

The complete administrative integration of Bessarabia in the Romanian administrative structures. The Law of administrative unification, 1925

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Abstract: - Bessarabia represents the eastern part of the historical Moldavia, and it is situated between the Prut river and the Nistru river. In 1812, it was taken by the Czarist Empire and it was part of it until 1918, when it joined Romania. The administrative integration into the Romanian structures represented a historical necessity. It was a complex process, sometimes difficult, which was carried out gradually. An important event in the administrative integration process was the adoption of the new Constitution in 1923, and the crucial step was the adoption of the Administrative unification law from 1925.

Key-Words: - Bessarabia, administrative organization, the law of unification administration - 1925

1 Introduction

Bessarabia was, between 1812-1918, a component of the Russian Empire. Its southern side, consisting in Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail counties, was reintegrated to the Romanian administration between 1856-1878. The transfer from a national administrative system to another one is accompanied by a process of upheaval and trauma of the human spirit.

The unification of Bessarabia with Romania in 1918 initiated the mechanism of the administrative reintegration into the Romanian administrative structures. An important event in the administrative integration process was the adoption of the new Constitution in 1923. The final of this process was represented by the adoption of the administrative unification law from 1925.

2 The Law of administrative unification, 1925

The most important step in achieving the administrative integration of the provinces united in 1918 with Romania consisted in adoption of the *Law for administrative unification*, on the 14th of June 1925. The first article from the administrative law provisions from 1925, stipulated that the Romania's territory was administratively divided into județe (counties) which were divided into

communes. There were urban and rural communes. The rural ones consisted of one or more villages. The commune's residence was in one of its component villages. The urban communes could be county residencies or non-county residencies. The county's prefecture was established in the county residencies. Those county residencies "which, by number of inhabitants and by their cultural or economic importance have a more influence on the state's general development, are to be declared, by law, municipalities" (art. 4). According to article 5, the counties were divided into subdivisions ruled by praetorians (art. 355), and the urban communes were divided into circumscriptions called sectors. Both subdivisions and sectors had no legal personality. The commune and the county had legal personality and were administrated "by councils consisting of elected counselors" (art. 10). The communes and counties were able to administrate their local affairs (art. 9). The local authorities administration of their "own affairs" was a fundamental principle of decentralization [1], and "the right of the territorial administrative units to achieve their own interests" actually meant the achievement of the local autonomy [2]. The attribute of local institutions to have legal personality is a central element of the administrative decentralization [3]. The head of the local administration was the mayor and that of the county administration was the prefect [4].

The mayors of the rural communes were elected by the communal councils, the mayors of the municipalities were appointed by the Internal Ministry from the proposals of the county Council (art. 31). The prefect was the representative of the central power in the county (art. 14) and he was appointed by Royal Decree. The activity of the communes and the counties was coordinated and controlled by the Internal Ministry (art. 13). The communal and county counselors were elected in a ratio of 3/5 based on the universal vote and 2/5 were counselors per se (art. 17 and art. 101) [4].

The provisions regarding the appointment of counselors, mayors and prefects highlight the flexible character of the principles which was the basis of adopting this law between the administrative centralization and decentralization [5]. The centralization “denies any judicial life for the local collectivities” [6] while decentralization allows a democratic management of local interests by means of the elected organs [7].

A complex document, with 400 articles comprised in six titles, the law included detailed stipulations regarding the way of territorial administrative organization of the country, smooth running of the urban and rural communes, electing and running of the county and communal local councils, the attributions of the leading factors, of the servants, setting up of the budgets, organization of the local police, leading factor etc.

In accordance with the age trend, the law comprised a lot of new stipulations: universal vote, women’s presence in federal administrative structures, making up of a public servant staff by means of the specialized schools, introduction of some provisions of procedural type in achieving some undertakings with administrative character, upgrading the inhabitants’ general education by means of the schools for adults, implementing some programs of cultural-urban and civic-administrative development, of arrangement and protection of the environment both in the rural and in the urban area etc.[8].

