

CENTENARY OF THE GREAT UNION
ROMANIA: 1918-2018

THE UNION OF BESSARABIA WITH
ROMANIA – THE ENTRANCE IN MODERNITY OF
THE TERRITORY BETWEEN PRUT AND DNIESTER

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*“Without the Romanian interwar period, Moldavia
would have been a bigger Transdnistria today...”*

(Valentin Mândăcanu, Flux newspaper, November 2007)

Abstract. *The article shows that despite the fact that the idea of a “Romanian occupation” was invoked in a Freudian obsessive fashion in the highest political tribunals in Chişinău (Kishinev), the public or academic debate has remained very clear in the clarification of the interwar realities of the Prut-Dniester territory. It attempts to find the right position about this are still on going. Ideological pontification persists and some clichés persist, too. There are rumours, blasphemies, “certitudes” sustained by the historiography of communist and Moldavian persuasion from Chişinău (Kishinev) and elsewhere.*

Keywords: *Bessarabia, interwar history, the “Romanian occupation.”*

Up until today, with few exceptions after 1990, Bessarabia's interwar history has been written by representatives of communist regimes. From Moscow, Bucharest or Chişinău (Kishinev), their voices have been heard and are still heard today when interwar Bessarabia is being discussed. Despite the fact that the idea of a “Romanian occupation” was invoked in an obsessively Freudian manner in the highest political tribunals in Chişinău (Kishinev), the public or academic debate has remained very clear in the clarification of the interwar realities of the Prut-Dniester territory. Attempts to find the correct position regarding this historical period are still on going. Ideological pontification persists and some clichés persist. There are rumours, blasphemy, “certitudes” sustained by the historiography of communist and Moldavian persuasion from Chişinău (Kishinev) and elsewhere. “We know” about the episode

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with the helmet on the top of a stick by a Romanian lieutenant at Edinet at the request of his commander, so that “Bessarabians” can practice saluting and learn respect. That's what we know. But how many of us know that three airports were built in Bessarabia during the interwar period? And if we do not know that, we may ask ourselves why not?

Bessarabia is not Transylvania. A fractured collective memory

Romanians have many reasons to discuss the moment of March 24, 1918 and its consequences. For this is a discussion about them, about a cropped part of their self-consciousness, no matter on what bank of the Prut they might find themselves today. Historian Nicolae Iorga's warnings from that fateful council – not to give up Bessarabia without a fight – were correct. The message of the historian was less about military strategy than about our collective memory. To give up without fighting is to learn to forget. Following the famous order of June 22, 1941, Romania returned relatively quickly to Bessarabia and Bukovina, but this episode had not been digested by the metabolism of the national consciousness. Marshal Antonescu, the ally of the Germans, was removed from public discourse and the history books after the communist occupation, along with the whole Bessarabia file. After the 90s, the recalibration of collective memory about this episode was difficult, for the reason that Marshal Antonescu was still on the register, without the right to become a recognised national hero. The consequences are obvious, with direct reference to the inability to recover the symbolic relationship with Bessarabia after 1989. It is hard to build when you have such a drawback, therefore, the discussions related to the March 24, 1918 and its consequences have for the Romanians a curative function, too.

“Romanian Occupation” – the first modernization of Bessarabia

The celebration of the 98th anniversary of the historic Assembly of the Country Council on March 27, after which the telegram was sent to King Ferdinand announcing the union with the Motherland, remains a landmark for all the inhabitants on the left bank of the Prut. And it is important not only for the meaning of the event regarding political-identity, but also because it marked, for the first time, the entry of this region into the modernity. This modernity, begun but never reaching an end point, was always interrupted by a history that, as Hegel used to say, sometimes just pees on people, ruthlessly defying them.

Bessarabia had as part of its emergence, in the various forms in which it introduced itself in its encounter with History, a modernization which took place in three stages, in so far as it occurred. The first, and the most significant stage, took place when it was included in Great Romania. A stage cut short by Moscow, which, after the Soviet occupation, took over the reins, imposing a second form of modernization, typical of communist regimes. This formula materialized in what was called a “development dictatorship” coupled with economic planning and the centralized assignment of the role of each of the territorial members of

the USSR. This modernization, aberrant and inefficient, eventually applied to the entire communist camp, varying from context to context. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the quintessence of this process can be fully understood by anyone who strolls through the centre of Chişinău (Kishinev) and contemplates, for example, the disproportionate dimensions of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The third stage of modernization began in 1990 and is not over yet. Its name is Europeanization, but the route turns out to be difficult, unpredictable, and often chaotic.

