDC). The Ministry of Justice registered the Association on 22 January 2002 under the number 2079. In the early years of its activities, the Association „MOTIVAȚIE” worked at the Centre of Active Recovery and Social Reintegration of the Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities – CCCT in Chisinau in partnership with DMPDC and was involved in carrying out activities at the Centre with the support of partners from Moldova, Romania and Poland. Currently, the organisation operates throughout the entire territory of Moldova, giving the support to the target group at home, through collaboration with Local Public Authorities (LPA), as well

as at two of its own centres in Vadul lui Voda - Centre for Independent Living and Centre for Vocational Training.⁹

3.2.2. Vision and Mission

Vision: “There are no people with disabilities; there are societies who make disabled environment, who create difficulties for people with different needs. The disablement lies in the construction of society, not in the physical conditions of the individual.” (Simon Brisenden, 1986)

Mission: to improve the quality of life for persons with mobility disabilities through the development of alternative services, involvement of beneficiaries in these services and by promotion of their rights.

Association „MOTIVAȚIE” is active in the social area and it focuses on assistance for children and young people with motor disabilities and their families in accomplishing their social inclusion. Human, material and financial resources are directed into this area.

Association focuses on the following strategic areas:

1. Social inclusion of children and young people with motor disabilities;
2. Promotion of the model of independent living;
3. Changing attitudes of society about persons with disabilities;
4. Improvement of state’s legislation.¹⁰

3.3. Structure of the Association “MOTIVAȚIE”

Association “MOTIVAȚIE” has three main centres of operation: Office of the AMM with the Resources Centre “dizABILITATE”, Centre for Independent Living (*Centru pentru Viață Independentă, CVI*) and Centre for Vocational Training (*Centru pentru Orientare Vocațională, COV*). The first one is located in Chisinau, while the other two in Vadul lui Voda, a small town around 18km east from Chisinau.

⁹ Information based on the “Strategic Plan of AMM 2012-2016”.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

3.3.1. Office of the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova



Building of CCCT, office of “MOTIVAȚIE”, Botanica, Chisinau

The office of the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova is a place of work for the Director of AMM, Accountant, Coordinator of Public Relations and occasionally other staff, including volunteers. Together with Resources Centre “dizABILITATE” it is located inside the building that is a home to Centre of Active Recovery and Social Reintegration of the Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities – CCCT.

Contact Information:

Address: Bd. Traian 23/1, Chisinau, MD-2060, Republic of Moldova

Tel/fax: (+ 373 22) 66 13 93

E-mail: office@motivation-md.org

Website: www.motivation-md.org

3.3.2. Centre for Independent Living



Centre for Independent Living (CVI)

Scope of activities of the Centre: promotion of an independent way of living for people on wheelchairs through organisation of quality services according to their special needs.

Centre for Independent Living is a project implemented by the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova, based on the model promoted by Foundation Motivation Romania and according to the philosophy and movement of independent living. Initially, the project provided services of accommodation in Chisinau for wheelchair users coming from different regions. However, in order to provide better implementation of activities, the decision was taken to buy a building in the town of Vadul lui Voda in the municipality of Chisinau. The house was rebuilt according to a special design, taking into account needs of wheelchair users.

Beneficiaries: children and young people on wheelchairs and their families, as well as specialists from other organisations that are active in the area of disability.

Proposed activities at the Centre for Independent Living:

- **Occupational therapy** - development or improvement of locomotive skills, development of independency skills, adaptation to new conditions and environments, agrotherapy;
- **Active recovery** - techniques of wheelchair's maneuvering and transfer, physiotherapy (curative gymnastics), prevention and prophylaxis of bedsores and other health problems, methods of wheelchair dance;
- **Psychological assistance** - individual and group therapy, counselling, testing, vocational guidance, art therapy, music therapy, development of creativity and effective communication skills;
- **Social assistance** - evaluation, home and individual evaluation, working with parents and relatives, activities of social integration;
- **Technical assistance** - evaluation and prescription of wheelchairs, assembling wheelchairs, reparation and individual adaptation, as well as advice regarding accessibility at home;
- **Sport activities** - wheelchair basketball and tennis;
- **Other services/activities** – creation of a database of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, lobbying, training and education of specialists in the area, summer camps, seminars aiming at raising awareness and spreading information to beneficiaries in villages and cities.

Contact Information:

Address: Str. Victoriei 1A, Vadul lui Voda, MD-2046, Republic of Moldova

Tel/fax: (+ 373 22) 41 71 55

E-mail: office@motivation-md.org

Website: www.motivation-md.org

3.3.3. Centre for Vocational Training



Centre for Vocational Training (COV), Vadul lui Vodă

Scope of activities of the Centre: promotion of active lifestyle of children and young people with motor disabilities through organisation of workshops, ateliers and professional courses.

Centre for Vocational Training was officially opened on 11 June 2010. It is a new project, both for the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova and for the Republic of Moldova, as there is no other training centre of this kind for people with disabilities. The idea of creating the Centre for Vocational Training came from the beneficiaries, themselves being young people with disabilities – wheelchair users. This centre offers opportunities to young people with special needs to accomplish their professional plans, develop abilities and skills necessary to learn a profession, which could then help them getting access to labour market and perhaps even enabling them to open their own business, which would provide them with a guaranteed income in the future.

Beneficiaries: children and young people on wheelchairs and their families, as well as specialists from other organisations that are active in the area of disability.

Proposed activities at the Centre for Vocational Training:

- **Rehabilitation and active recovery** – development of new personal skills, both for children and young people using wheelchairs in order to make their life more independent, curative gymnastics, various thematic discussions, such as prevention and prophylaxis of bedsores and other health problems, support and adaptation to new conditions of life, techniques of wheelchair's maneuvering, transfer from different positions, technical training of wheelchair dance, sport activities – wheelchair tennis and basketball;
- **Lobbying and advocacy** - information and promotion of rights of people with disabilities, organisation of different community activities in order to demonstrate skills and abilities of persons with disabilities. Activities aiming at raising public awareness through demonstration of wheelchair basketball, both in the regions and the city have a positive impact in terms of changing attitudes and mentality of people present at these actions. All these activities intend to influence decision makers and increase awareness among community members;
- **Training** - training of parents and social assistants in the assessed localities in different regions, training and education for young people with disabilities (TOT);
- **Psychological assistance** - individual and group discussions, psychological testing and counselling, vocational guidance, development of creativity and effective communication skills, occupational therapy activities – art therapy, music therapy, as well as development or improvement of locomotive skills etc.;
- **Informational assistance** - offering information and consultations to individuals/beneficiaries/their parents/social specialists in terms of disability;
- **Social assistance** - family assessment, home and individual evaluation, working with parents and relatives, various activities of social integration of persons on wheelchairs;
- **Technical assistance** - evaluation and prescription of wheelchairs, reparation and individual adaptation, as well as advice regarding ensuring accessibility at home;

- **Consulting service** - organisation of seminars, serving purposes of training and information for young people with disabilities and their families, both in rural areas, as well as in cities, for specialists of other organisations, consultancy services regarding various organisations that provide social services (depending on requirements of our beneficiaries);
- **Volunteering** - activities, implemented on the own initiative by any person, who to the benefit of others and without receiving any material reward, but observing certain rules and responsibilities, established by the organisation, them being a part of volunteer's obligations under the law, engages in the work of the association.

