

Organization and Activity of the Moldovan Military Congress (20–27 October 1917)

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The Eparchial House in Kishinev, which hosted the Moldovan Military Congress (20–27 October 1917).

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The Situation in Bessarabia and the Actions Undertaken to Summon the Congress

DURING 1917, the idea of an autonomous Bessarabia and of establishing an institution to rule the territory—revived immediately after the fall of the empire and after Tsar Nicholas II's abdication on 2 February 1917—started being supported by most professional associations and national political parties. They joined the movement for national liberation that included teachers, students, the clergy, peasants, co-operative members, etc., and Bessarabian soldiers, the large majority of which were far from Bessarabia's territory, either on the battlefields of World War I, or in the garrisons behind the front.¹

Through the decisions adopted, the congresses of the clergy, teachers, co-operative members, etc. held in the spring of 1917 outlined some objectives for Bessarabia. However, none of the adopted documents clearly indicated the specific path the province

should take. Under these circumstances, it was the military who took responsibility for Bessarabia's destiny, fully understanding that what they needed were concrete, urgent and efficient actions.

For the first time, the idea of summoning a Moldovan military congress, which would solve the abovementioned problems, was discussed in the meeting of the Moldovan Executive Committee of the Deputies' Council of Soldiers, Officers and the Navy within the Odessa Garrison held on 19 June 1917.² The representatives of the national military committees³ in Odessa, Kishinev, Sevastopol, and Iași jointly agreed to summon the Moldovan Military Congress in Kishinev on 20 October 1917.⁴ Similar decisions were taken by other committees of the Bessarabian soldiers.

The organization of the military congress required several stages. On 20 September 1917, in Odessa,⁵ a joint meeting was held with the members of the Moldovan committees of the regiments, military companies, military batteries, ship committees, representatives of the Black Sea fleet, and Moldovan military units from the Odessa Garrison. The meeting, chaired by Vasile Matveev, brought into discussion several issues, among which Sub-lieutenant Ion Păscăluță's request to organize a military congress.

Consequently, on 22 September 1917, Captain Emanoil Cately, interim president of the Moldovan Executive Committee of the Deputies' Council of Soldiers, Officers and the Navy within the Odessa Garrison, issued an instruction for the volunteer Ștefan Holban regarding his secondment to the Great General Headquarters of the supreme commander and to the War Ministry.⁶ In accordance with another mandate,⁷ signed on 27 September 1917 by the president of the same Moldovan association, Ștefan Holban and Ion Păscăluță were seconded to the Great General Headquarters with the purpose of personally submitting to the supreme commander several requests among which the one regarding the summoning of the Moldovan military congress in Kishinev.⁸

Gherman Pânteia considered that the organization of the military congress was set for 29 September when the General Committee gave their consent for the summoning of the military congress. From minutes no. 31 of the aforementioned structure one can understand that the organization of the Bessarabian Military Congress was unanimously supported by all those present.⁹ Sub-lieutenant Ion Păscăluță took the floor on this matter and mentioned he had information that over 2,000 soldiers might attend the congress. Listening to the speakers' opinions, the committee set up a commission whose purpose was to individually and urgently solve the problem of the delegates' secondment to the General Headquarters. The commission proposed a resolution to the committee, which was unanimously adopted.¹⁰ To support this approach, a decision was made to delegate Sub-lieutenant Ion Păscăluță, volunteer Ștefan Holban, and Lieutenant Anatolie Popa to the Great General Headquarters as of 1 October.

On 30 September, the Moldovan Central Executive Committee took the decision to delegate the aforementioned soldiers to the Great General Headquarters in Mogilev, basically with the same indications of the Moldovan Executive Committee in Odessa.

In his memoirs, Ștefan Holban mentioned that the one who came up with the idea of organizing the committee on his own responsibility was General Nikolay Dukhonin,¹¹ located in Mogilev.¹² Following the discussions with the Great General Headquarters in Mogilev,¹³ the delegation sent, from the very office of the aforementioned commission, the following telegram:

To all... To all... To all...

Commanders and Presidents of the Committees of military districts, battlefronts, armies, companies, and special military units.

With the approval of the Provisional Government, the General Military Congress of the Moldovan soldiers everywhere in Russia is summoned in Kishinev, Bessarabia, on 20 October. Please spread the word to elect and appoint two soldiers and one officer for every 240 Moldovan soldiers. In those units where their number is under the indicated figure, brigades, divisions and military corps shall be grouped so that all Moldovan soldiers are represented.

The delegates shall have on them written letters of delegation, as well as a travel allowance for five (5) days. Delegates of the Central Committee of the Moldovan Military, Sub-lieutenant Ion Păscăluță, Ștefan Holban.¹⁴

According to the author, the text was written by Ion Păscăluță, while Ștefan Holban, who personally sent it, supposedly added the final lines: “Delegates of the Central Committee of the Moldovan Military, Sub-lieutenant Ion Păscăluță, Ștefan Holban.”¹⁵

On 7 October, the Moldovan Central Executive Committee of the Soldiers, Officers, and Sailors’ Deputy Council discussed, in a secret meeting, the categorical refusal of the Russian Great General Headquarters to authorize the summoning of the Moldovan Military Congress. Defying this decision, the committee’s members decided to organize the congress without the permission of the Russian authorities. The committee sent to the commanders of all military units a telegram with the following text:

To the commanders of the army, army corps, and divisions.

