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“Russkoe Delo” and the “Bessarabian Cause”: The Russian Political Émigrés and the Bessarabians in Paris (1919–1920)

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Abstract

The study reconstructs the involvement and the activities carried out during the Paris peace conference of 1919–1920 by the Russian political émigrés and diplomats, as well social-political organizations, for the switching of the Bessarabian status from Romania back within the Russian borders. The plan was perceived as part of “Russkoe delo”, directed toward defeating the Bolsheviks and conserving Russia in its pre-1914 borders. The Bessarabian “delegates”, representatives of the “old” and the “new” regional elite, who disagreed on the political regime of the future Russia, but were united by the anti-Romanian feelings, worked hand in hand with the Russians to inform, persuade, and propagate, as well counter-balance the Romanian position at the conference.

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1 Introduction

“Russia not only collapses, she is dying, and indifferent Europe observes and ‘calculates’. It is difficult, especially difficult for us, who were stuck in Entente. How easy would have been if in the last spring the Bolshevism would have been put an end at one stroke! Now the destruction, famine, epidemic, moral decay and savagery [underl. in text] of all classes of people are taking place with a terrifying pace; Jewish pogroms in an unheard [illegible word] – is a vivid proof. And let Europe do not wash hands: she is also to blame for them [underl. in text], especially the Western experts so strenuously fighting against the intervention. Forgive my deviation from the Bessarabian question.”¹

The excerpt is from a private letter, sent at the beginning of January 1920 from Odessa to Paris, where the Peace conferences’ delegates were legitimizing the borders of the “new” Europe after the WWI. The president of a social-political organization, named the Odessa Committee for Saving Bessarabia, V. N. Tverdokhlebov, shared his deep concerns on the situation in Russia as well in the former Western gubernia of the Russian empire, Bessarabia, with A. N. Krupenskii, the former Bessarabian Marshal of nobility and yet the Committee’s “delegate” to Paris. While apparently “deviating” from the main theme of discussion, the author argues that the success of the “Bessarabian cause”² at the Paris Peace conference was in direct dependence of the success of the “Russian cause”, being widely called “Russkoe delo”. The situation inside Russia was viewed as being complicated, and the Allies’ attitude toward its future development was uncertain. A former Russian gubernia that became part of Romania in April 1918, Bessarabia was considered by both correspondents as part of the Russian space: the collapse of the Russian empire under the Bolsheviks was causing a disaster that affected all social strata inside the country, which the Bessarabian population witnessed itself. The Allies that “watched” the drama from the distance were as well considered responsible

¹ [V. A. Tverdokhlebov – A. N. Krupenskii, Odessa, January 16 1920], Vasili A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Box 17.6. Bessarabia. Correspondence. Krupenskii, 1920–1921, HIA.

² *Bessarabskoe delo* (Bessarabian cause – Engl.) – the expression used in the correspondence and the issued documents of certain Bessarabians as well Russian emigres circles, to express the goal of fighting against the established Romanian regime in the region and for its return within the Russian borders.

for the situation: when, at the beginning of the Peace conference, the White armies were successfully taking over some regions the Allies seemed enthusiastic about Russia's future as a democratic country, but when these were defeated Russia was left alone.

For the Russian political émigrés and diplomats in Paris who claimed to represent the interest of the Russian population in the condition when Russia was not allowed an official delegation at the forum, the defeat of Bolshevism and the preservation of the Russian territorial integrity were crucial issues. The Bessarabians who served with loyalty the Tsarist regime and felt ignored and marginalized during the Romanian rule stood on the side of the Russians. Being convinced that with the restoration of Russia in its previous borders Bessarabia would be again part of the “Greater and indivisible Mother-country”, the Bessarabians came to Paris to work hand in hand with the Russian representatives in order to achieve the goal. These informed and persuaded the Allies, as well polemicized and confronted the political opponents.

The study focuses on the role of the Russian political émigrés circles located in Paris and other European capitals, as well of the social-political organizations inside and outside Russia, in constructing and supporting the “Bessarabian cause” during the Paris Peace conference. Besides determining how the issue of Bessarabia was related to the Russian interests, I will focus on depicting who got involved, from institutions to groups and individuals, what kind of message related to Bessarabia on behalf of Russian representatives was delivered, how it was vociferated, in which way and toward whom it was directed. Reconstructing the relation between the Russian and Bessarabian émigrés will help evaluating the expectations of both sides and their contribution to “Russkoe delo” and its compound part, the “Bessarabian cause”.³ While regaining the territory of Bessarabia from the Romanians and re-uniting it back to Russia was seen during the Peace conference as a crucial task, what kind of Russia was to be rebuild was a confusing question for many Russians as well Bessarabians; nevertheless, many of them knew that they wanted it “Great and indivisible”, as it was in the older days.

³ *Russkoe delo* (Russian cause – Engl.) – the expression used by the Russian political emigres and diplomats, as well the Russian Whites inside Russia, to show the cause to fight for the defeat of the Bolsheviks, as well for the conservation of the pre-1914 Russian borders.

2 The research project “Ambivalent Reconfiguration of the post-Imperial Space: A Transnational Design for the post-WW I Bessarabia”

Bessarabia was one of those South European regions which status shifted, as a result of the November 1917’s Bolshevik *coup d’état* and of WW I, from a Russian imperial gubernia to a province of the Romanian nation-state. Under both the Russian tsarist regime that lasted over a century (1812–1918) and the Romanian regime that was short-lived (1918–1940), Bessarabia was attributed a peripheral political role. Nevertheless, in both cases it was the local political, economic and social elite that struggled to preserve the region’s status as well the acquired personal economic and social privileges. They claimed to play a crucial role in the development of the province and that nobody would be able to replace them.

In Bessarabia, like in the other parts of the Eastern Europe, “class and ethnic identities existed simultaneously and with little separation”.⁴ The war and the Bolshevik *coup d’état* made the former elite reconsider its identification, review its feelings of attachment and belonging. Its representatives felt burdened with belonging to a (single) nation and unprepared to embrace the “foreign” nation-state as a new motherland, which, on its turn, adopted from the very beginning a reluctant and cautious attitude toward those that were once loyal to the Russian empire. While before 1918 these did not insist on the ethnic conventional attributes, after that the identification as “Russian” and “Russian by name and soul” was articulated, although their ethnic origin was other than Russian.

Feeling estranged and marginalized, disoriented and nostalgic, those that once were “nobles”, “wealthy” and “landowners” seemed ready to resist. While hoping for the return of the past regime, some tried to negotiate their status under the new regime and adapt to the new life, as was the case of the former mayor of Chisinau and great landowner Panteleimon V. Sinadino. Others, like A. N. Krupenskii, that “were left out of a new life [...] and cried”,⁵ departed from Bessarabia and made efforts to coagulate the

⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, 22.

⁵ *Bessarabia*, Chisinau, April 30 1919.

pro-Russian forces outside the region, first in Odessa, then in Paris and other capitals. Both Sinadino and Krupenskii, as well as others – former political and social activists, public servants, teachers, lawyers and military, many representing the ethnic minorities that acquired certain privileges under the Tsarist rule – believed that Bessarabia’s future was outside Romania, and with Russia, but what kind of Russia would Bessarabia join remained an open question. Krupenskii was a convinced monarchist and up to his death in 1939 believed that the Bessarabians should belong “under the flag under which they were born, and which they revered as the symbol of their Motherland”.⁶ Others opted for a democratic Russia, in which the freely elected Constituency would play a crucial role. Sinadino ended up serving the Romanian regime; in 1940, when the Soviet troops invaded Bessarabia, he was arrested and died in Gulag.

At the beginning of 1919, to Paris rushed those that hoped for the legitimation of the newly established national borders, as well those that hoped to save the ashes of the empire. The Peace conference was perceived as the only chance to fight for the future of Bessarabia as a Russian territory. For the protagonists of our story Paris “was a corner for hurt feelings”⁷: in order to persuade the Great Powers that the Bessarabian issue was an indispensable part of “Russkoe delo”, not of the “Romanian cause”, these teamed up with the Russian political émigrés and diplomats. Claiming to represent the interests of the majority of the population of the region which, apparently, supported the return of Bessarabia to Russia, but was not allowed by the Romanian administration to freely express its opinion, these insisted that the only solution was to hold in the region a free plebiscite.

The arguments were laid before the foreign diplomats and politicians, as well as European public through official and hidden channels and various propaganda means. In order to become visible, the Bessarabians were networking, namely with the Russian émigrés and other visible supporters of the “Russian cause” in Paris, Geneva, Rome, London and other cities, as well with the White forces inside Russia. Acting in Paris meant persuading and propagating through official and hidden channels, in order to

⁶ Bessarabia and the Supreme Council, by Alexander Kroupensky [Krupenskii], *Struggling Russia*, New York, vol. II, no. 5–6, May 1 1920, 84.

⁷ *Bessarabia*, Chisinau, no. 23, April 30 1919.

bring the ideas across to the Allies and European public, as well counteracting the activity of the Romanian delegation and its supporters. While the Romanian delegates and Russian representatives were polemicizing before the Conference's delegates to whom Bessarabia should belong, the Bessarabians that supported the Russian or the Romanian interests were "crossing swords" mainly in the newspapers and other publications.

As a borderland region, first of the Russian empire then of the Romanian state, Bessarabia was not only subject to geo-political metamorphoses, but also to contrasting discourses regarding its national formation. It is one of the paradoxes of history that discursive binaries override sequential appropriations by neighboring states, overlooking both a wide spectrum of local ideological visions and existential choices. The resistance of the former elite to the inclusion into Romania's social space as a reaction of the 1917–1918 events, intertwined with Romania's nationalist policies and nostalgia for the "old times": revealing new mobility choices and political affiliations would have spoiled the idealistic picture of a continuous and linear nation-building process, presumably based on the population's conscious national aspirations, so dear to national historiographies. Thus the solution was to exclude the story of those who did not identify themselves with the nation-state and proposed alternative visions of belonging for Bessarabia from the historical picture of the region.

On the other side, for the well-known reasons, only during the last decades the once *taboo* topics of the Russian emigration and the White movement started to be thoroughly researched by Russian historians.⁸ Yet, the rich collections of works focus mainly on the crucial events and main figures, while the former geographical peripheries of the Russian empire remain peripheral in research as well. The rich Western historiography dedicated to the Russian emigration and the fight of the White political and military

⁸ Among the works of the Russian authors, also produced in cooperation with Western historians, see: Rossiia v izgnanii. Sud'by rossiiskich emigrantov za rubezhom, Moskva: IVI RAN, 1999; Rossiia i rossiiskaia emigratsiia v vospominaniakh i dnevnikakh: annotirovannyi ukazatel' knig, zhurnal'nykh i gazetnykh publikatsii, izdannykh za rubezhom v 1917–1991 gg.: v 4-h tomakh, Nauchnoe rukovodstvo, redaktsiia i vvedenie A. G. Tartakovskogo, T. Emmons, O. V. Budnitskogo, Moskva : ROSSPEN, 2003; "Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no!" B. A. Bakhmetev – V. A. Maklakov. Perepiska, 1919-1951. V 3-h t., Moskva : ROSSPEN, 2001; A. V. Tribunskii, P. A. Makushin, Pavel Nikolaevich Miliukov: Trudy i dni (1859–1904), Riazan', 2001; O. Budnitskii, A. Polian, Russko-Evreiskii Berlin, 1920–1941, Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2013.

forces inside Russia focused on “Russia abroad” in its political and cultural manifestation, as well on its crucial figures,⁹ while short episodes of the post-imperial revival that were coming from the former peripheries of the Russian empire were foreseen.

The main research questions of the project are: In which way the 1917–1918 local and international events affected the life of Bessarabians at individual and group level? How nationalization policies generated various forms of accommodation and/or resistance within the minority groups? How survival practices co-habitated with “long-distance” nationalism and nostalgia for “Mother-Russia” in the region and abroad? How local articulation of identity/identities was linked with transnational practices for the re-construction of regional borders, developed during the Paris Peace conference and after? What were the strategies and means adopted by the Bessarabian representatives at the Peace conference, on whom these relied and why? Did the defence of the “Bessarabian cause” have any impact on the negotiations at the Peace conference as well outside Quai d’Orsay? How the events in Paris echoed back to the region? Last, but not least, what was the specific of the Bessarabian case within the former Western peripheries of the Russian empire?

In my research I insist on four points of argumentation. First, I argue that in 1917–1918, as a result of the long-term competition between the two political projects – the Russian imperial and the Romanian national projects, the Bessarabians were not able to come up with an “independent” Bessarabian project. Nevertheless, the shift of Bessarabia’s political status from the Russian empire to the Romanian nation-state produced enormous social and mentality changes that animated reactions of non-conformity and attitudes of resistance, awakened patriotic feelings, as well fear and nostalgia. Once “departing” from the former Russian homeland, the former Bessarabian elite never “arrived” to a new destination. While imposing institutional integration and cultural assimilation, the Greater Romania that felt vulnerable toward its neighbors, did not care

⁹ The Western literature on Russian emigration is numerous and various. Among these, see: Mark Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Karl Schloegel (Hsg.), *Der große Exodus. Die russische Emigration und ihre Zentren, 1917 bis 1941*, München: Beck, 1994; *Russische Emigration im 20. Jahrhundert. Literatur, Sprache, Kultur*, München: Sagner, 2005.

much of those that made the past of the province, including the minorities that were acquired together with the new territory. Because of the fear of Bolshevism, Romania did not consider them dangerous but vulnerable instead.

