

**The Tsarist Administration in Bessarabia: the Preferential
Administrative Regime to Rule over the Transdanubian Settlers
(1818-1828)**

Associate Professor Sergiu Cornea, PhD
Cahul State University "B.P. Hasdeu", Republic of Moldova
s_cornea@yahoo.com

Abstract: The policy of the tsarist authorities in Bessarabia in the first years of occupation was dictated by the need to strengthen the military successes of the Russian Empire. The Russian authorities, having aimed to establish leadership in the Balkans, wanted to attract the sympathy of the neighboring peoples to their side by demonstrating the benefits of Russian governance in Bessarabia. The principle of applying double standards in one and the same territory stood on the basis of the administrative policy of Russian authorities in the region. The Russian authorities established the preferred administration regime for the trans-Danubian settlers who had the role to support the Russian absolutism in Bessarabia. Particularities of administrative organization of the trans-Danubian settlers, in south Bessarabia, established by Russian authorities in the period 1812-1828 have been considered.

Keywords: Russian authorities; Russian Empire; Danube

The Eastern part of Moldova, a territory later called Bessarabia, was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, without any historical, national and legal right, and turned into a colony of the Russian Empire.

The purpose of the policy pursued by the Tsarist authorities in Bessarabia during the first years of occupation was to strengthen the military successes of the Russian Empire. The next aim of the Russian authorities was to establish dominance in the Balkans, and they planned to attract the sympathy of the neighboring peoples by demonstrating the advantages of the Russian rule in Bessarabia. Therefore, initially, the Russian authorities created a provisional administration, which had similarities to that existing in Moldova, being considered as a continuity of government.

The administration of Bessarabia was a docile instrument of the Russian colonial policy in the region. The constant concern of the Russian administrative authorities was to denationalize and discredit the national administration, to ignore the local administrative practices and institutions, and to defame Moldovan law norms.

The administrative policy of Russian authorities in the region was based on the principle of applying double standards in one and the same territory. The Russian authorities created a preferential administrative system for the *Transdanubian settlers* in the region. The role of these settlers was to support the Russian absolutism in Bessarabia.

The military authorities were responsible for the settlers' issues in the years 1812-1815. M. Kutuzov appointed the officer D. Vatikioti as responsible for the settlers' problems.¹ In late 1815, the Russian authorities were more preoccupied with settling the colonists. Taking into account the settlers' initial requirements, they planned to create a Bulgarian Army on the basis of Bulgarian communities and according to the model of Cossack troops. On March 1812, a military unit of Transdanubian immigrants was created, but this unit existed until May of that year. (Chirtoagă, 1999, p. 162)

On December 31, 1815, the Russian minister of Internal Affairs O.P. Kozodavlev commanded I.M. Hartingh to gather information about the colonists settled in Bessarabia, and clarify the following issues:

- a) to control if the statements made by Kutuzov to settlers were true;
- b) to see on what official regulations they were administered;
- c) to find out the total number of colonists, the territories where they lived, the facilities they had when they came to Bessarabia;
- d) to specify the number of those who wanted to move beyond the Danube and to learn what conditions would be favorable for their transfer;
- e) to know how many Transdanubian settlers lived on private lands, and what were their benefits to the owners;
- f) to find out whether the settlers were located on the lands that were initially assigned to them, and also to find other land that could have been assigned to them.²

¹ History of Moldova. Documents and materials. Vol II. M, 1957, p. 182.

² The national Archive of Republic of Moldova (sequel A.N.R.M.), Found. 2, inv.1, d. 521, f. 2-3.

The analysis of the information required by the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs leads us to the conclusion that the Russian authorities had the vaguest vision about the real situation concerning the administration of the Transdanubian colonists in Bessarabia in the first years of Russian rule.

On March 1816, in Reni city, a special committee was created to collect the needed information about settlers. This committee consisted of the following members: Miletici (a retired major), Codru Marcenko (the region's subprefect), and the officials Vatikioti and Iușnevski.¹

Bessarabia was transformed into an area dominated by arbitrariness and wrongdoing even in the first years of Russian domination. The created situation was contrary to the interests of Russia's foreign policy, and didn't contribute at all to create a better image of Russia as a protector of the peoples of the same faith. That is why the Russian authorities took effective measures to redress the situation.

The created state in Bessarabia was examined by the Russian Council of Ministers. At the meeting on January 15, 1816, they decided to send a high-rank official to Bessarabia to govern the region according to the normative acts, and to develop new rules to rule the province.

