The Soviets and the Request for a Plebiscite in Bessarabia
One Hundred Years Since the Soviet-Romanian Conference in Vienna from 27 March to 2 April 1924

With the end of the Conference in Vienna, it was possible to assess the results of this unprecedented confrontation in the until then short history of Soviet-Romanian relations.

ONE HUNDRED years ago, in Vienna, on 27 March 1924, six years after the union of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania, the works of the Soviet-Romanian Conference began, after lengthy preparatory negotiations involving the diplomats of the two countries. Vienna marked an intermediate point in the tactics of the Soviets regarding Bessarabia: from the readiness to renounce any claims in the early 1920s, in the midst of the civil war or following the war with Poland, through the request for a plebiscite in the years of Lenin’s New Economic Policy and of entering the international arena, to the open threat of force in 1940, during the Soviet-German friendship period. On the other hand, after the USSR had been recognized at the beginning of February 1924 by Great Britain and Italy, the moment
chosen for the conference in the Austrian capital did not seem to be the most opportune for Romania’s interests.

The choice of Vienna as the venue for the Russian-Romanian conference, according to Austrian Foreign Minister Alfred Grünberger, was in full accordance with Austria’s tendency to contribute to the great work of political and economic reconstruction in Europe and the consolidation of the peace. He was confident that the Viennese atmosphere would exert a beneficial influence, helping to overcome differences and bring about a compromise between the two countries. Wishing success to the conference, the Austrian hosts were convinced that a good result of the Russian-Romanian meeting would contribute to the political and economic consolidation of the old continent.¹

At the beginning of the conference, different hypotheses circulated in the international press and different scenarios were outlined, some more controversial than others, highlighting, above all, the uncertainty and even the skepticism in regard to a future agreement. On the other hand, realizing the significance of the moment, the big dailies from Moscow and Bucharest took a principled position, rallying behind the delegations and waiting for their first moves on the chessboard.

The Request for a Plebiscite

In the joint meeting of the two delegations, on 28 March, the first Russian delegate N. N. Krestinsky, the USSR ambassador in Berlin, proposed to discuss 1) territorial, 2) financial and economic, 3) legal and political issues. Accepting the order of the proposed issues, the first Romanian delegate, Constantin Langa-Rășcanu, head of the Romanian Legation in Sofia, showed that the primary objective of the conference was to “resume normal relations” between the two states “on the basis indicated during the exchange of views that took place at Lausanne, and as agreed at the Tiraspol meetings of 26 November and 5 December 1923.”² The resumption of normal and friendly relations, from the point of view of the Romanian authorities, involved “necessarily and above all the recognition of the border.” According to Langa-Rășcanu, the presence of the Soviet delegation in Vienna was proof that the USSR Government, as a result of the talks at the Lausanne Conference, was ready “to recognize the Dniester as the border between Russia and Romania and that the issue of Bessarabia is not disputed.” In the desire to find “a formula that satisfies both Governments,” the Romanian delegation was willing to collaborate with the Soviet delegation to “solve in the broadest possible spirit all the problems with a view to resuming normal relations between both states.”
By referring to the “conversations” in Lausanne, Langa-Rășcanu was expressing the Romanian Government’s point of view on the principles of normalizing relations with the USSR. At the same time, he was seeking to test the reaction of the Soviet delegation, to see whether there was any intention regarding the recognition of Romania’s eastern border.

Krestinsky read out a response in Russian, “prepared ahead of time” and coordinated with Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov. He was surprised by the fact that the Romanian delegation considered the issue of Bessarabia’s incorporation into Romania “already solved” and that they had interpreted the arrival of the Russian delegation in Vienna as a recognition of the Dniester as “the border between the USSR and Romania.” The first Russian delegate specified that he had the mandate to discuss amiably, without any restrictions, all disputed issues, including the territorial one. Krestinsky pointed out that both the USSR Government and the previous authorities of Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine “did not give their consent to the incorporation of Bessarabia into Romania,” considering that the territory between the Prut and the Dniester had been “occupied” by Romanian troops in 1918 “by force and violence.” The Romanian Government’s arguments to justify “this seizure by force” were deemed unconvincing.

