

## **MARCH 27, 1918, THE UNION OF BESSARABIA WITH ROMANIA, THE FIRST LINK IN THE MAKING OF THE GREATER ROMANIA**

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**Abstract.** There are, in the history of peoples, events of great significance and national value. Such an event was on March 27, 1918, when under extreme conditions, under foreign occupation, the Country Council (the legislative body of Bessarabia elected by the people) decided to unite the Romanian province between the Pruth and Dniester with the mother country, Romania.

The act of the union of Bessarabia with the country was reckoned by the great historian Gheorghe Buzatu, one of the astral moments of Romanian becoming, along with January 24, 1859, May 9, 1877 and December 1, 1918. The special significance of this event consisted in the fact that, the Union of the Bessarabian people, freely expressed in March 1918, opened the series of three fundamental moments, the plebiscite assemblies in Chişinău, Cernăuţi and Alba Iulia, through which the Romanian people made their full national unity.

The Revolutionary-National Movement in Bessarabia in the years 1917-1918, which culminated in the return of the Romanian land between the Pruth and Dniester, self-embedded in the Tsarist Empire more than 100 years ago, during the First World War, in close connection with the Russian revolution that broke out in the spring of 1917, but also with the extensive upheavals in the struggle for self-determination of the oppressed peoples of the three empires: Tsarist, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman. The goals, the stages, the committed institutions, the leading figures, the achievements, and the failures of nearly two years that ended in the unification of Bessarabia, are the main concern of our research.

The development of the Bessarabian national movement from a romantic stage since the beginning of the Russian Revolution (February 27, 1917) to the convening of the first Congress of the Central Committee of Bessarabia (June 1917), at a stage of revolutionary realism opened by the Military Congress which put in front of the Bessarabian Romanian society the task of establishing the Country Council and the national army (October 20, 1917), when all the efforts were made to coagulate in order to achieve autonomy, independence, and then the unification of Bessarabia with the country (March 27, 1918).

The objectives of the Country Councils activity were transposed into the work of all professional formations and institutions at the beginning, later political ones, predominantly being: the introduction of the Romanian language and the Latin grammar, together with a fundamental reformation of the education, the cultural and spiritual life and the Romanization of the school institutions, cultural and ecclesial ones, so that they can then proceed to appropriate measures to defend the autonomy proclaimed on December 2, 1917, and to establish union with the country. Tangentially, the study also addresses the more important aspects of the international

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echo of the union of Bessarabia with the country and the effects of this fundamental segment of national history, which unfortunately lasted only about 20 years.

**Keywords:** Basarabia; Republic of Moldova; Chişinău; autonomy; independence; union; national movement; Soviet; Committee; government; Country Council; directorate; federation; The Tsarist Empire; Russia; soldiers; workers; peasantry; students; cooperative; schools; administration; institutions; culture; Romanian language; Moldavian language; freedom; autonomy; independence; union; Romania.

The unification of Moldova between Pruth and Dniester with the kingdom and with the people they were integral to, 100 years ago, represents an historical act of great account and valor for the Romanian nation. This is all the more so since the totalitarian communist regime established in Moldova between the two waters, categorically forbade an objective treatment of the problem, allowing only one sole interpretation, in most cases anti-scientific, truncated, tendentious. “The captivity and the communist bareness exercised not only on Bessarabia but on all the U.S.S.R nations,” in the recent published *A history of Bessarabia* eminent historian Anatol Petrencu<sup>1</sup> wrote, “built the saddest memory with hard to erase trace in the human nature and the souls of people”<sup>2</sup>.

The years of the First World War in particular, in which, since 1916 Romania was part of, participating, as it is known from August 15 together with the progressive powers of Entente, have inscribed in the history of Bessarabia, the creation of the Country Council, the proclamation of the Moldovan Democratic Republic, the rupture with the Russian Empire and the union with Romania<sup>3</sup>. Astral moment in the history of Romania, March 27, 1918, the day in which Bessarabia consolidates with the motherland opened the series of the three major fundamental events, which were spent in the glory year of Romania 1918, assured the realisation of the revolutionar process of accomplishment of the national unitary state on 1 December 1918, when Transylvania joined the Kingdom of Romania.

March 27, 1918 opened hereby, on the general background of the thoroughness of the battle of the nations enslaved by the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire for self-determination, fundamentals comprised of the *Fourteen Points (Woodrow Wilson)* on the future of Europe, a real rerevolutionary national movement with a romantic character in its first phase, a profound realism in the decisive phase of the practical realization of the union of Bessarabia.

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<sup>2</sup> Anatol Petrencu, scientific copy editor, *O istorie a Basarabiei*, Serebria Publishing House, Chişinău 2015, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Jipa Rotaru, publishing attendant, *Oameni și locuri între Prut și Nistru*, in *Captain Gh. V. Andronachi, Albumul Basarabiei în jurul Marelui Eveniment al Unirii*, Publishing House of the Romanian Association of Democratic Education.