Based on authorization no. 378764 issued by the Supreme Commander (Generalissimo) and by Kerensky, President of the Council of Ministers, the Moldovan Military Congress has been approved for 20 October 1917, in the city of Kishinev.

*We hereby ask your approval for the appointment of two soldiers and one officer for every Moldovan company, issuing for them the necessary letters of delegation and giving them the travel allowance for ten (10) days.*¹⁶

Obedying military discipline, and recalling the anarchy and chaos that had affected the former empire, the unit commanders did not question the content of the telegram and fulfilled the written requests.

At the meeting of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee of the Soldiers, Officers, and Sailors' Deputy Council on 13 October 1917, Ion Buzdugan proposed that the official date for the arrival of the delegates should be 18 October, even if they had arrived earlier. They also accepted the proposal to create a commission in charge of the verification of all credentials, which was supposed to establish the veracity of the documents presented by the delegates.¹⁷

The joint meeting of all Moldovan military committees in the Odessa Garrison, which was held on 14 October 1917, discussed the results obtained by the delegation at the Great Russian General Headquarters and the War Ministry. They had been sent there to obtain the authorization for the summoning of the Moldovan Military Congress. The meeting of the Kishinev military committee on 17 October was mostly dedicated to some practical aspects pertaining to the organization of the congress. Soldier Petru Dascăl's proposal was to set up a committee for the administration of the congress works and for the accommodation of the representatives sent to the congress.¹⁸

In his memoirs, Gherman Pântea claimed that the Government in Petrograd learnt about the summoning of the congress and ordered both the administrative and the revolutionary bodies to stop its organization, as well as to arrest those who had signed the telegram.

Under these circumstances, on 19 October was held an extraordinary meeting of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee,¹⁹ where representatives from other garrisons also participated, leading to a total of 50 people. Ion Păscăluță presented the activity report of the congress organization committee. During the debates the issue of its postponement was also raised, knowing that some of the delegates might not arrive on time for the congress or, generally, might not participate at all, as they had received telegrams from the Great General Headquarters informing them that the forum had not been approved by the central authorities.²⁰

One proposal was that the works of the congress should start on 21 October in order to facilitate the timely arrival of all delegates. These initiatives were not supported by President Gherman Pântea and by Vasile Țanțu, representative of the Odessa military association, who insisted that the congress should begin the following day, specifying that the hotel rooms had already been booked and

that most of the delegates had already arrived. After long debates, a decision was finally reached: the congress was to begin on 20 October, at 1 o'clock in the afternoon.²¹

At the meeting they also drew up the congress rules of procedure, perfected the details regarding the reports to be drafted by the deputies, set the time limit for speeches, etc. The congress participants received free transportation by tram in the city of Kishinev for its entire duration, based on an agreement concluded with the Belgian company managing the Kishinev railway transport company at that time.²²

On the Number of Delegates Who Participated in the Congress

ONE WIDELY debated topic in the specialist literature, in the memoirs of the direct participants in the event, as well as in the periodicals of that time is related to the number of representatives who were present at the military congress. The high interest in the number of delegates, which somehow legitimated the congress and the adopted decisions, generated a sort of competition; as such, the aforementioned documents presented different numbers, and some of them gave numbers that represented only half of what other figures mentioned. The minimum number indicated was 500, while the maximum one was of 1,000 delegates.

Moreover, since it was a military congress, most of the authors were obviously of the opinion that the participants were only soldiers. However, there was another idea circulating which stated that in the congress also participated delegations of civilians from the Bessarabian professional committees, as well as representatives of the ethnic minorities.

Finally, the number of the representatives who participated in the meetings on each day of the congress was also discussed. Historian Valeriu Popovschi, in his valuable work *Biroul de organizare a Sfatului Țării: 27 octombrie–21 noiembrie 1917* (The organizational board of the Country Council: 27 October–21 November 1917), following an in-depth research, grouped the authors according to the figure they gave for the number of representatives participating in the congress. In the abovementioned book, the author noticed that the specialist literature operated with numbers of 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 989, and 1,000 representatives/participants in the congress. It is worth mentioning that, during the meeting held on 29 September, Ion Păscăluță announced that the number of representatives they expected was around 2,000.

It is important to add that the number of delegates should have been much bigger, if the instructions in the telegram sent from the Great Russian General Headquarters by Ion Păscăluță and Ștefan Holban, which instructed the military units to delegate 1 officer and 2 soldiers for every 250 soldiers, and 1 officer and 1 soldier for the units with less than 100 people, had been exactly complied with, and if one takes into account that, according to some historical sources for 1917, the Russian army had somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 Bessarabian soldiers.