In his plea, Krestinsky sought to dismantle three “inaccurate theses” of the Romanian Government, arguing that: 1) Bessarabia had never belonged to Romania, because its territory had been in the past under the authority of Turkey, was “liberated” following a series of Russo-Turkish wars and “incorporated” into Russia in 1812, with the Romanian state being established a few decades later. In the process of regulating relations with neighboring states, the USSR was guided by the revolutionary principle of the peoples’ self-determination, and not by “some historical rights”; 2) from a Soviet perspective, the declarations of union of the Council of the Country of 27 March and 27 November 1918 had “no legal value,” because the assembly in Chişinău allegedly did not have the right to rule on such a vital matter, and besides both resolutions had been issued “under the pressure of the Romanian military occupation and terror,” following an irregular vote. In this situation, the USSR Government demanded “a plebiscite among the population of Bessarabia,” held in complete freedom. At the referendum, the population between the Prut and the Dniester had to decide, if: a) “they want to remain incorporated in the USSR”; b) “they want to leave the Union and be incorporated into Romania” or c) “they prefer to exist as an independent and sovereign state”; 3) from the Soviet point of view, the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia of 28 October 1920, “signed without the participation of Russia and Ukraine,” had “no legal value.”

Krestinsky insisted on solving the Bessarabian problem, which he considered “totally litigious,” through a plebiscite of the local population, organized in
The Soviet delegation did not support “by any means” the thesis of its “historical rights” over Bessarabia, as the successor of tsarism, and did not “by any means” insist on maintaining the province “in the bosom of the USSR.” However, he claimed that the “majority” of the Bessarabian population “accepts with difficulty its de facto incorporation into Romania.” This is why they insisted on the plebiscite. According to the first Russian delegate, if the Government in Bucharest was convinced that the overwhelming majority of Bessarabians identified with the Romanian people and wanted to belong to Romania, it should not have spoken against the referendum.

The Soviet delegation’s claims that it had reason to hope for a majority protest vote against the “incorporation into Romania” were clearly spurious. However, it was not so much the results of the referendum that interested the Soviets, but rather a possible acceptance of this initiative and the attestation of a previous case that could be invoked later, in one country or another, to destabilize the fragile balance of the Versailles peace.

From the Soviet point of view, the refusal of the Romanian delegation to discuss the issue of Bessarabia, thus declining the proposal of the referendum, was equivalent to the recognition by the Bucharest authorities that they held Bessarabia under their rule by force. The Soviet delegation felt obliged to declare “categorically and once again” that the USSR Government “did not and does not give its consent to the incorporation of Bessarabia into Romania and categorically protests against the annexation of Bessarabia by Romania.”

So, at the first working session, Krestinsky made a frontal move, seeking to take the initiative and dictate the rules of the game. In accordance with his instructions, not only did he not react to the references of Langa-Rășcanu to the “basis” set in Lausanne, which meant that Moscow did not put any value on what was discussed between the representatives of the two sides in the past, but also categorically denounced the main “theses” of the Romanian authorities regarding Romania’s rights over Bessarabia. The renunciation of the argument of the “historical rights” of the USSR over the territory between the Prut and the Dniester was a new element in the Soviet approach, although practically a good part of Krestinsky’s speech focused on the highly subjective and distorted interpretation of the historical developments in Bessarabia after 1812, pushing the discussion precisely into the realm of polemics about the past. The technique of disregarding “historical rights,” albeit half-heartedly, was however dictated more by the awareness of the fact that historical justice was on the side of the Romanians, as well as by the intent to surprise and cast oneself in a positive light. The vulnerable issue of “historical rights,” however, had to be compensated for by transferring the dispute to the field of “legal rights,” where, as it was believed, Romania would have been the disadvantaged party. As the
so-called “Averescu–Rakovsky agreement,” the only document concluded between the representatives of the two parties through an exchange of letters between Iași and Odessa, at the beginning of March 1918, remained expired even on the date of signing, Krestinsky contested the self-determination of Bessarabia through its elected representatives in the Council of the Country and did not recognize the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia, to which Russia was not a party, demanding a plebiscite on the self-determination of the land.

