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The Establishment of North-Eastern Borders of Romania: International and Legal Support for Incorporation of the Bessarabia Lands into the Kingdom (end of 1919 — the 1st half of 1920)

The foreign policy of Romania throughout the first decades of the 20th century was neither unplanned nor spontaneous. It was pursued by the Kingdom's leadership within the framework of the idea of establishing the "Greater Romania". Generally, the policy of official Bucharest during the war period and the period of the formation of the Versailles system of international relations was concentrated on defending national interests and gaining the status of a regional leader in the Balkans. The purpose of the article is to analyse the political struggle around the "Bessarabia" issue at the Paris Peace Conference throughout December 1919 —

March 1920. Indeed, exactly this time frame became decisive for the Romanian Kingdom in terms of the recognition by the international community of its sole priority to rule Bessarabia. Great amount of relevant information and materials enabled authors of the article to analyse a comparatively short-term period of proceedings of the Paris Conference as it clearly demonstrates the tense atmosphere of the process of creating a new geopolitical map of post-war Europe. As a whole, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's activities in solving the "Bessarabia" problem had positive outcomes for Romania. On March 12th, the National Assembly directed the decision on this issue to the government in Bucharest. Taking into account preliminary conclusions and "yearning" of Bessarabia population the Allies in general declared for the reunification of Bessarabia and Romania. At the same time, they demanded that official Bucharest guarantee legitimate interests of Bessarabia on the same conditions as for other parts of the Kingdom.

Key words: Paris Peace Treaty, "Bessarabia" issue, the Entente, diplomacy, National Assembly, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Romania.

Формування північно-східних кордонів Румунії: міжнародно-правове забезпечення інкорпорації бессарабських земель до складу Королівства (кінець 1919-го — перша половина 1920-го р.)

Зовнішня політика Румунії впродовж перших десятиліть 20 ст. не була випадковою чи спонтанною. Вона реалізовувалася керівництвом Королівства в межах ідеї створення «Великої Румунії». Загалом політика Бухаресту в роки війни й у часи формування Версальської системи міжнародних відносин стала показовою в аспекті відстоювання національних інтересів і завоювання статусу регіонального лідера на Балканах. Метою статті є аналіз політичної боротьби навколо «бессарабського» питання на Паризькій мирній конференції впродовж грудня 1919 — березня 1920 р. Фактично саме цей проміжок часу став вирішальним для королівської Румунії у питанні визнання міжнародною спільнотою її виключного права на володіння Бессарабією. Зважаючи на значний обсяг матеріалу, автори обрали відносно не тривалий період роботи конференції в Парижі, оскільки він переконливо демонструє, у якій напруженій атмосфері формувалася нова геополітична карта повоєнної Європи. У цілому діяльність А. Вайди-Воеводи у вирішенні «бессарабської» проблеми мала позитивні результати для Румунії. 12 березня Верховна Рада направила бухарестському уряду своє рішення з цього питання. Враховуючи попередні висновки та «прагнення» населення краю, союзники в цілому висловлювалися на користь возз'єднання Бессарабії з Румунією. Водночас вони наполягали на тому, щоб Бухарест забезпечив законні інтереси краю на тих самих умовах, що й у інших частинах Королівства.

Ключові слова: Паризька мирна конференція, «бессарабське питання», Антанта, дипломатія, Верховна Рада, А. Вайда-Воевода, Румунія.

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During January 1919 — January 1920, the states that won the First World War held the Paris Peace Conference, which was called to establish the terms of peace concluding a number of treaties with the defeated countries. Strategically, it concerned redistribution of spheres of political-economic and military influence and creation of a new political map of the world and Europe. Alongside with such "major" states as France, Great Britain, Italy and the USA, diplomats of other states were present in the French capital. Among others, there was the Romanian

representation which consistently proved its right to be heard at the Conference. The activity of the royal delegation was aimed at getting the Supreme Council's legal confirmation for joining a number of territories, in particular Bessarabia, to Romania.

In general, the "Bessarabia issue" was reflected in the publications of the participants of those events such as Alexandru Marghilomann²⁴⁸ and Vasile Tilea²⁴⁹. The military and political situation around the problem of Bessarabia's territorial belonging is described in the papers by Sergei Nazaria²⁵⁰ and Vladlen Vinogradov²⁵¹. It is worth mentioning the research

²⁴⁸ Marghiloman A. Note Politice 1897–1924. Vol. V: 1920–1924. București: Editura Institutului de Arte Grafice «EMINESCU», 1927. 244 p.

²⁴⁹ Tilea V.V. Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. 250 p.

²⁵⁰ Nazariya S. M. Vopros o Bessarabii v sovetsko-rumynskikh otnosheniyakh v nachale 20-kh godov i popytki yego mifologizatsii v rumynskoy istoriografii // Vestnik Dagestanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2013, vyp. 4. S. 39–47.

²⁵¹ Za balkanskimi frontami Pervoy mirovoy voyny, otv. red. V. N. Vinogradov, Moscow: Indrik, 2002, 504 s.

done by Izyaslav Levit, whose monograph deals with this problem²⁵². A number of other research papers also concerned studying Romania's foreign policy during this period²⁵³.

