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BESSARABIA: FROM PRONICE TO AUTONOMY AND PART OF **ROMANIA (1917–1918)**

Bessarabia entered into the Russian empire in 1812. Bessarabia were inhabited not the Moldovans only, but the Ukrainians too, in Khotyn district firstly, representatives of others nationalities, even Russians including, after the empire’s conquest. But the Ukrainians were the second largest group in the region. Romanians (Moldavians) named themselves 58% populations of the region in 1908.

80% of the population was engaged in agriculture. Bessarabia population did not know serfdom. But the largest estates belong to Russians. Landlords owned by 40% of the agricultural land [5. p. 5]. One peasant off five the peasants were landless, one off five have half *desiatyna* of land only.

After the February revolution in the Russia in 1917, Moldova Progressive Party, Moldavian National Party (MNP) appeared in Bessarabia, reunited later. The program of it demanded to grant Bessarabia “the widest administrative, court of justice, church, school and economy autonomy”, but leaving it “from now on connected with Russia on the laws base corresponding common interests”. The program never mentioned Romania or Romanians. During spring and summer Moldavian national committees

were created into the troops of the Romanian front and in the South of Ukraine.

The Soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies appeared in Bessarabia from March, later-peasantry Soviets. The land question was main for the majority of the population. So, the peasants began to capture the lord lands and estates. II-nd peasant congress of Bessarabia decided to transfer the land question into the authority of village, district, gubernia and All-Russian committees.

To some point the workers took part in self-organization too, new trade unions appeared. Majority of them were the rail workers. Using strikes, workers obtained rising of salary, even to 50–75%.

In that time in the Russian state existed food problem. The Provisional Government established a grain monopoly in March 1917, whereby all surplus was compulsorily purchased by the state at fixed prices. The split between consumers and producers was between town and country, as well as between regions- additional factor of the revolution, taking into account the problems with provisions in Romania also.

A congress of popular teachers of Bessarabia, that was taking part from April 10 toward 13 decided: in every popular school teaching must be carrying out by the native language of the pupils [5, p. 6]. MNP demanded to introduce Moldavian (Romanian) into schools, government and court. This party demanded to serve in church by Moldavian and that Moldavians must be senior in the church. They proposed introduce native language into the army, the Russian – for the communication with highest commanders only. These ideas and demands reveal results: the Moldavian/Romanian began to sound into schools and churches. Though Moldavian teachers rejected in this case the Romanian text-books and to study the Romanian language instead of the Moldavian one [6, p. 102]. Central committee of Moldavians-soldiers directly demanded from the Kishinev gubernia to Moldovanize schools.

A congress of the Soviets and the Bessarabia gubernia congress took part in May of 1917. The last of those declared to abolish private property on the land. To use the land may those who work on it. The peasantry committees of Izmail district were oriented onto Odessa, Khotyn district- toward Kyiv.

Bolsheviks strived to influent the events too and had penetrated into the existing Soviets. Kishinev soviet of the workers and soldier's deputies with chairs of committees of the military units stationed the town decided to take power to itself and others Soviets in 22 November. Of course, they recognized the decision of the II-nd All-Russian congress also [2, p. 184].

In 7 November 1917 the Military-Moldavian congress decided to create the Regional Soviet (Sfatul Țării) and proclaimed autonomy of Moldova, transferring of all lands without payment to peasantry.

Ion Inkulets was elected the chairman of Sfatul Țării in 21 November. In his speech he programmed Bessarabia as a democratic republic. The soci-

alist-revolutionaries insisted on the federative composition of future Russian republic [5, p. 104]. A chair of the Soviet general directorates- an executive organ was elected Petry Yerhan.

During the last months of 1917 in Bessarabia were created the detachments of the Red Guards and some Moldavian national units.

On 2 December of 1917 Sfatul Țării declared: “Bessarabia... is proclaimed Moldavia People Republik, which is entering as equal member into united Federative Russian Democratic Republic, before convoke People Gathering Moldavian Republic...” [3, p. 77]. Sfatul Țării planned in the near future to convene Moldavian People Assembly. The land must be redistributed to the peasantry divided equally, but after the special law only. Before it, peasants may take on lease the landlord’ land. Sfatul Țării declared some democratic liberties too, equality all nationalities. These land affaires concern 1918–1919 years only.