The Russians and other Russian-(speaking) minorities which formed the majority of Bessarabian elite before 1918, were neither numerous nor supported by their dismantled motherland. Instead, their feelings of patriotism and nostalgia were nourished by the “external national homeland”,¹⁰ developed not in Petersburg, but articulated by the Russian émigré circles in Paris and other European capitals. Thus the “Bessarabian cause”, which the former elite claimed to defend at Paris in the name of the Bessarabian population, was nourished not as a separate Bessarabian project, but as part of the “Russkoe delo” that claimed the preservation of the former Western borderland regions of the Russian empire.

Second, the defense of the “Bessarabian cause” at the Paris Peace conference was a transnational enterprise, in which networking, lobbying and propaganda played a crucial role. I argue that for the Bessarabians in Paris and elsewhere, for those who left for Odessa or stayed in Chisinau, networking was very important. They knew that “it is not what you know, it’s *who* you know”¹¹: moving back and forth, across boundaries and nations, and meeting first of all “who you know” and then persuading others to join, gave the opportunity to create a network, in which people were united by a common cause. Pretending to vociferate the interests of all the Bessarabians, the group members felt empowered with certain emotional and moral force. These approached individual political actors and tried to persuade them to lobby for their cause, as well created groups and organizations that publicly addressed official organizations and institutions (governments, parliaments and embassies), as well supranational assemblies, namely the Paris Peace conference and the League of Nations. They relied on those to whom the “Russian cause” – at least for a short period of time – became a life credo.

¹⁰ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 5 and the foll.

¹¹ David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting. The social meaning of creativity, from DYU and knitting to Youtube and Web 2.0*, Polity Press, 2011.

Third, the research aims at deconstructing the process of “remaking” the Eastern Europe at the Paris Peace conference, and showing the impact of the regional actors on the peace negotiations. While Eastern Europe looked to the representatives of the Great Powers as a conglomerate of nation-states with smaller or bigger claims, behind the “backs” of the nation-states appeared “faces” of the Other who envisioned a different fate for their region, but were barely heard. The representatives of the former Bessarabian elite that called themselves the “Bessarabian delegation”, came to Paris empowered to vociferate the opinion that Bessarabia should not belong to a nation-state, but go back to Russia that supposed to become a democratic country. Claiming the respect of the principle of self-determination, they teamed up with the Russian diplomats and political émigrés, in order to persuade the main actors on the plebiscite as the unique solution for the contradictory issue. Another major aim of the “delegation” was to counterbalance the position of the Romanian official delegation which argued for the recognition of Bessarabia as a Romanian territory and claimed exactly the opposite of the Russian/Bessarabian claims. Thus, the Bessarabians that situated themselves on the both sides of the barricade added “salt and pepper” to the Romanian-Russian official polemics.

Last, but not least, although little visible on the official stage but active on the propaganda sphere, the consistent activities of the Bessarabians in Paris had an important resonance back in Bessarabia. There, the opinions on the Bessarabian status were also far from being homogenous. Because of the call to patriotism and duty, as well the hopes coming from Paris, the nostalgic pro-imperial circles felt – even for a short time – that there were chances for the restoration of “Greater Russia”, once strong and powerful.

The research is based on a multitude of primary and secondary sources, in different languages and from different countries, which allow analyzing the discourses and disputes that were set around the Bessarabian issue. By revealing the social and political background of those that launched as well joined the cause, restoring the interactions between people within a specific local and transnational context while taking into account their personal interests and ambitions, reconstructing mobility patterns and restoring networks, as well explaining how a certain context molded the perception of

duty and *patriotism*, along with *property rights* and *security*, I want to show how complex social processes subsequently shaped the heterogeneous and multidimensional character of Bessarabian / Moldovan identity – a pertinent and contested issue today as well.

3 The Russian Political Émigrés and the Bessarabians in Paris (1919–1920)

3.1 Taking road to Paris

At the beginning of 1919, when the war was over, the either victorious or defeated countries expected the post-war peace treaties to be signed and new frontiers to be drawn. It was a turbulent time, when the empires were struggling in the last breath while not willing to recognize that the catastrophe of falling apart was irreversible; simultaneously, the new nation-states were born on the ashes of the empires and were fighting for stable frontiers. For the delegates at the Peace conference, “it was nothing less than to reshape the world, the nature of states and international relations in a new image. Promises had been made, expectations and aspirations raised, either deliberately or by accident, and now these pledges had to be redeemed”, wrote Alan Sharp in this regard.¹²

The apparently clear tasks proved extremely difficult to fulfil, not only in relation to the German territories, but also to the territories that once were known as Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires and to which the new political entities formulated their own claims. There was Russia, toward which the Allies had no clear strategy: they seemed confused “which” Russia to take into consideration. When the Russian empire was in agony and the Democratic republic was replaced by the Soviet state, there was still hope that the White armies will crush the Bolsheviks. The Russian “diplomats of the inexistent country”¹³ were let to express their will, although not being given seats among the delegates. These claimed that “the fate of these nationalities cannot be definitely settled without the consent of the Russian State”.¹⁴ They meant the peoples from the newly created Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and other former regions of the empire, which sent separate delegations to the Peace conference to claim

¹² Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement. Peacemaking after the First World War, 1919–1923*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 196.

¹³ Quoted from O. Budnitskii, *Diplomaty nesushchestvuiushchei strany*, in Introduction to: “Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!” B. A. Bakhmetev – V. A. Maklakov, *Perepiska, 1919–1951*, v 3-h tomakh, ROSSPEN, Izdatel’stvo Guverovskogo Instituta, Moskva-Stanford, Tom 1, 2001.

¹⁴ Conference Preliminaire de la Paix. Commission des Affaires Baltiques. Procès-verbal No. 4, May 26 1919, [Paris. Peace Conference, 1919. Commission on Baltic Affairs], HIA.

their independence. The Russian representatives were convinced that it were Russia's rights that were violated by such countries, as Finland, Poland and Romania, that used its weakness and defenceless to their own interest.¹⁵

At the earlier state of the conference, the common defeat of Bolshevism inside Russia that would lead to the construction of a democratic country seemed a perspective toward which both the Russian Whites and the Allies would make efforts. In the same context, the preservation of the Western peripheries of the former Russian empire within the geographical boundaries was declared as crucial for the "Russian cause". Claiming that the Russian people was for the respect of the principle of self-determination, the Russian representatives abroad set up plans and strategies for preserving Finland, the Baltic regions, Ukraine as well Bessarabia. The Western regions were neither homogenous nor similarly treated by the Russian politicians and diplomats; still, the main difficulty at the initial stage was to vociferate the "Russian cause" before the Allies in the condition when no official delegation on behalf of Russia was allowed at the conference.

On the other side, according to p. 6 of Wilson's "14 points",¹⁶ peoples of the former Russian empire were allowed to have their own national governments; no doubt that there were political forces in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and other state formations that wanted to see the principle implemented.

¹⁵ In a publication issued in May 1920, Pavel N. Miliukov expressed the idea that the "Balkanization" of Russia was witnessed immediately after the decisions of the Conference were issued: it allowed the "forcible dismemberment of a national organism which grew up in the process of natural expansion over the great Eastern European plain in the dark centuries when no national consciousness was awakened in smaller ethnographic units counting up to a hundred and, accordingly, a long process of physiological and racial fusion was going on undisturbed by any considerations of nationalist ideology. To denounce that stage of the peaceful amalgamation of races would be equivalent to a useless attempt at remaking history", concluded Miliukov. *The Balkanization of Russia*, by Paul N. Miliukov, "Struggling Russia", New York, Vo. II, No. 5-6, May 1 1920, 67.

¹⁶ "The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy". http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson's_Fourteen_Points

Already in the summer of 1918, the former Russian prime minister Alexander F. Kerenskii rushed to the European capitals to depict the attitudes on the situation in Russia. He was disappointed to find out that the politicians as well the public were little informed: “You cannot imagine how neglected have been the interests of Russia and the Russians, and how much more is to be done now, that at the moment of the partition of the world Russia would find experienced and skilful defenders of its interests,” wrote he in August 1918 to the president of the Union of the Revival of Russia (Sojuz Vozrozhdeniia Rossii)¹⁷, Nikolai V. Chaikovskii. Kerenskii was surprised to find out that neither the English prime minister D. Lloyd George, nor his French counterpart G. Clemenceau seemed aware of how the things were evolving inside Russia, so that he informed “the government, parliamentary and social activists and the representatives of the press on the real situation in Russia, the fight with monarchic-reactionary influence and the protection of honour and dignity of the Russian name, which, it must be said, was treated by the French government through the personal Russophobia of Clemenceau.”¹⁸ In the condition when the war was coming to end and the establishment of democratic governments was to follow, he argued that if not the Bolsheviks, Russia would form “a veritable democracy that will be able to defend the interests of the working masses from any reactionary adventures”.¹⁹ In this sense, the former members of the first Russian Constituent Assembly formulated the Declaration of the Russian democrats, which emphasized that the principle of the sovereignty of people should be respected. The main idea was that the necessary support by the foreign democratic governments should be directed toward

¹⁷ The Union of the Revival of Russia (Soiuz Vozrozhdeniia Rossii) was created in May–June of 1918, with the dissolution of the Right Centre led by the former Tsarist minister A. V. Krivoshein. It represented a coalition of the socialist-oriented parties of the Essers, Cadets and Popular Socialists that claimed the revival of Russia in its pre-1914 borders (without Poland and Finland), the restoration of the Constituent Assembly as the supreme legislative power and the cancellation of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918.

¹⁸ Kerenskii blamed Miliukov and the others who took the German side for the ignorant treatment of the Allies. [A. F. Kerenskii – N. V. Chaikovskii, August 8 1918, copy], N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject File], f. 14, Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

¹⁹ Kerenskii was disappointed to find out that nobody cared about the efforts the Left Center made in establishing cooperation with the Allies representatives in Russia, in the meantime the monarchist group of Gen. Alexeev being subsidized by the Allies. [A. F. Kerenskii – N. V. Chaikovskii, August 8 1918, copy], f. 16, N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject File], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

the organization of the elections for the Constituent Assembly.²⁰ The unconditional condemnation of Bolshevism and of the Soviet regime, and the immediate recognition of the Russian delegation representing the United Russian Democratic Government of Siberia, Cuban and the Northern Russia were mentioned among the “immediate measures” the Allies were expected to adopt in relation to Russia.²¹

The Kerenskii “episode” and the events that followed show the Allies’ confusion on the existence of a reliable force inside Russia, which led to their indecisive position on Russia’s official representation at the conference. The Russian representatives instead, regardless of their political orientation, were convinced that Russia not only should be given the chance to participate with full rights in the conference, but also that a set of problems could not be solved without Russia’s position to be taken into account. The future participation of Russian delegates in the conference was seen by the Russian politicians as “a question of an enormous importance, that should be thought upon day and night, as the present situation of the deepest anarchy, when anyone who is not lazy runs through the back door in all the offices and says nonsense, being often in the dexterous hands an obedient executor of the plans foreign and harmful for Russia – such a situation is absolutely unbearable, shameful and disgusting”.²²

Although the White movement²³ inside Russia did not succeed to come to a compromise for a unique political representation at the Peace conference, various political organizations

²⁰ The signatories of the document were A. Kerenskii, N. Avksent’ev, V. Zenzinov, A. Argunov, E. Rogovskii, O. Minor, V. Sokolov, M. Shlonim, the last being a Bessarabian of Jewish origin who was actively promoting the “Bessarabian cause” in different French publications. [Une Declaration des Democratres Russes, undated], N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

²¹ These were the “Immediate measures suggested by the Russian delegate N. W. Tchaykovskii [Chaikovskii] to the President of the Council, 1918”. (N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA). Chaikovskii was the former member of the Bureau for Organizing Morale of the Provisional Government, which main task was to “enlighten the population so that it would, of its own accord, support the Provisional Government as guarantor of revolution”. See, Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia’s continuum of crisis, 1914–1921*, Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 212–213.

²² [A. F. Kerenskii – N. V. Chaikovskii, August 8 1918 (copy)]. N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject File], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

²³ *Beloe dvizhenie* (White movement – Engl.) – a term used widely in Russian and Western historiographies to distinguish the organized movement of different political and military forces inside Russia and beyond its borders in the period of 1917–1923, with the aim to overthrow the Bolshevik government which was installed in Petrograd in November 1917, as well to fight the separatists tendencies that arose

and military commandments were convinced of the stringent necessity to ensure Russia's right for the participation in the post-war conference, in order to maximize the chances for the Allies' military intervention, and obtain the recognition of an all-Russian government.