Bessarabia being a province of the Russian Empire, broken abusively from the body of Moldova of Stephen the Great and Saint since 1812, the revolutionary movement from beyond the Pruth, had, at least in the initial phase, as a support the ample revolution, at the start bourgeois-democratic, then bolshevik russian. Unlike the Russian Revolution, the Bessarabian movement from 1917-1918 was a truly national one, of absolution from the enslavement of the Russian Empire “for the national rights and the reunion of the romanian province between Pruth and Dniester with the motherland, Romania”.<sup>4</sup>

In the national movement of Bessarabia emerged two streams. The first stream was represented by a moderated group, consisting of conservative boyars, priests and some intellectuals with Pavel Dicescu in the lead, doctor in philosophy and who opposed a revolutionary radical movement, being the followers of solving problems and the national claims of romanians by means of schools and national culture. The second group formed by the radicals, a powerful, young force, aiming to make more profound reforms for the benefit of the bessarabian romanians. In this group were young intellectuals and students, priests and teachers. In the lead of these were Manolache and Antonina Gavriliță, Natalia Hartia, Ion Pelivan, Pantelimon Halipa, Ion Inculeț, national poet Alexei Mateevici, Vasile Hartia, Ion Laza, Gheorghe Druță, Petre Bragă and so on.<sup>5</sup> Much more energetically and much more active than the former, this second group was more profoundly involved in the supporting the claims of the Bessarabians, their independence and unity with the country, constituting their major objectives, for which they initiated and supported, since the pre-revolutionary period, an intense and vigorous national propaganda activity on a political and especially cultural level<sup>6</sup>.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in the winter of 1917 marked the profound battle between the national liberation of the Bessarabian Romanians. “As the events followed quickly prefiguring the magnitude of the consequences of the Russian Revolution,” said St. Ciobanu,” the national movement from Bessarabia was presented to us **like a deep agitation of the entire nation, like a formidable breath of the great masses, like a collective action of the people**”<sup>7</sup>.

The national liberation movement of Bessarabian Romanians was particularly strong in the years 1917-1918, having a fast bloom after the

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Mihai Tașcă, *100 de ani de la Unirea Basarabiei cu România*, în *Basarabia – pământ românesc*, Anthology, vol. I, Serebria Publishing House, Chișinău, 2017, p. 11-37. To be also seen Ștefan Ciobanu, *Unirea Basarabiei. Studii și documente cu privire la mișcarea națională din Basarabia în anii 1917-1918*, Bucharest, 1929 or Constantin Aldea, *Pagini dintr-o istorie zbuciumată; Basarabia până în anul 1920*, Academy of High Military Studies Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993 and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Constantin Aldea, *Op. cit.*, p. 90-93

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93

<sup>7</sup> Șt. Ciobanu, *Unirea Basarabiei; Studii și documente*, Bucharest, 1929, p. XXXIII.

democratic revolution of February 1917 from Petrograd and the fall of the tsarist autocracy. Concretely, after the collapse of the Russian autocracy, the first manifestations of the popular masses between Pruth and Dniester took place and the first civilian and military organizations appeared in Bessarabia, which were at the forefront of the popular actions.<sup>8</sup>

The end of February and early March 1917, when, in Petrograd, the last battles for the collapse of the tsarism were fought (the bourgeois-democratic revolution) and the replacement of the old regime with a new one, the provisional government (Livov- liberal prince), on March 2, Chişinău and the whole of Bessarabia was fully calm, maintained by Governor Voronovici through the court-martial army and the siege condition.<sup>9</sup>

On March 5 barely, an official telegram from Petrograd (from the new provisional government) announcing that Bessarabia is no longer under the Empire and from now on it can enjoy freedom (svoboda) and, all its citizens were called to support the new government.<sup>10</sup>

As in Chişinău, everything coming from Petrograd was an order, they responded like to an order, first of all, the officials (most of them not being of Romanian ethnicity). They gathered by departments, still in tsarist uniforms and they chose professional committees comprising those from postal offices, zemstvos, schools (teachers), lawyers, assistant engineers, physicians, administrative and finance officials, etc. They sent worship telegrams to the new regime and blame the old of being “reactionary and demeaning”. Large urban and rural masses remained waiting.