Contact Information:

Address: Str. Bucovinei 17, Vadul lui Voda, MD-2046, Republic of Moldova

Tel/fax: (+ 373 22) 41 60 53

E-mail: office@motivation-md.org

Website: www.motivation-md.org

3.4. People involved: team, partners and donors

Association „MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova is composed of a team of 13 permanent staff, part of them being wheelchair users themselves and a changing group of volunteers (including 1-2 EVS volunteers at a time). The work and implementation of many of the projects of AMM would not be possible if not for the material and logistical help of multiple partners and donors, which will be also listed below.

3.4.1. Team

Name and Surname	Function
Nicolae Besliu	President
Igor Meriacre	Executive Director
Ludmila Iachim	Manager of the CVI and the Coordinator of the Programme of Active Recovery
Mariana Matfei	Coordinator of Public Relations
Ecaterina Surdu	Psychologist and Coordinator of Volunteers
Oxana Pisceanscaia	Accountant
Valentina Pavlov	Social Assistant
Ion Emilian	Physiotherapist and Instructor of Curative Gymnastics
Olga Morari	Administrator and Cook at the CVI
Tudor Onofrei	Technician and Instructor of Active Rehabilitation
Ivan Cebotari	Driver
Raisa Ratoi	Parent Resource
Natalia Calancea	Doctor
<i>Malgorzata Juchniewicz¹¹</i>	<i>Volunteer</i>



At work at COV, Vadul lui Voda

¹¹ EVS volunteer for a long-term project in 2012 (April-August).

3.4.2. Partners

Association „MOTIVAȚIE” in the course of 10 years of its activities, has developed effective partnerships with Central and Local Public Authorities (Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, District Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection and Municipal Directorate for Protection of the Rights of Children), economic agents, international organisations (UNICEF, UNDP), NGOs in the field (national and from other countries – Foundation Motivation from Romania, Association Perspective from Russia, Organisation Podaj Dalej from Poland and NGO Aljurveda from Ukraine).

3.4.3. Donors

During its 10 years of work, Association „MOTIVAȚIE” was supported by: UNICEF, Chisinau City Hall, UNDP, Soros Foundation, GTZ Germany, SOIR Sweden, Motivation Charitable Trust from the UK, SDC Switzerland etc.

3.5. Organisation of EVS projects at AMM

The following paragraphs will briefly explain the organisation of EVS projects at the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” from Moldova (AMM). Areas that will be described include: project environment, accommodation, language support, documents’ arrangement, organisation of the project and expected input of EVS volunteers.

3.5.1. Project Environment

The main office of the Association "MOTIVAȚIE" is situated in the Botanica district of the capital city of Moldova - Chisinau. Chisinau is the main administrative, economic, scientific and cultural centre of Moldova. It has just over 700.000 inhabitants and the whole metropolitan area is roughly composed of one million people. In terms of population size, Chisinau is the largest city in the country. The capital is divided into five administrative sectors: Botanica, Buiucani, Centre, Ciocana and Riscani. It is often referred to as the greenest city in Europe, due to the large number of green spaces: parks, gardens etc.

The Centre for Independent Living (*Centru pentru Viața Independentă*) and the Centre for Vocational Training (*Centru pentru Orientare Vocațională*) are both

situated in Vadul lui Voda, which is a resort town in Moldova, a suburb of the capital of the country, as well as a part of the Chisinau municipality. Vadul lui Voda is situated 18km east of Chisinau on the right (western) bank of the Dniester River. During the Soviet era, several million tons of sand were brought in there to create a wide artificial beach. Today it remains a small, mostly local tourist destination.

3.5.2. Accommodation, Language Support and Other Services

EVS Volunteers live usually in a common flat with other volunteers or in a local host family. It depends on their preferences, as well as on hosting possibilities on the moment of volunteers' arrival. Each volunteer has its own room, but shares kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Most of flats have internet connection (however often volunteers have to pay for it themselves) and there is a land phone line in all of them. ADVIT Moldova - "contact point for EVS" - takes care of all legal registration procedures and visa arrangements for volunteers. It provides them with language courses, either Romanian or Russian and allocates them a local mentor, usually a young Moldovan that helps in all initial arrangements (airport pick-up, getting to the flat for the first time, showing around the city etc.).

3.5.3. Structure of the Project

Activities at the AMM start at 9am and continue till 5pm at both centres: Centre for Independent Living and Centre for Vocational Training. Volunteers have to cover lunch expenses on their own. ADVIT Moldova provides them with pocket money, food and local transportation allowances. Transport to and from Vadul lui Voda is often organised for both volunteers and staff members, as the Association possesses 3 cars that are also adapted to needs of wheelchair users. The hosting organisation provides a supervisor for each volunteer. Usually it is a volunteer's coordinator that speaks English. He/she introduces a volunteer to activities of the organisation, offers an on-going support, as well as works together with a volunteer most of the time. At the moment, Ecaterina Surdu is both Psychologist and Coordinator of Volunteering Programme at the AMM. Additionally, in some of the organised activities, volunteers work together with other staff members, depending on needs and preferences of both volunteers and specialists.



With my supervisor, Ecaterina Surdu

3.5.4. Expectations and possible input of EVS volunteers

Volunteers can support the staff of the Association "MOTIVAȚIE" in following areas:

- **Arts & crafts workshops** (assistance and active involvement in creation of handcrafts together with beneficiaries);
- **Sports and leisure workshops** (sport, relaxation, social activities - table games, team games, barbeques, basketball, volleyball etc);
- Occasionally, volunteers will escort beneficiaries to **short visits and excursions** (sport events, expositions, day trips. festivals etc.);
- Under supervision of the project supervisor, volunteers have a possibility of **proposing and developing educational activities** depending on their interests, such as music therapy, puppet-show, English classes etc.;
- **Helping at the Centre for Independent Living and the Centre for Vocational Training** (cleaning, cooking, gardening, running workshops);

- **Helping to prepare meetings** with youth, specialists, tutors and representatives of partner organisations from various countries, as well as **working on establishing new contacts.**

A typical day of a working week can look as follows:

8:30-9:00 – travelling from Chisinau to Vadul lui Voda

9:30-10:30 – preparing for activities/participating in organisation of ateliers for beneficiaries

10:30 – 11:30 - preparing for the activities

11:30 – 12:30 – running activities & workshops, participating and organising ateliers for beneficiaries

12:30 – 14:00 staff meeting, discussion about the organisation of work, lunch + lunch break

14:00 – 15:00 – running activities & workshops/socialisation (ex. trip to Nistru)

15:00-16:00 – participating and organising ateliers for beneficiaries

16:00-17:00 – cleaning up after activities, staff meeting etc., return to Chisinau¹²

Volunteers' tasks are revised upon their arrival, according to current programme of activities of the organisation, as well as motivation and abilities of volunteers. Young people can benefit a lot during their projects, for example through an opportunity to learn new language(s) and culture. Contact with disabled youth and adults can teach responsibility, empathy, as well as may help to improve communication and organisational skills. The association has a general timetable of activities, already established, and volunteers get included in it, but they also have opportunity to bring their own ideas in order to initiate new activities.