The final and transitory provisions comprised some stipulations also referring to the actions of adaptability and administrative harmonization in the united provinces. Article 385 stipulated that zemstvas’ inheritance was to be transferred into the patrimony of counties “that follow them in rights and obligations”. The directors of prefecture in Bessarabia (like those from the Old Kingdom) who came from the subdivision stable administrators, were to be confirmed as sub prefects. The same status could be also awarded to those directors of prefecture who were not stable and had no academic

title, but “they have been working for at least five years in administrative positions and prove that they have the knowledge and the skills of the demanded position” (art. 391). By the law effect, the subdivision administrators, prime-praetorians and sub-prefects in charge in Bessarabia, became praetorians. All these latter servants, like the subdivision administrators and prime-praetorians, who had no academic title or didn’t come from active military, could “be declared stable as praetorians”, if they were appointed before the 1st of April 1921 and had all the necessary abilities (art. 393). The sub-prefect assistants were appointed “within the limit of vacant positions, subdivision secretaries or praetorians, if they fulfill the conditions of the present law” (art. 395) [4].

The administrative law from the 14th of June 1925 assured a unitary administrative territorial organization of the whole national territory. It can be considered “a reference point in the history of communes organization in our country”, unifying, as a way of organization, according to the existing model in old Romania, the communes from the entire national territory [9].

The Royal Decree from the 7th of October 1925, adopted based on the new law showed that there were organized in Romania 8879 communes, out of which 71 were urban communes as county residencies and 94 urban communes as non county residencies, 10 of them were sub-urban communes and 8704 were rural communes [5].

In Bessarabia the number of urban communes as non residencies increased from 6 to 7, the number of the rural communes decreased from 1946, as they were in 1922, to 716 in 1926. The subdivision number also decreased from 214 to 61 and of the rural communes from 3571 to 1672, for the same data taken as point of reference [10].

The completion of the new administrative organization ended on the 5th of February 1926. Romania had 71 counties. The names of some counties or the name of these residencies underwent some changes. In Bessarabia there was maintained the division in nine counties: Bălȃi (5260 km², 1 urban commune, 78 rural communes); Cahul (4482 km², 2 urban communes, 67 rural communes); Cetatea Albă (7595 km², 1 urban commune, 99 rural communes); Hotin (3782 km², 1 urban commune, 85 rural communes); Ismail (4212 km², 5 urban communes, 55 rural communes); Lăpuȃna (4181 km², 2 urban communes, 79 rural communes); Orhei (4246 km², 1 urban commune, 126 rural communes); Soroca (4331 km², 1 urban commune, 46 rural communes) and Tighina (6333 km², 2 urban communes, 81 rural communes) [10]. The name of

Chişinău county became Lăpuşna [9]. Comrat lost its quality of a county residence. Out of those 17 municipalities of the country (county residencies), there were two in Bessarabia: Chişinău and Cetatea Albă.

As an area, Hotin was the smallest county and Cetatea Albă was the largest, with a surface more than double than the first one, a fact meaning that in Romania there were small, middle and large counties. The most urban communes (five) were in Ismail, a small county as a surface. With this number Ismail held the second place in the country together with Constanţa and Hunedoara counties, after Fălticeni and Prahova counties which had seven urban communes each. The smallest number of rural communes (46) was in Sorooca county, the last but one place in the country, in front of Câmpulung county, and the greatest number of rural communes (126) was in Orhei county, much under the counties that were the richest in rural communes at a national level, Bihor and Hunedoara which had 416 rural communes each [11].

The administrative law from 1925 represented the decisive step regarding the administrative integration of Bessarabia in the Romanian structures. The zemstvas, the last inheritance or the Russian administration, ceased their activity. The Bessarabian scientist Svetlana Suveică, demonstrated in an excellent study the contribution of these structures to the russification of the Bessarabian society until 1918. The zemstvas of this place did not encourage the democratic spirit, they were the most conservative and reactionary from the entire Russian Empire and had no contribution to the emancipation of learning in the language of most of the province's population; in all the fields of activity, the Bessarabian zemstvas were situated after the achievements of the zemstvas from the entire Czar Empire [10].

