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Enemies, Partners, Neighbors. The Romanian-Ukrainian Relations at the End of the Great War

Abstract

The Kremlin's statements on the alleged territorial claims of Poland and Romania against Ukraine, statements issued in the aftermath of Russia's large-scale invasion of the neighbouring country, have prompted us to investigate the evolution of Romanian-Ukrainian relations between 1918 and 1922. Based on Ukrainian, Romanian and Western sources, archive documents and articles published in the press of the time, we provide an overview of the most important aspects in the common history of the two peoples during the above-mentioned period in Bessarabia and Bukovina, as well as of the diplomatic negotiations and territorial disputes between Bucharest and Kiev. Although in the early years of its existence, the Ukrainian People's Republic expressed interest in these two regions, during the Directorate – in the hope of an anti-Bolshevik alliance with Romania – it adopted a pragmatic attitude and even offered to acknowledge the border on the Dniester (which meant recognition of the union of Bessarabia with Romania). Nothing was said, however, about the future of Bukovina. The Paris Conference officially assigned the former Habsburg province to Romania,

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which triggered resentment among the Ukrainian population towards Romania throughout the interwar period. The Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, signed in 1997, is currently in force between the two neighbouring countries.

Keywords

Greater Romania, Bukovina, Bessarabia, Paris Peace Conference, borders /România Mare, Bucovina, Basarabia, Conferința de Pace de la Paris, granițe

The war that broke out in Europe in early 2022 has changed the lives of millions of people, shaken the confidence of the world's citizens in the current system of international relations, and might also impair the good neighbourly relations between the states in the region. In its efforts to isolate Ukraine and to create dissension between Ukraine and the countries that, in one form or another, support it in these difficult times, Vladimir Putin's regime has repeatedly floated the idea that Poland, Romania and the Republic of Moldova have a secret agenda and territorial claims against their neighbour. The most recent statement by the Kremlin on this point was made on National Unity Day (5 November 2022), during the Russian president's meeting with historians and representatives of officially recognised religions, which forced the Romanian Foreign Ministry to once again publicly uphold the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders (Precizări, 2022).

This study aims to present the evolution of Romanian-Ukrainian relations in the context of the First World War, the demise of the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires and the emergence of the Ukrainian and Moldovan nation-states, with special emphasis on the events mentioned by Putin, which however have long been settled through diplomatic efforts, by the signing of the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between Romania and Ukraine (2 June 1997).

The collapse of the Russian Empire, following the Revolution of February 1917, paved the way for the emergence of autonomous, and later independent, states in the area that had previously been under Romanov rule. In the south-east of the empire, the former governorates (gubernias) emancipated themselves, one by one, from the political authority of Petrograd. In those troubled times, in the full swing of the war, two new states emerged on Romania's eastern borders: the Ukrainian People's Republic (Ukrainska Narodna Respublika, or UNR) and the Democratic Republic of Moldova (RDM), which proclaimed their independence on 22 and 24 January 1918, respectively.

The rightful heir to a territory comprising nine governorates, Ukraine also aspired to gain other historical provinces, such as Bukovina, Kholm, Galicia and part of Bessarabia. Possessing remarkable demographic and economic potential and a political elite ready to lead the country, Ukraine emerged on the international stage as a state in its own right for the first time in modern history during the First World War. However, its authority was undermined by the Bolsheviks, so the only way for Ukraine to repel the "Red" offensive was to negotiate a separate peace with the Central Powers, which were interested in its natural resources and grain production. This is how, after weeks of negotiations, the Peace of Brest-Litovsk came about. During the talks, in addition to the Kholm region, the Ukrainians demanded Galicia, Bukovina and Ruthenian territories in northern Hungary, all belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Subtelny, 1988). However, facing the threat of obliteration and depending on German military aid, the UNR lowered its demands and proposed the establishment of an "independent Austrian province" consisting of Eastern Galicia and Bukovina (Czernin, 1919). An agreement that arose out of mutual interests was reached in the hope of concluding the talks as soon as possible. Thus, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine signed a political treaty (27 January 1918, Old Style), which economically and militarily ended the state of war between the UNR and the Central Powers. According to the provisions of the treaty, the pre-war border between Austro-Hungary and Ukraine was reinstated, but Ukraine additionally received the Kholm district, part of historical Polish territory.