The game of the Soviet diplomacy seemed quite sophisticated: on the one hand, the “historical rights” over Bessarabia were renounced, on the other hand, a plebiscite was demanded to create some new “rights” in place of the “old” ones. By advancing the plebiscite demand, the Soviets were trying to feign some regard for the principles of bourgeois democracy, hoping to win the game even with their opponent’s weapons, and, in case of a refusal, to deal a blow to their image. One way or another, the plebiscite proposal was a new form of contesting the Romanianness of Bessarabia. A simple approval of the very idea of a plebiscite on the Romanian territory between the Prut and the Dniester, six years after the Union, would have cast doubt on the legitimacy of its place within united Romania, as well as on the national unity as a whole. If the idea of a plebiscite, at the time it was launched at the Paris Peace Conference by a “Russian political representation” headed by Prince Georgy Yevgenyevich Lvov, could find some formal justification while the high Areopagus had not yet ruled on the Bessarabian issue, four years after the signing of the Treaty on Bessarabia, later ratified by three signatory countries, in which the Bolshevik Government never asked for the referendum, this sudden but delayed revelation of the Soviet leadership hardly lends itself to a rational reading. After all, the Soviets needed a spectacular entrance into the European arena, and the scope and resonance of such a diplomatic initiative as a plebiscite requirement in a European country could provide them with a whole range of propaganda tools.

In fact, the subtle demand for a plebiscite was, in the hands of the Soviets, a versatile weapon, ready to strike not only at Romania, but also, in the event of imposing a referendum in Bessarabia and creating a precedent, at the entire post-Versailles order, which had to be destabilized and shattered by any means, peaceful or violent. By advancing this demand of great strategic scope and with multiple objectives, the new Russia of the Soviets, which showed no regard for holding referendums within itself, tended to show that it was re-emerging on the international stage as a former Great Power.

First of all, the request for a plebiscite made it difficult for the conference to proceed, but the Romanian delegation, instructed by Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, was prepared for such a turn.
The Response of the Romanian Delegation

In the meeting of 31 March, the Romanian delegation wholly dismantled the entire scaffolding of the Soviet “theses,” showing that: 1) In 1812 Bessarabia was seized by the Court of the Tsars from the Land of Moldavia, violating the unity of its people with the consent of the Ottoman Porte. The Principality of Moldavia, with a compact Romanian population, which in 1812 was a victim of the imperialist policy of the tsars, voluntarily united in 1859 with Wallachia, forming modern Romania. The objection that Romania, under the name given to the modern Romanian state, did not exist in 1812, was immaterial, because there had always been “the same living and unitary nation, having a single common language, the same historical past and an indisputably identical ethnic character.” Uniting with Wallachia to form Romania, “Moldavia naturally transferred all its rights to the latter state” which, as it was pointed out, represents “the same political reality perpetuated in a new form.” 2) The union of Bessarabia with the Romanian state was due to local initiatives and, as supported by the Romanian Government, it was first debated, starting on 25 March, in the fractions of the State Council of the Moldavian Democratic Republic, and then submitted to a vote in plenary on 27 March 1918. After the free vote of the Council of the Country on 27 March, everything that happened in Bessarabia, including the adoption of the agrarian reform and the Declaration of “unconditional” union on 27 November of the same year, belonged to Romania’s internal life. The Soviets had to understand that Bessarabia, forcibly torn from the mother country in 1812, had returned to the motherland through an act of free self-determination. 3) The Union of Bessarabia was recognized by the Great Powers, through the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris, dated 28 October 1920, between France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan, on the one hand, and Romania, on the other, thus acquiring an internationally recognized status.

The Romanian delegation extensively addressed the issue of the “plebiscite” proposed by the Soviet side in utter disregard of all the acts of self-determination of Bessarabia, citing, among other things, a statement by Leon Trotsky, one of the Bolshevik leaders, who characterized in 1922 (“Between Red and White: A Study of Some Fundamental Questions of Revolution, with Particular Referenced to Georgia”) the proposal to withdraw the Red Army from co-opted Georgia and to hold a referendum under the control of mixed commissions made up of communists and socialists as “a most despicable imperialist trap masquerading as national self-determination.” The plebiscite, which the USSR demanded in Bessarabia, was never practiced by the Soviets. The insistence on a plebiscite between the Prut and the Dniester could be interpreted by the
Romanian Government “as being directed specifically against it.” However, on this basis, the negotiations could not be continued.

At the same time, the Romanian Government rejected the proposal of the plebiscite also in order to avoid entering into a flagrant contradiction with the Allies who had put their signatures under a treaty consolidating Romania’s sovereign rights over Bessarabia.