While analysing historiographical works of both Western European and Romanian researchers on the foreign policy aspects of the struggle for Bessarabia in 1919–1920, it should be noted that they are quite wide-ranging. In particular, the following names of scholars should be mentioned: Svetlana Suveica²⁵⁴, Raoul Bossy²⁵⁵, Erik Goldstein²⁵⁶, Alexandru Burian²⁵⁷, Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu²⁵⁸, Ioan Scurtu²⁵⁹, Armand Goșu²⁶⁰, Wilhelmus P. van Meurs²⁶¹, Alberto Bacșiani²⁶², Virgil Mândăcanu and Daniela Vacarciuc²⁶³, Marin Stănescu²⁶⁴, Ion Oprea²⁶⁵ and others²⁶⁶.

At the same time, some aspects of the problem remained beyond attention of the researchers, in particular it concerns activities of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod at the Paris Conference.

Thus, the aim of the given paper is to analyse activities of the Romanian Prime Minister at the Paris Peace Conference during December 1919 — March 1920, which was purposed at the upholding of Romania's legal right to Bessarabia. In addition, the position of the great states concerning

the deployment of military-political forces in Central and Eastern Europe, is also analysed in the article.

This article appears to be a logical continuation of a number of the authors' research papers on the "Bessarabian problem" during the period of formation of the Versailles System of international relations²⁶⁷. As their strategic purpose, the authors have chosen presentation of the Romania's foreign policy activities as a coordinated and balanced policy which was aimed at the approval of the kingdom as an independent state power in Central-Eastern Europe.

In the second half of 1919, the foreign policy situation for Romania remained rather complicated. The combination of internal and external conditions seemed to "put an end" to official Bucharest's ambitious plans to create "Greater Romania" and to finally secure the status of "Europe's gendarme in the East". However, the Romanian leadership managed to get out of the "stalemate" situation. In November 1919, parliamentary elections were held, which resulted in the change of the government Cabinet. On the 1st of December, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod became Prime Minister. According to the memoirs of Romanian diplomat Vasile Tilea, the new state leadership defined international activities as a priority direction for the development of the Kingdom²⁶⁸. Its main

²⁵² Levit I. E. Bessarabian question in the context of international relations (1919–1920). Paris Peace Conference, Tiraspol: Litera, 2012. 240 s.

²⁵³ Bessarabiya na perekrestke Yevropeyskoy diplomatii. Dokumenty i materialy, Vinogradov V. N., Yereshchenko M. D., Semenova L. Ye., Pokivaylova T. A. Moscow, Indrik, 1996. 380 s.; Problemy vnutri- i vneshnepoliticheskoy istorii Rumynii novogo i noveyshego vremeni, otv. red. S. A. Madiyevskiy. Kishinev, Shtiintse, 1988. 229 s.

²⁵⁴ Suveica S. «Russkoe Delo» and the «Bessarabian Cause»: The Russian Political Emigrés and the Bessarabians [IOS Mitteilung]. 2014, № 64. 53 p.

²⁵⁵ Bossy R. Amintiri din viața diplomatică (1918–1940). Vol. 1. București: Editura Humanitas, 1993. 340 p.

²⁵⁶ Goldstein E., *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916–1920*. New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1991. P. XIX, 307.

²⁵⁷ Burian A. Geopolitica lumii contemporane. Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2003. 356 p.

²⁵⁸ Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Bătălia diplomatică pentru Basarabia. 1918–1940*, Iași: Editura Junimea, 1991. 286 p.; Dobrinescu V.-Fl., Tompea D. *România la cele două Conferințe de Pace de la Paris (1919–1920, 1946–1947) Un studiu comparativ*, Focșani, 1996. 168 p.

²⁵⁹ Scurtu I. *Istoria României în anii 1918–1940. Evoluția regimului politic de la democrație la dictatură*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1996. 428 p.

²⁶⁰ Goșu A. *Recunoașterea internațională a unirii Basarabiei cu România*. Ioan Pelivan la Conferința de pace de la Paris (1919–1920) *Revista istorică*, 1993. № 9–10. P. 847–859.

²⁶¹ Wilhelmus P. van Meurs, *Chestiunea Basarabiei în istoriografia comunistă*. Chișinău: ARC, 1996. 528 p.

²⁶² Bacșiani A. *La difficile unione: La Bessarabia e la Grande Romania 1918–1940*, Pref. de Keith Hitchins; 2da ed. ampliata e rivista, Roma: Aracne, 2007. 414 p.

²⁶³ Mândăcanu V. Daniela Vacarciuc, *Ideea națională a românilor — Reîntregirea Țării*. Chișinău: Pontos, 2016. 236 p.

²⁶⁴ Marin C. Stănescu, *Armata română și unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România. 1917–1919*, Constanța: Ex Ponto, 1999. 244 p.

²⁶⁵ Ion M. O. *România și Imperiul Rus. 1900–1924*. Vol. 1, București: Editura Albatros, 1998. 339 p.

²⁶⁶ Clark C. U. *Bessarabia, Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, New York: Dood, Mead & Company, 1927; Copyright 2011 University of Washington. All Rights Reserved, in https://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text_archive/clark/mobile.html#C0 (Accessed on 23.06.2023).