The purpose of this article is to examine the first stage, the most contested and neglected in Moldovan public discourse. We will not make an exhaustive assessment of the entire period here, but we will put in front of the reader a series of data to suggest, first of all, a framework for understanding and analysing the period and, secondly, the decisive importance of the timeframe for the process for the modernization of the territory on the left side of the Prut River.

*Who was face to face at the moment of 1918?
And in which context were they so?*

As we have already suggested, Bessarabia interwar history is either absent from Moldovan public discourse or too often loaded with phrases extracted from the historiographical repertoire of Soviet ideology. And that's not good. Beyond the excuses or rejections, beyond the hurried assessments or diagnoses, it is necessary to understand the context of that "shining hour" of a nation that has not been politically involved too often. And then, one should, calmly, evaluate the results. The Romanian interwar timeframe was by no means a place of purity and innocence from any point of view, but from that to denying its incontestable modernizing dimension is an impassable step.

The first fundamental issues of interest: perspective, framework and the context of events. Provincial approaches focus, whenever discussing the post-union context, only on the territory between the Prut and the Dniester, the crisis and the inefficiency of the system there. It is too little. A step back would enlarge our perspective and would indicate that the inefficiency of the central administration was discussed not only in Chişinău (Kishinev), but also in the other regions of the country. The crisis of the administration was a reality not only in Romanian Bessarabia. Debate and criticism were not regional but national. But that would not be enough either. Two steps back would suggest that the discussions about system crises were not merely national, but ... European. Such fierce debates existed everywhere in interwar Europe, the continent materially and existentially shaken by the greatest war ever known to mankind, even in countries with bureaucratic traditions, solid institutions, and experience in administering its territories more well founded than in reunified Romania. The Old Kingdom (Wallachia) did not belong to this category: Bessarabia, and less. This is not an excuse, it's a fact. The situation between the Prut and Dniester after the Union was one of "war." Talking about normality or assessing the situation under the criteria of democratic normality specific for the 21st century is both absurd and irrelevant.

The export of the Bolshevik Revolution after 1918 – the first Soviet geopolitical project – was an exasperating constant reality: Chişinău (Kishinev), Tighina, Hotin, culminating with Tatar-Bunar (1924), these are several stages within the chronicle of these too easily forgotten confrontations. The second geopolitical project followed, namely the creation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). In 1925, Stalin still planned to conquer Bessarabia by direct military intervention, but over time the methodology changed. This is the context of the introduction in 1918 of the “institution of gendarmerie,” or military police, namely the Third Brigade, based in Chişinău (Kishinev) (and the White Fortress) – whose excesses were abundantly and ostentatiously publicized by the Soviets and their devotees. The local police was also reorganized, and among the police, only 20% were from the Old Kingdom (Wallachia), while the rest were Bessarabians.

On November 27, 1918, the Council of the Country dissolved itself – all the powers of government are transferred to Bucharest, overcoming the stage of relative self-government. The intermediate phase runs between November 27, 1918 and April 1920, when self-administration in the region diminishes. On December 29, 1919, the documents of Unification from Chişinău (Kishinev), Cernăuţi and Alba-Iulia were ratified. Vasile Stroescu, the rapporteur of the draft bill for Bessarabia, with tearful eyes, said, “Let God make this union be timely, lucky and eternal.” The 1920-1922 interval records the gradual transmission of the provincial administration to the central authorities (General Secretariats and General Directorates), and in 1923 the Constitution of the Great Romania is enacted.

*Modernizing the part and the whole. Inherent
difficulties in the “nation-building” process*

The modernization of Bessarabia was accomplished at that time within the context of the modernization of Great Romania, although it should be noted that the Old Kingdom (Wallachia), as well as in Transylvania, had begun going through the process at least 50 years earlier. As I have already suggested, the context was not the most favourable. Romania was then a country fresh out of the War, without solid democratic or institutional traditions, forced to evolve in the atmosphere of a generalized European crisis, after a War that effectively shook all the participants. No (other) event in European history has ever confounded and affected, either subjectively or objectively, Europeans to a similar extent.

