

LOSS OF ROMANIAN CITIZENSHIP BY RESIDENTS OF BESSARABIA AND NORTHERN BUKOVINA

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ABSTRACT

The process by which the inhabitants of the historical provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina lost their Romanian citizenship in the context of their annexation by the Soviet Union is relatively little known. The resistance of the Romanian authorities to the Soviets' intention to deport all persons originating from these provinces to the Soviet Union manifested itself in a legal confrontation that took place between 1944 and 1945, which resulted in the majority of refugees being spared from deportation. In this article, we propose an analysis of the reasons for contesting Romanian citizenship for people from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and the evolution of the legal confrontation between Romania and the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Romania, Soviet Union, loss of citizenship.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the loss of Romanian citizenship by the inhabitants of Bessarabia is presented in the public sphere as a kind of abandonment by the Romanian state of its own citizens in 1940. This framing implies an inability and a lack of will on the part of the Romanian state to protect its own citizens. A detailed examination of the historical process through which the inhabitants of Bessarabia lost their Romanian citizenship shows that the issue stems from the Soviet Union's refusal to recognize Bessarabia's union with Romania, the lack of an internationally recognized regulation regarding the transfer of sovereignty, followed after World War II by a diplomatic confrontation in which the Romanian government attempted to do everything possible to offer Romanian citizens in Bessarabia the option to choose their citizenship.

The debates at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference placed particular emphasis on issues related to the transfer of sovereignty over territories in Eastern Europe, including those concerning the transfer of citizenship. The basic principle was that of choice; citizens of territories subject to a transfer of sovereignty were to be given a sufficiently long period (12 months) during which they could choose either the

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citizenship of the former state to which they belonged or the citizenship of the new state to which they would belong after the signing of the peace treaties. Discussions regarding the transfer of citizenship established that the wife and children under the age of 18 would follow the husband's choice, and renouncing the old citizenship was not to result in the loss of real estate in the former state, while movable property could be transferred without being subject to taxes¹¹³.

At the end of World War I, Romania united with territories that had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina) and the Russian Empire (Bessarabia). Provisions regarding the transfer of citizenship were included in the peace treaties signed with the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Austria (the Treaty of Saint-Germain of September 10, 1919) and Hungary (the Treaty of Trianon of June 4, 1920), thus clearly regulating the citizenship of persons from the former Austro-Hungarian provinces. The situation of the inhabitants of Bessarabia remained unclear because no treaty was signed with the Soviet Union.

2. ROMANIAN SOVIET NEGOTIATIONS, 1920–1924

The recognition of Bessarabia's union with Romania represented one of the most difficult issues for Romanian diplomacy during the interwar period. A potential treaty to this effect was discussed at the Paris Peace Conference in early 1920 with the support of France and Great Britain. U.S. representatives opposed the signing of this treaty throughout 1920; it was ultimately signed by France, Great Britain, Italy, and Japan on October 28, 1920. The governments in Kiev and Moscow announced that they did not recognize this treaty¹¹⁴.

The first article of the Treaty of Bessarabia stipulated that “The High Contracting Parties declare that they recognize Romania's sovereignty over the territory of Bessarabia, bounded by the present frontier of Romania, the Black Sea, the course of the Dniester from its mouth to the point where it is crossed by the old boundary between Bukovina and Bessarabia, and this old boundary”¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ George Damian Mocanu, *Cum s-au trasat granițele României la Paris în 1919. Procesele verbale ale Comisiei pentru studierea chestiunilor teritoriale referitoare la România*, [How Romania's Borders Were Drawn in Paris in 1919. Minutes of the Commission for the Study of Territorial Questions Relating to Romania], Mușătești, Tana Publishing House, 2024, pp. 178–180.

¹¹⁴ Mihai Țurcanu, “Atitudinea SUA față de problema Basarabiei la ultima etapă a Primului Război Mondial și în timpul Conferinței de Pace de la Paris (1917–1920)” [“US attitude towards the Bessarabian issue at the end of the First World War and during the Paris Peace Conference (1917–1920)”], in *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, 3–4/2019, pp. 75–85.