²⁶⁷ Popenko Ya. Rumunskaya dyplomatia u borotbi za Bessarabiiu na Paryzkii myrnii konferentsii (sichen — traven 1919 r.) *Kyivski istorichni studii*, 2017. № 2 (5). P. 10–17; Popenko Ya. & V. Rumunskaya dyplomatia v borotbi za Bessarabiiu na Paryzkii myrnii konferentsii (sichen — serpen 1919 r.) *Rusyn. Kyshynev*, 2018, Tom 53, № 3, s. 152–171; Popenko Ya. *Politychna borotba za Bessarabiiu na Paryzkii myrnii konferentsii uprodozh travnia — serpnia 1919 r.* Eminak, 2018. № 1 (21), T. 2, s. 36–41; Popenko Ya., "Bessarabske pytannia" na Paryzkii myrnii konferentsii (osin — zyma 1919 r.) *Skhid. Seria: Istorychni nauky*, 2018. № 4 (156). P. 56–60; Popenko Ya. «Ya ne khochu tut zhaduvaty mynule. Moia rol — zainiatysia siohodenniam ta dyvytysia u maibutnie»: diialnist A. Vaydy-Voyevody na Paryzkii konferentsii (hruden 1919 r. — berezen 1920 r.) *Yevropeyski istorichni studii*. Kyiv, № 12. 2019. P. 136–155.

²⁶⁸ Tilea V.V. *Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920*. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 33.

integral part was signing all necessary treaties in order to “save the country from dreadful results of possible interruption of relations with the Allies”²⁶⁹. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod considered recognition of Romania’s official right to Bessarabia by the major states as one of the main tasks of the Romanian diplomacy in Paris²⁷⁰.

Emphasizing the Kingdom’s strategic diplomatic direction to keep good relationship with the Entente Allies, the Romanian government signed the Saint-Germain Peace Treaty with Austria on the 9th of December. This agreement became a compromise solution for the situation in the region. In particular, the Duchy of Bukovina remained a part of the Kingdom, but the Allies had a right to control the actions of Romanian authorities concerning observance of national minorities’ rights in the region. The Romanians also had to ensure the freedom of transit and economic relations²⁷¹. In addition, Bucharest leadership promised to withdraw troops from Hungary. In their turn, the Allied states formally confirmed the Kingdom’s rights to the new lands.

On December 29, the Romanian Parliament, in a solemn atmosphere, approved the laws on joining Bessarabia and Bukovina²⁷². Thus, it marked the legislative step to consolidate the state within “Greater Romania”. Meanwhile, official Bucharest received some positive signals from Western Allies. In particular, the “Russian problem” was discussed at the meeting of the Entente leadership on December 12th in London. Among different options for its solution, the meeting carefully considered a possibility of creating an “isolation barrier” for Bolshevik Russia; it would include giving up military aggression against Russia, refusal to sign any agreements with the Bolsheviks, and favor of strengthening relations with the states bordering Russia²⁷³. Considering that the proposal was made by Georges Clemenceau, Romania received a real chance, eventually, to acquire official international recognition of its new state borders.

Eventually, 1920 had to become a year for making final conclusions of the Paris Conference, as further prolongation of solving political and territorial problems could have caused another crisis on the European continent. Understanding these trends and moods of the European diplomacy, official Bucharest had

significantly revived its own foreign policy activities to promote and secure its national interests.

In January 1920, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod arrived in the French capital. The politician considered his main task to be fulfilled by all means, was to gain official recognition of Bessarabia’s joining to the Kingdom, from the conference’s leadership²⁷⁴. His main hopes relied on supportive attitudes of France, which backed Romanian aspirations from the very beginning of the conference. However, France’s unconditional support was not absolutely assured either. According to Vasile Tilea’s memoirs, official Bucharest’s evasion from withdrawal troops from Hungary, as it was required by the Supreme Council of the Conference, eventually caused the Allies to seriously consider denying the Romanians their territorial aspirations and “neutralizing the country, depriving it of military and economic support”²⁷⁵.

Under these conditions, the Romanian politician was invited to the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Allies to be held on January 20th. Among other points, the meeting was to discuss Question #5 “Affairs of Romania and Hungary” and Question #6 “Bessarabia Issue”. Their sequence clearly signaled to Alexandru Vaida-Voevod that he would have to answer both questions because their solutions were automatically interconnected. At the beginning of the meeting, due to the telegram of President Woodrow Wilson, the leadership of the Conference had to inform about the measures the Allies had taken regarding compulsion of Romania to withdraw its troops from Hungary²⁷⁶.

At the insistence of Georges Clemenceau, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod had to report progress himself. Recognizing a relatively weak international position of the Kingdom, the politician replied that his government fully agreed that the military contingents had to be withdrawn as soon as possible. Moreover, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod claimed that, according to the obligations of Romania to the Allies, the evacuation had already begun. According to him, only some technical problem emerged (railway transport — *authors*), and its solution could take several weeks²⁷⁷. According to Vaida-Voevod, the real date of final withdrawal of the troops from Hungary could be March 1st.

²⁶⁹ Problemy vnutri- i vneshnepoliticheskoi istorii Rumynii novogo i noveishego vremeni, otv. red. S. A. Madiyevskiy, Kishinev, Shtiintse, 1988. P. 200.