The answer of the Romanian delegation dismantled step by step the whole argumentation of the Soviets, without disregarding the sharper historical aspects pertaining to mutual relations and substantiating with irrefutable arguments, of race and law, the legitimate rights of Romania over the old Romanian province between the Prut and the Dniester. The unequivocal rejection of the plebiscite demand, as a hostile attempt to interfere from the outside in the internal affairs of the country, was also based on a series of cogent arguments, in accordance with the instructions of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu. Thus, the concern for the defense of Bessarabia’s right to be part of united Romania was accompanied by the effort to prevent, by rejecting the idea of the plebiscite, the undermining of the foundations of the postwar peace in Southeast Europe. It was clearly stated that for the Soviets, once they renounced their “historical rights” over the strip of land between the Prut and Dniester, the only solution in the case of Bessarabia that would bring them the friendship of the Romanian people was to recognize the return of Bessarabia to the bosom of the Romanian nation, correcting the errors of the past. 7

The End of the Conference

Krestinsky showed in the meeting of 2 April that the Soviet Government did not support the thesis of its “historical rights” and did not insist on keeping Bessarabia “at any cost within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.” He reiterated that he proposed “a plebiscite in Bessarabia,” to determine, under the conditions of guaranteed freedom of expression, whether the population wanted to remain in the USSR, leave the Union and be incorporated into Romania, or would prefer to exist as an independent and sovereign state. The position of the Soviet delegation, Krestinsky declared, was interpreted by the Romanian delegation as “an absolute renunciation by the Soviet Government of all rights over Bessarabia” and as disinterest in its future fate. He objected to the inaccurate interpretation of the meaning of his statement. Krestinsky declared that if the population of Bessarabia were to decide in a free “plebiscite,” contrary to the conviction of the Soviet side, in favor of
“leaving the USSR, forming an independent state, or uniting with Romania,” his Government would agree to any decision and “will not retain it by force” within the Union, as Romania did “with a number of provinces taken from its neighbors.” For the time being, however, as Krestinsky mentioned, his Government continued to consider Bessarabia “as part of the territory of the Union” and “could not recognize that the seizure of Bessarabia by the troops of the Kingdom of Romania in 1918, by force and violence, would create for the Romanian Crown any rights over Bessarabia.”

Convinced that Romania was holding the province between the Prut and the Dniester “despite the will of the overwhelming majority of the population,” the Soviet delegation rejected the Romanian Government’s approach regarding the recognition of Bessarabia as part of Romania. Krestinsky proposed to the Romanian delegation to give up setting “any preconditions” and proceed by mutual agreement to the discussion on the conditions for organizing the plebiscite. In the opinion of the Soviet delegation, this was the only way for “the Romanian Government to avoid the accusation that it holds Bessarabia under its power violently and against the will of the population, as it does with Bukovina, populated mostly by Ukrainian peasants.”

Refractory to the call of the Romanian delegation, the first Soviet delegate, following the instructions of the Political Bureau in Moscow, put even more emphasis on the demand for the plebiscite, not before repeatedly bringing up distorted historical data and empty accusations against Romania. Between these there was also the accusation that Romania fraudulently holds Bukovina, populated, as it was claimed, by “a majority of Ukrainians,” despite the demographic statistics that attested a relatively equal weight between the two predominant ethnicities—Ukrainian and Romanian. In the case of Bukovina, which had never been among the lands of the Russian Empire, the Soviets sought to sneak in the same method of the plebiscite, exclusively under the pretext of unfounded ethnic motivations. The allusion to Bukovina, after the contestation of Bessarabia, outlined the true dimension of the Soviet plans towards Romania, completely confirming the necessity of a firm countering of such subversive intentions.

As Constantin Langa-Rășcanu pointed out, the plebiscite, which the Soviet Government insisted on, was “an exceptional means for solving international difficulties,” when no other means could be found to ascertain the natural political affiliation of a population. Or, “the eminently Romanian character of Bessarabia, as well as its repeated acts of self-determination” made “the entire plebiscite proposal useless and vexatious.” Bessarabia, concluded Romania’s first delegate, “is a living part of the very organism of the Romanian nation,” its surrender or amputation being “an absolute impossibility.”
The Romanian delegation regretted that all its efforts to reach an amicable agreement did not find the expected echo. It noted that the delegation of the USSR refused to change its view on the plebiscite question, departing from the basis of the negotiations set in Lausanne. Consequently, observing that despite all efforts the Soviets persisted in their irreconcilable attitude, the Romanian delegation found itself compelled to suspend the talks and return to Bucharest.\textsuperscript{10}