The administrative integration of Bessarabia was a complex process that took place in an extremely unfavorable context for the Romanian state. The inherent difficulties of this process are not a justification for some mistakes made at the centre, a kind of haste in adopting some decisions and using some methods. Some contemporary authors highlight multiple gaps regarding the process of Bessarabia's administrative integration, such as: different abuses of the new established official administration; appointment of some corrupted clerks from The Old Kingdom to Bessarabia; some clerks coming from minorities, especially Russians, were considered trustless, as potential destabilizing Bolshevik agents; removal of the clerks and teachers who didn't speak Romanian language; a certain

haste regarding implementation of the Romanian language and transformation of the Moldavian peasants into Romanian ones; dissolution of the State schools belonging to the minorities; a certain socio-cultural marginalization of the minorities; obstruction of the religious services in the minorities' language; central administration incapacity to support a majoritary press in Romanian language; a national political life dominated by iterative misunderstandings, political marginalization of the Bessarabian officials; a continuous maintenance of the differences between city and village; a low level of Bessarabia's industrial development compared to Romania's, etc. [5, 10, 12, 13, 14]. All these deficiencies had a negative impact on the community's mentality, which caused a reluctance towards the "Romanian-wide" ideal [14]; and it also caused the idea that Bessarabia was not united to Romania, but it was conquered by Romania [12]. These remarks are basically correct, but they must be seen depending on their context and correlated to the other aspects and consequences of Bessarabia's process of integration in the structures of the Romanian society.

The Romanian state found the necessary resources to temporize and casually regulate the process of Bessarabia's integration. Making reference to the whole matter, the scientist Ion Agrigoroaiei from "Al. I. Cuza" University, Iaşi, stated that "These objective and subjective difficulties regarding Bessarabia's integration into the Romanian unitary national state (some of them were also differently obvious in other territories that had joined the Country) can not doubt either upon the character of the Union Act or upon the essence of the policy developed by the Romanian state in the next period" [5].

The strict administrative integration was accompanied and supported by the adoption of some provisions of harmonization and integration of the Bessarabian society into the Romanian spiritual and functional universe. So that, after 1918 there were adopted actions of integrating the education, Church, allotment and agrarian law, judicial laws, unification of the cultural-artistic and editorial life etc., some aspects that are not the present analysis object, yet [5, 15, 16]. However, we briefly mention some beneficial aspects of Bessarabia's integration in the Romanian administrative structures: Bessarabia inhabitants' life significantly improved between the Two World Wars; agrarian reform from 1921 positively influenced the peasantry living standard; the province capital, Chişinău, underwent a large modernization process consisting of paving

the main streets and draining the marshes of the Bâc river, a process that allowed new lands for building. The railway network was expanded, which allowed a better connection between Bessarabia's town and Chişinău, and between the province and Bucharest and other Romanian towns. The number of locomotives significantly increased from 29 in 1919 to 119 in a short time, and the frequency of trains runs on the routes Chişinău-Bălţi and Chişinău-Ungheni increased for four-five times during the Two World Wars; new roads and bridges were built over Prut river, which allowed the commercial products of the provinces to go west [12, 14].

Irina Livezeanu skillfully analyzes the efficiency of the cultural and school policy in Bessarabia, the increasing number of schools and libraries, an unprecedented access to culture, Romanian training courses, role of the extracurricular activities by means of cultural societies, soirees, folks and art tours, different publications in large print etc. [13]. This policy resulted in acquiring the accuracy of Romanian language and the increase of literacy. Thus, while in the countryside the number of literates was 12,5% in 1897, their number reached 26,4% in 1930, and this percentage increased from 32,8% to 53,3% in the city. The merit and quality of education were unanimously admitted and illustrated by the phrase "education in Romania" [14]. It is significant that in 1930, only 12.000 persons, meaning less than 1% among the Moldavians from Bessarabia, considered that the Romanian language was not their native tongue, which represented a remarkable success [12].