The Iasi conference (November 30 – December 1 1918) was the first gathering of the White forces that brought hopes to the Russians to get Allied military support against the Bolsheviks, but it disappointed the Allies with the contradictions among the anti-Bolshevik forces.²⁴ After the conference, many of the participants took the road to Paris and London, hoping that their pleas will be heard and answered. Thus, at the beginning of December 1918, in Paris the Russian Political Conference (*Russkoe Politicheskoe Soveshchanie*), under the chair of the former prime minister of the Provisional Government, G. E. L'vov, was founded. The organization included the Russian ambassadors V. A. Maklakov, B. A. Bakhmetev, M. N. Girs, K. N. Gul'kevich, I. N. Efremov, M. A. Stakhov, as well other politicians and several former ministers in Kerenskii's government: S. D. Sazonov, A. P. Izvol'skii, A. I. Konovalov, N. V. Chaikovskii, S. A. Ivanov, N. S. Dolgopolov, B. V. Savinkov.

In the meantime, the two Aide-memoirs, addressed by the Omsk government²⁵ to the Allies at the end of 1918, expressed the idea that the lack of a recognized authority should not be seen as an impediment for Russia to participate in the Conference: first, because Russia took an active part in the War, and second, the creation of an unified center of power (National Unification Center) inside Russia would "resuscitate Russia and the sovereignty of the Russian people" that could decide upon their own fate. For this purpose, Russia's recognition of the Wilsonian "14 points" and of the respect of the rights of every nationality

in the formerly annexed Russian territories, where non-Russian nationalities lived. The participants had colorful political affiliation, including Monarchists and Republicans, but also non-affiliated people from different social strata and professional occupations. Still, the militaries and intelligentsia prevailed. The cause in the name of which these acted was called *Beloe delo*.

²⁴ More on the expectations and outcomes of the Iasi conference, in: Christopher Lazarski, *The Lost Opportunity: Attempts at Unification of the Anti-Bolsheviks, 1917–1919*, Moscow, Kiev, Iassy, Odessa, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2008, 101–117.

²⁵ The Omsk government, led by Gen. A. Kolchak, was established in Omsk in November 1918 and dissolved in January 1920.

for the self-determination was declared.²⁶ Wilson, about whom Prince Lvov wrote that he “managed to take into his hands not a stick, as it would have been characteristic to the old forms and methods of life, but a tuning fork, on which the spiritual strings of all people are built”,²⁷ was considered as a saviour of all the oppressed people. The above declaration not only aimed at helping Russia fighting separatism, but also at tempering the “public opinion of the victorious democracies [which] is afraid of the ghost of political and social reaction”, considered the Russian ambassador to Paris, V. A. Maklakov.²⁸

The Omsk government entrusted the Reunion of ambassadors and Russian politicians, created in Paris under the presidency of the Russian ambassador to Rome, M. N. Girs, with consultative duties before the forthcoming Peace conference.²⁹ The ambassadors that served the pre-Revolutionary and Provisional governments, former government members and well-known politicians that left Russia after November 1917 were not only physically present in Paris, but also the only politically trustworthy. At the end of January 1919, these issued a declaration that contained the basic principles for the future development of a democratic Russia, among which the principle of the right of nationalities for self-determination was stated.³⁰ The conditions under which the principle was to be implemented were the following: “The political situation of the nationalities within the state will depend on the level of their culture and historical traditions. The accordance of the rights and interests of nationalities with the living interests of the state – that will be the main task to be solved - not only with the reestablishment of the Russian state on the new basis, but also in harmony with the reorganization with the international community”.

²⁶ [Aide-memoir, undated], Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 1 Correspondence], Folder Maklakov, V. 1937, 1918–1919, HIA.

²⁷ [Count L’vov – Charles R. Crane, Pekin, 1918], Russia. Posol’stvo (France), [Box 6], Folder 6.25 L’vov, Prince Georgii Evgen’evich, 1918–1919, f. 3, HIA.

²⁸ [V. A. Maklakov – S. D. Sazonov, Paris, January 7 1919 (copy)], Nikolai A. Basili Papers, [Box 1 Correspondence], Folder Maklakov, V. 1937, 1918-1919, HIA

²⁹ [Aide-memoir, undated], HIA.

³⁰ The principles of popular sovereignty, freedom of religion, the equality of all citizens before the law, and the equal access to political and social hierarchies, protection of labor, establishment of the legal agrarian basis, administrative decentralization and social education of the nation were formulated. [Deklaratsiia Russkogo Politicheskogo Soveshchaniia v Parije, vruchennaia Ministru Inostrannykh del Pizhonu v kontse ianvaria (1919)], Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject File], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

The declaration emphasizes that after the February Revolution the “new” Russia declared the independence of Poland, started the re-evaluation of its relations with Finland, raised the question of the “autonomy for the Baltic and other peoples”, the development of events being interrupted by the “Bolshevik Revolution”. There was the will to continue that path, but the changed circumstances required the reformulation of goals: “The new Russia will strive to eliminate from the very beginning the artificial causes of unhealthy separatism, fuelled by memories of old resentments, mistrust in the central government and resentment against the Bolshevik despotism. The unity of the state should not be constantly and continuously supported by the danger, this unity should become an organic one, because it is equally in the interest of the state and the nationalities. Political experience provides enough ways to implement this unity in the form of a federation or autonomy [...]”, stated the document.³¹

The conditions of autonomy formulated in the declaration could be interpreted in a variety of ways. One could read between the lines that for the illiterate and backward Bessarabia, where separatism alimented from Romania was flourishing, the mistrust in central government was periodically arising, and the sporadic condemnation of the 1812 act of military occupation by certain radical nationalist circles was expressed, the establishment of autonomy was difficult to imagine. In the condition when the democratic Russia “can neither deny itself the unity of the state, nor the secular heritage of the nation”, acquiring autonomy for Bessarabia sounded ephemeral.

In January 1919, the Kolchak government mandated G. E. L’vov, S. D. Sazonov, V. A. Maklakov, and N. V. Chaikovskii to defend Russia’s interest before the Peace conference, the group being known as the “Russian Political Delegation”.³² Inside Russia, it was clear to many that “such construction of representation does not answer, of course, the principles of international law and finds no examples in history; but the time

³¹ [Deklaratsiia Russkogo Politicheskogo Soveshchaniia v Parizhe, vrucennaja Ministru Inostrannykh del Pijonu v kontse ianvaria (1919)], N. A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject File], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

³² We take the name of the group in brackets, because it had not the status of an official Russian delegation at the conference. On the authority of V. A. Maklakov, as well on opinions of the delegates about each other, see: G. Adamovich, V. Alexeevich, Maklakov: politik, iurist, chelovek, Paris: Imprimerie de Navarre, 1959.

and circumstances are such, that this kind of deviation from theory and principles should be, for this is felt an urgent need.”³³ In an internal report of the “delegation” was noted that its main activity consisted of “observing the progress of the conference and presenting it in writing, memoirs and statements that set out and defended, in response to emerging issues, Russian wishes and requirements, or protesting against the violation of Russian interests.”³⁴

The Russian “delegation” acted as part of the Russian Political Conference (RPC) until its dissolution in July 1919, with the creation of the All-Russian government, and then it acted on its own. Although the “delegation” was not perceived as a unitary body that replaced the Russian government representatives, its members were invited to the Conference meetings and within the commissions to express Russia’s position related to the former territories of the Russian Empire. It encountered various challenges, including the reticence from various political groups and a larger public. Apparently, the latter was much more open to listen to the leftist argumentation than to sympathize the former Russian leaders Kerenskii, Sazonov, Izvolskii who were “met unfriendly by the press”, as these reminded the people about the older Tsarist Russia. “How far the significant shift occurred in this respect can be seen from the fact that, not to mention the once popular S. D. Sazonov, even the names of the more liberal Russian politicians fail to impress. When guided by the desire to defend the fighters of the new Russia from reproaches and excessive critique, the RPC issued to the press a declaration on the Constituent Assembly and the radical resolution of the land issue. “It had no effect whatsoever, and even moderate newspapers did not devote a single word to the declaration,”³⁵ noted pessimistically the RPC member, A. A. Titov.

Despite the reticence, the Russian representatives were ready to fight for the return of the former Russia’s territories. The Bessarabians who served the Tarist regime had also their own expectations from the Peace conference. These also rushed to Paris, but took

³³ Zhurnal zasedaniia obshchego sobraniia, no. 26, Ekaterinodar, May 25 1919. Vserosiiskii ..., 218.

³⁴ [Kratkij obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russikoï delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii, undated], f. 2, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, HIA.

³⁵ Zhurnaly zasedaniia pravleniia, no. 17 i 18, Ekaterinodar, March 25 and 26 1919. Vserosiiskii ..., 125.

different roads: while the former Bessarabian minister Ioan Pelivan came to the French capital via Bucharest, as the member of the Romanian delegation at the Peace conference,³⁶ the former Marshal of Bessarabian nobility, Alexandr N. Krupenskii, and the former mayor of Chisinau, Alexandr K. Schmidt, reached Paris through Odessa. These were part of a group of four people³⁷ that held the mandate from several Bessarabian and Odessa social(-political) organizations: (the Odessa Committee for the Salvation of Bessarabia and the Union of Bessarabian great landowners, the Uprava of Bessarabian zemstvo³⁸). These were against the union of Bessarabia with Romania, no wonder why their mandates were questioned by the Romanian supporters.

Pelivan represented the “new” local elite who took the lead in 1917 in the region caught by the war and the fall of tsarist regime. He lived with optimism the transformation of the Bessarabian gubernia into a “Moldavian Democratic Republic”, and then gave his vote for the union of Bessarabia with Romania. Krupenskii represented the “old” Bessarabian elite who flourished during the late Romanov empire, was actively involved in social, political and economic life of the region, was loyal to the Tsar and did not imagine one day all that would vanish. He hoped that Bessarabia had a chance, and people like him would go back to their Greater Russia.

³⁶ From December 1 1919 to May 31 1920 Ioan Pelivan was paid a monthly salary of 20.000 FR, the sum being similar to the salary of the other members of the delegation. ANR, fond 1449 Ioan Pelivan, dos. 41, 1900–1936, f. 24. On the activity of Ioan Pelivan at Paris, and his observations on the Bessarabian “delegation”, see, Ioan Pelivan, *istoric al mișcării de eliberare națională*, Ed. Ion Constantin, Ion Negrei, Gheorghe Negru, București: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2012, 390–409.

³⁷ A declaration, signed in Odessa on February 10 1919, stated that the Bessarabians A. N. Krupenskii, A. K. Schmidt, A. D. Krupenskii and V. V. Tsyganko, “representatives of various organizations and community groups of Bessarabia, [...] organize, under the chairmanship of Alexandr Nikolaevich Krupenskii, a common Commission for the purpose to achieve during the International Peace Conference the liberation of Bessarabia from Romanian annexation and for the realization of the aspirations of the people of Bessarabia”. (A. N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 2 Subject File], Folder Bessarabian commission of the Paris Peace Conference, HIA). While the first three supported the idea of the restoration of Russia led by a monarch, the former leader of Peasant Faction of the Bessarabian parliament “Sfatul Tsarii”, V. V. Tsyganko, was for the democratic Russia. For the Romanians, he “supports the same cause as MM. Krupenskii and Schmidt” (I. Pelivan – I. Inculet, June 2 1919. ANR, Fond 1449 Ioan Pelivan, dos. 128, f. 71), but he withdrew from the declaration and acted on his own.

³⁸ Uprava – the executive body of the local institution of self-government, called *zemstvo*. About the specific characteristics of *zemstvo* in Bessarabia and the reasons that motivated the Romanian administration to keep the Russian institution up to 1926, see: Svetlana Suveica, *Basarabia in primul deceniu interbelic (1918–1928): modernizare prin reforme*, Chisinau: Pontos, 2010, 210–235.

Neither Krupenskii nor Pelivan claimed the regional autonomy for Bessarabia: both experiences of the regional autonomy - within the Russian Federative Republic (December 15 1917 – February 6 1918 (O.S.), and later within Romania (April 9 – December 9 1918) – were short-lived. Despite the disappointment and frustration the abolition of autonomy caused among the local elite in both cases, both were conscious that Bessarabia was too weak and vulnerable on its own. In Paris, the Bessarabians situated at the different sides of the barricade knew that at stake was not the autonomy, but the full protection either from Romania or Russia. They also knew that the solution given by the conference could be the “right” one only for one side.

While one group worked hand in hand with the Romanian delegates, the other relied on the Russian representatives: at the first glance, the only difference was that Romania’s claims were defended by an official delegation at the Peace conference, Russia having hard times to find ways – official and hidden – to make its claim heard. Outside the walls of the Quai D’Orsay, the supporters of each side used similar strategies of hidden diplomacy and propaganda in order to be heard. The question is whether the message the Bessarabians wanted to deliver really made a difference, to whom and in which way.

