

**BESSARABIA, 1918: ANTI-BOLSHEVIK WAR AND INCORPORATION
INTO THE KINGDOM OF ROMANIA**

**BASARABIA, 1918: RĂZBOIUL ANTI-BOLȘEVIC ȘI ÎNCORPORAREA
ÎN REGATUL ROMÂNIEI**

Dmytro BONDARENKO
University of Szeged
Hungary

Abstract: *Romania became the most important barrier to the spread of Bolshevism in Europe in 1918-1920, it managed not only to repel Soviet aggression but also successfully to carry out the export of counter-revolution to Bessarabia in 1918.*

As a result of the Anti-Bolshevik War, Romania incorporated Bessarabia, thus completing national unification.

Keywords: *Bessarabia, the Kingdom of Romania, the Anti-Bolshevik War, 1918-1920, the export of counter-revolution, the Romanian War for National Unification, 1916-1920*

Rezumat: *România au devenit cea mai importantă barieră în calea răspândirii bolșevismului în Europa anilor 1918-1920, care nu numai că a reușit să respingă agresiunea sovietică, ci și să efectueze cu succes exportul contrarevoluției în Basarabia din 1918.*

Ca urmare a Războiului antibolșevic, România a încorporat Basarabia, finalizând astfel unificarea națională.

Cuvinte cheie: *Basarabia, Regatul României, Războiul antibolșevic 1918-1920, exportul de contrarevoluție, Războiul de Unire Națională a României 1916-1920*

Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century, the processes of national unification of Italy, Germany, and Romania reached a climax. However, in the case of Romania, Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire prevented completion the national unification. In 1914-1916, Romania was faced with a coalition choice: the Entente promised Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina, and the Central Powers promised Bessarabia. So, the Romanian unification would be finished if both Russia and Austria-Hungary had been disintegrated. And it happened as a result of the First World War. During 1918-1920, Romania managed to implement it national project and incorporate Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania and Banat.

The downfall of the monarchy and the collapse of the Russian Empire did not automatically lead to the integration of Bessarabia and the Kingdom of Romania for several reasons. First of all, Bessarabia was annexed more than 100 years ago and influenced by Russification. Secondly, Ukraine claimed the territory of Bessarabia, which provoked resistance from the local population.¹ Moreover, the Ukrainian Central Rada blamed the Provisional Government in the secret agreement with Romania according to which Bessarabia and Bukovina should be incorporated into the Kingdom of Romania.² Third, the national movement of Bessarabia was mostly republican, and as a result, the Moldovan Democratic Republic was proclaimed on 15 December 1917.

Findings

The emergence of Bolshevism in Russia at the end of 1917 became a new challenge to the World order and a threat primarily to the nations and dynasties of the states, where the Russian troops were deployed, especially Romania, which was officially at war with Soviet Russia from January 1918. The Bolshevik attempt to overthrow the monarchy and establish Soviet power in Romania failed in December

¹ Государственный архив Российской Федерации (ГАРФ), ф. 1800, оп. 1, д. 38, л. 157-159; Народня Воля 29 липня (11 серпня) 1917; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Румыния и Финляндия: от Антибольшевистских войн к флангам Санитарного Кордона (1918-1920)*, Одесса: Астропринт, 2021, с. 65.

² Народня Воля 5 (18) травня 1917, 9 (22) травня 1917, 19 травня (1 червня) 1917; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 65.

1917. The Romanian army maintained high morale and loyalty to the throne, preventing the Bolsheviks from capturing Iasi, managed to disarm the Bolsheviks troops.

In response, on 29 December 1917, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Leon Trotsky issued a note of protest to the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Romania in Russia Constantin Diamandi and accused Romania of “*laying hands on the Russian revolution.*”¹ At the same time, the Soviet part justified its right to intervene in the internal affairs of Romania: “*On the territory of the Russian revolution we will not tolerate any repression not only against the Russian revolutionaries, but also against the Romanian revolutionaries. Every Romanian soldier, worker and peasant will find protection for the Soviet authorities against the reactionary Romanian bureaucracy.*”²

So, Leon Trotsky declared Romania as a “*territory of the Russian Revolution.*”³ The Bolsheviks tried to take control over the Danube Delta. The Bolshevik uprisings took place in Chilia, Ismail, Sulina, and Tulcea. As Queen Mary pointed out: “*Bolshevism is the greatest threat nowadays.*”⁴

It should be noted that Romania had to fight on two fronts simultaneously: against Soviet Russia in the East and against Central Powers in the West. According to Romanian Prime Minister Ionel Brătianu, in the winter of 1917/1918, the Bolshevik front demanded diverting a major Romanian forces that led to the weakening of the front against the Central Powers.⁵

On 13 January 1918, the Soviet Russia made an international provocation that had no parallel in history and violated all norms of international law: the arrest of the Ambassador and the entire diplomatic mission of Romania, and simultaneously seizing the Royal Gold Fund that was being held at the State Bank of Russia after the evacuation of Bucharest in 1916. Thus, it was a Casus Belli. Under international pressure, the Romanian diplomats were released, but the Bolsheviks did not return the Gold Treasure to Romania, declaring their intention to hand it over “*to the Romanian labour people.*”⁶

In response to the appeal of the Bessarabian Sfatul Țării (National Council) on 16 January 1918, the Government headed by Prime Minister Ionel Brătianu in consultation with Generals Dmitry Shcherbachev and Henri Berthelot decided to send Transylvanians' regiment (a military unit of the Russian army consisted of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war of Romanian origin) to Chișinău to maintain order in the city and protect the authorities from Bolshevik atrocities. However, the Bolsheviks managed to disarm the Transylvanians. Moreover, the Bolsheviks decided to convene a “congress of councils” in Chișinău to proclaim Soviet power in Bessarabia.⁷

As for Romania, it was important to restore its national unity by means of the incorporation of Bessarabia, annexed by Russia in 1812 according to the Bucharest treaty between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. As a result, on 19 January 1918, the Romanian government decided to launch a military operation against the Bolsheviks in Bessarabia.⁸

The advance towards Chișinău began on 21 January 1918, and on 26 January the Romanian army took control over the city.⁹ On 26 January 1918, Soviet Russia officially severed diplomatic relations with

¹ *Документы внешней политики СССР*, т. 1, Москва: Политиздат, 1959, с. 66-67; *История Румынии 1918-1970*, Москва: Наука, 1971, с. 20; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 78.