On March 13, like in Petrograd and Odessa, other Soviet Bessarabian cities of the workers and soldiers were established in Chişinău from foreign elements to Chişinău and Bessarabia (president Galiţki, secretary Izbeţski, later proved as a Russian spy, members of Crâlov, Crupovici, Vaisman, Fihman and so on). On March 22 the **Soviet of deputies, workers and soldiers from Chişinău** was established.<sup>11</sup>

After the model of Petrograd and Odessa, the public meetings are multiplying, resolutions are voted for “the government(the one from Petrograd, obviously) and revolution”. For the lack of students an “alliance of high school students from Chişinău” is formed. Like mushrooms after the rain, there are **trade unions** of all kinds: bakers, choppers, confectioners, cooks, waiters, porters, visas, house maids, maids and servants, with committees, presidencies, assemblies, speeches and resolutions: ”Down with the Tsar Rasputin”, “Bloodless revolution”,

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<sup>8</sup> *Basarabia - pământ românesc. Anthology*, vol. I, Serebria Publishing House, Chişinău, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Petre Cazacu, *Moldova dintre Prut și Nistru. 1821-1918*, Chişinău Science Edition, Chişinău, 1992, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Jipa Rotaru, publishing attendant, *Albumul Basarabiei...*, p. XXXII-XXXIII.

<sup>11</sup> Petre Cazacu, *op.cit.*, p. 236-237.

“for the government of liberty” and so on. All these manifestations were called to represent the faces of the movement of the conscious proletariat which in Bessarabia was completely absent.

From the order of the provisional government in Petrograd:

- In all the Russian provinces (and in Bessarabia), the old administrators were replaced with the presidents of the provinces, calling them **commissioners** of the government – in general the great owners. In town halls, in the place and besides the communal councils, **executive committees** were formed, made up of representatives of new social and political organizations, including soldiers in some places.

- Urban and rural police are being replaced by a new, improvised new body – **the militia**, made up of absolutely unprepared people.

- Prisoners are being released from prison, leading to general amnesty. The famous Order no.1 is published in which soldiers will be addressed “you” and not “an inferior grade”, can smoke freely, can salute or not and can take part in clubs and political parties.

- The death penalty, the court-martial and decorations, except for the “Saint George Military Cross”, are abolished.

- In court, the staff remained the same, except for the **zemsky-nacealnic** (judge-subprefect) who was replaced by elected judges without legal titles.

- The laws of the old regime have not changed either, but slowly, they are no longer respected, and anarchy is installed.

Instead, the provisional government from Petrograd develops a powerful propaganda to “deepen the revolution”. The new parties, groups and organizations from the center send their representatives to all cities, villages and all fronts, so in the villages and towns of Bessarabia, as well as among Moldovans mobilized in different fairs and different fronts.<sup>12</sup>

Issues such as liberties, war, army, revolution, discipline, agrarian and economic issues are being debated everywhere by competent and incompetent, interested and disinterested, dogmatic and skeptical, enthusiastic and blazing, stupid and smart, by everybody, that’s why its called full equality, brotherhood and freedom of expression.

In the former empire, national movements are deepening and deepening: the Polish and the Ukrainians are opposed to the Russians, their example being followed by the Bessarabians.

On all fronts, as in fairs, between soldiers there is the dissociation and ranking of groups and nationalities. Everywhere national leaders are emerging, non-Russian groups support each other against the form of unified Russian state. All national movements are reserved at the beginning without solemn declarations of separatism.

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<sup>12</sup> Constantin Aldea, *op.cit.*,p. 98-99.

As for the Romanian province east of Pruth, from a propaganda point of view, the Petrograd government reserved Bessarabia a very special situation compared to the other provinces of the former Tsarist Empire. With the province's fame, with many antisemitic elements and with separatist, counterrevolutionary tendencies, Bessarabia was suspected of becoming the "Vandeea" of the Russian revolution. That is why special measures have been taken here, namely the sending of propagandists of the revolution. Popular socialists (Smidt and Cristi) send villagers to villages; so did the Soviet workers, soldiers and peasants from Odessa.

Kerensky, the actual head of the provisional government, from Petrograd on May 19, sends the first senator of the revolution, his trusted man, Socolov, to Chişinău. This and his companion in Chişinău, Vengherov, witnessed **the first Peasant Congress** of Bessarabia, where they convinced themselves of the existence in the Romanian province of the antagonism between the Russians and the Bessarabians and of the desire for autonomy of the Moldovans. In this spirit, they reported to the Petrograd government that it is necessary to send as many propagandists of the revolution as possible to Bessarabia. Thus, in the spring of 1917, Breşko-Breşkovskaia (the grandmother of the Russian revolution) to which Erhan reported on her arrival in Chişinău, that the 40 propagandists sent were arrested by the locals in the villages.

Ion Inculeţ, in 1929, published "A revolution lived" in the magazine "The Generation of the Union", in which he speaks about the preparation in March of a group of 80 agitators, the majority of soldiers, for 2 months, 8 for each county, to be sent to Bessarabia to preach the ideas of revolution, including unity with the Russian state. The Provisional Government (Livov) approved the selection of Moldovan soldiers, preparing and financing the action, and sending 40 people to Chişinău, starting June 1, 1917.

Propagandists invaded Bessarabia, bringing with them a whole arsenal of manifests, calls and brochures expressing the tasks of the Russian revolution. Under the leadership of A. Smidt and V. Christi, a special section was set up in Chişinău, which had the task of translating and spreading political brochures of "the deepening of the Russian revolution among Moldovans".