On May 21, 1816, the general - Lieutenant A.N. Bahmetiev became the plenipotentiary representative in Bessarabia. He also held the position of general Governor of Podolia. The plenipotentiary representative was given unlimited power. All authorities, the regional administrative institutions and the cities which previously were subordinated to military authorities, were under his rule.

When the institution of the plenipotentiary representative was created in Bessarabia, the tasks regarding the governing of the settlers and developing a regulation that would determine their position in the region started to belong to its competence. In his report to the tsar on July, 3, 1816, Bahmetiev stated that economically it was not profitable for Russia to create a Bulgarian army of colonists settled in Bessarabia, because they, as farmers, can bring more benefits to the empire.²

To restore order and to govern better the region, a provisional committee was created. This committee began its activity on July 4, 1816. The Committee was subordinated to the plenipotentiary representative of Bessarabia, and it was

¹ *Ibidem*, f.19, 21.

² A.N.R.M., Found.2, inv.1, d. 521, f. 86-88.

superior to the regional government. One of the tasks of this committee was to create conditions for the establishment of the settlers in the region (Cornea, 2003, pp. 48-50).

The Committee of Ministers of Russia, on April 29, 1816, considered the question of Bessarabia's settlers, and decided to appoint a Russian official authorized to tutor and govern together with the elected guilds the colonists settled in Bessarabia. This function was provisionally appointed, and this fact was dictated by the need to control the processes of colonization in southern Bessarabia. Initially, two curators of Bessarabia's settlers were appointed: D.P. Vatikioti and A.P. Iușnevski.¹ On July 10, 1816, after the transfer of A.P. Iușnevski to the Provisional Committee of Bessarabia,² Bahmetiev appointed D.P. Vatikioti as „curator for interim management of trans-Danubian settlers”.

The curator was tasked to defend the settlers from the local administration abuses, and to supervise these colonists in carrying out their duties that were legally established. He was obliged, three times a year, to personally inspect the localities inhabited by settlers. If he detected guilds' abuses, he had the right to replace them. The curator had to report the abuses committed by the local government to the plenipotentiary representative. The curator was also entitled to carry out judicial tasks. He used to judge verbally the small conflicts between settlers. He didn't allow foreign persons, deserters, runaway peasants from central gubernias to establish themselves in the areas populated by settlers. All cases and petitions of the settlers from the first regional government department were sent to D.P. Vatikioti, who was authorized to solve them.³

The residence of the settlers' curator was set in Reni. He was assisted by his secretary, a Russian official named Maleavin.⁴ The curator's competence was extended over the internal administration of settlers, and didn't substitute the regional authorities.⁵ The general administration of the lands was carried out by the subprefects. They used to collaborate with the settlers' curator if the matters and problems were related to the colonists. The subprefect could not take under guard,

¹ A.N.R.M., Found.17, inv.1, d. 17, f. 25-26.

² A.N.R.M., Found.4, inv.1, d. 48, f. 9.

³ A.N.R.M., Found. 2, inv. 1, d. 521, f.97,101, 102, 112.

⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 101, 104.

⁵ A.N.R.M., Found.17, inv.1, d. 17, f.113.

and could not punish the settlers without the curator's permission, unless urgent and criminal cases.¹

D.P. Vatikioti was helped by special guilds of settlers' communities to fulfill his tasks better.² They had the following duties and powers:

- a) to coordinate the development of benefits and the settlers' payments;
- b) to solve conflicts and insignificant disputes;
- c) to not allow among the settlers people who do not belong to the community;
- d) to issue travel permits;
- e) to report monthly to the curator about the local situation;
- f) to inform the settlers' curator about the exceptional cases in the local area.³

On December 1816, the task of foreign settlers' guardianship started to belong to regional inspectors as well. Their task was to protect the settlers from the abuses of authority.⁴

On April 1817, a new profession named regional guild was created. The regional guilds were elected by the settlers' communities with the curator's consent. The following regional guilds were confirmed by the first department: Mingler Ilia, Dmitrii Cutir, Ivan Vatikioti, Constantin Coicio and Vasiliu Ruban. The regional guilds carried out and implemented the government's orders. They were mediators in relations between the subprefects and settlers' communities, and supervised that the settlers couldn't carry out additional tasks. Their aim was to maintain the equitable distribution of benefits among the settlers.⁵

The analysis of the administrative procedures of the foreign settlers established in Bessarabia in the first years of occupation allows us to conclude that the Russian authorities promoted differentiated administrative policies in the same territory. The Liberal policy toward the colonists emerged from the strategic tasks pursued

¹ A.N.R.M., Found.2, inv.1, d. 521, f.101-102.