A secret clause, later revealed to the public, referred to the obligation of Austria-Hungary to enact a law by which Eastern Galicia and Bukovina would be reunited into an autonomous Ukrainian state within the Habsburg Empire (Wheeler-Bennett, 1936).

The Peace of Brest-Litovsk, the first to follow the Great War, put an end to the Allies' hopes of organising a Ukrainian front to prolong the war against the Central Powers in this part of Europe. As far as Bukovina was concerned, the secret clause created an advantage for ethnic Ukrainians over Romanians. The treaty also had another important strategic consequence for Romania, which was forced to conclude an unfavourable peace with the Central Powers.

The interests of the Central Rada in Bessarabia

Under the Russian Empire, there were strong economic ties between the Ukrainian governorates (gubernias) on the right bank of the Dnieper, especially in southern Ukraine, and Bessarabia. The presence of the Ukrainian population in the counties of Hotin and Akkerman (Cetatea Albă) further strengthened these ties before the First World War. For the sake of its local interests, the Central Rada tried to expand its sphere of influence to include the area between the Prut and the Dniester, thus giving the impression that it was even interested in annexing the territory. However, after a period of intense Russification, the Ukrainians in Bessarabia lacked a sense of national consciousness similar to that of the Ruthenians in Bukovina, and thus they did not play an active role in the political-diplomatic games of 1917–1920, nor did they constitute an internal pressure factor.

The first signs of the UNR's interest appeared as early as in the summer of 1917, when Volodimir Vinnichenko, the Rada's Minister of the Interior, travelled to Petrograd with the intention of obtaining the recognition of Ukraine's authority over ten governorates, including Bessarabia from the central government led by Aleksandr Kerensky. This mission was thwarted by the Moldovan authorities, who in turn submitted a memorandum and an ethnographic map to the Russian Prime Minister and thus successfully argued for "Bessarabia's right to self-determination and federal autonomy".

Confronted with the firm position of Chişinău officials, Ukraine gave up its plans for annexation for the time being and established normal political relations with its neighbour.

After the diplomatic success at Brest-Litovsk (see above), whereby it achieved many of its territorial objectives, the UNR publicly reiterated its interest in the situation in Bessarabia in the context of the negotiations between Romania and the Central Powers, conducted at Buftea, near Bucharest, and informed the Moldovan authorities that it wished to participate in the talks (A.N.I.C., Pelivan; Pântea, 1932). On 3 March 1918 (Old Style – os), a note signed by Foreign Minister Vsevolod Holubovich, about the “indivisible unity” of Ukraine and Bessarabia was sent to the countries participating in the negotiations. The request was based on demographic arguments (the significant number of Ukrainians in Hotin and Cetatea Albă regions), as well as economic and political arguments. For various reasons, none of the states participating in the conference agreed to the request: Germany was opposed to Ukraine taking over Bessarabia for geopolitical reasons, Austro-Hungary had its own interests in the northern part of the territory, while Romania refused from the outset to address the Bessarabian question during the peace talks with the Central Powers (Agrigoroaiei, 2007). The diplomatic note submitted to the Central Powers by the UNR government was debated at the meeting of the Country Council on 16 March 1918 (os) and rejected by a vigorous protest proclaiming the indivisibility of Bessarabia within the borders between the Dniester, Prut and Black Sea and rejecting Ukraine’s request to participate in the Bucharest Conference (Agrigoroaiei, 2007).

Despite its efforts, the UNR was not admitted to the talks in Bucharest; moreover, the Central Powers – especially Germany – suggested that Romania seize Bessarabia as compensation for the territorial losses and economic exploitation Romania had incurred as a result of the Buftea Peace Treaty.