²⁷⁰ Tilea V.V. Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 33.

²⁷¹ Tsimmerman M. A. Ocherki novogo mezhdunarodnogo prava. Posobie k lektsiiam, Praga, Plamia, 1924. C. 91.

²⁷² Stafi I. Spovedaniile Basarabiei. Chișinău: Bons Offices, 2007. P. 75.

²⁷³ Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939, Edited by E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, Vol. II, 1919. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office. 1948. P. 746.

²⁷⁴ Marghiloman A. Note Politice 1897–1924. Vol. V: 1920–1924. București: Editura Institutului de Arte Grafice «EMINESCU», 1927. P. 9.

²⁷⁵ Tilea V.V. Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 30.

²⁷⁶ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Volume IX. Washington, 1946. P. 911.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

However, David Lloyd George reminded that the Supreme Council of the Conference had demanded from Romania to withdraw its troops in July 1919, but Bucharest ignored those appeals. He also stressed that in the past Romania had managed to quickly find technical means for occupying Hungarian lands, for requisition of food, livestock and property on the occupied territories. According to the English representative, such an attitude towards the requests of the Allies, in case of a new war, could fully deprive Romania of support from the Entente. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod responded to the criticism of David Lloyd George in a diplomatic way, remarking: "I do not want to focus on the past here. My role is to deal with the present and to look into the future"²⁷⁸.

According to Vaida-Voevod, as a result of the German-Austro-Hungarian occupation during the war, Romania was on the brink of a national catastrophe, so all claims from the side of the Allies concerning official Bucharest's violation of agreements were groundless. Additionally, he noted that the position of the Kingdom was complicated by its territorial neighborhood with the USSR. In his words, "we are neighbors of the Bolsheviks, and we must live, not philosophize"²⁷⁹.

At the same time, adhering to diplomatic manners, the leader of the Romanian government mentioned that, "unfortunately, there was some misunderstanding between the Supreme Council and Romania, which should be avoided in the future"²⁸⁰. He insisted on the Romania's coalition partners to more carefully assess the real situation in the region. The politician attracted attention of the European leaders to the activities of the Hungarian Admiral Miklós Horthy, which, according to his words, had a clear anti-Romanian orientation. In his address, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod asked the Supreme Council of the Conference to take all necessary measures "for the Hungarians not to attack us after signing the peace treaty"²⁸¹. Further, in his speech, the Prime Minister directly addressed English representatives, asking them to be more loyal to Romania, which badly suffered during the World War²⁸².

Summarizing the speech, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod noted that he himself issued an order on evacuation of the royal troops and sincerely hoped for its fulfilment. At the same time, he warned: "Gentlemen, I do not want to promise anything I am unable to do[...]. I appeal to the Supreme Council again to take all possible measures for us not to become an object of the attack of the Hungarians in the future"²⁸³. Despite his emotional appeal to the Conference, both Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George repeatedly insisted that the Kingdom went on ignoring the Allies' demand to withdraw forces from Hungary. Georges Clemenceau declared bluntly that the Romanians themselves were provoking future aggression against them. In his turn, David Lloyd George, who was well aware of the internal affairs of the Kingdom, mentioned that in Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's own aspiration to fulfill the obligations before the Allies, he faced counteraction from the Romanian oppositionally-inclined "military party"²⁸⁴. This party demanded for all territories occupied by the Romanians to remain in the Kingdom, and thus to give up fulfilment the demands of the Supreme Council. Realizing that continuing debates on the problem would just finally "irritate" the Allies, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod had no other option but to fully agree with their requirements²⁸⁵. As a result, according to Georges Clemenceau, "the incident was over".

The problem of territorial belonging of Bessarabia also caused brisk discussions. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod was invited to speak again. He reminded the participants of the meeting about the historical connection of the region with the Kingdom and emphasized that on December 29, 1919, the population of the region had voluntarily voted to join Romania²⁸⁶. Responding to Georges Clemenceau's question about what Romania really wanted from the Conference concerning this problem, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod noted that he did not want to tire participants with long appeals, and thus he had asked the Conference to recognize the "de-jure" right of the Kingdom to Bessarabia. There is little need in describing the contents of the debates on the question that arose during the meeting

²⁷⁸ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Volume IX. Washington, 1946. P. 912.

²⁷⁹ Mitrasca M. Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers, New York, Algors Publishing. 2002. P. 93.

²⁸⁰ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Vol. IX. Washington, 1946. P. 913.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid. P. 914.

²⁸⁴ Mitrasca M. Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers, New York, Algors Publishing. 2002. P. 95.

²⁸⁵ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Volume IX. Washington, 1946. P. 914.