¹² This should only serve as an example and will depend upon the individual schedule of work of a volunteer, agreed with the supervisor and other colleagues. On some days – half-/full-day excursions or events take place and then a schedule looks different.



Myself with Ludmila, Diana (student) and beneficiaries from the Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation Programme (Stage 2)



Celebrating 2nd Birthday of the Centre for Vocational Training, Vadul lui Voda, 11.06.2012

3.6. My personal involvement

The following section will provide more detailed information about my personal involvement and outcomes of different initiatives I have undertaken during my EVS project in Moldova, both in the framework of work at the Association “MOTIVAȚIE” and also as part of other initiatives, for example co-organised by ADVIT Moldova.

3.6.1. Everyday plan of volunteering project

I can honestly say that every day and month at my hosting organisation was different and full of interesting activities and new discoveries. In general, the working schedule depended whether there was a “stage” or not. “Stage” in the context of my volunteering experience meant a Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation Programme, run at the Centre for Independent Living and the Centre for Vocational Training for the period of two up to four weeks. Such initiative is carried out 24h/day for the designated period of time, with involvement of all specialists and volunteers with the daily activities run mainly at the Centre for Vocational Training and early morning and evening ones at the Centre for Independent Living in Vadul lui Voda. Every “stage” involves 8-10 beneficiaries (some with personal assistants, most often family members) at the age of 16-30 with motor disabilities, including wheelchair users.

The plan of each Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation stage is accommodated to interests and needs of beneficiaries. In the first days, an individual programme is created for each participant. That can encompass: vocational orientation activities, writing CV and Motivation Letter, psychological tests and consultancy, arts and crafts ateliers, computer workshops, development of independent life skills (cooking, cleaning, washing etc.), basics of accountancy and beautician’s work, reparation and individual adaptation of wheelchairs, physical therapy, sport on wheelchairs, English language classes etc. The range of offered activities is very wide and new initiatives are always welcome. Once the individual programmes are completed, the schedule of “intervention” is designed by the Coordinator of the Programme of Active Recovery. Some of the fixed activities (run at each Programme of Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation) include: thematic discussions related to the life of people with disabilities (accepting disabilities, correct transfer on wheelchair, vocational orientation, education, personal hygiene, sexual life, parents – children relations etc.), development of independent life skills (taking a shower, washing clothes, cleaning rooms, kitchen, bathroom, basics of cooking, serving food, bed and table preparation etc.), as well as free time activities (trips, excursions, karaoke, board games etc.), aiming at socialising and getting to know each other better. Every

programme is ended with the evaluation meeting, where everyone implicated in the stage reflects on the gained experience and results from initiatives that were undertaken. This serves improvement of future programmes of Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation and evaluation of outcomes achieved.

As a long-term EVS volunteer, I participated actively in different forms of activities at the Association “MOTIVAȚIE”, such as preparation of games and ateliers for beneficiaries (introductory and socialising games), support at running of both Centres: helping in the kitchen, cleaning of workspace, gardening, as well as assisting specialists at their tasks, particularly Psychologist, Coordinator of Public Relations and Social Assistant. I divided my time between the two centres in Vadul lui Voda and the main office in Botanica, where I carried out more administrative tasks: preparation and translation of documents (from Romanian into English), scanning and copying documents, linguistic assistance in applications for funding, as well as personal assistance to the Director of AMM and the Accountant (helping with transfers from wheelchair to their cars and reversely, doing shopping for lunch at a local supermarket that is not adopted to needs of people with disabilities, attending meetings, such as that of the Coalition for Promotion of Rights and Activities connected to Volunteering etc.). Furthermore, I actively assisted beneficiaries during multiple excursions and events that were organised, such as to Dendrium, Zoological Garden, Public Library, Nistru River and beach, shopping at “Metro” supermarket etc. Many of these places are not adapted or at least are not fully prepared to welcome people with mobility disabilities, especially wheelchair users. That is why it was very important to help the young people with transfers, climbing up or rolling down the paths, getting on and off the boat etc.

3.6.2. Special events

Special events at AMM were happening quite often and included among others workshops with other organisations or social groups (such as prisoners), barbeques and celebrations (such as anniversaries of the Centres in Vadul lui Voda), festivals, outdoor activities, job fair and many others. I will describe here the most important ones. In the course of my project I got involved in organisation and running of one of the events as part of the **National Week of Volunteering (12-20.05.2012)**. I was responsible for production of about 50 plaster brooches that

were later used by children to paint the logo of National Week of Volunteering, as well as I designed and made myself flags and other informational materials, such as leaflets that aimed to promote the idea of volunteering, present different forms of engagement and benefits to the local community. The above mentioned event, entitled “Become a volunteer one day for your community” (*Fii voluntar o zi pentru comunitatea ta*), co-organised by Association “MOTIVAȚIE” took place on Wednesday, 16 May 2012 in Vadul lui Voda. It was a unique event for this local community and it was attended by about 150 children and young people. Special participants included an artist and singer Doinita Gherman, modern dance group “Just friends” and two journalists from Radio Moldova, Daniel Voda and Cristina Jandic, who moderated activities during the day. As a volunteer, I helped running the balloons workshop, making flowers and animals with children, information stand, distributing flags, leaflets and other materials to young people and their parents, as well as I took part in face-painting atelier, where I painted countless faces of small participants of the festival. The day was a full success and children familiarised themselves with the idea of volunteering through both fun and educational activities. Furthermore, on Sunday, 20 May 2012, I took part in the afternoon session of arts and crafts workshops: quilling, embroidery, work with beads, creation of bee-stands, key rings, greeting cards etc. (bee is the logo-symbol of the National Week of Volunteering) that aimed at social inclusion of people with disabilities into volunteering activities. The event was organised at the Municipal Library, “B. P. Hasdeu” in Chisinau by the Centre of Active Recovery and Social Reintegration of the Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities – CCCT. Activities were run by volunteers and social activists, some of them being dressed up in national Moldovan costumes. The session was attended among others by the Moldovan Vice-Minister of Media, Rodion Bajureanu, together with his wife, as well as the family of the Minister of Defense, Vitalie Merinuta. All the works created during that day were given as souvenirs – presents for public officials that had been involved in the 2012 National Week of Volunteering.