Let us examine the figures given by the authors and the extent to which the data presented had a real basis.

The number of 500 delegates was mentioned by some of the authors who had been direct participants in the works of the congress or had been contemporary with the event. Among those were Dimitrie Bogos, Ștefan Ciobanu, Gherman Pântea, and Onisifor Ghibu.²³ As such, Captain Gheorghe Andronachi and Vasile Harea,²⁴ deputy to the Country Council, mentioned the number of 600 delegates.

This figure is confirmed by Mihail Minciună, who, as correspondent of the *Soldatul moldovan* newspaper to that congress, in his report published in no. 8 of 4 November, remarked that on the first day of the congress “over 500 representatives were present,” while on the second day “all day long there were representatives of the Moldovan soldiers on the battlefields who arrived and their number exceeded 600.”

Ion Inculeț, who opened the proceedings on the first day of the congress, acting as a representative of the Commissioner of Bessarabia, opted for the number of 700 participants,²⁵ a number confirmed by Ștefan Holban, the future deputy to the Country Council.²⁶

The number of 800 participants was mentioned by the editors of a 1918 manuscript on Bessarabia’s history, by Sub-lieutenant Dumitru Mârza, a direct participant in the event, by Pan Halippa in his later memoirs, by Eugen Holban, son of Ștefan Holban,²⁷ as well as by contemporary authors.²⁸

Ion Pelivan, Ion Nistor, and Elena Alistar are some of the authors who stated that 900 delegates participated in the congress,²⁹ a number mentioned by some contemporary authors as well.³⁰

Some authors gave the exact number of 989 participants,³¹ a number which was taken as such by contemporary authors.³² A work published eight years after the congress announced the number of 1,000 delegates.³³

An original idea was brought forward by Captain Gheorghe Andronachi, who mentioned that in the congress had participated more than 600 Moldovan delegates, officers and soldiers from all battlefronts, including approximately 500 delegates from various professional institutions,³⁴ as the author called them.

What is, therefore, the real number of participants?

Mention should be made, first of all, that most documents concerning the Moldovan Military Congress are in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova,³⁵ but also in the archives in Bucharest. In the files kept at the National Archives, which were probably put together by the Commission appointed for the organization of this congress, we find: delegates' mandates and identification papers; certificates issued to the delegates—which confirmed their participation in the congress; certificates issued by the Committee's president for the organization of the congress, addressed to the unit commanders who were required to pay to the delegates the appropriate allowance; delegates' accompanying papers.

Following the analysis of these documents, we can make the following remarks.

As to the data/numbers mentioned by those who were contemporary to the event, we believe they are different because, on the one hand, not all delegates arrived on the first day of the congress (as a result of the analysis of the archive materials, we have established that some of the delegates—due to various reasons—arrived in Kishinev with a certain delay, on 21–22 or even 23 October), while other delegates left earlier than the official closing ceremony (if we judge by the number of days stated in the delegation paper for the congress, for some of the delegates the last day of stay in Kishinev was 25 October; therefore, some of them were forced to go back to their military units). Finally, some authors—knowing that the hall of the diocese had 1,000 seats—estimated the number of the people present in the room at a certain moment according to the perception they had over the number of people in the hall.

Moreover, another highly plausible idea was brought up, namely, that some delegates who went to Kishinev either before the beginning of the congress, or during its works, also went to their homes to see their parents, wives, and children, so that, given these circumstances, establishing the exact number of participants was even more problematic. Contemporary authors, however, took up the data presented by other authors.

The fact that the delegates' mandates were thoroughly verified was also indicated at the beginning of Mihai Minciună's article, published in the *Soldatul moldovan* newspaper.³⁶

The number of delegates to be presented herein has been established based on several sources.

The first source we used were the delegates' mandates and identification papers. Most of them were made on a template, written on forms or on paper with the header of the company/regiment/division that issued them. Arriving in Kishinev, the delegates presented their mandates to the commission in charge of the congress organization.

The first document verification took place on the premises of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee, where delegates went to announce their arrival and to receive information regarding their accommodation. The congress organization commission made some remarks on those mandates, i.e. they wrote a registration number and, in most cases, the date of arrival. As such, on the mandates and identification papers found there are some remarks, usually written in black ink, in ascending order from 1 to 608. There was one other mandate that we managed to identify, which did not have a number written on it, and we assigned it the number 609.³⁷ From other sources, we were able to identify the attendance of Captain Gheorghe Andronachi, who led a deputation of 19 people, all delegates of the 185th Infantry Regiment.³⁸

Other delegates were identified from other sources:

1. The name of a delegate whose mandate was not identified was established based on the certificate issued to the participant by the president of the Committee in charge of the congress organization, addressed to the commander of the unit, through which he was asked to give the delegate the legal allowance, according to the norms set by the War Ministry.