The leader of the group of propagandists brought to Bessarabia was Pantelimon Erhan, who will become president of the Soviet gubernial of the peasants deputies. At the same time, in Chişinău, under the impetus of the right to national self-determination propagated by the Russian revolution, the national movement develops.

**The Moldovian National Party**<sup>13</sup> is formed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. The first chairman was P. Gore, vice-president – V. Herta; secretary general – Pantelimon Halippa;

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<sup>13</sup> Jipa Rotaru, *Armata română în sprijinul unirii Basarabiei cu patria mamă* în *Buletin științific al cadrelor didactice din Academia militară*, Publishing House of the Academy of High Military Studies, Bucharest, 1990, p. 23-25.

honorary president – V. Stroescu. A core of Bessarabian Romanians – owners, intellectuals, professors and students – was formed, later joined by militaries from different centers of Russia and Romania, such as Odessa, Iași, Roman, Ecaterinoslav, Kiev, Novo-Gheorgiev, Sevastopol etc.

On April 9, 1917, the Moldovan National Party published its program, which included, among others: administrative, judicial, ecclesiastical and social autonomy of Bessarabia within the Russian Federation; Provincial Diet (Country Counseling); sending delegates (representatives) to the Center a representative besides “top management”; administration and schools to be in the hands of Moldovans; the nationalization of the schools and churches; the nationalization of the army and stopping the colonization of Bessarabia; Romanian language in schools, army, administration and church; the same rights for Moldovans beyond the Dniester and the agrarian issue – the expropriation and landowning of peasant.

The development of the Moldovan National Party’s action program began in Bessarabia during the period of **revolutionary romanticism**, which covered the months of March, April, May, when the idea of revolutionary organization was barely outlined. Svoboda, after 100 years of darkness, was the word of order in Bessarabia.

Starting with April, the first gatherings of the various national, agrarian, cooperative, cultural and church organizations, which represented the majority of the population and pronounce themselves for the future of the province, began to be held in Bessarabia. Thus, on April 7, in Chișinău, the Assembly of Cooperatives Union takes place. The adopted motion was based on administrative, church, cultural and economic autonomy. In order to achieve the economy, it was called for: the organization of a local legislative body – **the Country Council**, the Divan of the Country. There was no problem with the agrarian reform here. The provisions of the Program of the Moldovan Party were then repeated in general terms.

On April 18, the **Assembly of Officers and Soldiers of Odessa**, consisting of 10000 soldiers, was organized by Cateli, Anton Crihan, N. Ciornei, all of Bălți County. It was chaired by Captain E. Cateli, helped by Pantelimon Halippa, volunteer Păscăluță and I. Pelivan. The assembly had a great resonance throughout Bessarabia, composed mostly of peasants dressed in military outfit. It called for: “Bessarabia not to be ruled as a subjugated country but as a free country”, with the Country Counsel, composed of “the deputies of all peoples living in Bessarabia”, the Romanian language to be introduced into education, church, administration and justice; for the first time the agrarian issue was discussed; the problem of molding Moldovan cohorts. An outstanding activity was carried out in this direction by Anton Crihan.

General Scerbacev, commander of the Romanian-Russian front in Iași, by telegram no. 156370 approved the formation and sending in Bessarabia of 16

mobile mobs of militants recruited from soldiers born in Bessarabia, who were injured no less than twice. For their leadership (of the cohorts), Anton Crihan was set up as an inspector of the mobile mobs. Their rules were approved by the Deputy Commander of the General Staff of the military district of Odessa – Lieutenant-General Marx. The purpose of newly established cohorts was to maintain the personal security of citizens and to fight desertions and robbers, to prevent agrarian, disorder, to fight against anarchy and counter-revolution.

On April 24, the **Clergy and Lounges Congress** was established, and on May 9, the **Cooperative Congress**, chaired by G. Buruiana, a member of the Moldovan National Party.

On May 20 the **Student Congress** was established at the editorial office of the newspaper “Cuvânt Moldovenesc”, under the chairmanship of Teofil Iancu.

Between May 21 and May 24, the first Peasant Congress, convened by the Russian faction, will be sent to send delegates from Bessarabia to the Congress of Deputies of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants. Most of the participants were Bulgarian, Ruthenian, Ukrainian minorities. The Congress adopted the decision to expropriate and appropriate the peasants according to the rules to be drafted by the Russian Constitution.

Under the influence of this Congress, the Moldovan National Party revised the program on agrarian reform. The land was to be socialized, that is to pass into the possession of people, being distributed by the village people, that is, rules established in the Country Counsel.

The first **Congress of Teachers** in Bessarabia led by P. Gore, attended by 500 teachers, including the poet A. Mateevici and Metropolitan Gurie, decided to nationalize the school from September 1 and prepare teachers, as well as wide territorial and cultural autonomy of Bessarabia.