Balloons workshop, Vadul lui Voda, 16.05.2012



Face-painting atelier, Vadul lui Voda, 16.05.2012



Information stand, Vadul lui Voda, 16.05.2012



Creating a bee from beads, Chisinau, 20.05.2012 Presenting the work, Chisinau, 20.05.2012



With my supervisor and other volunteers, Chisinau. 20.05.2012

Another special event that I had a chance to participate in with the AMM being a co-organiser was the **International Children's Day (1.06.2012)** in Vadul lui Voda. Similarly as the Voluntering Festival, the event was attended by more than 100 children and young people from the local community together with their families, including beneficiaries of the Stage III Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation at "MOTIVAȚIE". After a small concert and musical performance of children and young people from Vadul lui Voda and beyond, all the participants had a chance to take part in dance, sport, singing and socialising group activities, as well as arts and crafts workshops, such as origami, face-painting, drawing etc. I personally got actively involved in the face-painting workshop, luckily joined by three other girls, who volunteered to help me as the atelier was very popular among little girls and boys. The result was children's smile and happiness, as well as countless painted faces and hands. It was another very successful and enjoyable day.



International Children's Day, Vadul lui Voda, 1.06.2012

3.6.3. My personal initiatives

A great thing about my EVS project (and as far as I know this applies to many other projects) was the freedom to plan, develop and carry out personal initiatives that are related to interests and abilities of a particular volunteer. As an international volunteer from Poland, I decided that it would be an interesting and

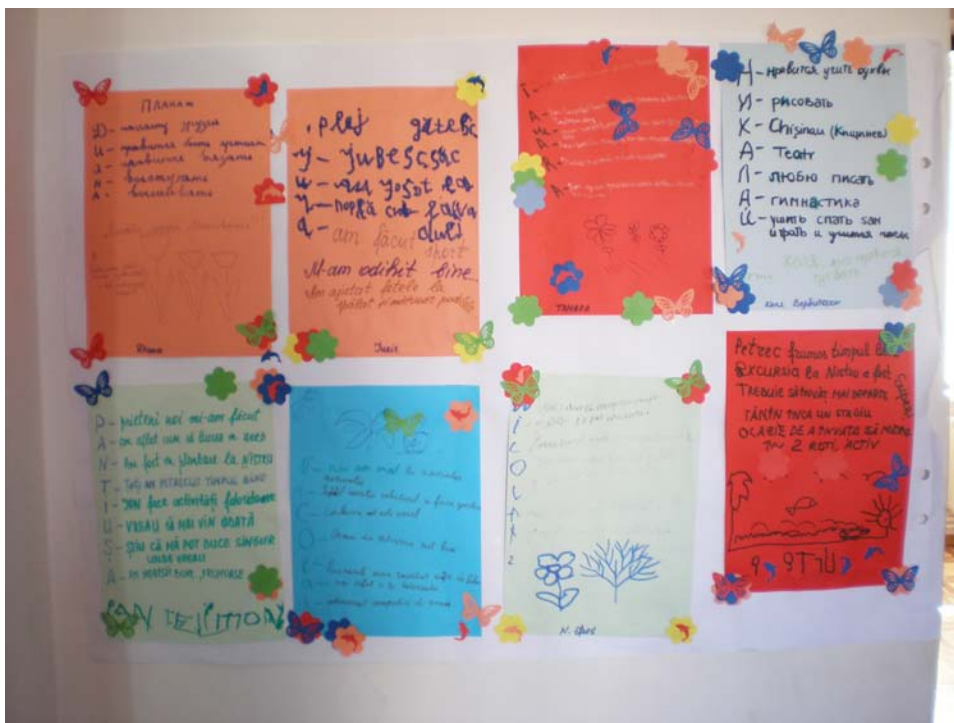
enriching experience for everyone, both for my colleagues at “MOTIVAȚIE” and beneficiaries if I prepared a powerpoint presentation about myself and my home country, including my personal interests and hobbies, information about my hometown and most important Polish cities, national symbols of the country, politics, culture, traditions, festivals, cuisine and much more, followed by quiz and discussion. This became my little personal tradition and I involved in this activity subsequent groups of beneficiaries. I also came up with an idea of thematic discussions with beneficiaries after my presentation – looking for similarities and differences between national customs, festivities and traditional food of both Poland and Moldova. The aim of this activity was to increase the level of knowledge and understanding of both countries and the results were very positive and enriching. Beneficiaries actively participated in quizzes and group discussions, as well as were asking additional questions. My personal success is also the fact that I carried out these intercultural activities solely in Romanian without any translation support.

Apart from my passion for intercultural exchange and experience, I am also very keen on learning foreign languages. That is why during the course of my EVS project in Moldova I continuously and simultaneously learned both Romanian and Russian. In order to further develop linguistic skills, I offered my help with the translation of materials for the website of AMM, as well as other documents crucial for the work of the organisation, such as the Statute, Volunteering Contract, Reports on issues related to the life of people with disabilities in Moldova, CVs of staff etc. I worked on the Romanian versions of documents and translated them into English. I also assisted with linguistic correction and edition of documents, such as the description of “MOTIVAȚIE” on the website of SALTO, application packs for funding, announcement for volunteers etc. In today’s world it is inevitable for any organisation, and particularly non-governmental organisation that heavily relies on material and logistical support from foreign sources, to have an updated and multilingual version of its website and complete set of translated documents. I was very happy to be able to help at least to some extent towards the achievement of such desired situation.

My third regular initiative that I undertook with subsequent groups of beneficiaries coming for the Programme of Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation was the creation of posters aiming at initial, gradual and final evaluation of the stage, impressions, new skills and experience gained, favourite and least favourite activities etc. I planned and developed this activity in a way that each individual was writing his/her name on the A4 piece of paper, one letter under another and was then forming a sentence beginning with the consecutive letter. The sentence had to involve opinion, impression or a remark on the experience or skills acquired during the programme at AMM. At the end, all posters were glued to one big piece of paper and hanged on the wall of the Centre for Vocational Training in Vadul lui Voda as a form of evaluation, memory and visual illustration of results of each stage. This concept served also a similar idea at the beginning of the programme, namely to list characteristics/interests/favourite activities of each beneficiary in order to get to know each other better and gain first knowledge of individual needs and preferences.

Fourth initiative and one that made me very happy about was running English language classes for beneficiaries on two levels: beginners and intermediate. The aim of this activity was to teach the young people basic words and expressions in English, as well as for some to develop already possessed range of vocabulary and grammar in order to provide them with an easier access to English-language resources on internet, enable them to make friends with people from abroad, as well as to listen to music or watch films in today's *lingua franca*. At the beginning of the stage I was carrying out an introductory meeting, serving the evaluation of the level of English possessed. Thanks to this, I was then able to divide beneficiaries into groups and plan the programme of teaching. I used different techniques, such as games, tests, oral, listening and writing exercises to develop various linguistic skills. At the end of each series of English classes I carried out final test aiming to assess the knowledge acquired. The activities played an important role in the process of socialisation and communication between the beneficiaries and myself as EVS volunteer, as well as resulted in the improvement of English and Romanian language skills respectively.