²⁸⁶ Mitrasca M. Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers, New York, Algors Publishing. 2002. P. 93.

of the Supreme Council. Their essence was logical and obvious — the leadership of the Conference immediately tied together the Romanian-Hungarian conflict, the military presence of the Royal Army in Hungary against the requirements of the Allies, and the “Bessarabia question”. Georges Clemenceau, who was more or less loyal to Romania, noted: “We strive to help, not punish you”²⁸⁷. David Lloyd George was more categorical about Romania’s territorial aspirations. He explicitly stated that the Conference waited for Romanian withdrawal from Hungary before deciding that Bessarabia would be recognized as a part of Romania. To the question of the Romanian representative whether the Conference would recognize the claims on Bessarabia only from the date of the final withdrawal of the troops from Hungary, Georges Clemenceau answered affirmatively²⁸⁸. He said directly: “On my behalf, and I think I can speak on behalf of France, I can assume that we are ready to recognize the right of Romania to Bessarabia”²⁸⁹. Finally, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod thanked the participants for giving him an opportunity to speak at the meeting, assured that he would do his best as to the withdrawal of the Royal troops from Hungary, and expressed hope for the positive solution of the Bessarabia problem.

In conclusion of the 20 January 1920 meeting, the Supreme Council decided to take into consideration the speech given by the Romanian Prime Minister but not to arrive at decision on the “Bessarabia problem” until the Kingdom had fulfilled the requirements of the Conference. The participants agreed to accept a preliminary decision of André Tardieu’s Commission, which unanimously expressed the opinion that this territory should be joined to Romania²⁹⁰.

While doing justice to the Romanian Prime Minister in fighting for the right to Bessarabia, it should be mentioned that it was hardly the most important issue for the leadership of the Paris Conference. Having solved all problems concerning defeated Germany and its allies, the United Kingdom and France inevitably collided with each other in their own political and economic aspirations to save/expand their own positions on the European continent. Under these difficult conditions of the diplomatic maneuvering between Paris and London,

Alexandru Vaida-Voevod had to defend the interests of the Romanian Kingdom. Hoping for support of France in official Bucharest’s aspiration to formally secure the new lands, the Romanian politician attempted to change the attitude of Great Britain as well. For this very purpose, he paid a visit to the United Kingdom from 28 January to 3 February. The visit of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod to London was positively elucidated by the local press. Conformable information was published in local editions of the “Daily Chronicle”, “The Times”, “Manchester Guardian” (29 January), “Morning Post” (30 January) and others²⁹¹.

It is worth mentioning that Alexandru Vaida-Voevod’s visit to the English capital, his meetings with the top leadership of the country and local trade officials and industrial circles were not done in vain. Vasile Tilea noted that the Romanian Prime Minister “managed to remove the largest problem to consolidate relations between our country and one of its major allies”²⁹². At the same time, despite established friendly relations between official London and official Bucharest, the British government continued to insist on the Romanians to comply with the demands of Western Allies, in particular: implementation of the electoral reform, observance of the national minorities’ rights, and, of course, withdrawal of occupational troops from Hungary. As an illustration, the meeting of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod and David Lloyd George on January 30th may be given, when the latter drew his colleague’s attention to the following aspect: “You should aspire to organize the recognition of minorities in a proper way to receive moral credit [*help — authors*] from England and America”²⁹³.

The Romanian Prime Minister’s hesitation in complying with the Allies’ recommendations eventually led to the denial of a written confirmation to recognize Bessarabia as a territorial belonging of Romania, at the regular session of the Supreme Council of the Conference on February 26th, 1920. The UK Foreign Secretary George Curzon commented on it with a brief explanation: “As long as Romanian troops remain in Hungary, the Council does not want to recognize Romania’s rights to Bessarabia”²⁹⁴.

At about the same time, the Soviet foreign policy department intensified its work to put an end

²⁸⁷ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Volume IX. Washington, 1946. P. 916.

²⁸⁸ Tilea V. V. Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 93.

²⁸⁹ Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Editor Joseph V. Fuller, Volume IX. Washington, 1946. P. 917.

²⁹⁰ Mitrasca M. Moldova: A Romanian Province under Russian Rule. Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers, New York, Algor Publishing. 2002. P. 95.

²⁹¹ Tilea V.V. Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 38–41.

²⁹² Ibid. P. 45.

²⁹³ Ibid. P. 57.

²⁹⁴ Levit I.E. Bessarabskii vopros v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii (1919–1920 gg.). Parizhskaia mirnaia konferentsiia. Tiraspol: Litera, 2012. P. 147.

to the economic blockade, to define the boundaries of its own state and, finally, to begin the process of the revival of the country. Our research does not involve the analysis of RSFRR's diplomatic activities during this time; this aspect was studied in detail by other scholars²⁹⁵. However, the Soviet "diplomatic history" cannot be ignored as it directly relates to the topic of our research. Moreover, in the authors' opinion, the aspiration of the Bolsheviks to hold peace negotiations with Romania caused the Supreme Council of the Entente to speed up the process of legal solution of the Bessarabia problem.

Thus, on February 24th, 1920, the Bolshevik Government on behalf of the RSFRR and the USRR addressed the Kingdom with a formal Diplomatic Note proposing "to enter negotiations in order to regulate mutual relations between the two nations and to establish a peaceful relationship between them, which would be useful and necessary for both states"²⁹⁶. The Russian government represented by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin suggested Romania to solve all problems in the "good will"²⁹⁷ format and asked Bucharest to determine the place and time for the meeting of the representatives of both countries. Already on February 26th, a similar note was handed to Romania on behalf of the Council of People's Commissars of the USRR. It stressed: "The continuation of current abnormal situation has a negative impact on the vital interests of the Romanian and Ukrainian nations". Similarly to the Note of February 24th, the government of Soviet Ukraine expressed confidence that peaceful initiatives would succeed and all "misunderstandings" between the states would be resolved²⁹⁸. This included a set of economic, political, and territorial problems, including "the Bessarabia issue".