¹¹⁵ „Înaltele Părți Contractante declară că recunosc suveranitatea României asupra teritoriului Basarabiei, cuprins între frontiera actuală a României, Marea Neagră, cursul Nistrului de la gura sa pînă la punctul unde este tăiat de vechiul hotar dintre Bucovina și Basarabia, și acest vechi hotar”, in ***, *Treaty between the Principal Allied Powers and Roumania Respecting Bessarabia*, signed at Paris, October 28, 1920, Treaty Series, No. 15, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922.

The remaining nine articles established the procedures for demarcating the border on the ground, the respect for minority rights, the procedures for acquiring and renouncing Romanian citizenship, the transfer of the mouth of the Chilia River to the jurisdiction of the European Commission of the Danube, and Romania's assumption of Bessarabia's proportional share of Russia's public debt, as well as the Russian state's other financial obligations. Romania sought to obtain international recognition and legitimization of the union with Bessarabia through two channels: the ratification of the Bessarabia Treaty by all signatory parties and direct negotiations with Soviet Russia.

In February 1920 in Copenhagen, the Romanian side requested that the Soviet Union recognize the union with Bessarabia as a condition for the resumption of diplomatic relations, a request that was rejected. The leadership of Romanian diplomacy in the years 1920–1922 fell to Take Ionescu, who believed that international recognition of Bessarabia's union with Romania would be sufficiently guaranteed by the 1920 Treaty of Bessarabia, without the need for negotiations or an agreement with Soviet Russia, especially since Take Ionescu did not believe the Bolshevik government would pass the test time¹¹⁶. A new diplomatic meeting between the Romanians and the Soviets took place in September 1921 in Warsaw: the Romanian side proposed as topics for a Romanian-Russian diplomatic conference the issue of the treasure confiscated in Moscow and the settlement of the practical aspects of Bessarabia's union, while the Russian side demanded discussion of Bessarabia's union. Romania refused to remove the issue of the treasure from the agenda and to agree to discuss the union of Bessarabia, which would have nullified the 1920 Treaty; the Soviet representative's reply was, "If you want Bessarabia, you will have to pay"¹¹⁷. The Soviets' final proposal at the 1921 Warsaw Conference was that, in exchange for recognizing the union of Bessarabia, Romania would renounce the treasure remaining in Moscow and conclude a non-aggression treaty with Soviet Russia.

The next opportunity to discuss the Bessarabia issue was at the Genoa Conference (April 10-May 19, 1922). This was preceded by the ratification of the Treaty of Bessarabia by Great Britain, which hoped that this gesture would strengthen Romania's position in discussions with Soviet Russia¹¹⁸. The Genoa Conference was effectively nullified by the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo (April 16, 1922) between Germany and Soviet Russia, a treaty that enshrined the international recognition of Soviet Russia and through which the two countries

¹¹⁶ Dov B. Lungu, "Soviet-Romanian Relations and the Bessarabian Question in the Early 1920s", in *Southeastern Europe*, 6, 1 (1979), pp. 29–45.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹¹⁸ Mihai Pițigoi, *O oportunitate ratată. Marea Britanie și ratificarea Tratatului de la Paris privind Basarabia [A Missed Opportunity. Great Britain and the Ratification of the Paris Treaty Regarding Bessarabia]*, *Analele Științifice ale Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iași, History*, 64/2018, pp. 401–413.

renounced any mutual claims, establishing in a secret annex the beginning of military cooperation that would last throughout the interwar period.

In December 1922, a meeting in Lausanne between Soviet Foreign Minister Chicherin and Romanian diplomat Constantin Diamandy established that discussions regarding Bessarabia would resume along the lines agreed upon a year earlier in Warsaw. The Romanian-Soviet conference would not take place until March 1924, and Moscow's position would become increasingly less inclined toward negotiations.

The Romanian-Soviet conference in Vienna from March 27, to April 2, 1924, marked the end of exploratory talks along the lines of negotiation pursued up to that point (the return of the Romanian treasure from Moscow, the conclusion of a Romanian-Soviet non-aggression pact, discussion of Bessarabia's union with Romania) and recorded the failure of all discussions initiated after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference. The mandate for negotiations with Romania established by the Political Bureau of the PC(b)R stated in its first point that "Bessarabia cannot under any circumstances be ceded to Romania", the manner of negotiation was to demonstrate a desire for a peaceful resolution of the dispute, the request to organize a referendum in Bessarabia was to become the central issue of the discussions, and the conference was to be transformed into an opportunity for propaganda in favor of the Soviet viewpoint on the Bessarabian question¹¹⁹.