Amidst the chaos and threat created by the Bolsheviks present on the territory of the young republic east of the Prut, one of the immediate consequences of the demands made by the Ukrainian authorities was the intensification of the unionist current in the RDM in favour of the union with Romania, materialised in the meeting of

the Country Council on 27 March 1918, where it obtained an absolute majority of votes (Andronachi, 1933).

The proclamation of the union of Bessarabia with Romania triggered a wave of diplomatic protests from the UNR and Soviet Russia (Calafeteanu, 1995). The Romanian government replied to one such note of protest, sent by the Ukrainian government on 13 April 1918, that Bessarabia “was united with its motherland, by virtue of a vote expressed almost unanimously by the Country Council”, that all nationalities were represented in the legislative body, that there was no region in Bessarabia where the population had asked for annexation to Ukraine and that the minority must obey the decision of the majority (Calafeteanu, 1995).

The “matter of Bessarabia” continued to fuel discord between Romania and Ukraine after the establishment of hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi’s regime, through a heated exchange of letters. In a diplomatic note of 5 May 1918, Dmitro Doroshenko, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister, rejected the decision of the Moldovan Country Council to unite with Romania, citing the special, complex political, economic and social relationships between Ukraine and Bessarabia. He argued that the Country Council had been established under extraordinary circumstances and had refused any submission to Romania, that the Entente powers had given written guarantees of the independence of the Democratic Republic of Moldova, guarantees confirmed by the Romanian authorities. He also pointed out that the Romanian army had entered Bessarabia exclusively for military purposes and would leave the territory once order was restored. The Romanian side rejected the above arguments one by one, insisting on the continued presence of the Romanian population in the area, and stressed that the Country Council had been governing “without interruption and with full independence”, as the legal representative and supreme authority of Bessarabia, that none of the official declarations of the Moldovan Parliament rejected the idea of an union with Romania and that there were no declarations guaranteeing the independence of the RDM from Romania issued by the Entente Powers (Calafeteanu, 1995).

Despite this controversy, a month later, Romania stated it was willing to approve the establishment of diplomatic relations

between the two countries, provided that the borders were recognised (Noe, 1918).

Different visions for the future of Bukovina

Much more complex was the nature of Romanian-Ukrainian relations in Bukovina, an Austro-Hungarian province in turmoil because of the war. In October and November 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was disintegrating. While the peoples of the Dual Monarchy sought their own political solutions, Charles I of Habsburg (1916–1918) proposed the federalisation of Austria. The Emperor's belated attempt to resolve the national tensions that had built up over the course of history failed, as the representatives of all the peoples rejected the proposal. The project could not solve any of the serious problems that concerned the elites of the nationalities subject to Austro-Hungary.

In a tense atmosphere, representatives of the Romanians and Ukrainians in Bukovina put forward opposing political solutions for the future of the province. While the Ruthenian leaders proposed the creation of an Austrian Ukraine comprising Northern Bukovina and Eastern Galicia, the Romanian leaders demanded either union with Transylvania – with the obligation that the two regions thus united should be freed from the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom – or union with Romania, in agreement with the Romanians of Transylvania and Hungary. The Vienna Parliament was the main forum for debates in which the two visions clashed.

In the following period, Romanians and Ukrainians intensified their political activity seeking to achieve their objectives. Two important events occurred in October and precipitated the situation. The Austrian newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* published an article revealing to the public the provisions of the additional part of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, according to which the Ukrainian state undertook to issue a bill in favour of uniting the territories of Eastern Galicia and Bukovina into an Austrian “country of the crown” (Secret Contract, 1918). The news irritated and alarmed the Romanians of Bukovina, who took radical measures.

Ukrainians were greatly encouraged by the emergence of the Ukrainian state in Galicia, a province bordering Bukovina. On

18 October 1918, the Ukrainian National Council (Ukrainska Nacionalna Rada) was established in Lvov under Yevhen Petrushevych, who, based on the principle of self-determination of nations, proclaimed the existence of a state of all Ukrainians in Austro-Hungary (Hacman, 1998). The authority of this body was to be exercised over the provinces of Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia. Shortly afterwards, the Rada proclaimed the West Ukrainian People's Republic (Zahidno-Ukrainska Narodna Respublika – ZUNR), which triggered a military conflict between Ukrainians and Poles.