According to the declaration of the Bessarabian “delegates”, led by A. N. Krupenskii, they came to Paris to fulfil a mission on their own and seemed determined to act “in the name of the Bessarabian population”. There were the Russian representatives who not only invited the Bessarabians to Paris, but also facilitated their departure from Odessa. According to a certificate, issued on January 27 1919 by the military governor of Odessa, Gen. A. N. Grishin-Almazov, A. N. Krupenskii and A. K. Schmidt were “dispatched to Paris as carriers carrying documents and letters to the representative of Russia to the Congress of Peace – Mr minister Serge Sazonov.”³⁹ To the certificate a list of 110 documents that were “verified and numbered by the French Commandment in Odessa” was attached.⁴⁰

³⁹ [Certificat, Odessa, January 27 1919 (Fr.)], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 2 Subject file], Folder Krupenskii, A. N., HIA.

⁴⁰ The list carried the signature and the seal of the French Commandment in Odessa. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 2 Subject file], Folder Krupenskii, A.N., HIA.

The road to Paris was strenuous. Two of the four Bessarabian “delegates” reached Paris only in April 1919, the others came by the summer. The two handed to the Russian representatives the program that stated the goal of the “delegation”: “to defend political and economic rights and interests of the Bessarabian population”. These ensured the Russian counterparts that their conationals were eager to be again “citizens of the Great Russian State and [...] is ready by all means to contribute to the restoration of the Greater Russia.”⁴¹ The tasks that were to be fulfilled with this aim in mind were the following: “First, to liberate the populations from the cruel and barbaric dominance of the Romanians and their government, and second, while reunited with the Russian state, to share in all its historical fate.” The freely held plebiscite was considered the “the most secured and, at the same time, the fairest way to achieve the proposed goals.” The Bessarabian “delegates” wanted to convince the Conference as well the larger public that the Romanian regime was illegally installed in the region and that the population not only condemned the new administration, but, in fact, sabotaged it. It did not and would not comply with the loss of the Russian motherland, and it wanted to confirm its point within a free plebiscite.

Although, apparently, the Russian representatives in Paris did not support the Bessarabian “delegates” financially,⁴² the Bessarabians and the Russians were closely working together for the same cause. The following pages will be dedicated to the efforts of the Russian emigres circles for the promotion of the “Bessarabian cause” as part of “Russkoe delo”.

⁴¹ The earlier program was rather similar with one quoted here. [Obshchaia Programma Predstavitelei Bessarabskogo Naseleniia, December 10 1919 (draft)], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 3 Speeches & Writings, 1919], Folder “General Program of the Representatives of the Bessarabian Population” (10 December 1919), HIA.

⁴² [V. N. Tverdokhlebov – A. N. Krupenskii, Odessa, October 20 1919], Vasili A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.5 Bessarabia. Correspondence – Krupenskii, 1919, HIA.

3.2 Memoranda phase: The Russian Political Conference⁴³

Despite little attention given to the Bessarabian issue in comparison to other stringent problems, it figured on the foreign policy's agenda of Kolchak's Government. On February 25 1919, the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Military Forces of the South of Russia A. A. Neratov, wrote to the Russian foreign minister, S. D. Sazonov, that “the replacement of the Romanian military forces that occupied Bessarabia with the Allied detachments” would be a solution that the Allies could adopt for the “protection of the Bessarabians from further harassment” of the Romanian regime.⁴⁴ Besides the idea of “protecting” the Bessarabians from the apparently unbearable Romanian rule, a strategic advantage was emphasized: to re-establish the contact between Galicia, Carpathian Ruthenia and Odessa regions. According to the document, among the inhabitants of these Northern regions “dominated the desire to merge with the unified Russia”, so from these regions the organization of detachments that would join the Denikin army could eventually merge. Neratov seemed optimistic: from the forming of a “territorial bow between the south of Russia and the Galician-Carpathian lands, through Bessarabia, bypassing Russian regions engulfed by the Ukrainian and Bolshevik movement” would apparently benefit not only the Russian military forces, but also the Allies. “Possibly, this consideration could awaken a greater interest of the Allied Powers toward the Bessarabian questions and toward a more energetic action in this regard”, concluded Neratov optimistically.

The Russian Government was aware that the Great Powers wanted to have Russia's signature under the peace treaties: this was interpreted, first of all, as the subsequent recognition of Kolchak's government as the All-Russian government. These were interested in the suppression of Bolshevism, thus the help offered to the White armies was expected. Taken into account the above mentioned common interests, “it should be ex-

⁴³ On the activity on the Russian Political Conference related to the Bessarabian issue, see my article in Romanian: Svetlana Suveică, Conferința politică rusă și problema Basarabiei (1919), in *Diplomație și destine diplomatice în lumea românească*, Paul Nistor, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (Ed.), Târgoviste: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2011, 113–129.

⁴⁴ [A. A. Neratov – S. D. Sazonov, Ekaterinodar, January 16 1919], Mikhail N. Girs Papers, [Box 42], Folder 42.5 Romania, Conditions and events, 1918 October – 1919 March, HIA.

pected that the Russian representation in Paris will succeed to either definitely defend Russia's vital interests at the Conference, or to elaborate such a formula, based on which the decisions on the Russian questions would be postponed till the creation of an all-recognized Russian Government, after the factual unification of the fronts. To such types of questions relate: the question on the Finland's borders, on the easement⁴⁵ within these, on the Eastern borders of Poland, on Bessarabia, on Transcaucasia, on the Straits [Bosphor and Dardanele]". The acceptance of these conditions was expected to be followed by technical and financial support of the Allies for the continuation of the anti-Bolshevik fight inside Russia. Russia, on its turn, was ready to accept the conditions of peace, but only those which did not affect directly its sovereign rights, wrote Neratov.⁴⁶

The Russian Political Conference (RPC) formulated Russia's interests of the preservation of Bessarabia within Russian borders being guided by the above-mentioned ideas. In the situation when Russia was not allowed an official delegation at the Peace conference, drafting memoranda, appeals and protests that were addressed to the Conference's president and the delegates and published for the wider public, was the main form of activity carried by RPC during its short period of existence.

The preservation of Russia's former Western borders was one of the most important tasks of the "Russian cause" that was given great attention from RPC members. Finland, the Baltic regions and Bessarabia were seen at the core of the Russian territorial identity, and the integrity of the future democratic state was seen in direct relation to these territories. In an explanation why the preservation of an indivisible Russia was crucial in comparison to that of Austria-Hungary, it was emphasized that the latter was an "artificial" construct and its dissolution "into a number of viable nation-states [was] in the interest of all mankind", while such a separation of states from Russia "would have

⁴⁵ A term used in the pre-revolutionary Russian legislation that expressed a certain right to use the land property of another without possessing it.

⁴⁶ According to the July 1919 estimations of the Russian Foreign minister, the Military Forces of the Southern Russia could resist alone for about three months. Upravlenie Inostrannykh Del pri Glavnokomandujushchem Voorujennymi Silami Juga Rossii, June 12 1919. Mikhail N. Girs Papers, 1917–1926, Box 43, Folder 43.3 Russia (Terr[itories] under White Armies, 1918–1920). Dobrovol'ceskaia Armia. Denikin, Gen., Mil[itary] oper[ation] in Don Region and So[uth] Russia. 1919 April–May, HIA.

condemned the great Russian people to economic death or to new wars”.⁴⁷ The excerpt, taken from an undated memorandum, underlined that the post-revolutionary Russia was different from other states: it was ready to take into consideration the legitimate grievances of people who wanted to organize their life based on the principle of self-determination, but that the wishes of the Russian people and the common interests related to defence, economic, and financial matters were also necessarily to be taken into account. There was a strong conviction that the Russian territorial question should be postponed until a formal delegation representing the Russian people at the Peace conference will be allowed.

While the RPC agreed on the necessity of the mission of the Economic committee of the Peace conference, that of the Political commission was considered as having harmful consequences for the Western regions. It claimed for immediate actions, in the condition when the official delegations were already heard by the committees regarding the former territories of the Russian empire. One of those was the Romanian prime minister Ion I. C. Bratianu who, on February 1 1919, pleaded before the Council of Ten with arguments of “justification of the union of Bessarabia with Romania”.⁴⁸

The first memorandum that related to the territorial “question” was issued by the RPC on March 9 1919 and contained the general principles, based on which the solving of the issues related to the indigenous peoples that once lived within the Russian Empire was possible: the recognition of Russia’s 1914 geographical borders, with the exception for Poland’s ethnographic borders; addressing the future status of nationalities with the consent of the Russian people who would express their will freely and participate in its regulations; the institution of a temporary regime for the interested nationalities to meet their economic, financial, and military needs, while the right to create their own authority was admitted.

⁴⁷ [*Memoir sur la delimitation des Droits de l’Etat et de la Nation d’apres la Doctrine de President Wilson. Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii*, undated], f. 3, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, 1881–1956, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, HIA.

⁴⁸ Bratianu and the Council of Ten, February 1 1919, in: Mitrasca, Marcel, *Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers*, Algora Publishing, 2002, 86.

The memoranda that followed emphasized that the above-stated principles stood at the basis of the territorial claims related to the Russian Western borders. The memo on the Polish territory (April 9 1919)⁴⁹ was followed by the memo on Bessarabia (March 22), that on Finland (May 8)⁵⁰ and the Baltic Provinces (May 24). The argumentation for the Polish territories and Finland differed from that related to the Baltic provinces. According to the last memo, they “cannot live as independent states separated from Russia, because of economic, as well of political reasons”: first, they were weak political entities, thus “they represent a convenient strategic bridgehead, where any Russia’s enemy, and especially Germany, can freely set an army of any size” for the subsequent attack of Moscow and Petrograd. The arguments were obviously set around Russia’s interest in Baltic territories: the fact that Russia would lose the access to the Baltic Sea “from the political point of view lead her back to the Middle Age Moskovia”. Russia would lose its maritime bases in the Gulfs of Finland and Riga, and “Peter’s window” would be shut. Then Russia’s loss would be taken over by Germany, which could form a common front with the Baltic states and use their territories for the strategic advancement against Russia. Second, the economic weakness of the Baltic provinces, their dependency on Russia and the vulnerability toward Germany was emphasized. The eventual separation from Russia would lead to economic difficulties, as Russia was planning to ask for the costs of the lost port and rail facilities. Last, but not least, there would be a

⁴⁹ In May 1919, S. D. Sazonov and V. A. Maklakov were invited to express the Russian point of view before the Conference’s delegates on the Polish question. In fact, these confirmed the recognition of the Polish independence, stated by the Provisional Government on March 16 1917 (O.S.) [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russikoi delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii, undated], f. 8, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], 1900–1956, Folder Paris Peace Conference, HIA. The full text of *The Proclamation of the Provisional Government to the Poles* can be read in: Robert P. Browder, Alexander F. Kerensky (Eds.), *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*, vol. 1, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961, 321–323.

⁵⁰ Finland became independent from the Soviet Russia on December 6 1917. In the two memoranda on the Finland question, *Mémoire sur la question finlandaise* and *Quelques considérations sur le problème finlandaise*, drafted to the Peace conference, their signatories insisted that the independence of Finland should be sanctioned by the Russian people. Russia had the right to be offered “strategic guarantees”, which were seen as compulsory, since these were set by the League of Nations. After the recognition of Finland’s independence by the Allies, RPC issued the last memorandum on May 8 1919, which contained a similar point of view. [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi delegatsiei Mirnoi Konferentsii], f. 5, 7, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

compromise solution: “their benevolent inclusion into the Russian Federation, with the guarantee of the largest national and cultural autonomy and full self-administration”.⁵¹

The argumentation of the memorandum on Bessarabia, issued on March 22 1918,⁵² looked significantly different from the memo on the Baltic provinces: while the last focused on political, economic and strategic losses considered vital for Russia, the memo on Bessarabia developed the arguments on Russia’s rights over Bessarabia in opposition to Romania’s rights. Thus, the beginning of the text stated that the presence of the Romanian troops in Bessarabia was “prejudging the fate of the province. The Peace Conference has, in fact, disapproved, on January 24 1919, the use of force in order to take possession of the lands bases on other than the rightful claims, of which the Peace Conference should be called upon to decide. A change in Bessarabia’s international status cannot be based on any historical account. Contrary to the legend created by some publicists, Russia has never stripped or robbed Romania. Russia has the formal right on Bessarabia, based on an international agreement”.⁵³

The first part of the document presented an overview on Bessarabia’s development starting from 1812. According to the signatories, the evolution of the region was positively marked by the Russian presence: in relation to the Romanian Principalities Russia played the role of a “protector” from the Ottoman Empire, while Bessarabia was ceded by the Ottomans as a result of a victorious military campaign, without any intervention from the Principalities which were their vassals. The subsequent ceding of Southern Bessarabia in 1856 was not done toward Romania but toward the Great Powers, ensuring them the right of the free navigation on the Danube. After more than two decades,

⁵¹ [Zakliuchenie Doklada Pol[nomochennogo] Sov[etnika] V Parizhe, undated], Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], 1900–1956, Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA.

⁵² The original text was in French, and signed by Prince Lvof, S. D. Sazonov, N. V. Cheaikovskii and V. A. Maklakov. Integrally published in: *Romanian Occupation in Bessarabia. Documents*, Paris: Imprimerie Lahure, 1919, 119–125.