Gradual change in the foreign policy positions of the World War winners towards the RSFRR (giving up direct military annexation, gradual promotion of economic cooperation etc.) and the re-formatting of relations between the sides, was taken into consideration by the Romanian political leadership as well, especially since Soviet diplomacy also strove to solve (at least for a while) problematic territorial questions with its neighbors. On March 3rd, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod on behalf of the Supreme Council

of the Ministers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania sent a note addressed to Georgy Chicherin. In it, the politician positively evaluated the initiative of the Soviet diplomacy to start a dialogue between the countries, mentioning that "Romania followed and would continue to follow the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a neighboring country". At the same time, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod emphasized that the Kingdom had completed its national unification thanks to discipline, the sacrifices made by the Romanian Army and the whole nation. In fact, his response to the People's Commissar Chicherin certified that Romania was ready for peaceful consultations aimed at regulation of the territorial problems, but the annexed lands, including Bessarabia, were to remain as a part of the Kingdom. In its turn, the Soviet Foreign Ministry promptly responded to the Romanian note on March 8th. Positively appreciating Romania's consent to the start of negotiations, it was proposed to hold them in Kharkiv. The delegates from the USRR, the RSFRR and Romania had to be present. Instead, the Bucharest government insisted that the meeting should take place in Warsaw²⁹⁹.

At first sight, it could seem that the Kingdom began to determine the vectors of its foreign policy activities independently, but further development of events showed that it was not the case. Only the consent of the Western partners within the military and political coalition (Great Britain, France, and the USA) could officially approve the new Romanian state borders. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod realized the complexity of the situation. That is why he and his supporters considered it was necessary at first "to get the support of the Western states on the normalization" of relations with the RSFRR, and only then to begin direct negotiations on defining the borders between the countries. Negotiations in London held by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, were dealing with these very problems. In his turn, David Lloyd George reminded the Romanian leader that Alexandru Vaida-Voevod had personally committed to withdrawing the troops from Hungary³⁰⁰. The English politician noted in his letter of March 3rd, which was addressed to Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, that the solution of the Bessarabia question in favor

²⁹⁵ Levit I.E. Bessarabskii vopros v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii (1919–1920 gg.). Parizhskaia mirnaia konferentsiia. Tiraspol: Litera, 2012. P. 146–152.

²⁹⁶ Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR: v 24 t. [Foreign Policy Documents of the USSR: 24 v.], redkol. vtorogo toma G. K. Deiev, Moscow, Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo politicheskoy literatury, 1958, T. 2: 1 yanvaria 1919 g. — 30 iyunya 1920 g., 1958. P. 390.

²⁹⁷ Nazariya S. M., Vopros o Bessarabii v sovetsko-rumynskikh otnosheniakh v nachale 20-kh godov i popytki yego mifologizatsii v rumynskoi istoriografii // Vestnik Dagestanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2013, vyp. 4. P. 40.

²⁹⁸ Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR: v 24 t., Moscow, Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo politicheskoy literatury, 1958, T. 2: 1 yanvaria 1919 g. — 30 iyunia 1920 g., 1958. P. 392–393.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. P. 410.

³⁰⁰ Za balkanskimi frontami Pervoy mirovoy voyny, otv. red. V. N. Vinogradov, Moscow, Indrik, 2002. P. 399.

of Romania would depend on it³⁰¹. At the same time, he emphasized once again that, in general, the Allies had come to understanding in the question of the formal recognition of Bessarabia as a part of Romania.

On the other hand, in its foreign policy strategy, the British government aimed to remove the Bolsheviks from power mainly using internal problems in the RSFRR itself, primarily due to considerable economic difficulties and strong internal opposition. Besides, through resumption of trade with Soviet Russia, England strove to resolve its own internal problems and to strengthen its political “presence” in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, the prospects of beginning Romanian-Bolshevik negotiations were perceived by the British diplomacy as an opportunity to restore regular trade in the Danube region, which would enable it to “establish its strong presence in the east and south-east of Europe”³⁰². According to Vasile Tilea, strengthening of England’s position in the region could only be achieved through positioning in the format “Romanian Bessarabia is a guarantee of the Danube navigation”³⁰³.

Meanwhile, France perceived the negotiations less loyally, because in case of their fast and positive completion, the ally of Paris, Warsaw, would find itself face to face with the Bolshevik government. Accordingly, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly opposed beginning of any peaceful negotiations with the government of the RSFRR. On March 6th, French issue of “Le Temps”, titled “Bulletin of the Day. Romania, Poland and the Soviets” expressed concern that Alexandru Vaida-Voevod considered the possibility of direct negotiations with the Bolsheviks as a completely obvious and necessary matter. Further, the author of the article stressed that Romania and Poland should have a common political program for possible political contacts with the Bolsheviks³⁰⁴. It should be mentioned that such interpretation of events was hardly new both for Bucharest and for Warsaw. The two countries realized that, with more or less coordinated political actions on the European political stage, they would be able to “guarantee” favorable attitude from the side

of Western partners. In particular, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, speaking earlier in the Romanian Parliament, in his speech emphasized clearly the importance of the common Romanian-Polish interests³⁰⁵.