Once the social and national movement deepens, militaries and intellectuals from the first-generation actively taking part, coming from peasantry ranking, the revolutionary romanticism is abandoned and a sense of realism prevails in relation to the satisfaction of immediate interests and the fate of the land.

If everything so far had been at the expense of the Russian Constitution, it was now the question of the creation of a Supreme Body of Bessarabia, which takes over these major tasks.

A first measure was the constitution in Chişinău of the **Central Committee of the Moldovian Soldiers** on June 23 1917, with the task of convening a Congress of Moldovan soldiers, headquartered at the Liberty Palace, with G. Pântea as president, to decide the fate of Bessarabia. In the conditions of the disorder and anarchy unleashed in Bessarabia and the claims of Ukraine to incorporate the Romanian province in the summer of 1917, on August 27, in Bessarabia is held the second Peasant Congress, attended by I. Inculet, freshly arrived from Petrograd, as a member of the Soviet deputies from Petrograd, as a



commissioner helper. This event, addressed to the majority of the population (the peasantry) and the main force of the Basarabian society, would mark the entrance of Bessarabia at a much deeper stage, namely that of **revolutionary realism**.

In the continuation of the national-revolutionary actions, **the first Moldovan Military Congress** will be convened on October 20. The Congress was held in the eparchial hall in Chişinău, being organized by E. Cateli, with the participation of an important group of representatives of the soldiers movement and other radical-revolutionary forces, including: Cijevski, Holban, Năstase, Pantelimon Halippa, P. Erhan, Gr. Cazacliu, Toma Jalbă from Transnistria and others.

Among other things, the Congress decided the only form of administrative organization admissible in the former Russian empire – the Russian Federation Republic, the nationalization of Moldovan units and the increase of the number of cohorts from 16 to 100, the immediate establishment of the Country Councils for the administration of all the autonomous Bessarabia, 120 deputies out of which 84 (70%) Moldovans and the rest of other ethnic groups; The Country Council was to function until the constitution of Bessarabia, elected by universal, equal, direct and secret vote; once the council of the country was established, all the committees established in Bessarabia had a strictly professional character, without interfering in political affairs; all administrative bodies were supposed to obey the Country Council; in the agrarian question - the land is the property of the people and will be distributed by the Constituent to those who will work it; nationalization of education respect for the rights of nationalities. The first 44 deputies of the Country Council were elected, by this Congress exactly. A special commission was set up to organize the Country Council, consisting of V.Tonţu as president, Anton Crihan, G. Pântea, I.Buzdugan, Țurcan, Sinicliu, Zberca, Rabbit, Mârzea, Iuda, Moraru and Ignatiuc as members.

Between November 26 and November 28, elections are taking place for the Russian Constitution<sup>14</sup>. Under the chaos of Bessarabia, Russian deserters and from the romanian-russian front, who were on their way to their provinces in the Empire, caused serious agrarian disturbances. The majority of the Russian Social Revolutionary party won the elections.

The Russian constituent met on January 5, 1918, and it only functioned for the two days because of the events that followed. The dissolution of the Russian Constitution has caused a great deception for the intellectuals and peasants of Bessarabia. The intentions of integrating Bessarabia into the Federation disappeared and the organizational action in the autonomous province intensified. This has strengthened the stream in favor of the rapid organization of the Country Councils. They were involved in designating their candidates, all political and professional organizations, and even the Bessarabian institutions, in the

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<sup>14</sup> Petre Cazacu, *Op.cit.*, p. 292.

proportion established by the Military Congress. The number of deputies increased to 1501 in addition to the 44 elected by the Congress of the soldiers, 30 were elected by the Soviet Moldovan peasants, the other 76 being: 10 from the dowry side, 11 from Chişinău and from the towns; 3 – the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants; 7 from the parties (1 from PSD, 1 from PSR, 1 from PSP and as was normal, 4 from PNM); 5 – cooperatives; 2 – railways; 2 – jurists; 2 – PTT; 1 - Congress; 1 - the intellectual society; 1- the trade unions of the Moldovan institutes; 1 – the clergy; 1 – the women’s league; 28 – organizations of nationalities with: Ukrainians – 10, Israelis – 10, Israelites – 10, Bulgarians – 2, Germans – 2, Gagauz – 1, Polish – 1, Armenians – 1 and Greeks – 1. All in all, there were 105 Moldovians (70%) and 45 minorities (30%).

On November 21, 1917, **the first council meeting**<sup>15</sup> was opened, which functioned as a parliament of Bessarabia for a year, from November 27, 1917 to November 27, 1918. The assembly was blessed in Romanian by the Russian bishop Akkerman, Gavriil. Through their presidents, all political, administrative and professional organizations have expressed their consent to the establishment of a central authority in the province to put an end to the growing anarchy in Bessarabia. The most enthusiastic were the representatives of the majority of Moldovans, who saw in the Country Councils the embodiment of their secular dream of autonomous rule, in order to contribute to the promotion of their own culture, distinct from that of the Russians.