⁵³ The agreement the authors referred to was the 1812 Bucharest treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Empire which ended the Russian-Turkish war of 1806–1812. [Conference politique russe. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix, Paris, le 22 Mars 1919], Vasilii A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.13 Bessarabia. Printed matter. Addresses. Prince L’vov, HIA. The memorandum drafted in French was integrally published in: *Romanian Occupation in Bessarabia. Documents*, Paris: Imprimerie Lahure, 1919, 119–125.

the regaining of the Southern Bessarabia in 1878 was solved exclusively between Russia and the Great Powers, while at that time there would have been no connection between the problem of free navigation on the Danube and the fate of Bessarabia, the Danube Delta being already detached in 1857. The Berlin Congress decided the cession of Bessarabia to Russia as a condition of the recognition of Romania's independence, was stated in the document.⁵⁴ The conclusion of the first part of the memorandum referred to the comparison of the Bessarabian case with that of Alsace and Lorraine, the comparison being also frequent in the press: "We are thus not facing any historical injustice, comparing to that experienced, during 44 years, by the Alsatians and Lorainians. Russia, which for more than a century subtracted the Christian Bessarabia from the Turkish yoke, holds at present the title of a sovereign over these provinces sanctioned by the Great Powers. It is its formal right over Bessarabia that is unquestionable".⁵⁵

The second part of the memorandum contained a series of arguments, based on which Russia was willing to take into account the "principles that derived from the Great War", i.e. the right of people to self-determination. "The legitimate desire that have indigenous nationalities to organize their national life" seemed a valuable principle for the "new" Russia that "could even, in some cases and being mutually agreed between her and these nationalities, recognize their independence. She also considers, under the same circumstances, the possibility of the reunion of a national fragment with its fellow people it would consider to be a part". Anticipating the events, we would say that such a generous offer from Russia had a purely declarative character, while it was not at all ready to cede the earlier acquired territories, most of them through the military conquest which contributed to the establishment of the Greater Russia.

The reference to the RPC memorandum of March 9 1919 was a clear proof that Russia's representatives in Paris were ready to fight for the preservation of the former Rus-

⁵⁴ The authors of the memo referred to the art. 43, 44 and 45 of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which recognized Romania's independence while extending the citizens' rights to the non-Christians, as well in the condition of ceding the Southern Bessarabia to Russia. As "compensation" it re-acquired Dobrogea with the Danube Delta and the Snake Island.

⁵⁵ [Conference Politique Russe. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix. Paris, le 22 Mars 1919], f. 3-4, Vasiliï A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.13 Bessarabia. Printed matter. Addresses. Prince L'vov, HIA.

sian territories: point 1 of the memo insisted on the recognition by the Great Powers that all the questions related to the pre-War Russian territories could not be solved without the consent of the Russian people. The principle of nationalities was to be applied under the conditions of “a real homogeneity of the national fragment with the people toward whom it gravitated”, as well “a real willingness of the members of the national fragment to unite with the fellow people”.⁵⁶ In order to prove such a case, a “popular consultation” after a “thorough study” of the region and under the ensured “technical conditions” should be made. Thus, the plebiscite was proposed as the only possible solution to clarify the will of the Bessarabians, but applied only if “the most serious international guarantees ensure the free manifestation of the genuine popular desire”.

The authors hinted at the fact that they already possessed the data of that “thorough study” that show the necessity to hold a plebiscite in Bessarabia. In fact, these quoted the data of the 1897 Russian census, according to which in Bessarabia lived 47,50 per cent of Moldavians and 27,75 per cent of the population of Russian ethnic origin, the others being Jews, Bulgarians, Germans, Roma, etc.⁵⁷ The authors of the document claimed that only in the counties of Balti, Orhei, Soroca and Chisinau, situated in the center of the province, the majority of population was of Moldavian origin.⁵⁸

The data on the regional ethnic composition seemed crucial to those that supported the claim of the plebiscite. Based on these, it was abusively assumed that the members of certain ethnicity (in this case, Russian) can be automatically placed in the group related to a certain political affiliation (pro-Russian). Moreover, it was assumed that those of a non-Moldavian ethnic origin were anti-Romanian or even pro-Russians, and that in the counties where the Moldavians constituted between 62.90 per cent (Chisinau) and 77.86 per cent (Orhei) the inhabitants would also express the reticence toward the newly established Romanian regime.

⁵⁶ [Conference Politique Russe. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix. Paris, le 22 Mars 1919], f. 5.

⁵⁷ The ethnonyme “Tsyganes” was used in the text.

⁵⁸ The table “Statistique des nationalités. Gouvernement de Bessarabie. Établi d’après les chiffres du recensement panrusse de 1897” was attached to the memorandum.

The statistical argument was followed by that of political nature. The signatories of the memorandum argued that the Romanians were invited in Bessarabia by “Sfatul Tsarii”,⁵⁹ the body which initially sought for help to counter the Bolshevik danger and land anarchy. Later on, the “re-establishment of order” was replaced with a “regime of occupation”, under which the two voting for the union of Bessarabia with Romania took place.⁶⁰ “Neither Russia nor the League of Nations can therefore account for the vote of “Sfatul Tsarii”, obtained in such circumstances, for the expression of the population’s desire, especially that “Sfatul Tsarii” itself, given the conditions that preceded its formation,⁶¹ is far from representing an assembly qualified to decide on such matters”, was specified in the document.⁶² In conclusion, the conviction that no definite decision on the revision of Bessarabia’s “international status” will be made without taking into account the principles outlined in the memo was expressed. It was insisted upon the above-mentioned principles as a basis for the “eventual establishment in Bessarabia of a provisional regime responding to the current necessities”.

The six-pages memorandum underlined that historically Bessarabia was part of the pre-War Russia which saved it from the Ottoman yoke. Bessarabia was acquired by Russia with the consent of the Great Powers, and Russia only complied with the XIX century’s peace treaties. The Bessarabian population itself should freely decide on the status of the province, in this sense a provisional regime of the Great Powers that will ensure “favourable conditions” for the decision to be taken was required. The document emphasized that regardless what the Bessarabian population would decide, the final

⁵⁹ The first Bessarabian parliament “Sfatul Tsarii” (Country’s Diet) was created in November 1918 and comprised representatives of the majority of political and social organization of Bessarabia. In April 1918, the majority of members voted for the union of Bessarabia with Romania. The composition of “Sfatul Tsarii” as well the voting was questioned by the opponents of the union: the pro-Russian forces inside Bessarabia and the Russian émigrés circles.

⁶⁰ The document referred to the first voting of “Sfatul Tsarii” of April 9 1918, when the union of Bessarabia with Romania was voted under certain conditions of autonomy, and the second voting of December 10 1918, which cancelled the status of autonomy.

⁶¹ The authors of the document considered that a body formed at the initiative of the military forces outside Bessarabia, in the condition of the war and the “revolution”, did not have a representative character. Thus its decisions did not express the will of the Bessarabian population.

⁶² [Conférence Politique Russe. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix. Paris, le 22 Mars 1919], f. 6.

decision on the status of the province should be taken with the participation of the representatives elected by the Russian people.

Soon after the memorandum was issued, the situation of Bessarabia became a subject of discussion among the former members of the State Duma. These met on March 28 – April 2 1919 in Ekaterinodar and voted a resolution on the Bessarabian “question”, which stated that it should be solved by the Great Powers “according to the interests of the united Russia”.⁶³ The document was sent to the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Military Forces of the South of Russia, A. A. Neratov, who was also responsible for the relations with all former Russian provinces.⁶⁴ Neratov, on his turn, forwarded a copy to S. D. Sazonov in Paris;⁶⁵ as Sazonov was the one to inform the Allies on the decision, he had the mission to persuade the Allies that the documents adopted the White forces inside and outside Russia referred to similar issues and proposed similar solutions.

Only two month later, the new memorandum concerning the Baltic regions⁶⁶ was issued. The same signatories as of the memorandum on Bessarabia confirmed that Russia was not planning to give up the territories that were seen as being vital to its economy and strategic position, instead being ready to provide them autonomy under the right of all people for self-determination.⁶⁷ In the case of Bessarabia, the autonomy as a solution was excluded; in both cases of Bessarabia and the Baltic regions, the exclusive right on the final decision was considered as belonging to the Russian people.

⁶³ Zhurnal obshchego sobraniia, no. 20, Ekaterinodar, April 26 1919. Vserossiiskii ..., 166.

⁶⁴ The Surveillance and Agitation branch was called OSVAG. See, Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's continuum of crisis, 1914–1921*, Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2002, 223; Gennadij A. Bordjugov, *Črezvyčajnye meri i “črezvyčajščina” v Sovetskoj respublike I drugih gosudarsvennyh obrazovanijah na territorii Rossii v 1918–1920 gg.*, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 38 (1–2), janvier–juin 1997, 29–45:37.

⁶⁵ A copy of the document is kept in: Mikhail N. Girs Papers, [Box 42 Subject file], Folder 42.6 Romania, conditions and events, 1919, April–October, HIA.

⁶⁶ The Memorandum of May 24 1919 came as a reaction to the establishment of two committees, planned to examine political and economic issues pertaining the situation of the Baltic regions. [Conférence politique russe. Paris, le 24 mai 1919. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix], Russia. Posol'stvo (U.S.), [Reel 22], Folder 22.1 Nationality question. Baltic region, 1919, f. 1, HIA.

⁶⁷ The content of the memorandum was reproduced, in brief, in: [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi Delegatsiei Mirnoi Konferentsii], f. 8.

To the RPC members, informing and persuading the Allies representatives and the European public opinion to support the restoration of Russia, so that it can again become “great and indivisible”, was crucial. In relation to this goal, these made a constant evaluation of the behaviour of the representatives of “nationalities and regional formations” that come to Paris to claim independence for their regions. Thus, the Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Ukrainians and Georgians that were classified as “friendly”, “hostile” or “separatist”, were criticized as lacking authority and influence: “[...] all of them are writing memoranda, distribute notes and in general agitate with all means in their favour, but do not have much success, the broader population is not even aware of their existence”,⁶⁸ considered the Russian representatives. Nevertheless, their activity that was focused at “denigrating” the Volunteer army was evaluated as successful.⁶⁹

It should be noticed that the Bessarabians were not mentioned neither in the list of “hostiles” nor in that of the “separatists”. The explanation is simple: the Bessarabians present in Paris, but also these that remained at home, did not demand independence. They were either for the recognition of the union with Romania or for the preservation of its status as the Russian province. Moreover, the Russian representatives claimed that the region was temporarily under the Romanian occupation, and that situation that was to be redressed soon.

The documents issued by the RPC in relation to the issue of Bessarabia show that it was presented as part of “Russkoe delo”. The RPC members argued that the only solution for solving the contradiction was to allow the free expression of population’s opinion within a plebiscite which corresponded to the principle of self-determination. The proposal that did not receive the acceptance of Romanian delegation seemed rational at the first glance, if not the condition which was imposed: to be held only in four central counties of Bessarabia populated by the Romanian majority, while the population living

⁶⁸ Zhurnal zasedaniia obshchego sobraniia, no. 25, Ekaterinodar, May 18 1919. Vserosiiskii ..., 201.

⁶⁹ Zhurnaly zasedaniia pravleniia, no. 17 i 18, Ekaterinodar, March 25 and 26 1919. Vserosiiskii ..., 129.

in the rest of the region was automatically qualified as supporting the return of Bessarabia to Russia.

The memoranda received no reply from the Conference’s officials, and no plebiscite was held in the region. Nevertheless, at this initial stage of the conference when the organization of the pro-Russian forces was also a challenge, it was important to send to the conference’s delegates, as well from Paris inside Russia and its former territories, a clear message that the supporters of the cause were influent and numerous, as well determined to defend before the decision-makers Russia’s point of view.

The efforts of RPC were not meaningless: the Russian representatives were trying to take the revenge outside the conference, so that their point of view formulated in the memoranda was spread out in the press, in order to inform the European public about the “Russian cause”. The memoranda on Bessarabia were drafted with the constant involvement of the Bessarabian representatives in Paris, these having the opportunity to be involved in the political debates and also staying optimistic about the positive solving of the Bessarabian issue in the favour of Russia.

With the dissolution of RPC in July 1919, these were carried further by the members of the “Russian Political Delegation”.

3.3 Protests’ phase: The “Russian Political Delegation”

Between the dissolution of the RPC in July 1919 and the first half of 1920, the “Russian Political Delegation” was authoring the official documents that were addressed to the Paris Peace conference. The “delegation” included Count L’vov, V. A. Maklakov, N. V. Ceaikovski, and B. Savinkov, mandated at the beginning of 1919 to defend the interests of the Omsk Government before the Great Powers. According to a written evaluation of September 23 1919 on the situation concerning “Russkoe delo”, the Great Powers remained reluctant to the Russian claims, apparently “because the work is done almost by the servants of the Old Russia”. Thus, while the former head of Provisional Government, Count L’vov, decided to quit, the other were to carry the mission for-

ward.⁷⁰ Despite the dissensions between the four,⁷¹ the “delegation” continued to support the organization of the military, financial, commercial-industrial and other sections of the All-Russian government,⁷² as well to regularly inform the Russian officials on the pertinent discussions at the conference.