² A.N.R.M., Found. 2, inv. 1, d. 214, f. 35; Found. 17, inv.1, d. 17, f. 76.

³ A.N.R.M., Found. 2, inv. 1, d. 214, f. 32-33; Found. 2, inv.1, d. 521, f. 101.

⁴ A.N.R.M., Fond. 2, inv. 1, d. 214, f. 34-35.

⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 130-131, 133-134.

by the tsarism in the Balkans. That is why they had a special attitude toward the settlers, who were placed in more favorable conditions than the local population.

On April 29, 1818, the Tsar Alexander I promulgated in Chisinau the new regulation of Bessarabia's administration with the title "The establishment of the formation of the Bessarabian Province."

"The Establishment" has created a new administrative structure of Bessarabia. The competences of the province's administrative and judicial institutions and the powers and obligations of the officials in local and regional administration were clearly defined.

The special administration system of foreign settlers in southern Bessarabia was maintained during this period as well. The foreign colonists settled in the southern territories of Russia until 1818 were administered and subordinated to the general governor of Novorosie. On March 22, 1818, the "Regulation on the administration of settlers in southern Russia" was approved because of the repeated and insistent requests of the colonists.¹ According to this regulation, a special institution of settlers' guardianship was created, and it was called "the guardianship Committee of the settlers in southern Russia. The head of this committee was the general I.N. Inzov - the principal curator and chairman of the guardianship Committee of the settlers in southern Russia."² Subordinated to this Committee, the colonies passed to the Dnieper River, but the colonists settled in Bessarabia were not included in the activity of this committee. (Nakki, 1900, p. 181)

When Tsar Alexander I visited Chisinau, the general I.N. Inzov insisted that the regulation of 22 March had to be applied in Bessarabia as well. (Mescheryuk, 1950, pp. 78-79) The extension of the regulation act over Bessarabia was preceded by a new campaign to collect information about foreign settlers, and this campaign ended on March 1819.³ On October 1819, the Committee of Ministers of Russia considered the issue of Bessarabia's colonists, and decided to give them the same rights and privileges as the colonists settled in southern Russia.⁴ On December 29, 1819, a Senate Order about equivalence in the rights of the trans-Danubian settlers established in the southern Bessarabia and Russia was enacted. This Senate Order, on January 20, 1820, was sent to Bahmetiev for execution.⁵ The provisions of this

¹ A.N.R.M., Fond. 17, inv. 1, d.70, f. 144-146.

² *Ibidem*, p. 112-113, 144-145.

³ History of Moldova. Documents and materials. Vol. II. 1957, pp. 533-534.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.537-538.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.544-545.

act have been completed by the Interior Ministry circular of 12 March 1820. (Mescheryuk, 1971, p. 32)

So, the situation of colonists from Bessarabia was determined by the stipulations set out in the above mentioned documents. A Bessarabian Bureau for foreign settlers was created, and it consisted of three officials. In this Bureau, two representatives of the colonists were chosen to solve disputes between the settlers.

The Bureau members were appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs. The Head of the Bureau was proposed by the Committee of Ministers of Russia, and other members were proposed by the Guardianship Committee of the settlers in southern Russia. This committee was transferred to Chisinau at the end of 1820.¹

The Bureau was responsible for the examination and resolution of the issues related to colonists. In carrying out its duties and responsibilities, the Bureau used to cooperate with administrative, regional and local judicial institutions. The Bureau members could attend the first court review of disputes between settlers and natives.²

The territory inhabited by settlers was divided into four districts:

1. Prut (14 localities: Colibași, Brânza, Valeni, Slobozia, Boboiești (Surăieni), Cîșlița, Vadul Boului, Giurgiulești, Mândrești, Anadolca, Frecăței, Bojorca, Cișmichioi, Volcanеști);
2. Cahul (10 localities: Cartal, Satul Nou, Barta, Caragaci, Bugeac, Etulia, Hași Abdul, Curci, Țnpuțița, Bolboaca);
3. Ismail (14 localities: Taraclia, Tatar-Copciac, Cubei, Satiľic-Hași, Cairaclia, Bolgrad (Tabac), Caracurt, Cismea-Văruit, Babele, Duluchioi, Taș-Bunar, Ciișia, Erdec-Burnu, Șichirlîchitai);
4. Bugeac (19 localities: Traian, Valea-Perjei, Cot-Chitai, Lunga, Gaidar, Tomai, Baurci, Cayaclia, Beș-Alma, Congaz, Cioc-Maidan, Cirsov, Beșghioz, Comrat, Joltai, Avdarma, Chiriet, Dizghinje, Enichioi). The administrative center of settlers was established in Tabac, renamed in Bolgrad at the request of settlers.³