2. Another 18 delegates were identified from a list set up by the Congress Commission on the first day of works,³⁹ names that do not appear on other lists.

3. Thirteen people were identified based on the minutes and reports drafted at the congress. For instance, Gherman Pântea, who was one of the main organizers of the congress, Ion Buzdugan, Nicolae Grosu, Anton Rujină, speakers at the congress, etc. whose names we have not come across on any of the lists and who did not have a mandate.

Consequently, based on the analyzed documents, we can accept that 680 delegates participated in the congress, among them eight civilians; we therefore confirm Gheorghe Andronachi's hypothesis which stated that there were also civilians among the congress participants, but their number is smaller than the one mentioned by the aforementioned author.

We will, however, admit that the real number of delegates was higher.

The Works of the Congress

THE AGENDA was published two days before the opening of the congress works, on 18 October 1917, in the *Svobodnaia Bessarabia*⁴⁰ newspaper. The fourteen subjects to be discussed were: the election of the praesidium; greetings; the report on the Central Committee; the autonomy of Bessarabia; the nationalization (Moldovenization) of armies; Bessarabia and its leadership; field work; on what is happening now and on the elections to the

Founding Assembly; on cultural enlightenment; the nationalization (Moldovenization) of schools and high offices in Bessarabia; on the Moldovans living on the other side of the Dniester; the election of Moldovan representatives—one for the Republic Council, one for the High Command of all Armies, and one for the War Ministry; the election of the three representatives in the Peoples' Council; the National Fund (money).⁴¹

The Moldovan Military Congress, also known as the First Congress, carried out its works on 20–27 October 1917 in the hall of the diocese. People's interests and expectations regarding the congress were high.⁴² The delegates started their march on Aleksandrovskaia Street at 2:20 in the afternoon, moving towards the hall of the diocese, bearing national flags, and accompanied by a military orchestra.⁴³ The works of the congress started at 3 p.m. with the singing of *La Marseillaise*.⁴⁴ Gherman Pantea congratulated the congress on behalf of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee of Soldiers, Officers, and Sailors' Deputy Council, making the proposal to move on to the election of the praesidium. The congress was also saluted by the representatives of the local authorities, of the political parties, community and national organizations on the battlefield and behind it.

Among the first speakers who also set the tone of the meeting were military delegates as well. Vasile Țanțu, Nicolae Secară, Andrei Scobioală, Grigore Cazacliu, Anton Crihan, Alexandru Moraru, Emanoil Cately, Constantin Osoianu, Vasile Matveev, Ion Codreanu, a member of the Executive Committee of the Guberniya Soviet of the Peasants' Deputies in Bessarabia, Ion Păscăluță, etc.⁴⁵ Representatives of the Armenian and Jewish communities, of the Moldovan society, of teachers, of co-operative members, of the Moldovan National Party, etc. also took the floor. Toma Jalbă, the representative of the Moldovans on the other side of the Dniester, asked the congress not to forget about the Transnistrians in this historic moment.⁴⁶

During the first day of the congress several congratulatory telegrams sent to the congress were read.

The meeting of 21 October was presided by the chairman of the congress, Vasile Cijevschi,⁴⁷ a cavalry officer. He compared the Bessarabian assembly to the Peoples' Congress in Kiev,⁴⁸ arguing in favor of autonomy and explaining the term to the participants. Then, the rapporteur explained the meaning of the terms *autonomy* and *federation*, and argued that they were necessary for a prosperous life.

Deputy Teofil Ioncu, who brought additional information to what Cijevschi had already said about the Peoples' Congress in Kiev, also referred to self-determination, encouraging the participants to declare the absolute independence of the province from Russia, making a direct proposal for the establishment of an

institution to rule the province, the purpose of which would be to implement the idea of national self-determination.⁴⁹

Ion Buzdugan gave detailed information about the possible forms of autonomy, explained their meaning in the life of the peoples, and mentioned that the most appropriate form of leadership for Bessarabia would be the *republic*. Following a speech on the history of the land, Ștefan Holban argued in favor of the Bessarabians' legitimacy and historical right to a wide autonomy, also referring to the illegalities of the occupation, as well as to the duplicitous policies of old Russia.⁵⁰

After a break, the delegates presented some resolutions regarding the issue of autonomy. Then, they took a vote on the declaration of the autonomy of Bessarabia, which was unanimously adopted. The Resolution of the Moldovan Military Congress of 21 October 1917 stated the following:

On the Autonomy of Bessarabia

Taking into account the national culture of the Moldovan people and their history, starting from the principle of revolution whereby each people has the right to decide their own fate, the Congress, wishing to unite the Moldovan people and to establish their national rights and the betterment of their economy and culture, took the decision

To declare the territorial and political autonomy of Bessarabia

In order to protect the rights and interests of the autonomy of Bessarabia from the interim occupation, to be a representative body of the Moldovan people.