In order to gain better political and social representation, the Ruthenians of Bukovina established a regional committee (*kraiovi komitet*) in the following days, headed by a smaller governing body led by Omelian Popowicz (Ботушанський, 2013; Новосівський, 1964). A manifesto was issued to the Ukrainian population, which called for the establishment of self-defence organisations in all the towns and villages of Bukovina.

The Romanians responded immediately, with the National Assembly adopting a resolution which denounced the partition of Bukovina and elected a Romanian National Council (CNR) of 50 persons, led by a presidium.

From the outset, the Ukrainian committee had several advantages over the CNR. The Romanian nationalists, unlike the Ukrainian ones, did not set up local committees in the important towns or villages of the province, nor did they form a volunteer corps of Romanian soldiers from the regiments stationed in the province. These two decisions were of great importance when the Rada negotiated with the Austrian governor Joseph Etzdorf from a position of strength (Țugui, 1996). Another advantage of the Rada was that Wilhelm Franz of Habsburg, son of Archduke Stephan and grandson of Emperor Charles I, was sympathetic to the Ukrainian national movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Vitencu, 1919). By creating the Ukrainian Legion that summer, Wilhelm of Habsburg became an important actor in the province's political games after the transfer of the "legionaries" to Cernăuți (Chernivtsi) and Rădăuți in October.

In order to ascertain the options of the two main communities of the province, Count Etzdorf summoned the leaders of the Rada and the CNR for talks, but the Romanian political leaders outright

rejected any compromise with their Ukrainian counterparts. Things came to a head when the Rada organised a mass demonstration in Cernăuți (3 November 1918) and decided to annex to *zUNR* the city and county of Cernăuți, as well as the counties of Zastavna, Coțmani, Vășcăuți, Vijnița, Siret and some communes in the counties of Rădăuți, Suceava and Câmpulung. The *CNR*'s claims that all of Bukovina should belong to Romania were publicly rejected (Ботушанський, 2013). Two days later, the Ukrainian committee took another important step towards seizing power, by announcing its intention to occupy the Gendarmerie headquarters, the Police Directorate and the Cernăuți railway station, with the aim of intimidating Governor Etzdorf (Șese zile, 1918; Bălan, 1929–1930).

The Ukrainian Regional Committee released a manifesto “to the free citizens of all nations and social classes of the country” on 6 November 1918, in which the Rada presented itself as the only “well-organised” political force that had taken upon itself the “arduous task of maintaining public order and security” by seizing power in the city of Cernăuți and northern Bukovina (Manifestul, 1929). The only aspect the Ukrainian leaders neglected was the military one. No one expected, apparently, that Romania would take action north of Rădăuți.

Faced with the situation created by the latest decisions of the Rada, the *CNR* demanded that the Romanian government intervene militarily in order to protect the “Romanian brothers”. The 8th Division commanded by General Jacob Zadik was ready for action right on the border. While urgently seeking military and diplomatic support from Kiev, the Rada formally protested against the military action of the Romanian army and threatened to report the case to the Entente. After the withdrawal of Ukrainian soldiers stationed in Cernăuți (Добржанський, 2009), the Romanian army entered the capital of Bukovina on 11 November 1918; Ukrainian troops moved to the northern part of the province and then across the border into Eastern Galicia. During the following week, local Ukrainian committees formed across the Prut were liquidated by Romanian detachments (Ardeleanu, 1938).