Despite this attitude of the Prime Minister to possible intergovernmental union, according to Alexandru Marghiloman, “Paris accused him [*Alexandru Vaida-Voevod* — authors] of closeness to London”³⁰⁶ as a potential rival of France trying to strengthen its presence in the Balkans. It seemed that the creation of an inter-governmental coalition between Romania and Poland, with the possible accession of the Baltic States to them, looked like a real possibility. This option of forming a “buffer zone”, which would directly isolate the Western states from Soviet Russia, had to satisfy the leadership of the Entente³⁰⁷.

However, by March 1920, it had not been implemented for several reasons. Firstly, in January 1920, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Poland held a conference in Helsingfors. The main point of the agenda was their attitude to the RSFRR. As a result, the meeting approved a resolution “to coordinate actions, in accordance with the recommendations of the Entente states”. Nevertheless, they did not manage to create a military and political alliance. Lithuania had serious territorial disputes with Poland, so it perceived the idea “coldly”. Estonia had already negotiated peace with the RSFRR (the treaty was signed on February 2nd)³⁰⁸.

Secondly, the Polish state revived in November 1918, having received military and financial assistance from France, occupied large territories of the former Russian Empire. As a result, Polish political elites and Polish society settled on the ideology of creating “Great Poland” within the borders of 1772. Polish Leader Józef Piłsudski in general considered that “the longer the mess in Russia goes on, the larger territories Poland will be able to control”³⁰⁹.

In the course of time, Poland began to position itself more and more as a single regional leader which in fact “protected Western civilization” against the Bolsheviks. The Western partners, particularly the British Foreign Office, also tried to persuade

³⁰¹ Bessarabiia na perekrestke yevropeiskoi diplomatii. Dokumenty i materialy [Bessarabia at the Crossroads of European Diplomacy. Documents and materials], Vinogradov V. N., Yereshchenko M. D., Semenova L. Ye., Pokivaylova T. A. Moscow, Indrik, 1996. P. 188–189.

³⁰² Muntyan M. A., Dunayskaya problema v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniyakh (1945–1948), Kishinev, Shtiintsa, 1977. P. 17.

³⁰³ Tilea V. Actiunea diplomatică a României. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 156.

³⁰⁴ Le Temps, 1920, 06 mars, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2439423/f1.item> (Accessed on 10.11.2023).

³⁰⁵ Le Temps, 1920, 03 janvier, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k243879g.item> (Accessed on 10.11.2023).

³⁰⁶ Marghiloman A. Note Politice 1897–1924. Vol. V: 1920–1924. București: Editura Institutului de Arte Grafice «EMINESCU», 1927. P. 32.

³⁰⁷ Satskyi P., Stratehichne znachennia ukrainskykh etnichnykh terytorii u protsesi konsteliatsii Tsentralnoi Yevropy v 1920-ti rr. // Yevropeyski istorichni studii, 2016, № 3. P. 123.

³⁰⁸ Istoriia diplomatii: v 3 t. / pod red. V. P. Potemkina, Moscow-Leningrad, Gosudarstvennoie izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1945, T. 3: Diplomatii v period podgotovki Vtoroi mirovoi voiny, 1945. P. 72–73.

³⁰⁹ Meltiukhov M. I., Sovetsko-polskie voiny. Voiianno-politicheskoie protivostoianie 1918–1939 gg., Moscow, Veche, 2001. 460 c.

it in this: "If Poland can acquire the leading role in signing peace between the Bolsheviks and all the states bordering with Russia, without excluding Romania, the position of Poland in the international community will become of primary importance, and peace signed in this way will gain support of the Allies post factum"³¹⁰. Territories that were claimed by other states (particularly Lithuania) appeared in the sphere of Polish vital interest³¹¹. It is analyzed in more detail in the works by Michael Meltyukhov³¹².

Thirdly, it was lack of a common position among the victorious states. France strove to reinforce its political influence on the continent as much as possible. On the one hand, it aimed to "block" the defeated Germany within the circle of French supporters and allies, and, on the other hand, it tried to secure its presence in Central and Eastern Europe. That is why it inspired to support militaristic anti-Bolshevik moods in Poland and Romania. As mentioned above, to put an end to the Bolshevik power, Great Britain reckoned more upon the internal problems of the RSFRR, though it informally supported all anti-Bolshevik forces. Besides, the British also tried to solve part of their own internal problems, primarily economic ones, "at the expense" of the Bolsheviks, and therefore they began contacts with the revival of trade relations.

The position of the USA in this situation could be explained by the words of American diplomat Charles Joseph Vopicka: "America has a good opportunity to receive orders from Russia for raw materials and industrial products, the demand for which will be extremely large"³¹³. As regards this, similar ideas were expressed by Romanian statesman Alexandru Marghiloman. In particular, he emphasized that leading American companies strove to renew trade with Russia as early as at the beginning of 1920³¹⁴. Italy had similar interests in establishment of economic relations with the Soviet government as it needed Russian raw materials to support its own economic system³¹⁵.