The Country Council, representing the legislative power in Bessarabia, was created, amid the overthrow of the Russian monarchy and the old Russian constitutional law, as an expression of legitimate national revolution even more than the Soviet deputies of Petrograd, where not all nationalities were included<sup>16</sup>.

This was the case in all provinces inhabited by other nationalities than the Russian ones: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Kaucaz, Georgians, Tartars and Armenians.

The first presidential council organ elected by the council was made up of the president - Ion Inculeţ, vice-president – Pantelimon Halippa and secretary – Ion Buzdugan.

As a first measure of organization, the Council decided on December 2, 1917, that Bessarabia to be proclaimed republic, an autonomous state within the Russian Federation.

It was not until December 7 that the Country Council chose a government (**the Directorate**) with President P. Erhan. All Russian laws and all public institutions inherited from the Tsarist regime and during the Revolution remained in force if they were not abrogated by the Council and published in the newspaper “Sfatul Ţării” (the new laws). All existing institutions were placed under the

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293 and next.

<sup>16</sup> Jipa Rotaru, *Armata română....op.cit.*, p. 25.

command of the directors and the Country Council. The new order was based on the militia and the army. The government was recognized by the Petrograd regime, which sent a permanent representative to the Republic of Moldova.

In December 1917 and early January, the Country Council is facing two major problems, namely:

1. The anarchy's height reaches unbearable odds. In the region of Hotin, Cabul, Bălți, Sorooca, Chișinău theft, land devastation, murders, unprecedented chaos, appears, to which the cohorts and the national army, under the influence of the Maximalist propaganda, no longer can deal with them.
2. Bolshevik struggle against the national revolutionary movement.

After the end of the armistice by General Scerbacev (November 26, 1917) the Bolsheviks, in order to transform Romania into a Soviet republic, sent Rosal, former commander of the Kromshtadt Fortress, to Iași, to suppress General Scerbacev and dethrone King Ferdinand. The Commander of the Iași Garrison, with the help of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry division, disarmed the group of Russian soldiers and Russian army from Iași and sent them in wagons under guard across Dniester.

At the same time, the "Rumcherod" (the Romanian Black Sea Front and the Odessa Front – abbreviated as Frontotdel) was organized in Odessa against the Country Council, which prevented the plan to annex Bessarabia to Russia. Also, considering it bourgeois and nationalist, the Committee of Workers and Soldiers in Chișinău also stood up against the Country Council. Both, Rumcherod and CMD in Chișinău were dominated by purely Russian elements, with a mixture of Jews and Ukrainians. Under these circumstances, Bessarabia faces the confrontation between the two currents: national-revolutionary and Bolshevik. The Rumcherod takes military organization measures to conquer the power. A strong Bolshevik propaganda develops with a peasant committee consisting of 16 Russians, 4 Ukrainians, 2 Jews, a Bulgarian and a Romanian (Cătărău). The Rumcherod destroys Moldovan cohorts and regiments and creates in Chișinău a "stamp" of Russian armies from Bessarabia district, led by Korovin<sup>17</sup>.

In Chișinău, in mid-December, alongside the Board of Directors, six Bolshevik-like committees functioned. In this situation, the Country Council, in a secret meeting on December 14, decided to ask for help from outside and instructed the Board of Directors to proceed as it thinks fit to ensure order.

Ion Incuț and P. Erhan had secret talks with the Chief of the Military District of Odessa, asking them two Cossack divisions. V. Cristi (Director of Internal Affairs) and I. Pelivan (Director of Foreign Affairs) went to Iași and requested the help of General Scerbacev.

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<sup>17</sup> See: *Declarația oficială a Sfatului Țării de Unire a Republicii Democratice Moldovenești (Basarabia) cu România*, în Ion Constantin, Ion Negrei, *Pantelimon Halippa în Apostol al Basarabiei. Studii, documente, materiale*, Chișinău, 2013, doc. nr. 27, p. 195.

On December 20, Russian organizations launched the rumor about the secret meeting, with which occasion the Land Council sold Bessarabia to Romania, and so the peasantry would not benefit from an agrarian reform.

In the first decade of January 1918, there was a dual authority in Chişinău: the Country Council and Rumcherol, who had taken over the leadership by issuing Order No. 1 on January 1, and announcing that the Frontotdel took over the entire power, and that all military units will be under his command. The order was signed by Perper, Demetrievev and Kobak. The Frontotdel established his control over the post, telegraph and train station in Chişinău. He began to stop the supplies of feeds and forage that headed for the front (Romania) and to sell the products stored in Frontotdel's warehouses. These shipments were stopped between January 1 and January 5.