Although the referendum argument had been used before in connection with Bessarabia, this time the mission of the Soviet diplomats was to repeat it ad nauseam – knowing it would be rejected. On the other hand, the Romanians wanted to separate the issue of the treasure from the question of recognizing Bessarabia's union, being ready to sign a non-aggression treaty with Soviet Russia – but these issues, which the Soviets had strongly demanded in previous discussions, were now of no importance to Moscow. The Vienna Conference was doomed to failure from the outset, and for the Soviets it had a single purpose: international propaganda regarding the Bessarabian issue in the context of a referendum on union contested by the authorities in Bucharest¹²⁰. From this point on, for the Soviets, the Bessarabian issue became secondary from a diplomatic standpoint: according to Maksim Litvinov, Russia could afford to wait for a favorable opportunity to resolve the dispute, as the disputed border sector was far too narrow compared to the length of the Soviet borders, and the lack of a trade agreement with Romania was not likely to harm the Soviet economy.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Cominternul și originile moldovenismului. Studiu și documente [The Komintern and the origins of Moldovenism. Study and documents]*, Civitas Publishing House, Chișinău, 2009, doc. 7.

¹²⁰ Marcel Mitrașcă, *Moldova: A Romanian Province Under Russian Rule*, Algora Publishing, 2002, pp. 119–120.

¹²¹ Dumitru Preda, *Relații româno-sovietice. Documente 1917–1934 [Romanian-Soviet relations. Documents 1917-1934]*, Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 283.

3. ROMANIAN CITIZENSHIP AND THE ANNEXATION OF BESSARABIA IN 1940

Prior to the start of the Vienna negotiations regarding the recognition of Bessarabia's union, Law No. 724/1924 on the Romanian citizenship was adopted in Bucharest on February 24, 1924¹²². Under Article 56, this law granted Romanian citizenship by right to all residents of Bessarabia who were domiciled within the province on March 27, 1918, as well as to those who, although not residing there at that time, were born in Bessarabia. At the same time, under Article 47, the law provided for the possibility of waiving its benefits, that is, the right to opt for another citizenship. The granting of citizenship by operation of law did not eliminate the need for registration, the compilation of lists, and the issuance of certificates of nationality. In practice, it was precisely at this stage that difficulties arose: a significant number of people were left off the final lists, either due to administrative negligence or because of local circumstances.

The second key moment was Law No. 86/1939, adopted specifically to address the gaps left by the previous regime. Still, after the finalization of the citizenship lists, numerous people remained outside the official registry. The new law extended the registration deadline to February 1, 1940, under the same conditions, thus offering a new opportunity for those who had not managed to finalize their legal status. With regard to Bessarabia, the 1939 law did not represent a new basis for citizenship, but rather an extension and completion of the regime that began in 1924.

The major rupture occurred in June 1940, with the cession of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. From that moment on, the issue of citizenship was no longer merely one of conferral under Romanian law, but also one of the practical affirmations of political and legal affiliation in the context of a change in sovereignty. From the perspective of the principles of international law, the annexation of a territory could not automatically result in the total and unconditional absorption of the entire population into the citizenship of the annexing state, without considering the individual's actual connection to the territory and without allowing for the possibility of choice. The annexation of Bessarabia occurred following a Soviet ultimatum on June 28, 1940; this annexation was not officially recognized by Romania, as the negotiations concerned exclusively the withdrawal of the administration and the army, without any discussion of the transfer of citizenship or the possibility of choice. The withdrawal from Bessarabia triggered a wave of refugees whose exact numbers are impossible to estimate; what is certain is that the Soviet authorities did everything in their power to prevent the flight of Romanian citizens who did not wish to remain under Soviet rule.