The historical document was received with great enthusiasm, the audience kept cheering "hooray, hooray," as well as "long live free and autonomous Bessarabia." On 22 October, the meeting started at 3 o'clock in the afternoon; on its agenda was the nationalization of military units. Nicolae Furtună, at that time commander of the First Moldovan Regiment, presented to the congress a detailed report on the creation of the national army. Anton Crihan, organizer and inspector of the military cohorts set up in Bessarabia as of August 1917,⁵¹ reported to the congress on those military units exclusively composed of Bessarabian soldiers, mentioning that they were the very first national military units created in the province with the purpose of restoring order and protecting the population from the anarchy that was affecting the territory situated between the Prut and Dniester rivers.

Anton Crihan requested that the Moldovan cavalymen from the town of Novogeorgievsk and from other places in Russia should be transferred to Bessarabia, where national units were already being created. Lieutenant Valentin Prohnițchi proposed the creation of two regiments of 15,000 people each.⁵²

Until 10 o'clock in the evening, when the meeting came to an end, several speeches and debates followed; as a result, some resolutions were proposed and were submitted to the secretariat.

During the meeting of 23 October, opened at 10 o'clock in the morning, and chaired by Gherman Pântea, the final resolution for the organization of the national military units was read and unanimously voted. The decision regarding the Moldovan rapid intervention militia units (cohorts) was also read. The congress took the decision to increase up to 100 the number of already existing Bessarabian rapid intervention militia units (cohorts), each having 100 men.⁵³

During the same meeting, they discussed the creation of a Supreme Council for the administration of Bessarabia. Rapporteur Ion Buzdugan argued for the necessity of a Council to manage all the affairs of Bessarabia, mentioning that it should be, however, created by the people. Its name should be the Country Council (*Sfatul Țării*, the Council of the land of Bessarabia); Ion Buzdugan also proposed that this new institution be composed of 100 deputies, distributed as follows: 30 members representing the Military Congress; 30 representing the peasants; 10 from the Moldovan parties and organizations; 30 representing other nationalities in Bessarabia.

Vasile Țanțu came up with the proposal to elect 120 deputies to the Country Council, where 40 of them should represent the Military Congress, underlining the fact that they had to be elected from among those worthy and famous, and that these proposals should be explicitly submitted by the representatives of the battlefronts, districts, associations, etc. However, most participants opted for the election of deputies according to the counties, and they asked for the creation of the Country Council without any delay.

Other speakers also took the floor, and they asked for the immediate creation of Bessarabia's Country Council. A third proposal was presented, which asked for the appointment of candidates according to battlefronts, military districts, organizations, and also counties.

In what regards the Country Council, the first Moldovan Military Congress in Russia decided:

*To immediately create the Country Council, the purpose of which is to manage all affairs of autonomous Bessarabia. To set up the Country Council with 120 members, as follows: 44 representatives from the Military Congress, which are to be elected immediately; 30 representatives of the Moldovan peasants; 10 of the Moldovan parties and organizations; 36 representatives of the other Bessarabian nationalities, according to the ratio—70% Moldovans, 30% other nationalities. Moreover, to offer—besides the 120 seats—10 seats to the Moldovans from the other side of the Dniester, if they accept them.*⁵⁴

After a four-hour break, the participants brought up a topic with profound social implications: the agrarian issue and the one of colonization. As a result of the debates held on these topics, the congress adopted a decision according to which the land would be distributed to “those who would work the land with their own hands.”

On the same day, the congress also talked about the Russian situation at that moment, as well as about the attitude to be adopted towards the Constituent Assembly.⁵⁵

On 24 October, after the adoption of those resolutions, some of the delegates insistently asked to discuss again the structure of the Country Council. The meetings that followed included the other subjects that were on the congress agenda. The resolution regarding the Moldovans who were living on the other side of the Dniester was supported by the large majority of deputies, and they decided that the Transnistrians be given ten seats in the future legislative body.

Another issue that was discussed dealt with the organization of national schools. Participants asked for concrete measures for the nationalization of the educational institutions; teachers and professors were told to become involved as much as possible in the process of nationalization and of making Romanian the language of instruction.⁵⁶

The subjects that dealt with cultural enlightenment, the organization of the Moldovan schools for soldiers, the setting up of libraries, and the nationalization of the schools in Bessarabia were all discussed together.

The meeting held on 25 October started with the future regulation for the election of deputies to the legislative institution.

The following meetings discussed the criteria to be followed for the distribution of the deputy mandates.

The congress also elected a liquidation committee for the implementation of the decisions voted and adopted at the congress. On 26 October, at 6 o'clock in the evening, the works of the congress were declared closed. On 27 October, the meetings were more technical in nature. They were already dealing with the organization of and elections to the Country Council. On the last day, the congress elected a Board for the Organization of the Country Council⁵⁷ made up of five people, the purpose of which was to regulate the principles and the representation criteria in the legislature, and to set the agenda for the first meetings of the Country Council.⁵⁸

THE SOLDIERS' actions gave new impetus to the timid attempts of the civil society, which had been previously unable to regulate the legal relations between the province and the center, to establish the legal status of Bessarabia under the new conditions, or to create a legislature for Bessarabia

called upon decide the fate of the province located between the Prut and the Dniester rivers.