Last but not least, this EVS Volunteer's Guidebook to Moldova itself is both my own initiative and at the same time it serves as a presentation of results of my entire volunteering project at AMM. I hope that it will be useful for future generations of EVS volunteers coming to work at Association "MOTIVAȚIE", as well as for other volunteers looking for information, resources or inspiration.



Impressions of beneficiaries of the Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation Programme (Stage 3)



Relaxing at Vadul lui Voda beach at Nistru river with beneficiaries of the Vocational Orientation and Rehabilitation Programme (Stage 4)

3.6.4. Additional involvement

As an active and energetic person, I became involved in several additional activities in the course of my EVS project in Moldova. As there were a lot of small initiatives, I will only present the most important ones. With the support and coordination of ADVIT, and particularly Mariana Cojan, together with other international volunteers, I participated in two events for children and young people with mental and physical disabilities. The first one was took place on **31 May 2012** at the Internat 5, a boarding school in Telecentru district of Chisinau. As a group, we took part in the **celebration of the last day of school**. We presented ourselves in our national languages (and if someone was able, also in Romanian) on the school forum and wished everyone good luck with their exams and all the best for holidays, we watched a musical performance of kindergarten and school children, served pizza and drinks to the children at their lunch time, as well as did a tour around the school. The continuation of this initiative was a full day event on **5 June 2012** in Costesti, dedicated to the **International Children's Day**. It was attended by around 150 children and young people, their parents, assistants and volunteers at the recreational centre in Costesti, a village around 30km south-west from Chisinau. Our form of participation included organisation of games and workshops, such as water balloons' game, face-painting, drawing contest, volleyball and other sport activities. We also presented ourselves and our projects, as well as motivations for coming to Moldova on the forum composed of all participants of the festival. The day was a success as we managed to run fun activities for children, got to know each better and made useful contacts with other participating organisations, such as Public Association Filocalia.



With Mariana from ADVIT and volunteers from Belgium and Netherlands, Costesti, 5.06.2012



International Children's Day, Costesti, 5.06.2012

Thanks to meeting the president of Filocalia, Mrs. Larisa Ciobanu and one of the managers from the organisation, Mrs. Corina Erşov in Costesti, I was invited to their event “**Volunteering – a resource for success**”, which took place on **1 July 2012** in the Botanical Garden in Chisinau. It was an all day event for old and new volunteers of Filocalia and was organised on the first anniversary of the creation of volunteers' team at the Association. The purpose of the meeting was to gather together 45 young people from Moldova and other countries (among others EVS

Volunteers) with different ideas, aspirations and expectations in order to inform and train them to participate more actively and effectively in the actions undertaken by Filocalia. The event was also attended by the representative of the Centre of Active Recovery and Social Reintegration of the Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities (CCCT), Mrs. Natalia Matei, ADVIT's coordinator, Mariana Cojan and local and international activists and entrepreneurs. As an international participant I shared my personal experience and knowledge on volunteering, which I have undertaken both in Moldova and in previous years in the USA, Peru and Scotland. I was also awarded with the diploma for my active participation in the event for children in Costesti and as recognition of my involvement in activities organised by Filocalia. Throughout the day I took part in informative sessions on past and present volunteering experience and achievements, planning of the future actions of Filocalia, such as the second edition of "Help the bell to ring for every child" (*Ajută clopoțelul să sune pentru fiecare copil*), which will be a social campaign aiming at collection of material aid, such as school supplies, office items, backpacks, books, etc. for school children from socially vulnerable families from Chisinau and several villages of the country in the period of 1-31 August 2012. "Volunteering – a resource for success" was an interesting and enjoyable event for me, filled with friendly atmosphere, great mood, guitar songs, inspiring ideas and motivation for intensified volunteering participation in the future.



"Volunteering – a resource for success" event, Chisinau, 1.07.2012

4. ABOUT MOLDOVA

4.1. Initial thoughts

Coming to a new country as a volunteer usually requires a great dose of enthusiasm, positive attitude to life, independence, self-initiative and willingness to help and assist others, often more vulnerable groups of people. In order to learn and understand history, politics, culture and traditions of a host country, one has to devote a lot of time and passion. As in the famous iceberg model of culture, some elements, such as food, dress, language, fine arts, music, dance etc. are more easily spotted. Visible elements at the tip of the iceberg represent behaviours or aspects of a society which are apparent when we first get into a new culture. Other elements need time to understand and realise. Those are so called invisible elements (also known as the foundation). They represent beliefs, values, thought patterns and norms of culture. These help us better understand the visible elements of a culture.¹³

I brought up this model of culture in order to highlight the importance of making an effort to comprehend deeper layers of culture and thus understand values and belief systems of a new country. I believe that this is particularly important for volunteers as they interact with local people on a daily basis and therefore it is crucial for them to try not to judge the society/culture based explicitly on what they see when they first enter it. Throughout my entire volunteering experience, I have strived to continuously deepen my knowledge and understanding of Moldovan history, politics, culture and traditions. Whenever possible I tried to talk to local people, I participated in various cultural events and I travelled around the country. All this was aimed to get a clearer picture of what I had known before coming here and what I have encountered while living and working in this fascinating Eastern European state.

This part of the guidebook aims to shed some light on different aspects of life in Moldova, such as geography, history, politics, culture, tourist attractions and

¹³ Edward T. Hall, "Beyond Culture", New York: Anchor Books Edition, 1976.

cuisine. I do not intend to present all aspects of the above mentioned topics, but rather wish to give a general overview and leave this area for further exploration of EVS volunteers coming to Moldova.

4.2. Geography

There is a legend proudly told by the locals that explains the origins of the country of Moldova. At the beginning, when God was creating the world and he was giving land to different people, he forgot about Moldovans. In order to compensate for that, God decided to give them paradise to live in. This story has a lot of truth and it can be confirmed by everyone, who has ever visited Moldova. The nature is calm: there are no sharp mountain tops, rough sea, dense forests or sun-burnt plateaus. The colours are limited to the light blue of the sky, darker blue of the slowly flowing rivers and countless variations of juicy green of pastures, fields, forests and vineyards.

Moldova is a small landlocked country, situated in the south-eastern part of Europe, bordered on the west by Romania and on the north, south, and east by Ukraine. Most of its territory lies between the region's two main rivers, the Dniester and the Prut. The Dniester forms a small part of Moldova's border with Ukraine in the north-east and south-east, but it mainly flows through the eastern part of the country, separating Bessarabia and Transnistria. The Prut River forms Moldova's entire western boundary with Romania. The Danube touches the Moldovan border at its southernmost tip. When you look at the map, the Republic of Moldova, in accordance to the shape of its frontiers looks like a grape. The total area is 33.843 km², which gives the republic 32nd place in Europe in terms of size.

Moldova's proximity to the Black Sea gives it a mild and sunny climate. On the average, winter temperatures are slightly below 0°C, however -20-30°C is also possible. Summers are long and hot, with the average temperature over 20°C, but 30-35°C or even 40°C temperatures are also frequent. The soil is very varied, but the black soil (*chernozem*) is prevailing. Rich and fertile soil contributes largely to the fact that Moldova is predominantly agricultural country, producing fruits, vegetables and the famous wine.