Meanwhile, the Country Council is being prepared to be dismissed. On January 6, in Chişinău, armed detachments of Transylvanian volunteers that came from the front (Ukraine) to Iaşi were arrested and disarmed. The action was commissioned by Kobak, with a Moldovan unit participating. All the Romanians in the Intermediate Commission for supplying the Romanian Army de pe front, and the commission's money (2 million rubles) were confiscated. Several arrests were made among the councilors of the Country Council. Some have hidden: V. Cristi, N. Codreanu, T. Ioncu, and others fled to Iaşi: Pelivan, Anton Crihan, G. Buruiană, I. Buzdugan, Gafencu şi Tonţu, inform the Romanian government about the events in Chişinău. The Frontotdel asked, on January 6, Ion Inculeţ and P. Erhan to come to his headquarters. Not part of the Moldovan Bloc, under the pressure of the Country Council, they accept to send a telegram to Iaşi, requesting that the Romanian Army of Bessarabia to be withdrawn. To their luck, the telegram had no effect, and on January 10/27, 1918, the Romanian units passed the Pruth. The Bolsheviks left Chişinău on January 11/24 withdrew beyond the Dniester. Battles took place in Bender (Tighina).

The Romanian military intervention has caused disagreements in the Country Council. P. Erhan and G. Pânteia, accused by the Moldovan Bloc for pro-Russian attitude, resign and provoke the crisis of the entire Directorate. On January 19, the new Directorate (second in lead with Daniil Ciucurencu) was elected. The place of Pânteia, in the war, was taken by Colonel Brăiescu, and P. Erhan was elected to the instruction. The new cabinet (Second Bessarabian Directorate), lead by Ciucurencu, had the mission to restore order in Bessarabia and present its program. The Prime Minister received the telegram of the French minister in Iaşi, Sant-Aulaire, read in a January 22 session, arguing that the Allies accept the Romanian troops mission in Bessarabia.

In this session, P. Erhan was commissioned to hold a speech – a plea in favor of proclaiming independence, following the model of Ukraine.

On the night of January 23-24, 1918, the "Free Democratic Republic of Moldova (independent), independent and uninterrupted, having the sole right to

decide its future in the future.” The Country Council, by its dominion – the Council of Ministers, is the only one able to lead the affairs of Bessarabia. Both the Moldovan Bloc and the minorities voted for independence.

A period followed when General Alexandru Averescu, the new Prime Minister of Romania, replacing I. C. Brătianu (January 27th), tried to settle the conflict with Rumcherod and save the many Romanians arrested in Odessa, including General Coandă. In this respect, General Al. Averescu had a meeting with Racovschi in Iași. The understanding Racovski-Averescu becomes obsolete under the signing on January 7, 1918 of Peace with Central Powers.

On March 5, Romania’s new government, A. Marghiloman, known for its Germanophilic position, is established in Romania, and the latest attempt by the Ukrainian (social-revolutionary) government to claim the occupation of Bessarabia is taking place. Under these conditions, the first to ask for the union with Romania are the peasants, members of the Bălți county dynasty (March 2, 1918). On March 13, a motion similar to the one launched in Bălți was signed by the members of the dowry in Soroca county, who are much more radical, not asking, but “declare the union of Bessarabia with Romania”, signed by 165 people. The union with Romania also asked the great owners of Bessarabia organized by Pantelimon Sinadino in the Union of Great Owners, who attacked the Country Council, led by Inculeț and Erhan, blaming him for giving instructions and laws in the spirit of Lenin’s decrees and Trotsky. Consequently, UMP demanded “the removal of the Country Council as an arbitrary institution chosen by a band of maximalist militaries, without taking into account the bourgeois and intellectual levels, and not even that of the better peasants, having at the head persons who had previously been found in the extreme socialist organizations from Petrograd”. Their anger started from the position of the Country Council on the agrarian issue – the expropriation of the estates and the appropriation of the peasants.

The memoir of the great owners was presented to King Ferdinand in Iași on March 6, 1918, personally by P. Sinadino. So, the Country Council, after being attacked by the left extreme (the Bolsheviks) as a bourgeois and counterrevolutionary, was now attacked by the right, as Maximalist and Bolshevik. On March 27, 1918, the famous council meeting took place in Chișinău, which voted for the Union of Bessarabia with Romania under certain conditions<sup>18</sup>.

The first part was also attended by A. Marghiloman, the Prime Minister of Romania, who read the Romanian Government’s statement, which suggests the idea of uniting the Romanian province to the east of the Pruth with the country, recognizing the preservation of the integrity of Bessarabia. Then he showed that

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<sup>18</sup> General M.C. Schina, *Pe marginea Unirei. Basarabia ianuarie 1918 – iunie 1919, în Basarabia – pământ românesc, Antologie*, vol. I, Serebria Publishing House, Chișinău 2017, p.747-750. See also: Mihai Trașcă, *op.cit.*, p. 27

the unification of Bessarabia must be done with the preservation of the local peculiarities of this country.