Despite these unfavourable circumstances, the virtual and potential elements of success were there, and they were recognized as such. Seton Watson, the English historian, and one of the main supporters of Romania in Paris, declared at the time: “Two generations of peace and proper governance could turn Romania into a real paradise.” However, this was not meant to be complete. And this [incomplete success] was not due only to Bucharest’s shortcomings. The increase of the territory, as well as that of the minorities, is an objective fact. The sixth country in Europe in terms of size and the second largest in Central Europe, behind Poland in terms of population, Romania increased from 130,177 km² in 1912, with a

population of 7,160,682 inhabitants (in 1912) to 295,049 km², with 15,541,424 inhabitants in 1920. Minorities have reached 28%.

The issue must not be however exaggerated, for in 1930 the Romanians were the indisputable majority: 71.9% Romanians; 7.9% Hungarians; 4.1% Germans; 4% Jews; 3.2% Ukrainians; 2.3% Russians; 2% of Roma etc. The total: 18,057,028. A clarification is necessary at this point. The issue of minorities remains extremely delicate and controversial in the context of European interwar history and not just a delicate subject in Romania. The evaluation matrix cannot be realised or especially current at the beginning of the 21st century, although it is obvious that things have not always been ideal. However, nuances exist and must be identified. A direct commentator, generally critical of the Romanian realities after the First World War, wrote the following: “We must emphasize that the Romanians have endeavoured to associate the autochthonous individuals to government and administration. By doing so, they have shown themselves more liberal and forward looking than the Serbs, who have always conceived Yugoslavia as a greater Serbia, awarding most of their senior functions to the administration and the army. If the Swabians and the Saxons had long accepted to cooperate with the Romanian authorities, the Hungarians were always isolated in an inflexible opposition “[Henri Proust, *Destiny of Romania (1918-1954)*, 2006].

*Eternity was born in the village, but
modern nationalism in ... the city*

Whether it is true that eternity was born in the village, it is then equally true that modern nationalism was born in the city. And this is one of the elements for which the “nation-building” process launched by Bucharest did not take place under the best auspices – in 1930, Romania was predominantly rural: 29% – urban, 79.8% – rural.

To all these, and many others, there were added subjective reasons. The lack of knowledge of Bessarabia was notorious. For many, it was a “no man's land” – a “Bolshevik” space, as the term was used, in relation to the province, more jokingly, more seriously, even in 1938 – an unknown territory inhabited mostly by Romanians, of course, but still unknown after all. But this should not be exaggerated or psychologized, for the objective determinants for this state of affairs are obvious. Let us ask today how many Romanians on the right bank of the Prut River know in 2016, in the era of Internet, television, radio, printed and electronic media, of quick means of transport, what is it going on over there? How many have crossed the Prut River? How many times? ... And then maybe we will judge more realistically the information gap between the two banks after the First World War. Such deficiencies were added, in the case of Bessarabia, to others, older and less visible.

As already noted, Bessarabia was at that time a territory that did not participate in some of the great national moments – the revolution of 1821, the standardization of the language and the Latinization of the Romanian alphabet from 1840-1850,

the creation of the unitary Romanian state in 1859, the creation of the dynastic class in Romania in 1866 and 1881, the gaining of independence from the High Porte in 1878. A Romanian cavalry officer from 1918 notes: “Today's Bessarabians are the sons and grandchildren of the Moldavians of 1812. Their idea of their own origins goes only so far.”

In general, we find in Bessarabia – what else? – a predominantly rural population: 13% – urban, 87% – rural. Romanians lived in the villages: out of the 56.2% of the Romanians from Bessarabia only 31.5% lived in urban areas. The province's literacy rate was extremely small: 19% literacy pre-War, with an increase to 38.1% in the 1930s! The smallest literacy figures were for the Romanians! The autochthonous majority of cities was also a reality: even in 1930, Chişinău (Kishinev) had a 45% Jewish population, of which 27% were Russian. There was no middle class, and if there was, it was autochthonous. A French diplomat noted, after a visit to Bessarabia in June 1922 that “the population of the cities was purely Russian and Jewish and violently anti-Romanian.” And Stefan Ciobanu warned in 1925: “If someone wants to get an impression about Bessarabia from its towns, he would commit the worst mistake ... Most cities are an artificial creation of the Russian regime and they are inconsistent with the life led in the surrounding villages.”

Actors of modernization: apostles, adventurers and outlaws

These were, briefly, the conditions under which the Romanian administration intervenes and acts over the Prut River after 1918. Under these circumstances, the institutional compatibility between the two banks is difficult. Officials hardly cross the Prut River and those in Bessarabia, the descendants of the old regime, massively boycott Bucharest's initiatives and refuse to speak any language other than Russian. Under these conditions, three types of administrators arrive in Bessarabia: the apostles, the adventurers and the convicted.