In the case of Bessarabia, a large number of residents demonstrated their attachment to Romania through evacuation or repatriation in 1940, that is, by leaving the province and settling on Romanian territory. This movement cannot be viewed

¹²² Monitorul Oficial No. 41/1924.

merely as an act of flight, but also as a concrete expression of the will to remain under Romanian authority.

Another important factor in this development was the issue of Soviet passports distributed to the inhabitants of Bessarabia in the fall of 1940. The receipt of such documents cannot be automatically interpreted as a valid and freely expressed choice of Soviet citizenship. Given the conditions of occupation and rapid administrative reorganization, the distribution of passports was of a general nature and did not necessarily imply genuine individual consent. Furthermore, the fact that Soviet authorities continued to approve repatriations to Romania even after this stage suggests that the issue of definitive allegiance was not, in practice, fully settled. The existence of these repatriations demonstrates that leaving the occupied territory and returning to Romania remained, in fact, ways through which a portion of the population continued to identify with Romanian citizenship.

4. ARTICLE 5 OF THE ARMISTICE CONVENTION

The dispute between Romania and the Soviet Union regarding the citizenship of Romanians in Bessarabia centered on Article 5 of the Armistice Agreement of September 12, 1944. This article obliged Romania to immediately hand over to the Allied High Command all Soviet and Allied prisoners of war, as well as all Soviet and Allied citizens interned or forcibly brought to Romania. At the same time, the article stipulated the Romanian state's obligation to provide for the maintenance, medical care, and transportation not only of these categories but also of displaced persons and refugees, until their repatriation. It was precisely this wording that gave rise to a conflict of interpretation. From the Soviet perspective, Article 5 constituted sufficient grounds for identifying and repatriating to the Soviet Union a very broad category of persons considered Soviet citizens. From the Romanian perspective, the text could not be automatically extended to all Bessarabians who had taken refuge in Romania, and the inclusion of "refugees" within the scope of the article did not equate to legitimizing forced and indiscriminate repatriation. The implementation of the armistice was overseen by the Allied Control Commission, which was in fact under Soviet control, meaning that the legal debate took place within a profoundly unequal political context¹²³.

The first transport of persons subject to repatriation, organized from Bucharest on October 23, 1944, showed that the refugees' willingness to return to the Soviet Union was low. Some of those on the lists did not show up for boarding. For the

¹²³ George Damian Mocanu, "Presiunile Moscovei pentru deportarea românilor basarabeni în Uniunea Sovietică la sfârșitul celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial" ["Moscow's Pressure for the Deportation of the Bessarabian Romanians to the Soviet Union at the End of the Second World War"], in Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean and Dumitru-Mircea Buda (eds.), *Literary discourse today. Dialogue and multiculturalism*, Section: History, Political Sciences, International Relations (Târgu-Mureș), 2022, pp. 139–144.

Soviet side, this was interpreted as the result of obstruction by the Romanian authorities; for the Romanian side, on the contrary, it demonstrated that these people did not consider themselves Soviet citizens and that their wishes had to be considered. Thus, as early as the fall of 1944, the dispute centered on two incompatible conceptions of citizenship. The Soviets proceeded from the premise that citizenship was determined by territorial control and the internal legislation of the USSR; the Romanians argued that a change in sovereignty could not nullify a person's right to choose a particular state affiliation.

At the same time, administrative pressure from Soviet authorities had been evident since September 1944. The prefectures reported to the Ministry of the Interior the interventions of Red Army representatives aimed at repatriating Bessarabian refugees who did not wish to leave. The Ministry of the Interior's response, formulated in General Aldea's circular of October 4, 1944, stated that refugees from Bessarabia could not be forced to return to the Soviet Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported this position, asserting that Bessarabian refugees in Romania could not be automatically classified as Soviet citizens. Nevertheless, on October 6, 1944, Colonel Borisov, on behalf of the Allied Control Commission, requested the compilation of a nominal register of Soviet citizens in Romania, without providing a precise definition of this category. The lack of a clear legal definition was not accidental but allowed for a broad interpretation favorable to Soviet claims. The escalation of Soviet pressure became evident in early November 1944. On November 2, General Vinogradov informed the Romanian government that the application of Article 5 was "entirely unsatisfactory", reproaching the Romanian authorities for failing to provide complete data on Soviet and Allied citizens and for obstructing their repatriation. At this point, the legal dispute had already turned into a political accusation: Romania was suspected not only of interpreting the armistice differently, but of sabotaging it.