The presence of the Romanian army allowed the representatives of the Romanian National Council to quietly plan the future

destiny of the province. The General Congress of Bukovina was held in Cernăuți, in the Synod Hall of the Metropolitan Palace on 15 November 1918 (os), and was attended by the leaders of all nationalities of Bukovina, with the exception of the representatives of the Jewish National Council and the Rada. The congress proclaimed “the unconditional and definitive union of Bukovina, with its old borders up to Ceremuș, Colacin and the Dniester river, with the Kingdom of Romania” (A.N.I.C., Presidency of the Council of Ministers).

The Paris Peace Conference: the shattering of the Ukrainian dream

The Paris Peace Conference was Ukrainians' last hope for the recognition of Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state, by an “act of elementary justice in accordance with the principles proclaimed by the powers of the Entente and the United States of America” (Sidorenko, 1919). A large, well-prepared and extremely active delegation, led by Hrihori Sidorenko (1919) and then by Mykhailo Tishkevich (1919–1920), travelled to France and defended their standpoint with memoranda, notes, letters of protest and statements addressed to the President of the Supreme Council. However, because of the civil war, Ukraine was not granted the status of a participant in the debates held between 18 January 1919 and 21 January 1920. A very good description of the situation in Ukraine at the time of the Conference was given by the newspaper *Bukovina* published in Cernăuți:

the issue of the delimitation of Bukovina territory was also raised during the peace conference. It was less serious, because in this matter of the delimitation of Bukovina we were not dealing with a people inclined to agreement, but with a nation on its way to a state organisation, still troubled by internal struggles and continually oscillating between Bolshevism and the bourgeois establishment. The Ukrainians could by no means have been in a good position at the Peace Conference, when Ukraine's friendship with Kaiser's Germany was still so fresh in everyone's minds after the Peace of Brest-Litovsk (*Delimitarea Bucovinei*, 1919, 1).

The general aims of the Ukrainian envoys were to obtain international recognition of Ukraine, the withdrawal of Polish, Romanian and Allied troops from the country, as well as support in their fight against the Bolsheviks.

Ukraine's geopolitical interests are well reflected in the book written, published and distributed during the conference by Stanislaus Dniestrzański, based on ethnographic and demographic arguments and on the Fourteen Points of US President Woodrow Wilson. In his 120-plus page study, the author emphasized the large number of Ukrainians (over 40 million), and the vast territory they occupied. In recounting important events in 20th century Ukrainian history, the study focused on the eastern regions and the conflict with Soviet Russia (Dniestrzański, 1919).

Essentially, Dniestrzański's argument posited that the Ukrainian people was a shield against the Bolshevik danger, perceived as a "threat to European civilization". The Ukrainian land was described as a link between East and West. The area of interest of the Ukrainian nation, as the volume shows, also included territories under the Romanian state. With regard to Bessarabia, the author stated that there were many Romanian enclaves in Ukrainian territories, and vice versa. Two counties were of particular interest to Ukraine: Akkerman in the south, with 27% Ukrainians, which, in the author's opinion, was a relative majority, and Hotin in the north, where Ukrainians held an absolute majority, with 53%. In Bukovina, four counties were objects of territorial claims: Coțmani, Zastavna, Vașcăuți and Vijnița, as well as parts of six other counties: Cernăuți, Câmpulung, Rădăuți, Siret, Suceava and Storojineț. The border between Romania and Ukraine could also be established, according to the author, along Novosilițe (Noua Sulița), Cernăuți, Siret, the Suceava river, towards Storojineț and Cârlibaba (Dniestrzański, 1919).

Although the Romanian delegates were sympathetic towards the Ukrainian national cause when no Romanian territories were being claimed, the Peace Conference rejected the Ukrainian demands, and Romania's right over Bukovina was recognised by the Treaty with Austria (10 December 1919), which confirmed the decision of the National Congress of Bukovina, adopted by vote.

The Directorate and the Matsievich Mission in Romania (1919-1923)

Romanian-Ukrainian relations reached their peak under the Directorate, the political regime established after the overthrow of hetman Skoropadsky and the re-establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic on 14 November 1918 under the leadership of Vynnychenko. Throughout 1919, the Directorate tried to assert its authority over a territory where Polish, Bolshevik, White Russian and Entente troops were operating, and in order to counter all opposing forces, it sought to gain international recognition from important European states and create an anti-Bolshevik military alliance with Poland and Romania.