Both at the beginning of the conference, and at the end of the proceedings, the Romanian delegation emphasized that the only way to return to the negotiating table was in keeping with the “basis” agreed in Lausanne, which, however, was no longer relevant for the Soviet representatives. The conference came to an end in the evening of 2 April.\textsuperscript{11}

Conclusions

With the end of the Conference in Vienna, it was possible to assess the results of this unprecedented confrontation in the until then short history of Soviet-Romanian relations. At the negotiating table, the delegates of the two countries presented two divergent offers: a plebiscite versus the recognition of Romania’s sovereignty over Bessarabia. Romania’s offer was natural and in full agreement with its national interests of good neighborliness with the Soviets, but also with the policy of the Great Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia. On the contrary, draped in the democratic garb of the plebiscite, the Soviet offer aimed to turn Romania into the training ground of dangerous and toxic experiences for its stability and state integrity and to deceive the Western democracies, seeking to demolish everything that had been built in this part of Southeast Europe, based on the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference. Once these subversive intentions were uncovered and countered, the Soviet representatives would only reap the propaganda fruits of their unfriendly approach. Henceforth, the Bessarabian card would be played by the Soviet propaganda with even greater ferocity everywhere, even regardless of the context, disturbing the waters and poisoning the atmosphere around Romania.

From the stage generously provided by the Government of Austria, where they tried to exploit some of the more sensitive points of the Romanian file, the Soviet delegates conveyed to the whole world that the time of concessions in foreign policy had passed and that henceforth the role of the USSR in the sphere of international relations would have to be given a different weight. The rise of a new Union of incalculable and irreconcilable Soviets was a direct threat to Romania, which saw its eastern frontier threatened as never before in the recent
past, but it was also a challenge to the policies and security interests of the Great Powers in Southeast Europe.

If, until Vienna, the two neighboring states, despite all the diplomatic hostilities, had felt somehow attracted to each other, after the failure in the Austrian capital, the Soviets and Romania would move further and further away from each other for a whole decade. The ultimate and unacceptable demand of the plebiscite, drastically reducing the room for maneuver of the Soviet diplomacy and causing a principled rejection on the part of the authorities in Bucharest, had the effect of closing the doors for a further Russian-Romanian agreement on a negotiated basis.

Notes

2. On 19 December 1922, the representative of Romania at the Lausanne Conference, Constantin Diamandy, had a long meeting with the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgy Vasilevych Chicherin, who made an offer for a future Soviet-Romanian conference. According to Chicherin, the Soviets were willing to recognize Romania’s rights over Bessarabia in exchange for the handover of the Romanian treasury assets held in Moscow and the renunciation of any financial claims, to settle other matters in dispute and to sign a non-aggression pact for a certain period with Romania. Chicherin’s offer, however, was directly related to the situation in Russia at the time and did not entail a firm commitment. At the Soviet-Romanian talks in Tiraspol, the readiness of the two sides to meet in a bilateral conference was confirmed (Cojocaru, 51–53).

3. The Declaration of the Council of the Country of 27 March/9 April 1918 on the union of Bessarabia with Romania was voted with 86 votes for, 3 against, and 36 abstentions, 13 deputies being absent, out of a total of 138. The declaration of the Council of the Country of 27 November/10 December 1918 was voted with about 70 (80) votes for, about 10 against, from the total number of 93 deputies on the lists. Mihai Tașcă, “Sfatul Țării a ales România Mare,” Timpul (Chișinău) 27 November 2008; Sfatul Țării: Documente, vol. 1, Procesele-verbale ale ședințelor în plen, edited, introductory notes and commentaries by Ion Țurcanu (Chișinău: Știința, 2016), 92.

4. In relation to this request, it is worth noting that as early as 25 December 1922, in a letter to Litvinov, with reference to the rumors about a plebiscite in Bessarabia, Chicherin indicated that the departure of Romanian troops from the territory between the Prut and the Dniester was the condition for a referendum, which was from the Romanian point of view “absolutely improbable.” “Any intermediate decision, such as autonomy or independence [for Bessarabia],” Chicherin continued, “is for us very acceptable, very desirable, and for Romania, unacceptable.” The referendum, he believed, “would be a precedent for Dobruja, and for Transylvania, and for Banat.” The head of the Soviet diplomacy not only realized the unacceptability for Romania of a referendum in Bessarabia, but had the opportunity to convince himself of this fact, talking with the journalist Iacob Rosenthal, the editor of Adevărul (The truth) Bucharest newspaper, during a discussion at the Lausanne Conference. Chicherin told Rosenthal on 1 January 1923 that in the matter of Bessarabia “our principle leads to a plebiscite, and the decisions of the Council of the Country, taken under the pressure of Romanian bayonets, cannot be considered, in any way, as a plebiscite.” Rosenthal replied that Romania “will not accept, under any circumstances, a plebiscite in Bessarabia.” Therefore, the Soviet ruling circles knew, long before the meeting in Vienna, what would be the reaction of the Romanian Government to the request for a referendum in Bessarabia and, nevertheless, the plebiscite remained the ace in Krestinsky’s sleeve, ostentatiously played in front of the Romanian representatives.