To keep them under permanent control, the Russian authorities put supervisors in colonies. They supervised the colonies, and were obliged to inform the superior

¹ Historical Introduction to the statistical description of Bessarabia (sost.Skalkovsky). SP-B, 1846, p. 437.

² History of Moldova. Documents and materials. Vol II. K., 1957, p. 502.

³ Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire, V. 36, pp. 519-520.

courts of all cases of force majeure and events occurring in the colonies. They were responsible to maintain public order, and ensure transportation and supervision of the arrested through the territories. They also needed to be responsible for the stationing and the passage of military troops. They had to supervise the trade and economic activities as well.¹ In early 1824, if the colonies had two supervisors, then the function of sub-supervisor could be liquidated.²

The administration of the settlers was different from that one established in the rest of the region. This fact was due to the political interests of Russia. By promoting a fair administrative policy toward settlers, the Russian authorities hoped to facilitate the process of denationalization of the native population, and to conquer neighboring people's sympathies.

Finally, analyzing the causes that determined the tsarism to make some changes and concessions in the administrative organization of Bessarabia, we find out that the external interests of the tsarism played an important role. Since ancient times, the expansion was the cornerstone element of the Russian foreign policy. For centuries, this expansionary trend was disguised with different ideological motivations. The first one was that they insisted on the idea of Christian messianism, then they wanted to restore the Greek empire, led by a Russian government, later changed into the plan to create a Dacian state, and followed by a project to create new states on the border of Turkey, under Russian rule.

Bessarabia occupied a special geopolitical position, being considered by the Russian authorities as an important factor to strengthen its positions in the Balkans. Russia sought to attract the Southeast European peoples that were under Turkish rule, and to use the national liberation movement in these countries to achieve its own interests. The Tsarism insisted at every opportunity to demonstrate that it supported the liberation struggle of the Balkan peoples.

According to the strategic plans of the Russian autocracy, Bessarabia had to become „bait” for the Balkan peoples, and they were given the possibility to move to live in Bessarabia. The Russian authorities wanted to impose on the Balkan peoples the idea that only under Russian domination it was possible sustainable development. Therefore, they declared some facilities to the Bessarabia's inhabitants and some features have been maintained in the administration.

¹ A.N.R.M., Fond.305, inv.1, d.16, f.3-15v.

² A.N.R.M., Fond.305, inv.1, d.54, f.3-3v.

Preferential administrative practices and policies were promoted in the region to the trans-Danubian settlers established in the region. These colonists have been assigned an important role in colonial policy promoted by the Russian authorities in Bessarabia.

Bibliography

Chirtoagă, I. (1999). *Din istoria Moldovei de sud-est/From the history of South-East Moldova*. Chisinau.

Cornea, S. (2003). *Organizarea administrativă a Basarabiei (1812 - 1917)/The Administrative organization of Bessarabia*. Cahul.

Mescheryuk, I.I. (1950). Болгарские и гагаузские поселения Бессарабии в 20-х гг. XIX столетия/ Bulgarian villages and gagauzkie Bessarabia in the 20's. XIX century. *Ученые записки КГУ/ Memoirs of KSU* Т. II.

Mescheryuk, I.I. (1971). Социально – экономическое развитие болгарских и гагаузских сел в южной Бессарабии (1808 – 1856)/The socio - economic development of the Bulgarian and gagauzkih villages in southern Bessarabia (1808 - 1856). *Кишинев/Kishinev*.

Nakki, A. (1900). Очерк гражданского устройства Бессарабской области с 1812-1828 / Outline of the civil unit of Bessarabia from 1812-1828. ЗООИД. Т.22, Odessa.

*** (1846). *Историческое введение в статистическое описание Бессарабской области (сост.Скальковский). СП-Б/Historical Introduction to the statistical description of Bessarabia (sost.Skalkovsky). SP-B*.

*** (1957). *История Молдавии. Документы и материалы/History of Moldova. Documents and materials*. Vol. II.

*** *Полное собрание законов Российской Империи/ Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, V. 36.