Fourthly, all political activities of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, which were aimed at strengthening both internal and external positions of the Kingdom, caused growing resistance and dissatisfaction. Adherence to the idea of beginning a peaceful dialogue with the Soviets caused some distancing on the part of France, which began in fact to "blackmail" the Romanian government using the "Bessarabia problem".

In domestic politics, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's activities caused dissatisfaction on the side of King Ferdinand I and the supporters of the previous Prime Ministers Ionel Brătianu and Arthur Văitoianu. Eventually, on March 12th, 1920, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod was dismissed from power. All his initiatives and activities aimed at reaching a fast and positive solution of the Bessarabia question for Romania were not taken into account. The new government was headed by Alexandru Averescu.

It is worth mentioning that foreign policy activities of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, aimed at strengthening both the internal and international positions of the Romanian Kingdom, faced rather strong opposition and dissatisfaction demonstrated by the world community. Support for the idea of starting a peace dialogue with the RSFRR and the USSR caused some distancing on the part of France. It was not possible to establish a productive dialogue with London. The US continued to insist on other interested parties to be involved in the resolution of the territorial dispute. In the Kingdom itself, the activities of A. Vaida-Voevod also caused dissatisfaction of King Ferdinand I and supporters of the former Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu.

Despite this, the activities of A. Vaida-Voevod also had certain positive shifts in the territorial claims of Romania. On March 12th, the Supreme Council of the Entente sent the Romanian government its decision regarding Bessarabia region. It informed that the great powers reached a common opinion that it is in the interests of Romania and its neighboring states that this issue should no longer be left unresolved. Taking into account all previous conclusions and aspirations of the local population, the Allies expressed their common support for the unification of Bessarabia and Romania, which had already taken place de-facto. However, they insisted that Bucharest ensure the protection of the interests of Bessarabia's national minorities on the same constitutional basis as in other parts of the Kingdom. In case of difficulties and complications, they proposed that arbitration by the League of Nations be used to resolve them.

It is worth noting that only on October 28, 1920, was this territorial dispute resolved in favor of Romania. On this day, England, France, Italy, Japan, and Romania signed the Agreement on the Union of Bessarabia with Romania (the Paris or Bessarabia Treaty). The text of the treaty consisted of nine articles. In the preamble,

³¹⁰ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-polskikh otnoshenii* / red. T. G. Snytko, Moscow, Nauka, 1964, T. II: noiabr 1918 g. — april 1920 g., 1964. P. 600–601.

³¹¹ Pavlova M. S., *Litva v politike Varshavy i Moskvyy v 1918–1926 godakh*. Moscow, Aspekt-Press, 2016. 172 p.

³¹² Meltyukhov M. I., *Pribaltiyskiy platsdarm (1939–1940): vozvrashcheniye Sovetskogo Soiuzna na berega Baltiiskogo moria*, Moscow, Algoritm, 2014. 717 p.; Meltyukhov M. I., *Sovetsko-polskie konfliktyy. 1918–1939 gg.*, Moscow, Algoritm, 2017, 574 s.

³¹³ Vopicka Charles J. *Secrets of the Balkans. Seven years of a Diplomatist's Life in the Storm Centre of Europe*, Chicago, Rand McNally & Company, 1921. P. 328–329.

³¹⁴ Marghiloman A. *Note Politice 1897–1924*. Vol. V: 1920–1924. București: Editura Institutului de Arte Grafice «EMINESCU», 1927. P. 16.

³¹⁵ Tilea V. *Acțiunea diplomatică a României*. Nov. 1919 — Mart. 1920. Tipografia «Foaia Poporului», Sibiu, 1925. P. 96.

the signatories noted that its main purpose was to achieve general peace in Europe, taking into account the aspirations of the population of Bessarabia. The authors argued that this step was justified from geographical, ethnographic, historical, and economic points of view. In fact, the conclusions of the A. Tardieu Commission of April–July 1919 were voiced.

Thus, Romania's long struggle for the world's official recognition of Bessarabia's annexation to the Kingdom came to its end. As expected, however, the signed document provoked protests from the governments of the RSFSR and the USSR. Subsequently, the ratification process was drawn out over the years. Great Britain ratified it in 1922, France — in 1924, and Italy — in 1927. However, Japan refused to ratify it. The United States and a number of European states did not recognize it either. Romania found itself "de facto" with Bessarabia annexed, but "de jure" the process never culminated in final international recognition.

Therefore, it can be confidently stated that the Romanian state and political leadership of that time demonstrated remarkable persistence in consistent implementation of its foreign policy regarding Bessarabia. Bucharest successfully pursued its state-building program. As a result of territorial changes in Central-Eastern Europe, favorable conditions emerged for realization of the "Greater Romania" project through the acquisition of new territories. Bessarabia occupied a significant place in this doctrine. At the same time, the process of annexing new territories was not always voluntary and was accompanied by the use of force by the Romanian state machinery.

It is noteworthy that the royal government partially managed to capitalize on favorable foreign policy circumstances and the support of its Western allies for its aspirations. On the other hand, it ultimately failed to fully achieve international recognition and legally secure these gains.

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