The Moldovan Military Congress held in the autumn of 1917 took the initiative and the responsibility for the destiny of the province by declaring, on 21 October, the political and territorial autonomy of Bessarabia, while on 23 October it set the foundations of the legislative body of the country, i.e., the Country Council.



Notes

1. For a chronology of the events in Bessarabia in 1917–1918, see Mihai Adauge, Eugenia Danu, and Valeriu Popovschi, *Mișcarea națională din Basarabia: Cronica evenimentelor din anii 1917–1918* (Kishinev, 1998).
2. National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, F. 727, inv. 2, file 8, fols. 16–17v. (hereafter cited as NARM).
3. The Bessarabian soldiers organised themselves in national military committees of the Russian army, which represented an element of the fight for national freedom. As of April 1917, the Bessarabian soldiers from the military units on the battlefield and behind it were organised based on ethnic principles. Various structures of our soldiers were set up in the main centers where other Moldovan soldiers were concentrated: Kishinev, Bender, Iași, Roman, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kiev, Novogeorgievsk, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Voznesensk, and many other cities.
4. Căpitan Gh. V. Andronachi, *Albumul Basarabiei în jurul marelui eveniment al Unirii* (Kishinev, 1933), 129.
5. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 6, fols. 169–169v. Minutes no. 53, of the extraordinary meeting of 20 September 1917 of the joint Moldovan regimental, company, and battery committees, the Executive Moldovan Committee, the representatives of the Black Sea fleet soldiers, and of other Moldovan units within the Odessa garrison, which took place under the chairmanship of Sub-lieutenant Vasile Matveev and of the secretary, volunteer Toma Cecati.
6. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 6, fol. 168.
7. The instruction read: “By seconding you to the General Headquarters, we hereby authorise and strongly ask you to vigorously insist to obtain and solve the following matters: obtain the authorisation and support for the summoning of the Moldovan Military Congress in Kishinev; complete the 40th Reserve Infantry Regiment only with Moldovans and Bessarabians; rename the 40th Reserve Infantry Regiment as the ‘First Moldovan Reserve Regiment’; rename the 129th Light Artillery Battery for antiaircraft operations of the 5th Reserve Artillery Division, completed only with Moldovans, as ‘Ștefan cel Mare First Moldovan Antiaircraft Battery’; rename the 145th Light Artillery Battery for antiaircraft operations of the 5th Reserve Artillery

- Division, completed only with Moldovans, as ‘Basarab Second Moldovan Antiaircraft Battery.’” NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 6, fol. 170.
8. Ibid.
 9. Gherman Pânteia, *Unirea Basarabiei, acte și documente cu ocazia împlinirii a 25 ani de la săvârșirea marelui act istoric* (Odessa, 1943), 43; NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 16, fols. 22–24.
 10. For the approval of the instruction, a commission was set up, in which were elected: Sub-lieutenant Nicolae Secară and the volunteer Bâtcă, as well as Anton Rugină—with 17 votes and 2 abstentions; Anton Crihan—unanimously; Ion Dascăl—unanimously. The commission had to draft a report to be approved in the following ordinary meeting. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 16, fol. 23.
 11. General Nikolay Dukhonin was appointed head of the Great General Headquarters of the Russian Army on 10 September 1917. On 25 October, during the Bolshevik revolution, he asked the Bolsheviks to cease their action against the government. On 29 October, Kerensky appointed him as Supreme Commander simultaneously with his departure to Petersburg. He was killed by the Bolsheviks on 20 November 1917 while he handed over his position to their representative.
 12. Alexandru Bobeica, *Sfatul Țării, stindard al renașterii naționale* (Kishinev, 1993), 57; Ștefan Holban, “Evenimentele premergătoare congresului ostașilor moldoveni 1917,” *Patrimoniul* (Kishinev) 1 (1991): 12–13.
 13. In his memoirs, Ștefan Holban mentioned that the telegram had been written on the ledge of a window at the post office in the Great General Headquarters, located in the building of the railway station in Mogilev. Holban, 13.
 14. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 38, fols. 1–1v.
 15. Andronachi, 127–128.
 16. Gherman Pânteia, *Rolul organizațiilor militare moldovenești în actul Unirii Basarabiei* (Kishinev, 1932), 28.
 17. The Committee’s president announced that the delegates had already started to arrive for the Moldovan Military Congress set for 20 October that year and that some of them had not received any type of instructions or mandates and no one had information about the financial means they needed for food and lodging, especially since the beginning of the congress was still one whole week away. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 6, fol. 144.
 18. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 6, fol. 48. Minutes no. 38 of the Plenary Meeting of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee of 17 October 1917. The agenda was presented, which included several topics. Regarding the necessity to set up and elect a committee to manage the activity of the congress and to accommodate the delegates, the committee decided to set up the commission and to elect its members.
 19. Minutes no. 39 of the extraordinary meeting of the Moldovan Central Executive Committee of 19 October 1917. The meeting was opened by the President of the committee, Sub-lieutenant Gherman Pânteia. Because the meeting on 19 October was an extraordinary one, to discuss the matters regarding the Moldovan Congress to be inaugurated on 20 October, the president of the committee, Pânteia, proposed

to the assembly that honorary guests, who had come to the Moldovan Military Congress as representatives of various units and battlefronts, should be able to participate. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 9, fol. 179.