On November 8, 1944, Colonel Nicolae Hagi-Stoica, a magistrate, drafted a report in which he systematically articulated for the first time the essential issues of the dispute. He raised the issue of precisely defining the concept of a Soviet citizen and pointed out the unclear legal status of several categories of people: Bessarabians and Bukovinians who had taken refuge in Romania, Romanian officials of Bessarabian origin, refugee priests, people who had never been under Soviet rule, but who came from territories claimed by the USSR, as well as Soviet citizens originally from within Russia who had married Romanian men or women and wished to remain in the country. In November 1944, the pressure took on an increasingly brutal dimension. Soviet officers demanded lists of students of Bessarabian origin from schools and lists of civil servants from Bessarabia from public institutions. There were reports of the abduction of Romanian citizens originally from Bessarabia, who were taken away without legal procedure and transported to the Soviet Union.

An important milestone in clarifying the Soviet position was reached on November 28, 1944, when Soviet Colonel Borisov stated that all Soviet citizens –

whether from Bessarabia, Bukovina, or other regions of the USSR – must be repatriated, citing a Soviet decree from March 1941. According to this interpretation, all Bessarabians who themselves or whose parents had been citizens of the Russian Empire prior to November 7, 1917, and who had resided between 1940 and 1941 in territory controlled by the USSR, held Soviet citizenship. The problem, however, was that the Soviet side applied these criteria in an expansive manner, going so far as to include people who were not of Bessarabian origin but had happened to be in Bessarabia at the time of the 1940 occupation.

The Romanian government's response was based on two major principles. The first was that seeking refuge in Romania constituted an expression of the individual's will to remain under the authority of the Romanian state. The second was the right to choose citizenship in the event of a change in territorial sovereignty, a principle enshrined in international law. Following this logic, Bessarabians who had left the territory occupied by the USSR could not automatically be considered Soviet citizens. It was precisely on this basis that, on December 8, 1944, Prime Minister Nicolae Rădescu asked Savel Rădulescu to secure a suspension of repatriations until the concept of a Soviet citizen was clearly defined.

The meeting on December 15, 1944, between Savel Rădulescu and General Vinogradov revealed with particular clarity the true scope of the Soviet objective. On that occasion, Vinogradov stated that the USSR sought to "obtain" 140,000 Bessarabian refugees in Romania. Even more significant is the fact that, when the Romanian side invoked the right of option, Vinogradov replied that these people were Soviet citizens and that the Soviet state needed them. A pivotal moment for the formulation of Romania's legal defense was the acquisition, on December 30, 1944, of the text of the Soviet decree of March 8, 1941. Based on this, the Romanian jurist Alexandru Danielopol formulated a restrictive interpretation, according to which the acquisition of Soviet citizenship required the cumulative fulfillment of three conditions: the person must have been a citizen of the Russian Empire on November 7, 1917, must have resided in Bessarabia on June 28, 1940, and must not have left the territory within the timeframe set by the Soviet ultimatum. This interpretation meant that not everyone who happened to remain in Bessarabia could be considered a Soviet citizen – neither those who had requested repatriation to Romania, nor those who had not had permanent residence there between 1917 and 1940. General Vinogradov, however, refused to accept the Romanian position and referred the matter to the authorities in Moscow for resolution.

The response received from Moscow on March 3, 1945, dashed hopes for a negotiated solution based on balanced legal grounds. Colonel Borisov announced that all Bessarabians who had acquired Soviet citizenship under the decree of March 8, 1941, were to be repatriated regardless of their choice. Furthermore, the Soviet interpretation went so far as to consider a Romanian citizen born in Romanași County, who was found in Bessarabia on June 28, 1940, to be a Soviet citizen simply because he had been on territory occupied by the USSR. At the same time, the Soviet

authorities demanded that a complete census of all Soviet citizens in Romania, according to their own definition, be conducted within ten days.