Having taken power, the Directorate established diplomatic ties with various European states, where political and intellectual personalities and career diplomats were sent on diplomatic missions. Ukraine's extraordinary envoys to Bucharest were Yuri Hasenko in the first part of 1919 and the former minister of foreign affairs, Kostiantin A. Matsievich (July 1919-1922), whose appointment indicates the importance that Ukrainian authorities attached to relations with Romania.

Through various communication channels and press statements, the Ukrainian envoys attempted to win the goodwill of the Romanian authorities by offering in exchange the recognition of the border at the Dniester, as was the case with the statement which Consul Mazarenko, head of the Ukrainian mission to Chişinău, made to the Romanian press in April 1919: "Ukrainians do not think at all about Bessarabia, which was and must be Romanian land", the diplomat assured. "Their only desire is to live in friendship with Romanians, from whom they expect help and support" (Ce spune, 1919).

The Romanian-Ukrainian talks reached a climax on 26 July 1919, when the UNR submitted a note to the Romanian government renouncing its territorial claims and declaring the Dniester a "definitive border" (Misiunea, 1920). Ukraine announced its intention to conclude an agreement with Poland, "a friend of Romania", thus ending the hostility between the two parties and recognising the borders established by the Paris Peace Conference. The document

stressed the neighbouring country's interest in war supplies – guns, cartridges and cannons – and in Romania's support in negotiations with the Entente, “in terms of permanent supplies and the organisation of the army”. Other objectives included co-opting Romanian, Polish and Allied representatives to the General Staff of the Ukrainian Army and forging commercial relations. Finally, Ukraine mentioned the “Bolshevik issue”, which “again threatened to ruin Ukraine, as a result of which all states bordering the Bolsheviks and primarily Romania and Poland would have to take the blow which was and is being softened by the resistance of the Ukrainian people” (Misiunea, 1920). Actually, the “Bolshevik danger” was a recurrent theme in the Ukrainian diplomatic discourse during this period. On several occasions, Matsievich warned Romania that the Bolsheviks' aim was to occupy Bessarabia (Interview cu, 1919).

The UNR also sought to establish economic relations with the Kingdom of Romania. As a professor of economics, Matsievich believed that the rapprochement of the two states, “agricultural countries par excellence”, was absolutely necessary as they complemented each other in certain areas, and even proposed an economic triangle that would include Poland. In his plans, the Ukrainian diplomat stressed the role of the sea basin in the development of trade relations:

The mutuality of economic interests of the two neighbours goes even further, as the two countries are linked by the issue of the Black Sea and the straits. In my opinion, the interests of Ukraine, like those of Romania, fall within the main sphere of influence of the «League of Nations» and do not lie in the establishment of a single will, as was intended by Russia, which, it should be noted, generally speaking and excluding Ukraine, does not have any real economic interest, either in the Black Sea or in the straits (Declarațiunile D-lui, 1919).

Towards the end of 1919, Ukraine intensified its efforts to draw Romania into an alliance against the Bolsheviks. In November, Symon Petliura, chairman of the Directorate of the Ukrainian People's Republic (since February 1919), warned of the serious situation on the Romanian border, insisting on several points: the

need for a Romanian-Ukrainian alliance in the face of the Russian threat, the need to include Poland into such an alliance in order to “constitute a force against Greater Russia, which would prevent it in the future from pursuing the policy of conquest which it had been pursuing until the outbreak of the World War” (Interview-ul nostru, 1919).

While sympathetic to the political and military efforts of its eastern neighbour, Romania took no steps towards the alliance, forcing Matsievich to resume Ukraine’s requests for the “political recognition of the Ukrainian republic and its national government, as well as technical and instructional support in the organisation of its national army on Romanian territory” (Nistor, 1934), applicable under a military convention. During the civil war across the Dniester, however, Romania had a benevolent attitude towards the Ukrainian national army (Știri din, 1919; Misiunea, 1920).