5. Cojocaru, 169–175.

6. In a Note to the Paris Peace Conference of 24 July 1919, of the representatives of the former imperial and post-imperial Russian authorities (Prince Lvov, minister-
chairman of the Provisional Government, Minister of Foreign Affairs S. D. Sazonov, N. V. Tchaikovsky, V. A. Maklakov, the ambassador of the Provisional Government in France), gathered in the “Russian Political Conference,” a plebiscite was requested only in the perimeter of the “four Moldavian counties of Bessarabia” (Bălți, Soroca, Orhei, and Chișinău), which had to be organized “under conditions of maximum trust, as soon as order is restored in Russia.” Until then, a “provisional administration under the tutelage of the Peace Conference” had to be installed in Bessarabia, which had to annul all the measures and decrees of the Romanian authorities. As a principle of self-determination for the peoples of the former Russian Empire, the idea of a referendum was made public on 9/22 December 1917 by the delegation of Soviet Russia at the negotiations with the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk. Thus, p. 3 of the immediate and general peace project of the Soviets provided: “3) National groups that have not enjoyed political independence shall be guaranteed the opportunity to decide freely, by referendum, on the question of their accession to one or another state or of their governmental independence. This referendum will have to be organized in such a way as to guarantee full freedom of vote for the entire population of the territory in question, without accepting emigrants and refugees.” Joseph Noulens, Mon ambassade en Russie Soviétique 1917–1919, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), 197. See also Marin C. Stănescu and Costin Feneșan, Lenin și Troțki versus Ludendorff și Hoffmann: Două cupluri inamice care au schimbat cursul istoriei (1914–1918): Documente, scrieri, mărturii, amintiri și relatări (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999), 405. In reality, the principle of the referendum, accidentally articulated, had no value for the Bolshevik Government, but, at most, only a strictly propagandistic one, being abandoned practically as soon as it was announced, especially since it did not agree with the revolutionary theory of “class struggle.”

7. Cojocaru, 182–188.
8. According to the Austrian census of 1910, the population structure of Bukovina, according to the language of communication, looked like this: 38.4% Ruthenians, 34.4% Romanians, 21.2% Germans, 4.6% Poles, 1.3% Hungarians. Constantin Ungureanu, “Populația Bucovinei în perioada administrației provinciale (1861–1918),” Revista de istorie a Moldovei 1(105) (2016): 35–36.
10. C. Langa-Rășcanu’s statement does not contain any reaction to the USSR’s claims on Bukovina, which can be explained 1) by their deliberate disregard, to emphasize the absurdity and unacceptability of such malicious gestures, or 2) by a lack of attention of the Romanian delegates, taken by surprise by the allusion to Bukovina. Later, various Romanian officials would reject with all their energy any Soviet claims on Bukovina.
Abstract
The Soviets and the Request for a Plebiscite in Bessarabia:
One Hundred Years Since the Soviet-Romanian Conference in Vienna from 27 March to 2 April 1924

Six years after the union of Bessarabia with Romania, the works of a Soviet-Romanian conference began in Vienna, on 27 March 1924, after lengthy preparatory negotiations. The delegates of the two countries presented two divergent offers: a plebiscite versus the recognition of Romania’s sovereignty over Bessarabia. Romania’s offer was natural and in full agreement with its national interests of good neighborliness with the Soviets, but also with the policy of the Great Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia. On the contrary, draped in the democratic garb of the plebiscite, the Soviet offer aimed to turn Romania into the proving ground for dangerous and toxic experiences for its stability and state integrity, and also to deceive the Western democracies, seeking to demolish everything that had been built in this part of Southeast Europe, based on the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference.

Keywords
Romanian-Soviet relations, plebiscite, Vienna Conference (1924), diplomacy, negotiations