4.3. Society

The population of the Republic of Moldova is estimated to be around 4mln people. The exact number of Moldovans, who emigrated in search for better working and living opportunities is unknown, but it can be as high as ¼ of the total size of population. According to the 1989 Soviet census¹⁴, the Moldovans, speakers of a Romance language, essentially identical to Romanian, comprise 64% of population of the whole country. The Ukrainians, the Russians and the Bulgarians constitute for 14%, 13% and 2% of the population, respectively. The last ethnic group of 4% is formed by Gagauz people, who speak a unique Turkic language, share the Orthodox Christian culture of their neighbours, and mostly speak Russian as well. In terms of religious affiliation, all of Moldova's main ethnic groups are traditionally Orthodox Christian.¹⁵

The capital city of Moldova, Chisinau with slightly more than 700.000 inhabitants, is often referred to as the greenest city in Europe, due to the large number of green areas, such as parks and squares. The second biggest city, the "capital" of the self-proclaimed separatist republic of Transnistria is Tiraspol (nearly 150.000 inhabitants). Other major cities include Balti (144.300) in the north part of the country, Bender (93.700) on the right bank of the Dniester River and Ribnita (50.100) on the left bank of the Dniester River. Moldova is divided into thirty-two districts, three municipalities and two autonomous regions (Gagauzia with the capital – Comrat and Transnistria - Tiraspol). Final status of Transnistria is disputed, as the central government does not control that territory. The unresolved conflict with Transnistria is too broad and complex to analyse in such a short publication like this guidebook¹⁶ and therefore this will be left for personal exploration of EVS volunteers coming to Moldova.

¹⁴ No official population count has been made since then.

¹⁵ Bruno Coppieters, Michael Emerson, Michel Huysseune, et al., "Europeanization and Conflict Resolution." http://www.belspo.be/belspo/home/publ/pub_ostc/WM/rS10303_en.pdf [Accessed on 26.06.2011]

¹⁶ I wrote the entire Masters dissertation on the reasons why Moldova-Transnistria conflict has remained unresolved.

4.4. History

Moldova is a typical borderland, where the ethnic identities of its population have experienced strong influence from neighbouring countries, particularly from present-day Russia, Romania and Ukraine. The history of Moldova, similarly to many other East European countries, is a story of multiple wars, constantly changing rule and shifting borders. Present-day Moldova has been inhabited for centuries by a large number of ethnic groups, The main groups forming the historic region of Bessarabia (the region between Dniester and Prut Rivers and the Black Sea, without the Transdnestrria – narrow strip of land on the east bank of the River Dniester) were Moldovans (Romanians), Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Jews and other such as Germans, Poles, Greeks, Gypsies, Serbs, Czechs and even French.¹⁷ Since 1812 Bessarabia has been a part of the Russian empire, initially as an autonomous region, later in 1871 became a *guberniia* (province) with Chisinau as its capital. The integration into the Russian empire resulted in great changes in economic, political, and social structures, as well as in legislation and culture. A so-called “melting pot” was formed, where different ethnic groups were fused into a multiethnic regional identity, based on Russian language and culture. In the Soviet times, the language and culture together with the Soviet nationality policy aimed at the homogenisation of ethnic characteristics in order to promote the new supra-ethnic community: the Soviet people.¹⁸

The history on the right bank of the Dniester River is slightly different. There has never been a clear ethnic majority there and the population was formed by immigrants from both east and west, who arrived in XVIII century when the region came under the Russian rule. These were mainly: Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Poles, Germans and Greeks. The Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Social Republic existed on these lands between 1924 and 1940. Prior to the short rule of Romania in 1940-1944, Transdnestrria had never been a part of the Moldovan state and even later the locals clearly differentiated themselves from the “Bessarabians”. Soviet ideology often presented Romania and Romanians as

¹⁷ Alla Skvortsova, “The Cultural and Social Makeup of Moldova: A Bipolar Or Dispersed Society? In: Kolstø, Paul, National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies. The cases of Estonia and Moldova.” Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2002.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

enemies, therefore Transdnistrians were proud that they had belonged to the Soviet Union longer than the people on the right bank of the river.¹⁹ All ethnic groups were highly russified and to a large degree also socialised into a Soviet lifestyle. The Transdnister population remained loyal to the Soviet state and the Great Russian culture throughout the whole period of the USSR's rule. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Transnistria proclaimed its independence on 2 September 1990, which resulted in a short 1991-1992 war that ended with the ceasefire agreement in July 1992. Since that time, Transnistria remained a *de facto* independent "state" with its own president, government and administrative structures, however not recognised by any country of the world.

4.5. Politics

Moldova is a parliamentary representative democratic republic. According to its Constitution, the parliament is the supreme representative organ and the single legislative authority of the state. The parliament is formed by unicameral assembly with 101 seats, whose members are elected by proportional representation every four years. In order to enter the Moldovan Parliament, independent candidates must obtain 3% of the total number of votes. The political parties must pass a 6% threshold, and the electoral blocs that consist of two parties at least 9%. The electoral blocs consisting of more than two political parties must receive at least 12% of the votes. The President (head of state) is elected by the Parliament for a four-year term, and is limited to two terms.

On 16 January 2012, Nicolae Timofti, an independent candidate was elected as a new president of Moldova, ending a political deadlock of almost three years. The current Prime Minister is Vladimir Filat (since September 2009), the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM). The ruling coalition is the "Alliance for European Integration", which was created on 8 August 2009 by the former president, Marian Lupu (current leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM)), together with Vlad Filat, Mihai Ghimpu (leader of the Liberal Party (PL)) and Serafim Urechean (member of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM)). Moldova currently aspires to join the European Union and has

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

implemented the first three-year Action Plans within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). However, the possibility that Moldova becomes a serious candidate to be a European Union member state is still slim. This is partly due to the deterrent political cooperation within the government and the most dominant and urgent domestic conflict over the pro-Russian breakaway region Transnistria that must be resolved before Moldova can strengthen its ties with the European Union.²⁰

4.6. Culture

Culture of the Republic of Moldova represents a large range of activities: literature, theatre, music, fine arts, architecture, cinematography, broadcasting and television, photographic art, design, circus, folk art, archives and libraries, books editing, scientific research, cultural tourism etc. It is rather difficult to describe it in details in such a short space, so I decided to focus more on the holidays and festivities that are celebrated by Moldovans throughout the year. The rest can be discovered by volunteers themselves. As I have not experienced all the Moldovan traditions myself, I have resorted to using some popular internet resources on the country.

Moldova has quite many national holidays, which are official days off. The national holiday calendar starts with the **New Year Day (1 January)**. It is celebrated traditionally with the family or close friends. Nevertheless some people prefer a merry and loud company and a walk around the city. The traditional outdoor merrymaking place is Chisinau's central square located between the Government Building and the Central Cathedral.