5. PARTIAL RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

On May 22, 1945, a Romanian-Soviet meeting was held at the Soviet Legation in Bucharest aimed at resolving the issue of the Bessarabians and Bukovinians¹²⁴. Representing the USSR was Minister Pavlov, the USSR's extraordinary envoy to Romania; representing Romania were Mihail Ghelmegeanu, president of the Romanian Commission for the Implementation of the Armistice, Minister Ciuntu, and lawyer Alexandru Danielopol; Magistrate Gane served as interpreter. This meeting was of utmost importance because it marks the Soviet side's acceptance of a partial right of option for Bessarabian refugees in Romania; for this reason, we will present this document in detail.

The preserved minutes show that the meeting had three main objectives. The first was to establish a specific method for identifying and registering persons considered or presumed to be Soviet citizens. The second was to define the categories of Bessarabians and Bukovinians who were to be registered on the lists. The third was to find an administrative formula through which the Romanian government could carry out Soviet demands without causing, at least on the surface, an immediate and mass deportation. Pavlov clearly tells Ghelmegeanu that the new Soviet communiqué "supplements" the previous instructions and "definitively" establishes the Soviet position on the identification and registration of Soviet citizens. After registration, individuals were to be asked whether or not they wished to return to the USSR, and if they cited "valid reasons", representatives of the Allied Control Commission would not have compelled them to return. Here, Pavlov also introduces the only clearly formulated concrete exception: women married to Romanians, with children and a household established in Romania, whom the Soviets declare they will leave in Romania so as not to break up families.

Pavlov requested that the Romanian government completely rewrite the administrative instructions regarding the registration of the persons in question, not merely add a supplement to the previous circulars. He insisted on "a single, complete, and definitive communiqué". Moscow sought to eliminate any previous Romanian formulations that might have left room for interpretations more favorable to the Bessarabians. Second, Pavlov demanded that persons who had arrived in Romania between June 28, 1940, and June 22, 1941, be placed on a special list, presumed to be Soviet citizens, while those who arrived after June 22, 1941, were to be included on the lists of actual Soviet citizens, provided they met the conditions of the Soviet decree. Third, he wanted the registration to be carried out without

¹²⁴ Marin Radu Mocanu, *România și armistițiul cu Națiunile Unite. Documente [Romania and the Armistice with the United Nations. Documents]*, Arhivele Statului din România, 1995, pp. 252–262.

publicity, through internal administrative channels, without the press or radio, and even demanded that the penalty for failure to appear be maintained, as a “threat to the public” and to the “prestige of the Soviet Government”.

This request to maintain secrecy is one of the key points of the document. The Soviets wanted complete lists, drawn up quickly, without public opposition and without political agitation. A second reason was to avoid mobilizing those targeted. Ghelmegeanu and Ciuntu immediately noted that, if the document were not public, individuals would not know the terms and conditions of registration, and if they found out through unofficial channels, panic would ensue. Another reason was to maintain control over interpretation. If the text remained internal, the ambiguous formula of “simple record-keeping” could be applied flexibly: it was presented to Romanians as an inventory, but in practice it could become a pretext for the subsequent roundup of individuals. Ghelmegeanu says exactly this: even if they are not deported, the mere fact that they are listed means that “the Soviet government, having their lists, can arrest them whenever it wants”. Pavlov does not respond with a solid legal guarantee but merely repeats that individual cases will be examined.

Essentially, Pavlov proposed a two-pronged approach: an apparent renunciation of immediate mass repatriation, but the maintenance of a complete mechanism of control over the people. He expressly states that, unlike the Soviet demands of March 1945, identification is no longer linked to the dismissal of officials and workers, nor to mass repatriation. Ghelmegeanu thanked him for this concession, which, however, was only apparent; Moscow was abandoning immediate brutality and shifting to a gradual approach: inventorying, listing, individual interrogation, filtering based on grounds accepted by the Soviets, and then eventual repatriation.