In the meantime some changes occurred in relation to the Bessarabian issue. On July 2 1919, the Romanian prime minister, Ion I. C. Bratianu, as well the Russian ambassador to Paris, V. A. Maklakov, were invited to present the Romanian and the Russian view on Bessarabia. Maklakov admitted that he did not represent any functional Russian government and referred himself to the two memoranda quoted above, of March 9 and 22 1919, that were addressed to the Peace conference by the RPC. From these he extracted two points: first, that there was no dual agreement that would authorise the Romanian demand on the region; second, that the only principle based on which Romania could claim the region was the principle of self-determination. Maklakov admitted that “if there were any Russian subjects of Romanian nationality who wished to unite under one flag with the rest of their countrymen, Russia would be well-advised to permit it. Russia was big enough to make a sacrifice of this kind”. He then challenged Bessarabia’s desire to join Romania and considered that the wish of the union was a “camouflage”,⁷³ as not the whole region was populated by Moldavians: “Parts of the country were completely Russian”, with the

⁷⁰ [September 23 1919, sent to Omsk], Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], 1900–1956, Folder Paris Peace Conference 1919, HIA.

⁷¹ Kolchak’s “special representative”, B. Savinkov, who joined the delegation only in August 1919, seem to have taken some of Sazonov’s duties. He considered Sazonov an old monarchist, who spoke “as if the Tsar was in the next room”. See, Richard B. Spence, Boris Savinkov, Renegade on the Left, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1991, 224 and the foll.

⁷² [Russkoe Politicheskoe Soveshchanie v Parizhe, undated], Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, 1919, HIA. See, also: V. Zh. Tsvetkov, *Beloe delo v Rossii. 1919 g. (formirovanie i evoliutsija politicheskikh struktur Belogo dvizheniia v Rossii)*, Moskva: Posev, 2009.

⁷³ Maklakov then entered the polemics while referring to the historical facts, and said that even the word “Bessarabia” was wrongly used by the Romanians, as it was an Ottoman province of the XVIII century, which Christian inhabitants benefited from Russia’s moral protection. While in 1812, when the province was taken from the Ottomans, it had the population of around 300,000 people, it then grew up to 3 mln., due to Russia’s constant possession and care of the territory. The exception was made for the South of Bessarabia between 1856–1878, lost to Romania after the Crimean War, but which was also returned after two decades, while Romania was given the twice larger Dobrogea and the access to the Black Sea. Secret. Notes of the Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Powers held in Mr. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Wednesday, July 2 1919, at 3.30 p.m., F.M. Records 15–29, May 14 – July 2 1919, vol. 2, American Commission to Negotiate Peace, p. 3–4.

exception of the four districts in the centre, where "a plebiscite should be held and if the population decided to join Romania, Russia would agree with the decision". Maklakov denied the Romanians' affirmation that the Bessarabians had freely expressed their will to join Romania, as the body which voted for that option was not elected through the universal suffrage.⁷⁴ The Russian representative concluded that a "free plebiscite" was required to find out the will of the people, whereas he seemed convinced that the results would prove a "contrary different result". He insisted on that a decision favouring Romania would be "a source of permanent grievance, and would do harm to Romania, which would not be in a position to absorb an unwilling population".⁷⁵ While showing a map of Bessarabia, he concluded that a plebiscite in the four Bessarabian districts where a Romanian majority lived⁷⁶ was the most he could admit. The plebiscite was presented as the only concession Russia would have been ready to make in the conditions of the advancement of Kolchak armies. Similar to Maklakov, Bratianu turned to historical arguments in order to prove the Romanian rights on Bessarabia. He stated that Bessarabia was forcedly kept by Russia for more than a century, and when Russia was dismembered the region went back to Romania. The Romanian army was called to enter Bessarabia by the people and the remained then authority. While those that sympathized the Bolsheviki were not happy with the restored order, other groups of population were dissatisfied because of the imposed reforms. He gave the example of the Bessarabian landowners, expropriated in favour of the peasants, one of those being the head of the Bessarabian "delegation", A. N. Krupenskii, as well as others that embarked the anti-Romanian discrediting campaign in Bessarabia and outside the country.

Although no decision was issued on the status of Bessarabia, the Russian émigrés seemed convinced that Bessarabia was not lost to Romania. The White press inside

⁷⁴ Maklakov argued that the representatives of municipalities which were freely elected after 1917 protested against the annexation.

⁷⁵ [Exposé de M. Maklakov a la Commission de la Conference de la Paix. Paris, le 2 Juillet 1919], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 2 Subject file], Folder Maklakov, at Peace Conference Commission, Paris, HIA.

⁷⁶ See in the Annex the draft map, prepared by RPC, and which Maklakov handed to the Committee of Four during the hearings of July 2 1919. The map was corrected by hand by A. N. Krupenskii who considered the initial numbers as being exaggerated.

Russia even speculated that the Allies would let Russia to have at part of it.⁷⁷ After the July 2 hearings the Russian representatives directed their attacks mainly against the Romanian administration in the region. On July 24 1919, the Russian “delegation” addressed to the President of the Peace conference a note of protest in relation to the forthcoming parliamentary elections. It declared the support for the “Russian point of view on the issue of Bessarabia”, formulated in the RCP memorandum of March 22, and expressed the adherence to the idea of the plebiscite that was defended by the Russian Ambassador, V. A. Maklakov, during the hearings. Attesting that after the hearings no decision concerning Bessarabia’ status was taken, the “delegation” contested the behaviour of the Romanian administration in the region: according to the document, Romania treated Bessarabia “as an annexed country” and Romania’s intention to held the parliamentary elections in Bessarabia that supposed to “be the best plebiscite” was an abusive measure, similar to other measures taken there. “The Romanian government, being aware of the sentiments of the Moldovan population hostile to the annexation, instituted in Bessarabia a true regime of terror”, which abolished the former Russian municipalities, zemstvos and law courts and persecuted the “partisans of Russia”, claimed the authors of the document.⁷⁸

The signatories referred to the crucial moments of Bessarabian history, when its status was changed in favour of Romania through the vote of “Sfatul Tsarii”, which was qualified as “illegal from the point of view of the international law”, from the political point of view being also viewed as one “imposed by force”. In these circumstances, the organization of the parliamentary elections based on the principle of compulsory voting was evaluated as a “triple attempt on the rights of Bessarabia which is denied its right for self-determination; on that of Bessarabia which is deprived by its right of self-

⁷⁷ *Priazovskii Krai*, November 1919, quoted in *Renasterea Romana*, Rome, January 22 1920. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 9 Miscellany, January 1920 – January 1921], f. 7, HIA.

⁷⁸ Among the acts of terror the shooting of the four “Sfatul Tsarii” deputies and presence of the Romanian troops in the building where “Sfatul Tsarii” voted for the union with Romania were mentioned. The discussion about the shooting of the deputies Pantsir, Vranov, Chiumachenko and Grinfeld, is quoted in the anti-Romanian literature, while the Romanian historian do not mention this fact at all. See, in this regard, Victor Stepaniuc, *Statalitatea poporului moldovenesc. Aspecte istorice, politico-juridice*, Chişinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2005.

determination; of that of Russia, which consent was not requested; finally, of that of the Peace conference, which decisions are also affected by a unilateral and an arbitrary act”. The authors of the document insisted one more time on the organization of a plebiscite that should be held only in the four central counties populated by the Romanian majority (Balti, Orhei, Soroca and Chisinau). A new idea was that a provisional regime instituted in Bessarabia by the Peace conference should ensure the free holding of the plebiscite: “A Commission named by the Peace Conference should be sent without any delay to Bessarabia to ensure the functioning of that provisional regime, and to guard in the future the impartial implementation in the four districts where the population is constituted from a Moldavian majority”.⁷⁹ No answer from the president of the Conference followed in this regard.

Despite the opposition expressed inside Bessarabia, as well by different Russian émigrés organizations, the first parliamentary elections based on the universal suffrage took place in Bessarabia on November 2–4 1919.⁸⁰ In contrast to Krupenskii and other Bessarabians who widely criticized them, the Bessarabian minister Ioan Pelivan, who actually took part in the conference as the Romanian delegate, was determined to use the results of the elections as proof of the population for the new regime. He was informed by the minister Ion Inculet that “in the elections we succeeded in the best possible way. We encountered many difficulties, worked a lot, but the results are absolutely excellent. I send three copies of the “Monitorul Oficial”, where the results of the elections for the Chamber have been published. I think you would be able to use these through all channels with the maximum result and utility for us. It would be good if you make a report based on the results, while showing: 1) that in the elections all the people

⁷⁹ These decrees referred to the compulsory voting, on the abolition of Zemstvo and municipalities, on the extension of Romanian subjecthood on the Bessarabians, as well as on the expropriation of those Bessarabians that refused the Romanian citizenship, and the others. The document was drafted in French and signed by Prince L’vov, Sazonov, N. V. Chaikovskii, and V. A. Maklakov on July 24 1919. Mikhail N. Girs Papers, [Box 39 Subject file], Folder 39.9 Bessarabia, conditions and events, 1917–1918, HIA. The text was also published in: *The Case for Bessarabia. A Collection of Documents on the Romanian Occupation*, London: The Committee for the Salvation of Russia, 1919.

⁸⁰ A thorough analysis of the first parliamentary elections in Bessarabia and their impact, see: Svetlana Suveică, *Basarabia în primul deceniu interbelic (1918–1928). Modernizare prin reforme*, Chişinău: Pontos, 2010, 64–82.

participates and that it was a plebiscite. Make the exact counting. I did it only approximately, from which derives that in elections over 77 % took part”.⁸¹

While the Romanian delegation tried to bring the idea of “elections as plebiscite” across, the Russian circles as well as the Bessarabian “delegation” struggled to argue the contrary: that the elections could not in any case be counted as a plebiscite, and that a plebiscite in the Bessarabian central counties was absolutely necessary, while the remained part, populated by minorities, apparently manifested a pro-Russian attachment.

The protest of the Russian “delegation” was published in the Swiss *Tribune de Geneve*, due to the efforts of the Russian poet Serge Perskii who received the text from A. N. Krupenskii.⁸² Later, Perskii wrote to the head of the Bessarabian “delegation” that the publication caused “a lot of protests, more than 70 letters [addressed] to the same redactor”.⁸³

On September 25 1919, another note of protest of the Russian “delegation” followed; the text of the protest was also published in the Swiss press, as the result of the common effort of Krupenskii and Perskii.⁸⁴ This time, as a reply to the memorandum of the Romanian delegation issued to the Conference’s president on September 9 1919.⁸⁵ The Romanian affirmation, according to which the fact that Russia was a contracting party to the 1916 Treaty of alliance⁸⁶ should serve as a basis for the recognition of Romania’s rights on Bessarabia, was criticized. The signatories of the protest seemed surprised that the Romanian delegation “has welcomed the proposal to submit to an impartial trial the

⁸¹ I. Inculet – I. Pelivan and D. Ciugureanu, Chisinau, November 15 1919. ANR, Fond 1449 Ioan Pelivan, dos. 129, f. 52–56. Reproduced in: Svetlana Suveică, *Basarabia în primul deceniu interbelic (1918–1928): modernizare prin reforme*, Chişinău: Pontos, 2010, 343–344.

⁸² In a letter to A. N. Krupenskii, S. Perskii explained that while the director of the publication was missing, he had to persuade the redactor, “a great friend of Romania, “ce noble pays”, who, in the end, agreed to publish the text. [S. Perskii – A. N. Krupenskii, Aug. 19 and Sept. 1 1919 (Rus.)], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Perski, S., HIA.

⁸³ [S. Perski – A. N. Krupenskii, Sept. 4 1919], HIA.

⁸⁴ [S. Perski – A. N. Krupenskii, Aug. 19 1919], HIA.

⁸⁵ [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii, undated], f. 9, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, HIA.

⁸⁶ The secret Treaty of alliance was signed in Bucharest on August 4 1916 (O.S.) between Romania and the Entente Powers. It stipulated the conditions, under which Romania entered the War on the Entente’s side, against the Central Powers.

voices they claimed were of the population of the districts in question”, as well that it asked for the reparations for the period of Bessarabian occupation: in 1812 Romania did not exist as a state, so “it is difficult to believe that it asks for “reparation” for being taken out from the Turkish yoke”.

The free expression of the will of the Bessarabians to unite with Romania was also contested, based on the affirmation that “Sfatul Tsarii” did not have any quality to represent the Bessarabian population.⁸⁷ The document emphasized for the first time that the defence of the idea of plebiscite in the four central counties of Bessarabia was expressed “in accordance with the representatives in Paris of the Bessarabian population”. Thus, the two “delegations” publicly declared that these pursued similar goals on the Bessarabian issue: both groups supported the idea of a plebiscite and, with this aim in mind, formed a common front to persuade the Great Powers to ensure the holding of the plebiscite in the region.