The celebration of the New Year Day happens short before the celebration of **Christmas** according to the Julian Church calendar (Moldovans are predominantly Eastern Orthodox) which falls on **7-8 January**. Those two days are official days off when people go visiting and have parties at lavish tables and children go from

²⁰ European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. Country updates – Moldova. <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/moldova> [Accessed on 25.06.2012]

house to house singing Christmas Carols, which are believed to bring peace and welfare into one's home.

The spring starts with a very interesting holiday – **1 March**, when people give their family, relatives, friends and other people they know small *mărțișors* - red and white talisman objects worn on the lapel and symbolising spring and the revival of nature. Although this day is not a day off, people are animated and lively, and the red and white *mărțișors* pinned onto their lapels emphasise the general festive mood. This beautiful tradition of welcoming the spring with *mărțișor* souvenirs exists also in the neighbouring country Romania and in Bulgaria.

The beginning of March is marked with one more celebration – that of **8 March, the International Women's Day**, which is an official day off and the male population scours shops actively in search for presents for their beautiful ladies. On that day men are typically much more polite and attentive with females around them. They are readier to offer a female a seat in public transports or a compliment. Flowers and presents for their beloved ones are also very important.

Spring is also the season of some major religious feasts which are movable, in that they do not fall on a fixed date in the year. The **Julian (Eastern Orthodox) Easter** is celebrated after the first full moon on or after the day of the vernal equinox; up to a week after the first day of Passover. The Easter celebration continues for 2 days, which are official days off. The Eastern Orthodox Church has another celebration – the so-called **Commemoration or Memorial Sunday** - one week after the Easter. That is the day when the family comes together traditionally and visits the graves of their dead relatives.

The Moldovans give a tribute of honour to the former Soviet Army soldiers, who defended their Motherland fighting against the Nazis in the years of the Great Patriotic War (World War II, 1941-1945) on **9 May**, which is celebrated as **Victory Day**. That is the day when Moldovans show deep respect and gratitude to all soldiers and military officers, who fought against the Nazis. On 9 May, the residents of Chisinau come to the War Memorial to put flowers on the grave of the Unknown Soldier. Moldova's top leaders and government officers, as well as

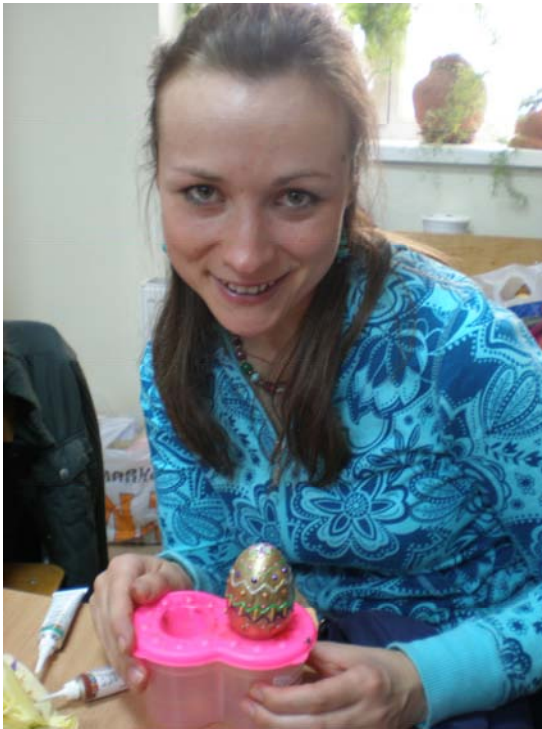
heads of diplomatic missions resident in Chisinau lay wreathes to the war monument. The official name of this holiday is **Victory Day and Commemoration Day of the Heroes**, who have fallen to defend the independence of their Motherland. 9 May is a day off in Moldova.

Moldova's Independence Day is also an official holiday. It was celebrated first on **27 August 1991**. The President of Moldova makes a festive address to the residents of the country. Concerts, fairs and other festive public events take place in Chisinau and other cities and towns on that day. The first military parade was held in Chisinau on 27 August 2001, when Moldova was celebrating its 10th Independence Day. In addition to the Independence Day and the international religious feasts traditional for all Christian countries, Moldova has several holidays specific only for this country. Thus, Moldova celebrates **Our Language (*Limba Noastră*)** holiday on **31 August**. People commemorate their national writers and poets on that day. A concert is held typically in the central part of Chisinau with participation of folk dance ensembles, as well as Moldovan pop stars and invited guests. 31 August is another day off in Moldova.

The festivities calendar is closed in October with the **Day of Chisinau (Hramul Chişinăului)**. This holiday exists in every city or village with a church/central cathedral and it falls on the day of the church's patron saint/icon. Before 2001 the Day of Chisinau was a movable feast falling on the first Saturday in October, but starting in 2001 it was given a fixed date – **14 October**. It is an official day off for the residents of Chisinau. Day of Chisinau is celebrated throughout the city with all kinds of outdoor events, exhibitions, shows and concerts. Mid-October weather is still relatively warm in Moldova, so many people go on a picnic on that day.

Certain western world holidays, such as **St. Valentine Day** and **Halloween** are also popular in Moldova, but they are celebrated mainly in night clubs and public entertainment places.²¹

²¹ Moldovan Holidays. <http://www.allmoldova.com/en/moldova/info/holidays.html> [Accessed on 25.06.2012]



Painting Easter eggs, Costesti, 7.04.2012

4.7. Tourist attractions

Although, the Republic of Moldova is a small country, it has a great potential to become a popular tourist destination thanks to its landscapes, natural scenery, interesting geological forms and very hospitable people!

Cultural Tourism; The Republic of Moldova has a rich cultural heritage, which may be of great interest to tourists. 140 cultural heritage sites may be included in the tourist circuit. The earliest visible remains of the built heritage are Geto-Dacian sites and Roman fortifications. The remains of medieval fortresses, archaeological complexes, such as Orheiul Vechi, cave monasteries, nobles' mansions and peasants' houses offer a diversity of attractions for visitors. Chisinau, the capital city, features a good number of cultural heritage monuments, fine examples of domestic architecture from the XIX and XX centuries, orthodox churches and monuments (such as the one of Stefan cel Mare, the biggest national hero of Moldova). Other cities worth visiting for their unique history and cultural value include Soroca (the city in the north-east part of the country, on the border with Ukraine, famous for its rich and spectacular Roma residences on the hill), Balti (home to the Polish community and the third biggest city Moldova, if

Tiraspol is counted), Comrat (the capital city of the autonomous region of Gagauzia), Tiraspol (capital city of the self-proclaimed Transnistria) and Vadul lui Voda (resort town, 18km east from Chisinau at the Dniester River).