20. Ibid.

21. To encourage the attending representatives, Ion Păscăluță presented to the assembly the actions of the delegation that was sent to the Great General Headquarters with the purpose of requesting the authorisation for the inauguration of the Moldovan Military Congress on 20 October; from what he presented, one can understand that the congress was authorised. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 9, fol. 179.

22. Ibid.

23. Dimitrie Bogos, *La răspântie: Moldova de la Nistru în anii 1917–1918* (Kishinev, 1924), 67; Ștefan Ciobanu, *Unirea Basarabiei: Studiu și documente cu privire la mișcarea națională din Basarabia în anii 1917–1918* (Kishinev, 1993), 53; Pântea, *Rolul organizațiilor militare moldovenești*, 30–31; Onisifor Ghibu, *Cum s-a făcut Unirea Basarabiei* (Sibiu, 1925), 13; id., *Cu gândul la Basarabia* (Arad, 1926), 127; id., *Pe baricadele vieții: În Basarabia revoluționară (1917–1918): Amintiri*, edited by Octavian O. Ghibu, foreword by Iurie Colesnic (Kishinev, 1992), 401, 402, 424.

24. Andronachi, 129; Vasile Harea, “Mărturia unei generații,” manuscript, Romanian National Archives, Iași Branch, Vasile Harea personal collection, file 38f, p. 2384.

25. Ion Inculeț, *O revoluție trăită* (Kishinev, 1994), 101; Eugen Șt. Holban, *Ostașii Moldovei: Monumente istorice (1917–1918): Rolul ostașilor Moldovei în făurirea renășterii naționale și Unirii* (Kishinev, 1995), 38 etc.

26. Holban, 15.

27. “Basarabia sub dominația rusească (1812–1917),” manuscript, NARM, coll. 727, inv. 2, file 1, fol. 62; Dumitru Mârza, “Amintiri cu date istorice asupra pregătirii Unirii Basarabiei cu Patria Mamă, organizarea și activitatea Sfatului Țării al Basarabiei, organizarea unităților din fosta Republică Moldovenească,” manuscript, NARM, coll. 727, inv. 2, file 98, fol. 5, etc.

28. *O pagină din istoria Basarabiei: Sfatul Țării (1917–1918)*, eds. Ion Negrei and Dinu Poștarencu (Kishinev, 2004), 139; Mihai Tașcă, “Un document inedit scris de Dumitru Mârza, deputat în Sfatul Țării, ce reflectă evenimentele din Basarabia din anii 1917–1918,” *Transilvania* (Sibiu), new ser., 3–4 (2008): 63; Demir Dragnev and Ion Varta, *Istoria românilor: Epoca modernă: Curs de lecții* (Kishinev, 2000), 194; Lidia Pădureac, *Relațiile româno-sovietice (1917–1934)* (Kishinev, 2003), 19; Gheorghie E. Cojocaru, *Sfatul Țării: Itinerar* (Kishinev, 1998), 30.

29. Elena Alistar, “Fizionomia socială și politică a Sfatului Țării,” *Viața Basarabiei* (Kishinev) 4–5 (1933): 44, and the review *Cugetul* (Kishinev) 1 (2006): 6; Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* (Cernăuți, 1923), 415.

30. Iurie Colesnic and Vasile Țanțu, *Basarabia necunoscută*, vol. 2 (Kishinev, 1997), p. 162; Dumitru Suci, *Monarhia și făurirea României Mari (1866–1918)* (Bucharest, 1997), 195; Stelian Neagoe, *Istoria unirii românilor* (Bucharest, 1993), 255; Keith Hitchins, *România (1866–1947)*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl., transl. George G. Potra and Delia Răzdolescu (Bucharest, 2004), 313, etc.