The Ukrainian extraordinary diplomatic mission operated until 1922, but after the military defeat of Ukraine its role and activity declined considerably. Between 1921 and 1923, Professor Matsievich was heavily involved in the political organisation of Ukrainian emigration from Romania.

Conclusions

The establishment of the Ukrainian state in 1918 is closely linked to Romania in various ways. Within a short period of time, during the short-lived existence of this Ukrainian political edifice, the two countries had different relations, ranging from collaboration to antagonism and dissension over territories.

In the context of Romanian-Ukrainian relations, it is necessary to first take into account the existence of important communities of Ukrainians on the territory of historical provinces: Bessarabia (in the north and south) and Bukovina (in the north, where they were in the majority), regarded as part of the area of formation of the Romanian people. The rise of the nationalist sentiment among the Ukrainians of Bessarabia and (especially) Bukovina and the vested interest of the UNR led to tension between Romania and Ukraine, which was mitigated by Kiev’s pragmatic policy, especially

during the Directorate, a regime interested in eliciting a benevolent attitude from (if not an alliance with) the Kingdom of Romania in the fight against Bolshevik troops. Bucharest viewed the efforts of the young Ukrainian republic with distrust, and the assistance it offered did not go beyond humanitarian and economic aid, in no way involving military support, as its eastern neighbour would have wished.

While the scepticism of the Romanian political elite can be accounted for by the internal difficulties of Ukraine (a country with three successive political regimes in just one year), torn by the horrors of civil war and turned into a battlefield between the troops of the “white” and “red” Russians, the lack of interest in its fate demonstrates insufficient knowledge of Ukrainian history and a concern rather with the western border and the worrying events in Hungary, where a Soviet republic led by Béla Kun had been proclaimed in 1919. One might even say that only after the recent conflict broke out in 2022 did Romanian society begin to pay increasing attention to Ukraine, a country which, for most of the 20th century, was largely unknown to Romanians and whose history was known only through the official versions of Russian and Soviet historiography.

Secondly, we should also mention the behaviour of the leaders of the Ukrainian community in the above-mentioned provinces, which after 1918 formed the bulk of a minority officially estimated at 582,815 in the 1930 Census held on the territory of Greater Romania. In Bessarabia, the Ukrainian representatives abstained from a decisive vote in favour of the Union with Romania, while in Bukovina, they were openly against the union and took military action against it, as we have shown above. The external context was not favourable to the Ukrainians either, as they claimed territories of Romania and Poland, states which – compared to the two Ukrainian state entities, ZUNR and UNR – were much better organised, had disciplined armies and enjoyed a favourable attitude of the Entente.

The union of Bukovina and Romania and the recognition of this act at the Paris Peace Conference came as a shock to the local Ukrainian elite, which many of the politicians of the old generation could not shake off. For this reason, they chose to continue the political

fight outside the province, first on the territory of the ZUNR, then in states located in central and western Europe (Mihai, 2011; 2018). They paid particular attention to Bukovina, which was the case on 18 March 1919, when the Ukrainian delegation to the Peace Conference reported the “terror” exercised by Romanian troops in this province, where “elite members of the intellectual class” had been imprisoned (Sidorenko, 1919).

The integration of Ukrainians into Romanian society was a difficult and complicated process, especially amid the efforts to Romanianize the former Habsburg province (Hausleitner, 2001). During the inter-war period, Ukrainians – the fifth largest community in Greater Romania – fought for their political, cultural and social rights through their own political parties, cultural and sports associations and societies. All these groups had one common goal: breaking Bukovina away from Romania and annexing it to a Ukrainian state in its own right, which was achieved through the formation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The signing of the treaty between the two states after the demise of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the sympathy and support of the Romanian authorities as well as the entire Romanian society for the Ukrainian fight against the Russian invasion opened a new stage in Romanian-Ukrainian relations (despite some friction over the delimitation of maritime territories in the Black Sea), based on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

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