The apostolate belongs primarily to the teachers. Primary schools in Bessarabia grew in number significantly after the Union. Requests to the Ministry of Instruction in Bucharest coming from all over the country for school inspectors, teachers, and instructors across the Prut are becoming more and more numerous. Cases of graduate or medical doctors petitioners who were trained at major Western universities are not unique. A Sorbonne graduate, for example, as a “fighter” and “intellectual,” wanted to teach Italian and French in Bessarabia to bring Russianized Russians and the Russian bourgeoisie closer to the Romanian language and culture, using Latin as a background. The educational project was successful: the phrase “(to be) school(ed) by the Romanians” was appreciated for a long period, even in the 1950s and 1960s, in what will become MSSR (Moldova Soviet Socialist Republic).

Adventurers are inevitable under these circumstances. Without knowing much about what is happening there, with a conquistador mentality, or a mentality of imperial settlers in Africa – the phrase was used explicitly as such – adventurers went in Bessarabia, attempting spectacular coups. However, their number is not significant nor were their effects significant. The phenomenon gradually disappeared in a few years.

Those banished or the convicted ones by the Old Regime are the most numerous category, at least according to Soviet historiography (then Moldovan). Sending civil servants, soldiers or gendarmes to Bessarabia for incompetence or violation of regulations was a frequent practice in the era. They were not always or necessarily malicious, but they did not want to be there or did not know what to do. Lack of communication and understanding of the area or excess of zeal are causes that must also be considered.

Political modernization. The “Bessarabia ... for Bessarabians” stage ended in 1923

There is too much talk about the so-called regional policy that the Bessarabians would have deployed in interwar Romania. Never, it is implied, did they feel at ease in their new composition and therefore they have jointly amended the Romanian political system. Nothing more inaccurate. The Bessarabian Peasant Party, which included Pan Halippa, D. Ciugureanu, St. Ciobanu, Emil Catelli, etc., merges in 1921 with the Peasant Party of the Kingdom – Ion Mihalache. The request was made by C. Stere. And Ion Incuț's group merges in 1923 with the National Liberal Party. Basically, in 1923, the “Bessarabia for the Bessarabians” stage ended, at least formally. Before and after 1923, the internal confrontations between the various Bessarabian groups constituted a factor that blocked the unification and functioning of the institutions. That is why talking about the “unity of Bessarabians” with the Old Kingdom (Wallachia) is nonsense.

Moreover, the criticisms of the Bessarabian politicians were political, not ethnic and not even regional. Contesting, for example, the right of the liberal government to organize the crowning of Ferdinand I in Alba-Iulia (October 15, 1922) the main opposition parties, among which the Peasant Party refused to attend, including the affiliated Bessarabians. Similarly, the position of the Bessarabian leaders towards the adoption of the 1923 Constitution was different: the group of Ion Incuț, who merged with the National Liberal Party on January 20, supported and voted for the fundamental law, while Pan Halippa's group merged with the Peasant Party, in opposition, adopting a negative attitude. Significant documents such as the memoirs or speeches of 1924 launched by Bessarabians were by no means against the Union, but against the politician – often criticized from obvious party political positions – undermined on behalf of the Union and on behalf of the responsibility put before Romanian politicians by such a sacrosanct gesture.

The political life of the former Tsarist province has changed structurally after the Union. From the point of view of political modernization, the first elections organized on the basis of universal suffrage took place in 1919. The democratic organization of the population – even if not impeccable – was entirely different from that of the Tsarist regime up till then. The first steps towards political modernization in Bessarabia can be seen in the interwar period. The Constitution of 1923, a fundamentally European act, was to remain in force until 1938. From

a political point of view, the process of “nation-building” carried out at that time is the first project of modernization of the territory between the Prut and Dniester according to the norms and criteria of the Western liberal democracy, with obvious deficiencies of operation. Unfortunately, they are obvious even today...

*The modernization of agriculture,
industry and commerce*

Agriculture was predominant in Bessarabia. 85% of the population lived in rural areas. The 1921 agrarian reform, one of the most radical in Europe, massively affected the Tsarist feudal realities and in Bessarabia it ended in 1923. “Our House,” the special institution appointed to manage repatriations, gave the Bessarabian peasants legal titles of ownership. There was one amendment, and this was for a long time and unfairly interpreted by Soviet historiography. If in the other Romanian provinces, the land was taken from the direct owners, in Bessarabia it was taken from the peasants, who had occupied it in 1917-1918, but in order to be returned to them, and not for reasons of expropriation. The major crises in the field of interwar Bessarabian agriculture are by no means Romanian: in 1926 the Polish market for wine and grapes was lost (Romania is increasing its coal tax, Poland – for the import of wine and grapes) and the 1929 world crisis affects Romanian agriculture and, to a great extent, Bessarabia.