National symbolism was reinforced by erection of some representative monuments (statues of Stephen the Great and Ferdinand I in Chişinău and of Vasile Lupu in Orhei), radio was introduced, the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church was consolidated etc. Some of these developments had special ethno-political connotations, with an overwhelming role in strengthening imaginary community naturalness of national affiliation. The process of emancipation and modernization of Bessarabia, although natural for that time, got Romanian image in the collective mentality. Rail, radio, telegraph were not only expression of technical revolution, but also *Romanian* progress. [14]. The complex role of administration was to consolidate the national solidarity, and its effects were visible. In this context we emphasize Charles Upson Clark conclusions who remarked that, in 1919, Chişinău „looked like a Russian province town where the Romanian entity seemed to be still strange, even if in the country it was obvious. But in 1925 Chişinău was clearly a Romanian province

capital, although it still preserved a certain Russian atmosphere" [13].

The process of the administrative integration of Bessarabia roughly completed in the first decade after the Union accomplishment. The crucial moment was the law from 1925. Two famous inter-war specialists remarked that the new law couldn't satisfied all that time challenges and that each "province tended to keep its own administrative system that couldn't be replaced by a fully new administrative system [17]. Integration was achieved through the use of democratic mechanism „without involving the violence specific to the Russian communism" [14]. Another researcher, referring to the entire Romanian legislation, actually assumed that the process of unification and smoothing of the Romanian legislation, after the 1918 Union, was supposed to be completed in 1943 [9]. Among the variability of the expressed opinions relative to this process, we can also note the reproach that the 1925 law had been tardily adopted [18].

The 1925 administrative unification Law was criticized at that time especially on behalf of the political opposition, considering that the law had accomplished an excessive centralization [19]. This reproach can be also found in the estimations of some contemporary specialists [20; 21], where the law is considered like an extension of the old kingdom legislation of Romania [22]. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the 1925 administrative law framed within the democratic spirit of that age, introduced the decentralizing principle of the Romanian society organization and evolution. Imposition of the decentralizing principle was a welcome, innovative element for the Romanian society evolution, taking into account that its historical evolution on a universal level was a difficult, sinuous one.

4 Conclusion

The 1925 law represents the crucial legislative document that accomplished the administrative integration of Bessarabia into the unitary Romanian administrative structures – the county, the administrative subdivision and the commune, the communal and county council, the prefect and the mayor, were elected, organized and operated by themselves, as appropriate, in the same way like in the whole territory of the Romanian state.

The administrative unification law from the 14th of June 1925, represents one of the most important laws that contributed to the modernization and consolidation of the Romanian society after the First

World War. Keeping the country's unitary character, the law prepared the way, at the same time, for the administrative decentralization principle. It represented a historical necessity for that time. The law remained a reference one in the evolution of the Romanian administrative history, and it was considered a real reform, a name which is actually remarkable in the current references.

Tsarist administration on Bessarabia, 1812-1918, could not provide a modernization process of Bessarabian society, because of the stifling policy of Russian government, of the conservative attitude of the central policy against the periphery. The springs of Bessarabia rule were subordinated to the expansionist reason and to the economical and ethnic domination. Bessarabia administrative integration into the Romanian society structures, between the Two World Wars, meant the start of an authentic, although difficult, modernizing process of the Bessarabian society and also the province return to its natural environment. This process was based on some very important decisions, namely: the introduction of universal suffrage, 1918; the peasants land reform, 1921; the new Constitution, 1923; and the 1925 administrative reform.

The process of Bessarabia modernization was a complex one, materialized in large areas, such as social, economical, political, scientific, cultural, urbanistic and also in consolidation of the national consciousness, etc. An illustration of this process, even if a brief one, can be noticed in the growing number of schools, from 1.747 to 2.718, in the pupils number, from 136.172 to 346.747, between 1920-1939; setting out a competitive higher level of education (scientific, artistic, theological), establishing the conditions of implementation for an industrial life, increasing of the cultivated area from 3.280 ha, in 1916, to 13.495 ha, in 1926; modernization of the railways and extension of the road network from about 200.000 km before the unification, to 1.106.535 km of stoned and paved roads at the end of the Two World War period; organization of a valid banking system, of an operational sanitary system, etc. Bessarabia modernization between Two World Wars must be considered the beginning of a long process, interrupted however by the rapt of Province by Soviet Union and its implicit placement into a foreign social, economical and political regime, tough, closed and dominated by the communist dictatorship.

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