During this meeting, each situation received a specific Soviet interpretation. The first category consisted of people who were not in Bessarabia and Bukovina on June 28, 1940, nor did they have permanent residence there. For these, Pavlov agreed that they should not be included on the lists. The second category consisted of people who had arrived in Romania between June 28, 1940, and June 22, 1941. For these, the Soviets maintained a “presumption” of Soviet citizenship, but without immediately establishing their citizenship definitively. The third category consisted of people who arrived in Romania after June 22, 1941; for them, Pavlov states that if they had been former subjects of the Russian Empire in 1917 and fell under the provisions of the decree, they were “undoubtedly” Soviet citizens. The fourth distinct issue concerned individuals who were not in Bessarabia on June 28, 1940, but had registered with Soviet consulates by May 1, 1941; Pavlov considered them subject to the requirement of being included on the lists. The fifth issue concerned the Bukovinians evacuated between June 28, 1940, and June 22, 1941, regarding whom Ciuntu and Ghelmegeanu insist that the decree of March 8, 1941, exempted them, while Pavlov wants at least a separate record of them.

In response to each of Pavlov's positions, the Romanian representatives offer precise counterarguments. Ghelmegeanu insists that mere inclusion on the list is dangerous, as it provides the Soviets with a concrete tool to subsequently arrest those "in dispute". Danielopol criticizes the lack of criteria for admitting "valid reasons": without fixed criteria, Soviet assessment becomes arbitrary. He requests that a Romanian representative also participate in the interrogations conducted by representatives of the Allied Control Commission, possibly through joint commissions; otherwise, the entire operation would remain exclusively in the hands of the Soviets. Pavlov rejects this request for the time being, stating that the issue of joint commissions will be discussed "later".

Minister Ciuntu pointed out that people would inevitably become frightened, especially if they learned about these lists through indirect channels. Regarding the Bukovinians, he noted that they did not fall under the provisions of the Soviet decree and that their inclusion would cause "unimaginable panic", as it would be perceived as a preliminary measure for repatriation. Ghelmegeanu supported him and requested either the removal of the passage regarding the Bukovinians or its transfer to a "supplementary order", accompanied by the phrase "mere administrative record". Pavlov agreed only partially, ultimately proposing a third special list for Bukovinians who arrived between June 28, 1940, and June 22, 1941. The issue regarding the Bukovinians was that their citizenship was guaranteed by the 1919 treaty with Austria and that they had never been part of the Russian Empire. Following this meeting, the process of repatriating refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union was based on the written consent of the individuals concerned to leave Romania.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Given the circumstances of World War II, archival sources are imprecise regarding the exact number of people affected by the developments described above. The 1941 census recorded 68,953 refugees from Bessarabia in Romania, a significant number given the administrative chaos and the extremely short timeframe in which the Soviet Union's annexation took place. On August 15, 1944, 690,473 refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were registered on Romanian territory, of whom 456,331 came from Bessarabia. Their number may have been higher, given that population movements continued for some time after August 15, 1944¹²⁵. Alexandru Danielopol recalled that approximately 50,000 of these individuals

¹²⁵ Mihaela Teodor, „Problema cetățeniei basarabenilor refugiați din România, aspect al luptei pentru păstrarea identității naționale” [“The Citizenship Issue of Bessarabian Refugees from Romania: An Aspect of the Struggle to Preserve National Identity”], in ***, *La frontierele civilizațiilor. Basarabia în context geopolitic, economic, cultural și religios* [At the Frontiers of Civilizations: Bessarabia in Geopolitical, Economic, Cultural, and Religious Context], Galați University Press, 2011, p. 264.

returned to the Soviet Union¹²⁶; the tables preserved at the National Archives in multiple files and periodically updated mention a figure of 58,000 people.

The loss of Romanian citizenship by Romanians in Bessarabia was a complex process, the main cause of which was that the Soviet Union did not recognize Bessarabia's union with Romania in 1918. The citizenship status of people in Bessarabia was not guaranteed by international treaties, as was the case with the other provinces (Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina). Even so, the Soviets effectively contested the acquisition of Romanian citizenship by Bukovinians through the Treaty of Saint-Germain – without, however, doing so explicitly. The confrontation between the Romanian and Soviet authorities between 1944 and 1945 regarding the repatriation of Bessarabians and Bukovinians was an unequal one; it was a confrontation between the force of law and the law of force. Even so, the Romanian authorities' insistence on the right to choose regarding citizenship meant that less than 10% of the refugees from Bessarabia and Bukovina were sent to the Soviet Union.

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