The frail bases of industrialism in Bessarabia were mainly based on the colonial mode in which this area had been organized – the enterprises in Bessarabia were in fact annexes of those over the Dniester, as they would become after the Communist occupation. Their purpose was to process raw materials to be used in industrial cities. Practically speaking none of them was in the hands of the Romanians. The industry was developing especially in relation to agriculture: mills, tannery, soap factories, oil, and alcohol industry. After the Romanian “occupation,” the progress was obvious: before the war there were 207 industrial establishments, which produced 250,000,000 lei, and in 1932, there were already 213 factories, which produced 800,000,000 lei.

Credit and co-operation were domains that have developed significantly between the two World Wars. In the wake of the War, there were 377 structures of credit and custody with a capital of 51,000,000 lei, and in 1938 there were 424 and the capital was 289,123,247 lei. Banks were set up: Bessarabia Bank (1920), with branches all over the world, Dacia Bank, Romanian Bank, Union of Romania Bank, The Viticulture Bank of Romania, Iași Bank, Moldavia Bank etc. And we cannot overlook here, perhaps, the most important financial project carried out at the time: the change from the Russian rouble to lei and monetary unification. Trade also developed: in 1938, there were over 20,576 individual and commercial firms, but the ethnic structure was preserved – 5,209 Romanians (17%), 8,136 Jews and 5,584 other nationalities. The explanation is not difficult to find: though imperfect, Romanian democracy functioned then as did the market economy. The rules of the game were, as much as possible, respected and the winners were not decided in advance...

The modernization of infrastructure

The backward Czarist province of Bessarabia would feel the biggest shock from the modernization project carried out in Greater Romania in the field of communications and transport. After the war, there was a deplorable railway network in Bessarabia (with a gauge different from the Romanian one). Progress was obvious and quantifiable. In 1919, the Galați-Chișinău (Kishinev) journey time was 19 hours, in 1938 it was 8 hours. There were 29 locomotives before the War in Bessarabia, but there were 130 in 1920. If there was only one daily train on the Chișinău (Kishinev)-Ungheni line, in 1940 there were 5 pairs of daily trains.

The development of rolling stock, direct freight and passengers' trains are elements to be noted. For example, in what concerns the urban transport in Chișinău (Kishinev) in 1938, there were 14 km of related lines. If in 1918 there were 150 km of continuous roads, in 1938 there were 754 km. In 1919 there were 620 bridges with a length of 4,261 m and by 1940 4,105 bridges with a length of 17,989 m were built. In the case of river transportation, there was even a project linking the Vistula of Dniester, which would have reduced a ship's passage by 3,000 nautical miles and opened new markets in Denmark and Norway. It did not materialize. Romania was one of the first countries in the world to use air transport in Bessarabia, building three airports: one in Chișinău (Kishinev) (1921), one in White Fortress (1935) and one in Ismail (1935).

The modernization of cultural institutions

Education was a priority in the modernization project of interwar Bessarabia. In 1918, the proportion of the literacy was incredibly small: only 10.5% of Romanian men and 1.77% of Romanian women. Only the Gypsies, of all the ethnic categories, were less educated than the inhabitants of Bessarabia. Russians, Jews, Germans, Poles, etc. recorded proportions of over 50%.

The enthusiasm of the apostles was noticeable: before 1918 there were no Romanian schools, but after 1918 there was a real "cultural revolution" (Alexandru Boldur). The number of schools increased significantly, so that in January 1939 there were 2,718 schools with 7,581 teachers and 346,747 pupils. There were also state and private schools in a remarkable regime of tolerance: out of the 97 private schools that existed in Bessarabia in 1938, 75 were Jewish, 5 German, 4 Polish, 1 Ukrainian, 2 Russian and 10 Romanian. In 1940 in Bessarabia there were 14 lyceums for boys, 9 for girls, 24 gymnasiums and secondary schools.