Simultaneously, the pro-Russian forces from Chisinau were claiming that “in order to save the whole cause [underl. in text], the American and, possibly, the English representatives should declare immediately to all the nations that the Conference forbid [underl. in text] Romania to held in Bessarabia elections for the Constituency and the Senate.”⁸⁸ The document did not remain unnoticed and, unsurprisingly, there were the Americans that reacted in the first instance⁸⁹: the issue of Bessarabian elections was raised on October 11 1919 by the head of the American delegation Frank Polk before the Council of the Heads of the delegates. Polk argued that he did not want the Council to take a decision on the matter, but “simply wished to bring to the attention of the Council the fact that the Romanians were exercising rights of sovereignty in Bessarabia, and that the silence of the Conference in regard to this matter might give the Romanians

⁸⁷ Besides G. E. L’vov, S. D. Sazonov, N. V. Ceaikovski, and V. A. Maklakov, the document was signed by B. Savinkov. [Délégation Ruse à Paris. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix, Paris, le 25 septembre 1919], Vasilii A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.13 Bessarabia. Printed matter, Addresses, Prince L’vov, HIA.

⁸⁸ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, August 27 1919], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Sinadino, Panteleimon V., HIA.

⁸⁹ From the beginning of the Conference, as well during the July 2 hearings, the US delegation was showing its sympathy toward the “Russian cause”. See, at large, Marcel Mitrasca, Moldova.

ground for believing that the Council consented to their having assumed this sovereignty.”⁹⁰ The intention was mainly to discourage the Romanian administration to hold the elections. No less important was to encourage the pro-Russian forces inside Bessarabia to continue opposing the integration of the region into Romania.

The parliamentary elections were *fait accompli*, but the spirits around the issue did not calm down. On November 9 1919, the Russian “delegation” issued a short note of protest to the president of the Peace conference, dedicated once again to the parliamentary elections in Bessarabia. It cited the July 24 memorandum and stated that the elections “in a not annexed but simply temporary occupied country should be considered as illegal”. The signatories claimed that the “arbitrary act” of elections, organized by the Romanian government, “prejudged the fate of the province”.⁹¹

The election episode shows the impact of the news on the mood of the public that circulated from Chisinau and Bucharest to Paris and back. The opinion of the Russians “delegates” on the “elections’ parody” was shared by the Russian ambassador to Bucharest, S. A. Poklevskii-Kozel. In a report on the situation in Romania he claimed that in Bessarabia the officials were smuggling the votes from the electorate “under the terror and direct threatening”, and that “the revocation of the elections in Bessarabia is of paramount importance”.⁹² On the same note was writing from Chisinau to Paris the Bessarabian landowner P. V. Sinadino. He informed the Bessarabian “delegate” A. N. Krupenskii that “there was no election campaign and it was impossible [to hold] any, while everything is in the hands of the Romanian servants, sycophantic corrupt

⁹⁰ The Romanian action in Bessarabia at the Council of Heads of Delegations, October 11 1919, Marcel Mitrasca, Moldova, 92–93.

⁹¹ [Délégation Ruse à Paris. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix, Paris, le 15 November 1919], Vasiliu A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.13 Bessarabia. Printed matter, Addresses, Prince L’vov. HIA.

⁹² Poklevskii annexed to the letter the translation of two critical articles that appeared in the Romanian daily newspapers *Dimineața*, (November 13 1919), in which Bessarabia was named “the republic of Inculets”, while the Tsaranist Party of Bessarabia led by Ion Inculet gained 80 per cent of the valid votes (72 seats out of 90). A copy of the letter, issued by S. D. Poklevskii-Kozel to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denikin government, S. D. Sazonov, was issued to A. N. Krupenskii on November 27 1919. [Kopia pis’ma Rossiiskogo Poslannika v Rumynii – Ministru Inostrannykh Del, November 14 1919], Vasiliu A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 18 Subject file], Folder 18.13 Bessarabia. Election matters, HIA.

scoundrels, everywhere are gendarmes and police forces.”⁹³ Sinadino’s letters show that in the province the supporters of the “Bessarabian cause” were hardly keeping their optimism, in the condition when the Romanian authorities were trying to catch any sign of Bolshevism among the population, thus those that in a way or another was showing their attachment to Russia risked to be charged as Bolsheviks. “To move from one place to another you need again a special permission, when there is no even a bit of a free press, when a freely spoken word in Russian – gives you the nickname “Bolshevik”; in order to finally eradicate any allusion to everything is Russian, let’s identify what is Russian with Bolshevism and that is all! “You are a Russian – then you are a Bolshevik”. You understand what an allergenic and accommodating formula it is!”⁹⁴

The news from Paris was always expected, and it could be “good” only for one side: “We were all a little saddened by your news on the situation of Bessarabian issue in Paris in early October. I do not know what the actual situation is, because it has been two months since that! I hope that the stupid stubbornness of Bratianu, Romania’s poor maintenance of intrigue against the Allies, their campaign and rule in Hungary were able to open the eyes even of the most short-sighted people.”⁹⁵

The documentary and printed material, held in the personal archives of the members of the Russian “delegation”, prove that these were informed on the situation in Bessarabia mainly by the Bessarabian “delegate” A. N. Krupenskii. The latter kept a rich personal correspondence with P. V. Sinadino, who, like other Bessarabians, hoped for the re-establishment of the Russian regime. He carefully selected different materials and such articles from newspapers, in which “is gathered everything that can be of interest to the large public on the Bessarabian question. Reading this article gives you a clear picture on our life, our rights and our situation!”⁹⁶ While sending the materials to Paris, the head of the Bessarabian Union of great landowners expressed the hope that “even

⁹³ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, December 7 1919], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Sinadino, Panteleimon V., HIA.

⁹⁴ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, December 7 1919], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Sinadino, Panteleimon V., HIA.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, January 1 1920].

Maklakov and Sazonov would be possibly interested – this is a good material for those, who in the future would have to defend your Bessarabian cause.”⁹⁷ At the same time, he was carefully choosing the curriers, and sometimes travelling from Chisinau to Bucharest, in order to send the letter to his counterparts in Paris, so he did not get caught by the Romanian authorities.

Sinadino claimed that he had serious reasons to be concerned about his security: “Generally we do not benefit from any protection”. While referring to the Russian supporters, he argued that “it can be much better if Russian representatives would be completely withdrawn from Bucharest, and America would be ask to protect us, now there is a fictive protection, while all of our representatives, such as Poklevskii, are worthless. I personally respect all of them, but they put themselves in a false position, and have long been at the mercy of the Romanian Government, and therefore can no longer act vigorously; however, they are possible also not to blame, but the whole Russia is to blame that we have no government and proper troops; otherwise, there would be finalized conversations; when, finally, it will all change?”⁹⁸

In a letter of A. N. Krupenskii to S. D. Sazonov which was never sent, the attitude of the Romanian authorities toward those Bessarabians that supported the “cause” defended in Paris from Bessarabia was emphasized. Krupenskii claimed that around 120 inhabitants of Chisinau were charged with Bolshevik agitation and could be sentenced to death. Although the information seemed not proved yet, Krupenskii expressed the certainty that “if not all the accused, though a great majority of them were guilty not of Bolshevism, but of devotion to Russia and hostility to Romania, which government wants to get rid of them under the guise of the Bolsheviks”. His certainty was explained by the familiarity with the Romanians’ way of thinking and actions, but also by “numerous examples” of that kind. According to Krupenskii, many Bessarabians who were detained in Bucharest and Iasi prisons did not benefit from any protection: “it is not only that the officials of the Embassy do not take steps to facilitate the situation of our

⁹⁷ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, December 7 1919].

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

conationals, but also none of them took into consideration to visit the detainees, to ascertain the conditions under which they live”. In the name of the “representatives of the Bessarabian population”, he expressed a deep disappointment for “such an inexcusable indifference of the officials of the Embassy, particularly unacceptable in such difficult times for Russia”.⁹⁹ Taking forward the idea of Sinadino, Krupenskii asked S. D. Sazonov to intervene before the Allies, so these could send a representative to assist in the trial, while under the weak judicial system and the state of martial law kept in the region a fair trial was hardly to be held.¹⁰⁰ As far as the researched materials say, no appeal in this sense was made by the Russian representative.

An undated internal report on the activity of the “Russian Political Delegation” stated that it performed, “as far as it was possible, its role of the defender of the Russian interests”. Among the successes of the interventions, through which “Russia’s interests were declared in everyone’s hearing” the postponement of the recognition of the union of Bessarabia with Romania “until the last moment” was specified.¹⁰¹ The declarations of the “delegation” were considered as “juridical titles”, based on which the restored Russia could ask later for the “recognition of its rights, violated by the treaties”.¹⁰²

While the Russians were happy with the postponement by the Allies of the final decision on the status of the region, the Romanians were obviously not, and used every occasion to mention that the Bessarabian “question” was decided in the favour of Romania. On January 22 1920, *Le Temps* was informing its readers that the Romanian prime minister A. Vaida Voevod was heard before the “Council of Four” on the “Bessarabian cause”. The Allied representatives ensured him that the Commission on the Romanian Affairs “has unanimously decided to attribute Bessarabia to Romania” and that “the Conference has already come to a decision on that subject”, the Romanian

⁹⁹ [A. N. Krupenskii – S. D. Sazonov, July 18 1919], Vasilii N. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder Bessarabia. Correspondence – Krupenskii 1918–1919, HIA.

¹⁰⁰ The state of martial law on the entire territory of Bessarabia was maintained up to January 11 1922, then it was limited to the strip of 30 km along the Eastern Romanian border. ANR, fond Presedinția Consiliului de Miniștri, dos. 20/1922, f. 2, 5.

¹⁰¹ [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii, undated], f. 19–20, Nikolai A. Bazili Papers, [Box 9 Subject file], Folder Paris Peace Conference, HIA.

¹⁰² [Kratkii obzor zaiavlenii, sdelannykh Russkoi delegatsiei Mirnoi konferentsii, undated], f. 21.

official argued that it was done “at the time when it was still hoped that Kolchak would defeat the Bolsheviks”, and that the lack of fully guarantee of the union of Bessarabia with Romania supported the “state of uncertainty” in the region. Vaida Voevod was told that “the Conference is waiting our evacuation of Hungary before deciding that Bessarabia shall be definitely Romanian”. In the interview that took place immediately after the hearings, he declared that “the Council has already unanimously recognized that Bessarabia is a Romanian province”.¹⁰³ The Romanian press, as well the supporters of Romania from outside the country took the declaration forward: thus Swiss *Journal* re-published an article from the Romanian newspaper, in which it was stated that “the population of Bessarabia provides daily proof of attachment to the mother-country, to which it is united again, and offers innumerable voluntary service for combatting the Bolshevists.”¹⁰⁴

The pro-Russian press did not remain silent and answered accordingly, by notifying that the Romanian prime minister was said that the Allied representatives “did not have the mandate to decide on the allocation of this province”.¹⁰⁵ Especially the American publications were eager to reject the news on the recognition of Bessarabia as a Romanian territory. The *Chicago Tribune* expressed the opinion that “until this is done, the Allies will have no negotiations with Rumania regarding Bessarabia”.¹⁰⁶ At the other side of the world, *Action Française* claimed that “Sovietique ou non, la Russie et la Russie”, thus trying to convince its readers that there were chances for Russia to be “re-suscitated”, and that the position of the Allies on the “Russian question – if there is a Russian problem – is seen through many and various prejudices.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ La question de la Bessarabie, *Le Temps*, January 22 1920.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal*, January 29 1920.

¹⁰⁵ The article Le Conseil supreme et la Bessarabie (*Le Temps*, January 23 1920) was re-published in: *Evenement*, *Ordre Public*, and *Petit République*, January 23 1920. Similar texts contained the articles: La question de Bessarabie, *Figaro*, January 23 1920; La Bessarabie reviendra a la Roumanie, *Democratie Nouvelle*, January 23 1920; Bessarabie et Roumanie, *Ere Nouvelle*, January 23 1920; La question de la Bessarabie, *République Française*, January 23 1920. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 9 Clippings and miscellaneous correspondence, January 1920 – January 1921], HIA.

¹⁰⁶ Rumania not to get Bessarabia, Council Rules, *Chicago Tribune*, January 22 1920. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 9 Clippings and miscellaneous correspondence, January 1920 – January 1921], f. 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Action Française*, January 30 1920.

From Chisinau, the former landowner Panteleimon V. Sinadino was describing to A. N. Krupenskii that the so-called “daily proof of attachment” was not a benevolent expression of support to the Romanian regime, but a forced one. This time Sinadino was concerned with the conscription measure: an advert signed by the Bessarabian minister Ion Inculet and spread on the Chisinau streets calls for conscription of the “true” sons of Bessarabia to replace the sons of the Old Kingdom” who have already “fought and served”.¹⁰⁸ He claimed that “the young men are forced to come, and then are asked “where you wish to serve – in the infantry, cavalry, or artillery” and then, having received the answer, they give them to sign a paper where it is said that a certain volunteer [underl. in text] subscribed: “in the infantry”, etc”.¹⁰⁹ In a report written at the end of July 1919 was mentioned that the “Russian officers are by now only invited to serve, but to our shame we must confess that there were cases of Romanization: the former hussar of Lubin, Co. Braescu moved to the Romanian service, there were about a dozen similar cases.”¹¹⁰

By the spring of 1920 the optimism of the Russian and Bessarabian representatives in Paris considering the successful solving of the Bessarabian issue diminished. On March 3 1920, the Allied Powers adopted in London the Declaration on Bessarabia, in which was specified that the Bessarabian issue “was treated by the Allies as part of the Romanian “question” and that the delay of the final decision was motivated by the willing to “bring about a friendly arrangement between Romanian and Russia”, as well by the fact that Romania agreed to withdraw its troops from Hungary.¹¹¹ “After taking into full consideration the general aspiration of the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian character of that region from the geographical and ethnographical points of view, as well as the historic and economic arguments, the Principal Allied Powers pronounce themselves therefore, in favour of the reunion of Bessarabia with Romania which has

¹⁰⁸ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, January 1 1920 1919], Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Sinadino, Panteleimon V., HIA.