31. *Cartea Unirii, 1918–1928* (Bucharest, 1929), 54; Alexandru V. Boldur, *Basarabia și relațiile româno-ruse: Chestiunea Basarabiei și dreptul internațional* (Bucharest, 1927), 30; id., *Basarabia românească* (Bucharest, 1943), 129; id., *Istoria Basarabiei*, 2nd edition (Bucharest, 1992), 499; Ion Pelivan, *L'Union de la Bessarabie à la mère-patrie/La Roumanie* (Bucharest, n.d.), 28; id., *Chronology in the Most Important Events of the Life of Bessarabia* (Paris, 1920), 14.
32. Ioan Scurtu, Dumitru Almaș, Armand Goșu, Ion Pavelescu, and Gheorghe I. Ioniță, *Istoria Basarabiei de la începuturi până în 1994* (Bucharest, 1994), 107; Ioan Scurtu, Dumitru Almaș, Armand Goșu, Ion Pavelescu, Gheorghe I. Ioniță, Ion Șișcanu, Nicolae Enciu, and Gheorghe E. Cojocaru, *Istoria Basarabiei de la începuturi până în 1998*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Bucharest, 1998), 82; id., *Istoria Basarabiei de la începuturi până în 2003*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (Bucharest, 2003), 126; *Aspects des relations russo-roumaines: Rétrospectives et orientations* (Paris, 1967), 69; Charles King, *Moldovenii: România, Rusia și politica culturală*, transl. Diana Stanciu (Kishinev, 2002), 32, etc.
33. Carl Uhlig, *Die Bessarabische Frage: Eine geopolitische Betrachtung* (Breslau, 1926), 57 etc.
34. Andronachi, p. 129. The researcher backs up Vitalie N. Ciobanu in that the number of civilians amounted to 300. Vitalie N. Ciobanu, *Militarii basarabeni 1917–1918: Studii și documente* (Kishinev, 2010), 69.
35. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 39, file 40, file 43; Central National Historical Archives (Bucharest), coll. Pan Halippa, Ion Pelivan etc. (hereafter cited as CNHA).
36. *Soldatul moldovan* (Kishinev), no. 7, 26 October 1917.
37. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 40, fol. 20.
38. CNHA, coll. Ion Pelivan, file 469, fols. 9–9v.
39. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 43, fols. 63–83.
40. *Svobodnaia Bessarabia* (Kishinev), no. 141, 18 October 1917.
41. CNHA, coll. Ion Pelivan, file 356. From the archive of Ion Pelivan. Minutes of the Moldovan Military Congress in Russia held in Kishinev on 20–27 October 1917.
42. *Cuvânt moldovenesc* (Kishinev), no. 91, 20 October 1917.
43. Pântea, *Unirea Basarabiei*, 43–47.
44. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 18, fol. 1.
45. Bogos, 100.
46. Pântea, *Unirea Basarabiei*, 49–50.
47. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 18, fol. 2.
48. Bogos, 100. The Peoples' Congress in Kiev, as some authors underline, played an important role in the evolution of the idea of autonomy of the peoples living in Russia. The congress was held on 6–15 September 1917. There were also six delegates from Bessarabia who participated in the forum. Vasile Cijevschi was elected vice-president of the Kiev Congress; he addressed the congress together with Teofil Ioncu and Vladimir Cazacliu. Dumitru Th. Pârvu, *Problema Basarabiei, în lumina principiilor actelor juridice internaționale* (Bucharest, 2013), 216; Ion Inculeț, *O revoluție trăită* (Kishinev, 1994), 97–98.
49. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 18, fol. 3.

50. Ibid., fols. 2–8. Minutes of the first Moldovan Military Congress in Russia held in Kishinev on 20–27 October 1917.
51. Ibid., fol. 3v.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., fols. 2–8.
54. Ibid. For a summary of the activities carried out by the Country Council, see Mihai Tașcă, *Basarabia—pământ românesc: Antologie*, vol. 1 (Kishinev, 2017), 7–37; NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 18, fols. 2–8.
55. NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 18, fols. 2–8. Minutes of the first Moldovan Military Congress in Russia held in Kishinev on 20–27 October 1917.
56. Hristea Dăscălescu, *Revoluția de la 1917 în Basarabia, lupta moldovenilor pentru limba, școala și cultura națională* (Kishinev, 1938), 71–72.
57. Valeriu Popovschi, *Biroul de Organizare a Sfatului Țării (27 octombrie–21 noiembrie 1917): Studiu și documente* (Kishinev, 2013), 140–149; NARM, F. 727, inv. 2, file 3, fols. 19–33; file 20, fols. 1–31; file 41, fols. 1–5; file 92, fols. 1–20; file 99, fols. 25–34; Minutes of the Moldovan Military Congress, kept with the Archives in Bessarabia, 1936, nos. 2–3, pp. 121–131.
58. Popovschi, 7; Cojocar, *Sfatul Țării: Itinerar*, 25–30; id., “Constituirea Sfatului Țării: O abordare istorică și istoriografică,” *Transilvania*, new ser., 3–4 (2008).

Abstract

Organization and Activity of the Moldovan Military Congress (20–27 October 1917)

The authors analyze the events and the situation in Bessarabia in the autumn of 1917, presenting the activity of the Moldovan Military Congress, which took the initiative and the responsibility for the destiny of the province by declaring, on 21 October, the political and territorial autonomy of Bessarabia, and on 23 October set the foundations of the legislative body of the country, *Sfatul Țării* (Country Council), the Parliament of the Moldovan Democratic Republic.

Keywords

Bessarabia, the Soldiers, Officers, and Sailors' Deputy Council, autonomy, Country Council