The council of the country in its present composition will only remain to solve the agrarian issue, according to the needs of the people. The idea of unification was resumed in the discussions that took place in Bucharest on March 22, during the visit of I. Inculeț, Pantelimon Halippa and D. Ciucurencu.

In Chișinău, on March 26, a meeting was held attended by A. Marghiloman – Minister of War, Hârjeu, Inculeț, local directors and C. Stere, doctor P. Cazacu and V. Cădere, the occasion for the meeting in the next day of the Country Council in a public hearing to rule on the fate of the province. At the March 27 meeting, voting Bessarabia's union with the country, voted for the Union: 86 deputies, 3 against, 36 abstained and 13 deputies absent.

Inculeț informed the outcome of the vote of the Country Council, after which he invited Marghiloman<sup>19</sup> to the room, to whom he communicated the result of the vote and asked if he accepted the conditions of the Union. The enthusiasm covered the whole of Moldova. The promulgation of the Union's act by the King followed, through the Official Gazette of August 8/10 1918.

On April 3, the Country Councils elected Constantin Stere as president and a new General Council of Directors (the Third Directorate). Two members were then elected in the Bucharest government: I. Inculeț și D. Ciucurencu. The Board of Directors has developed an activity program to pacify Bessarabia, but could not be applied because at the end of June. A. Marghiloman decreed a siege in Bessarabia and appointed Genral Arthur Văitoianu, general commissioner for all of Bessarabia. Văitoianu was responsible for the army acquisitions, but also for police and censorship.

The Country Council dissolved the Moldovan army that was no longer necessary, and switched to the choice of the agrarian commission and the constitutional commission. The state of siege introduced by the Marghiloman government is in flagrant contradiction with the conditions of the Union. A group led by Cijevski, N. Alexandri, Păscăluță, Cristi and others protested demanding to raise the state of siegel ensuring citizen freedoms; restricting the rights of gendarmes; recruitment of remote officials; the normal functioning of the courts. Through these protests, the group gave fuel to the Union's opponents, who, under the slogan "annexation, fornication, betrayal" plotted against the Union. However, under the influence of the presence of the Romanian Army, as of February 1918, robberies and transgressions ceased, the order returning to normal in Bessarabia. This allowed the siege to be lifted.

By a manifesto addressed to the people on April 22, 1918, the Board of Directors announced that "all the freedoms acquired through the revolution remained untouched, because the parliament remained - Country Council and

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Mihai Trașcă, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

government – The Council of Directors. The County Council remains in operation until the problem of the land and the other things has been resolved as the interests of the inhabitants”.<sup>20</sup>

The extraordinary session of the Country Councils was closed until the completion of the work of the Agrarian and Constitutional Committees. Both Committees began their work in April 1918. Thus, the chairman of the Agrarian Commission and its soul is Anton Crihan, who becomes the father of the agrarian reform. The Constitutional Commission will have as chairman V. Bâtcă.

When the Agrarian Committee concluded its work, the Extraordinary Meeting of the Country Councils was convened on November 27/December 10, 1918. After the vote of the draft Agrarian Reform Act, Anton Crihan's work, without questioning the constitutional issue (the report of the Constitutional Committee), as the assembly was animated by the intention to renounce the conditions of the Union, the Country Council voted the following motion: "Following the union with Romania – mother of Bucovina, Transylvania, Banat and the Hungarian lands inhabited by Romanians in the Danube and Tisa, the Country Council declares that Bessarabia renounces the conditions of union stipulated in the act of March 27, being confident that in Romania all Romanians are assured in the future a clean democratic regime."

By solving the agrarian problem and by abandoning the elaboration of a new Constitution, which in the newly created conditions is no longer justified, the Country Council declared the unconditional unification of Bessarabia with "Mother-Romania". The decision was signed by Pantelimon Halippa as president, V. Bâtcă and G. Buruiană as vice-presidents, and A. Scobiola as secretary.

Following this vote, the County Council dissolves and the Elected Board of Directors resigns.<sup>21</sup>

In the autumn of the same year, on 1918, on November 28, Bucovina united with the country without conditions, and on 1 December, in Alba Iulia, through the unification of Transylvania, ended 100 years ago, ended 100 years ago, the process of uniting all the Romanians and building up the Great Romania. A year later, the Romanian Parliament ratified the acts of unification of Bessarabia, Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș, Banat and Bukovina at a solemn meeting of 29 December 1919, so that the for Peace Conference in Paris in 1919-1920, remained only to establish the law, which the Romanian people had accomplished in a profound democratic spirit by unanimous expression in the Plebiscites of National Assembly in Chișinău, Cernăuți and Alba Iulia, the creation of Great Romania and the enrollment on the map of Europe of the whole Roman state in its natural boundaries.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Jipa Rotaru and Luiza Lazăr Rotaru, *Sfatul Țării- Primul Parlament al Basarabiei și Unirea cu Țara*, în Document. Buletinul Arhivelor Militare Române XV – nr. 2 (56)/2012, p. 26-31.