A neighbouring Romania concluded peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary empires, and was strongly suffered from the war and occupation. Its government was transmitted to Yassy.

In some towns of Bessarabia, in Kishinev local soviets recognized the Soviet power with its center in Petrograd. A *revcom* of Romanian front took power to themselves. So, new power appeared in Bessarabia, protests of Sfatul Țării were neglected [6, p. 105]. The peasants continued to seize landlord’s lands.

In this situation Sfatul Țării was not sure in its Moldavian troops. This body gave its executive organ freedom of actions with aim to take order in Bessarabia. This meant even to lead the Romanian troops into the country. The socialists and representatives of national minorities in Sfatul Țării rejected categorically possible an invasion of Romanian troops in Bessarabia. These politicians pointed on the danger of occupation by these forces their Motherland [7].

The Romanian advance began in the end of 1917 and continued in January of the next year. It was not met with greeting. The Russian Commander-in Chief of the front Scherbachev supported Romanian invasion and began to retreat troops from the Russian positions. The Romanians advanced by 6 divisions. This situation led to crisis in Sfatul Țării.

Soviets defended Kishinev from January 10 to 13, but retreated under the pressure of bigger Romanian forces. In official statement about the arriving Romanian troops was said, that Romanians were met by Sfatul Țării, Peasant committee, Moldavian committee, sailors and Moldavian troops. The aims of Romanians are to protect railways, to guard storehouse and provision bought in Bessarabia and nothing more. The inhabitants were called to preserve public order [1, p. 80–81]. This statement was supported by Sfatul Țării too, but in 24 January 1918.

In reality, Romanian troops persecuted members of anti-Romanian actions, Bolsheviks, socialists-revolutionaries also. The inhabitants of

Kishinev, later-inhabitants of others Bessarabia villages and towns were perceived as they were occupying with all consequences toward them. The executions without judges began. The trade-unions went into underground.

After the Romanian capture of Kishinev, 13 January the Soviet Russia dissolved its relations with Romania, because it opened war actions against its official statement.

From Romanian soldiers were creating units for the return of landlords' lands. This was not met with joy by peasants. The leadership of Sfatul Țării realized the consequences of Romanian invasion in Bessarabia for themselves and hatred by majority of population toward them [7]. The Ukrainian part of Bessarabia did not see itself in the Romanian state. So, Inlalets and Yerhan sent telegram to Romanian government and Scherbachev with protest against invasion.

III-nd Peasantry congress of Bessarabia unanimously took resolution on 19 January 1918 that "all power must belong to Soviets of workers, soldiers and peasant's deputies". Part of them was later shot by Romanian troops, some of them were members of Sfatul Țării [4, p. 64–65].

The Romanian troops waged battles with Soviet troops and their supporters until middle of February 1918. Before it, 26 January the same year at the session of Sfatul Țării was decided to reunite with Romania. In Ukrainian part of Bessarabia this act was rejected by creating in Beltsy revolutionary center for defense of Bessarabia. Ukrainians from that part of Bessarabia delegated their representatives to the Ukrainian Central Rada. Ukraine pretended on the weapon and property of the Romanian front.

Sfatul Țării had not possibility to wage war against Romanian troops, because some of its members were strongly supporters of the reunification with Romania, Inkulets including. Some subunits of Romanian front waged battles against Romanian troops with support of local inhabitants. On 5 March the agreement was signed between the Reds from the Soviet Ukraine and Romanian side about restoration of peace. 9 March the agreement about liberation the territory of Bessarabia from Romanian troops was confirmed by the Romanian government. The Romanian troops must leave Bessarabia in two months. The situation must be settled with the representatives of the Entente too [2, p. 321–322]. But this agreement was not realized after Brest peace conclusion with Central Rada. The former tried to defend its interests in Bessarabia also as well as others Ukrainian government, but for them it was secondary question.

Sfatul Țării turned out in full dependance from Romanians. So, according of its Declaration from 27 March 1918 Moldavian People Republic was united with Romania according principles which had traits of some autonomy. But at the second session of Sfatul Țării on 26 November 1918 it was decided to reject any autonomy and to reunite with "Great Romania" [6. p. 110]. The others conditions from 27 March were annihilated. Sfatul Țării disbanded itself on 10 December of 1918.

So, we may say that national, but not social, revolution was to some extent successful in Bessarabia for Moldavians/Romanians, but not for all others nationalities of the country.

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