Wine Tourism; Vineyards constitute great attractions of Moldovan countryside. Over centuries Moldova has gained rich traditions of growing grapes and wine production. There are 142 wineries in the Republic of Moldova, out of which 23 have experience and facilities to receive visitors. Here tourists can experience and learn about the complex production processes, see bottling and, of course, sample the final product. Moldovan wine enjoys a good reputation internationally for its quality. As a wine country, the Republic of Moldova offers visitors opportunities to choose their favourite itineraries: underground cellars and towns, wine storage facilities, wine processing factories, production processes of sparkling wine, *divin*, *heres*, balsam, etc. Combined with the vineyards that surround them into the tourist route "The Wine Road in the Republic of Moldova", the wineries represent a substantial reason to visit the country. They are also means of promoting the Moldova's best tourism product.

Hereby, a concise list of the most important tourist attractions in Moldova:

Monasteries and Churches: Capriana Monastery, Hincu Monastery, Rudi Monastery, Saharna Monastery, Tipova Monastery, Curchi Monastery, Frumoasa Monastery, Cosauti Monastery, Japca Monastery;

Museums: Alexei Mateevici House & Museum, Alexander Pushkin House & Museum, Igor Vieru House and Museum, Museum Complex "Old Orhei", National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, National Archaeology and History Museum of Moldova, the Museum of Popular Art, National Gagauz history and ethnographic museum of Dumitru Cara-Ciobanu;

Wineries: Cricova Winery, Milestii Mici Winery, Purcari Winery, Cojusna Winery;

Natural monuments: Prut Toltres, "The Hundred Knolls", "Emil Racovita" Cave;

Natural Reservations: "Padurea din Domneasca" Reservation, "Codrii" Reservation, „Iagorlic” Reservation, „Prutul de Jos” Reservation and „Plaiul Fagului” Reservation;²²

²² The official website of the Republic of Moldova. Tourism. <http://www.moldova.md/en/turism/> [Accessed on 25.06.2012]



Chisinau, monument of the national hero – Stefan cel Mare (Stefan the Great) and the patriotic poster



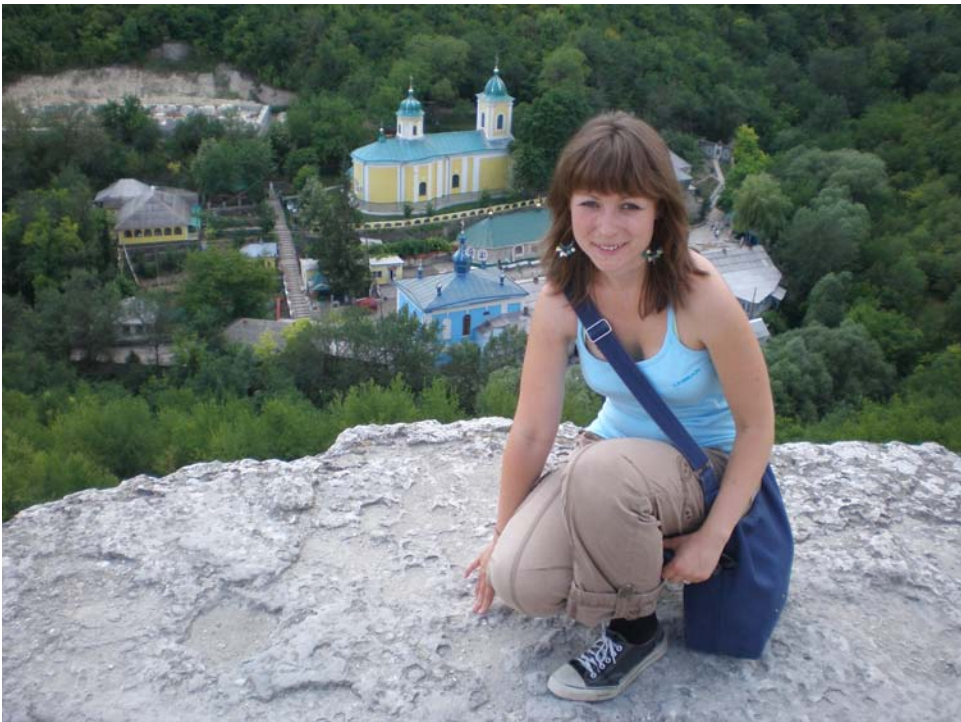
Orhei Vechi



Balti



Tiraspol



Saharna Monastery

4.8. Cuisine

Traditional Moldovan cuisine is very diverse in terms of flavours and methods of preparation of dishes. It is due to the fact that it has been influenced by cultures of many peoples, who have lived on this territory for centuries: Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Jews, Germans and others. Moldova is considered to be a country of grapes, fruits and plentiful vegetables, sheep breeding and poultry farming. Favorite dishes of Moldovans are *brynza* (a cheese-like dairy product), *mamaliga* (a mash from corn flour), served with *brynza*, milk, red-beet soup, salted fish and cracklings, as well as dishes from vegetables, fruits and meat. Wine has also a special place in the Moldovan cuisine.

Thanks to favourable weather conditions and rich soils, Moldovan cuisine is full of delicious vegetables and fruits, such as marrows, aubergines, bell peppers, tomatoes, beans, lentils, radishes or onions. Vegetables are used either separately or as a side dish and can be roasted, stewed, baked, marinated, or boiled. Bell peppers and aubergines are often stuffed with rice and meat, or other vegetables. Various vegetable ragouts, purees from beans, appetisers from marinated vegetables are also popular. Garlic is very popular. There are two popular types of sauce with garlic in Moldova - *mujdei* and *scordoli*. Besides, garlic is added to almost every meat or vegetable dish. Second course dishes in the Moldovan cuisine are traditionally made of beef, pork, poultry, mutton or fish. Meat can be roasted, baked or grilled. One of the most favorite dishes of Moldovan people is a chicken soup with vegetables (*zama de gaina*), jellied chicken (*racitur*), stuffed cabbage (*sarmale*), *costita*, *mititei* (grilled meat). Moldovans usually cook meat with lots of vegetables and fruits, such as apricots or quince. It's also very common to use wine and tomato juice while cooking meat and meat sauces. None of traditional holidays is organised without Moldovan wine, which is very well known even abroad. Wines are commonly used for cooking of national dishes and are always there at the festive dinner. Wines accompany almost every meal. In Moldova wine is also used for making of confectionary products, like cakes and cookies made with puff paste. Moldovan halva and nut nougat are just delicious.²³

²³Moldovan Cuisine. <http://www.worldofmoldova.com/en/article/moldovan-cuisine/> [Accessed on 25.06.2012]

FINAL THOUGHTS

The process of creation of this guidebook was a real pleasure for me, as I have been able to review on all aspects of my volunteering project – people I have met, activities I got involved in, places I have seen and delicious dishes I have tried. I would like to thank everyone involved in my EVS once again for the great opportunity of experiencing life and work in Moldova and all the positive memories I will bring with me back home! Last but not least, I truly hope that this publication will be of use for future generation of EVS volunteers at the Association „MOTIVAȚIE” and at other projects. May it serve them well as a source of knowledge and inspiration for further exploration of this interesting country on the borders of Europe.

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