The logistics of cultural space also grows. In 1919 the Unirea Conservatory was founded, in 1928 the National Conservatory, and in 1936 the Municipal Conservatory. In 1926 the Faculty of Theology of Chișinău (Kishinev) was founded as part of the University of Iași, and in 1933 the Faculty of Agronomy was established. In addition, the National Theatre in Chișinău (Kishinev), the Central University Library, the National History Museum, the Chișinău (Kishinev)-based Fine-Arts Society, with several sections.

The Church in Bessarabia is also reorganized, becoming, after an already famous saying, a “golden metropolis”: a new orphanage, a sanatorium for priests, even a religious Bank, unique in the Romanian landscape, are being built. In 1925, the Romanian Patriarchate was established, comprising the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, with two dioceses: the Archdiocese of Chişinău (Kishinev) and the Episcopate of the White-Ismaïl Fortress. In 1928, Gurie Grosu was raised to the rank of Metropolitan. The effectiveness of the Romanian interwar education and cultural logistics was indirectly congratulated by Valentin Mândăcanu's scholar: “Without the Romanian interwar intervention, the left of the Prut would have been a bigger Transdnestrria nowadays.”

*Democratic modernization
versus totalitarian modernization*

It has already been noted, in the case of the disproportion between the Romanian schools and the minority schools, that the intervention of the Romanian state has not been sufficiently effective. There is an explanation that I have already suggested. No matter how strong the provincial project of Romanianization was, the instruments were democratic, considering all internal and external constraints. Hence ineffective, at least in the short term, especially compared with the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, much more willing to solve everything by force, irrespective of the local reaction, regardless of the desire of the population or its orientations. The same can be said of the press. A statistical analysis from 1917-1927 shows that in Bessarabia there were 58 publications, out of which 24 were Romanians, 34 were Russian; of the total of Romanian publications 10 were daily newspapers and out of the total of Russian publications, 32. The Romanian press was “a minority press, barely tolerated” (Onisifor Ghibu) – with a count of 7 newspapers and three big daily newspapers written in Russian, only one Romanian daily newspaper was issued in Bessarabia. The explanation is the same: the intervention of the Romanian status cannot be compared in any way with that of the Soviet regime, which wanted to change overnight and no matter how violent the means, the ethno-identity profile of a whole province.

*The Bessarabians – the “Jews”
of the fascist interwar Romania*

We have already mentioned that the interwar history of Bessarabia is too often under the influence of Soviet communist ideology. Historians of this extraction from Chişinău (Kishinev) only add nuances to a thesis already delivered by Moscow. But sometimes these nuances are surprising. Here, for example, is Vasile Stati's case. His style of writing history – ethnical, psychological, a “golden age” type of writing, in which the achievements of the Republic of Moldova are described hagiographically – is similar to that of the official scribes to which the communist regime, wherever it may be, has already accustomed us. The chapters in Moldavian

History of Vasile Stati (which, in fact, plagiarize with several pseudonyms) are relevant to the official/officious communist historian, and the titles of some chapters are significant: “The establishment of the new political system,” “War. Fascist plague envelops Moldova,” “Defending the Ancestral Land,” “Restoring Economic and Cultural Potential,” “R. Moldova at Zenith (1960-1990)” etc.

However, the approach of the historian from Chişinău (Kishinev) culminates with a thesis which he insistently insinuates in his books: the idea that the Bessarabians are the Jews of interwar Romania! Here is a significant quote: “In reality, the Romanian occupation regime, through its chauvinist policy, transformed the territory between the Prut and the Dniester into a huge concentration camp, where the population was trampled, maimed, shot, mocked and scandalized” (Vasile Stati, *History of Moldavia*, Chişinău (Kishinev), 2002). If we recall the insistence with which Chişinău (Kishinev) launched at some point diplomatic initiatives in this direction, under the Voronin regime, things are becoming more obvious in terms of the relationship between historiography and politics beyond the Prut. Hence the precautions we must take every time interwar Bessarabia becomes a historiographical subject.

Conclusions of stage

The data we have examined showed two things: Firstly, the only European modernization project of Bessarabia in the 20th century was the Romanian one, carried out during the interwar period; Secondly, quantifying the objective conditions of the region both internally and internationally – extremely unfavourable to a process of national construction following a democratic formula – we can conclude, despite some perceptions that still hang heavy, that the modernization project was rather a success. Under these circumstances, describing the Romanian interwar period as the worst period in the history of the Prut-Dniester territory in manuals that (dis-)integrate history, in political discourse or elsewhere is absurd, false and unacceptable. And this is from all points of view.

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