¹⁰⁹ [P. V. Sinadino – A. N. Krupenskii, Chisinau, December 7 1919].

¹¹⁰ [Polozhenie v Bessarabii. July 25 (1919), by Lt. Baranovskii]. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 2 Subject file], Folder Bessarabian question, HIA.

¹¹¹ The text of the document was reproduced in: Marcel Mitrasca, Moldova, 96.

now been formally declared by the Bessarabian representatives and are desirous to conclude a treaty in recognition of this as soon as the conditions stated have been carried out”, specified the document. Another point that was made was that safeguarding the interest of Bessarabia within Romania and regarding its neighbours, as well protecting the minorities from the region should serve as important conditions for the recognition of the union.

The contradictory comments in the press followed immediately: while the English *The Times* informed its readers that “the Supreme Council in London has recognized the reunion of Bessarabia with Rumania”,¹¹² the French *Bonsoir* noticed that the Romanian retreat from the Hungarian territory was imposed by the Allies for the recognition of Bessarabia as the Rumanian province, but that “it is doubtful that any Russian diet would ever agree its richest province to be amputated”.¹¹³

On March 12 1920, the Russian “delegation” issued the note of protest to the president of the Peace conference, apparently, the last one related to Bessarabia. According to a copy of the document, held in V. A. Maklakov files, Russia possessed “imprescriptible rights” over Bessarabia and that the final decision on the Bessarabian status had to be postponed until “the Russian people, again obtaining the possibility to be heard, could participate in this settlement.”¹¹⁴ As a favour, Russia was willing to “offer to the population from certain Bessarabian counties were the Moldavians form the majority the option to freely decide on the issue related to the country it would prefer to be attached to.” In London, the Supreme Council of the Allies “seemed to have decided without taking into account the above considerations [...] and declared itself in the favour of the Romanian pretentions over Bessarabia”, against which decision protested the signatories of the document. These concluded that “the Russian people cannot fail to recover and will not con-

¹¹² According to the publication, the recognition was to be formally signed with the retreat, by the end of March, of the Romanian army from its present position in Hungary to the “Clemenceau line”, which roughly corresponded with the actual frontier between the two countries. Romania to have Bessarabia, *The Times*, March 9 1920.

¹¹³ *Bonsoir*, March 9 1920.

¹¹⁴ [Au Conseil Supreme des Allies, Paris, March 12 Mars 1920 (copy)], (signed by Prince L’vov, S. Sazonov, V. Maklakov, B. Savinkov), Vasilii A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder Bessarabia. Paris Peace Conference reports, resolutions (A. Krupenskii), HIA.

sider itself bound by the decisions affecting its assets, taken without its participation and contrary to his will.” Thus the note confirmed once again the position of Russian émigrés on Bessarabian issue and the fact that Russia would not comply in the future with the conference’s decisions that were contrary to its own interests.

Despite the issued protest, the personal accounts of the Russian representatives did not seem optimistic. The second day, in a letter to his counterpart in Washington, V. A. Maklakov reflected on the eventual aggression of Poland toward Belorussia and Lithuania, “as Romania occupied Bessarabia.”¹¹⁵ While the Bessarabians continued to write back and forth about the possible changes that would occur in relation to the “Bessarabian cause”, the issue almost disappeared from the letters of the Russian diplomats.

The archival documents we have consulted make us conclude that after the London Declaration on Bessarabia and actually until the Treaty on Bessarabia was signed on October 28 1920 in Paris,¹¹⁶ the Russian “delegation” did not show any sign of activity related to the issue of Bessarabia. The only threat toward the Romanians was coming from Soviet Russia who became more and more active on the international stage.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, these Russian émigrés continued to spread among the wider public inside Russia and within its former Western territories the message that the fight against the Bolsheviks was not lost yet and the democratic Russia has the chance to be rebuilt.

¹¹⁵ “Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!”. B. A. Bakhmetev – V. A. Maklakov, *Perepiska, 1919–1951*, v 3-h tomakh, Tom 1, Moskva-Stanford: ROSSPEN, Izdatel’stvo Guverovskogo Instituta, 2001, 190.

¹¹⁶ The Treaty was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1922, by France in 1924 and by Italy in 1927, and not by Japan which was interested in promoting economic cooperation with the Soviet Union.

¹¹⁷ On the evolution of the Romanian-Soviet relations and the issue of Bessarabia in the interwar period, see: Octavian Tîcu, *Problema Basarabiei și relațiile sovieto-române în perioada interbelică (1919–1939)*, Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2004.

5 Conclusions

The efforts of the Russian diplomats and political émigrés during the Paris Peace conference of 1919–1920 were channelled toward persuading the conferences’ delegates and the European public to support Russia’s interests in fighting the Bolsheviks as well preserving its pre-war territories, while these represented a vital part not only of the Russian geographical corps, but also of its economic, socio-cultural and national identity. Bessarabia was part of Russia’s territorial acquisition of XIX century that was lost as the result of the WW I and the Bolshevik *coup d’état*. The preservation of the Bessarabian territory, together with other former Western parts of the Russian Empire, became one of the goals of “Russkoe delo” – the cause that lived long after the Peace conference.

Developed and promoted by the Russian political emigres circles as well the White forces inside Russia, “Russkoe delo” quickly attracted the support of the former Bessarabian elite. The Bessarabians that lamented the dissolution of the Russian empire while not finding their way into the Romanian nation-state, were persuaded, encouraged and supported by the Russian political émigrés and diplomats to join the cause. Despite a different ethnic origin, they identified themselves as “Russians by name and in soul”, and continued to perceive Bessarabia as part of Russian geographical, political, economic and cultural space. Losing Russia meant losing the motherland, while fighting for the return of Bessarabia under the Russian protection meant fighting for the “holy and just cause”.¹¹⁸

The “come-back scenario” of the former Bessarabian elite was a “revenge of the past”, to put in Ronald Grigor Suny’s words. Being deprived of its political, economic and social privileges, feeling frustrated and ignored, it felt empowered and determined to resist. Its representatives, at home and abroad, argued that Romania occupied the region and did not value its own citizens. They, on their turn, wanted to belong where they once felt protected and secured, i.e. to Russia, regardless of the confusion what

¹¹⁸ The phrase is taken from the correspondence between P. V. Sinadino and A. N. Krupenskii. Alexandr N. Krupenskii Papers, [Box 1 Subject file], Folder Sinadino, Panteleimon V.

kind of political regime will Russia embrace. The active anti-Romanian propaganda promoted mostly outside Bessarabia but which echoed in the province, as well the postponement of the final decision by the conference, maintained in the province the state of incertitude and nostalgia for the imperial past, which was used by the pro-Russian forces in their favor.

Among the factors that worked against the Russian future for Bessarabia were: Romania was seen an important force in fighting the Bolshevism, in these circumstances concessions over Bessarabia were made; there was little unity among the Russian émigrés and Russian whites in general, as well within the "Bessarabian delegation" in particular; with the recognition of Bessarabia as Romanian territory, the pro-Russian argumentation weakened; the formal role of the League of Nations, as well the recognition by the Great Powers of the Soviet government and the establishment of the Soviet borders.

The Russian émigrés did not give up their hopes, including the preservation of the former imperial space. The second day after the recognition of Bessarabia as a Romanian territory in the Paris Treaty, the Russian ambassador to France, V. A. Maklakov, wrote to his counterpart, B. A. Bakhmetev, in Washington: "We do not address the question of the unity and integrity of Russia and pretend that this problem has not been compromised. But of course, in essence, it is compromised regarding Poland and even in respect of all national entities, but only compromised and not resolved, it will only be resolved after the fall of the Bolsheviks, when finally a government will appear which could rule Russia, while insisting on its decisions. This also determines the attitude toward the Bessarabian question. You know from the newspapers, that the powers without feeling any embarrassment on behalf of America, gave Bessarabia to Romania. We remained silent. Why? Simply because the maximum that could have been done here was to include a further notice that the future Russian government will be invited to adhere to this act; although we were told that it would only have to adhere not challenge, but to us it is evident that this future government could challenge it by a simple fact of non-recognition, and then the question will remain open and will be resolved depending on

the correlation of forces. There is this clause which, of course, per se does not mean much, but which, however, allowed us to keep silent.”¹¹⁹

By the end of 1920, the Russian émigrés were conscious of the fact that “on the Bessarabian issue, the Bolsheviks possess that real threat which we do not possess; the protest of the Bolsheviks against the seizing of Bessarabia now induces panic here on the Romanians who are afraid of the war, as well on all these powers that want to avoid any war.”¹²⁰ There were the Bolsheviks that “are making now the unity of Russia. [...] They have protested against the holding of Bessarabia by Romania and are warning Romania with a war; they will declare war to Poland, probably on the basis of the Polish agreement. They have seized also Azerbaijan and Armenia, tomorrow they will seize Georgia. Finally, their convergence with Lithuania is the next, and will not be surprized if similar thing will happen with the Baltic States.”¹²¹ The perspective for regaining ground and face the Bolsheviks was sombre.

After 1920 the issue of Bessarabia was almost eliminated from the concerns of the two diplomats, to re-appear only in 1921, when Alexandr N. Krupenskii, this time alone, formulated a series of memoranda on the situation of the Russian minority in the Romanian Eastern province before the League of Nations. According to the claimant, the Russian minority was badly treated by the authorities: it was marginalized from administrative and cultural life, deprived from economic rights and forbidden to have its own education in Russian mother-tongue. The former head of the Bessarabian “delegation” gave up himself on questioning the status of the province: he, like other Russian Whites, was aware of the fact that the union of Bessarabia with Romania was a *fait accompli*.

Nearly a century passed from the Paris Peace conference. Although the Russian historians embraced the multi-perspective analysis of the consequences of the war and the 1917 Bolshevik *coup d'état*, there are opinions that consider that the “national and geo-

¹¹⁹ V. A. Maklakov – B. A. Bahmetev, October 21 1920. “Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!” B. A. Bakhmetev – V. A. Maklakov. *Perepiska, 1919–1951, v 3-h tomakh*, ROSSPEN, Izdatel’stvo Guverovskogo Instituta, Moskva-Stanford, Tom 1, avgust 1919-sentiabr’ 1921, 2001, 220.

¹²⁰ V. A. Maklakov – B. A. Bahmetev, December 7 1920. “Sovershenno lishno i doveritel’no!”, 299.

¹²¹ Ibid.

political catastrophe" was not the result of the war defeat, but of the post-war circumstances that forced Russia to say "Goodbye, Nystad Peace, Ismail and Poltava!"¹²² At the Peace conference where Russia's interests were not represented, "with a stroke of the pen" Russia lost everything for which "she shed blood in the war". The "Bolshevik revolution" and the decomposition of the army are considered less important when it comes to evaluate the motives that led Russia to Civil War and the dismantling of the empire. Echoes of the post-WWI-Russian "drama" are heard up to today, through the attempts to blame Western powers that it pushes Russia out of her "historical" spheres of influence.

The arguments, as well the means of propaganda used a century ago to defend the "Bessarabian cause" by the Russian Whites, were successfully taken forward by the Soviet propaganda machine. It is of little surprise that today similar arguments, modelled for a new context, are spread in Russian media as well historiography, as well taken forward by some Moldovan historians who believe that Moldova's future lies in its past.

¹²² N. A. Narochnitskaia, *Voina, smertel'no opasnaia dlia Rossii ...*, in: E. N. Rudaia (Ed.), *Zabytaia voina i predannye geroi*, Moskva: Veche, 2011, 15. All three geographical points were symbols of the rise of the Russian empire. The Treaty of Nystad, signed between Tsardom of Russia and the Swedish empire on September 10 1721, recognized the transfer of Estonia, Livonia, Ingria, and Southeast Finland to Russia, while a part of Finland was returned to Sweden. Ismail is a fortress in the South of Bessarabia which was conquered from the Ottomans by the Russian troops in 1790, and the battle of Poltava of 1709 signified the fall of the Swedish Empire and the rise of the Russian empire.

Annexes

Ethnic Composition of Bessarabia, 1919*



*Source: [Conférence Politique Russe. A Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de la Paix. Paris, le 22 Mars 1919], Vasiliï A. Maklakov Papers, [Box 17 Subject file], Folder 17.13 Bessarabia. Printed matter. Addresses. Prince L'vov, HIA.

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