² *Документы внешней политики СССР*, т. 1, Москва: Политиздат, 1959, с. 66-67; *История Румынии 1918-1970*, Москва: Наука, 1971, с. 20; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 78.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *România în Primul Război Mondial*, București, 1979, p. 345; *Очерки политической истории Румынии (1859-1944)*, Кишинёв: Штинница, 1985, с. 190-191; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 71.

⁵ *Studii și materiale de istoria contemporană*, vol. I, București, 1956, p. 13; *Очерки политической истории Румынии (1859-1944)*... с. 186; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 71.

⁶ *Документы внешней политики СССР*, т. 1, с. 89-90; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 80.

⁷ *История Румынии 1918-1970*, с. 22; Marcel Mitrasca, *Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2002, p. 36; Glenn Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*, Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2011, p. 272-273; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 79-80.

⁸ Marcel Mitrasca, *Op. cit.*, p. 36; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 80.

⁹ Marin Stanescu, *Armata română și unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România, 1917-1919*, Constanța: Ex Ponto, 1999, p. 109; Dumitru Preda, Costica Prodan, *Romania in WWI. A Concise History*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012, p. 126; Glenn Torrey, *Op. cit.*, p. 272-273; Михаил Мельтюхов, *Бессарабский вопрос между мировыми войнами, 1917-1940*, Москва: Вече, 2010, с. 35; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 80.

Romania and declared war on Romania, stating that “*Romanian oligarchy opened military actions against the Russian Republic.*”¹

Most of Bessarabia was relatively easily occupied by the Romanian army, some difficulties arose in the southern part, where the non-Romanian population was predominant and the Rumcherod had strong positions (Chilia, Ismail, Vilkovo, Akkerman (Cetatea Albă)). Bender (Tighina) had to be taken twice - on 2 and 7 February 1918 due to the proximity of Tiraspol, from where the Bolsheviks received reinforcements. Reni and Bolgrad were occupied on 24 January, but Ismail and Chilia on 3 and 8 February 1918, respectively, due to river battles between the Romanian and Russian Danube flotillas. The Russian warships left the Danube after another battle on 18 February 1918. Finally, on 8 March 1918, after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, Akkerman was occupied without any fight.²

The rapid advance of the Romanian royal troops in Bessarabia, sometimes up to 60 km a day, especially the occupation of Akkerman (Cetatea Albă), caused panic among the Red Army. The Red Commander Nikolai Muraviev supposed that the Romanian army was going to cross the Dniester and continue its attack on Bârzula and Odessa, which he telegraphed to Petrograd on 7 March 1918,³ but, unexpectedly for the Bolsheviks, the Romanian army stopped on the right bank of the Dniester.

Indeed, the first Bolshevik attempt of the World Revolution failed in Bessarabia, and on its territory there was the clash not only export-revolution and export-counter-revolution but also Bolshevism and Nationalism (national unification). On 9 April 1918, Sfatul Țării proclaimed the unification of Bessarabia and Romania, which was ratified on 17 April 1918 by King Ferdinand and then on 20 December 1919 by a new parliament elected from all regions of united Romania.⁴

Conclusions

Romania completely isolated from the Allies was forced to sign the Bucharest Peace Treaty twice - on 7 March (preliminary) and on 7 May 1918, which was never ratified by King Ferdinand, and therefore was such a temporary armistice. Under the conditions of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, Romania ceded South Dobruja to Bulgaria, and some “border correction” in favour of Austria-Hungary; but at the same time, as territorial compensation, Bessarabia was recognized as an integral part of Romania.⁵ In fact, it was the first international

Agreement to recognize the reunification of Bessarabia and Romania. The second such a document formally recognized the union of Bessarabia with Romania was signed by the Allies in Paris on 28 October 1920, widely known as the Treaty of Bessarabia or the Paris Peace Treaty. The unification was recognized by the United Kingdom, France and Italy. However, the Soviet Union never recognized it.

Unfortunately, the Romanian attempt to sign the peace agreement with Soviet Russia in Warsaw in 1920 was unsuccessful even in spite of the fact that Romania did not support Poland as an ally in the Soviet-Polish War. As a result, the territorial integrity of Romania guaranteed by Great Britain and France was violated by the USSR in July 1940, after the defeat of France in the war against Germany.

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¹ *Документы внешней политики СССР*, т. 1, с. 89-90; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 80.

² Glenn Torrey, *Op. cit.*, p. 276-277; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 81.

³ ГАРФ, ф. Р-130, оп. 2, д. 572, л. 43-52; Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 81.

⁴ Дмитро Бондаренко, *Указ. соч.*, с. 82-83.

⁵ *Ibid.*; Филипп Нотович, *Бухарестский мир 1918 г.*, Москва: Соцполитиздат, 1959, с. 99-100, 111-112, 144, 151-177, 212-213.

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