

THE GROUP PROFILE OF THE BOLSHEVIKS AT THE BEGINNING OF MOLDAVIAN ASSR (DECEMBER 1924)

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Abstract: *The so-called First Moldavian Party's Conference (December 1924) was a fundamental event during the first months of the existence of the Moldavian ASSR. Despite the fact that the project was coordinated by the central Party authorities, at the local level staff policy was determined by three approaches – the available cadre that existed, the loyalty towards Bolsheviks and the small number of natives on which the Party could count. Before the beginning of the conference, the participants (more than 160) had to fill out a form with 16 questions. We consulted 160 of these questionnaires at the Archive of Social-Political Organizations from the Republic of Moldova. The questions inquired about name, age, social origin, party-membership (Bolshevik and other for the pre-October period), ethnicity, language skills, revolutionary experience, military service and other information. In this paper we partially summarized the data from these questionnaires and obtained the following group profile: 63.75% of the participants had the age between 21 and 30 years, only four persons had higher education and only 16 finished secondary school; the most frequently declared nationalities were Russian and Ukrainian (61.87% together), 120 out of 160 participants knew the Russian language, only 11.25% had been members of other parties before 1917, 68.12% of them had been in the Red Army and 19 persons were Bolsheviks with previous subversive/“revolutionary” activity in Bessarabia (Romania).*

Keywords: Moldavian ASSR, Bolsheviks, first conference, questionnaire, group profile

On 18-19 December 1924 at Balta¹ the so-called “First Moldavian Party Conference from Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (hereinafter: MASSR)” was organized. This was the first official large reunion of the Bolsheviks after the decision concerning the establishment of the MASSR (on the left bank of the river Dniester) in October 1924. On 8 October 1924 the Revolutionary

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¹ As one of the leaders (G.I. Staryi) declared on the first day of the conference – 18th of December 1924, the republic's center was moved from Tiraspol to Balta because the first town was situated on the river Dniester and it wasn't proper for activity. Archive of the Social-Political Organizations from the Republic of Moldova (rom. Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice din Republica Moldova) (hereinafter: ASPORM), Fund 49, inv. 1, file 6a, p. 34.

Committee (with 12 members²) was created, its main purposes being to unify the Party's structures from parts of two guberniyas (Odessa and Podolsk) in one party organization, to open the national question and to create the new Soviet staff.³

The conference from 18-21 December 1924⁴ was attended by more than 160 Bolsheviks, delegates of the primary organizations. Before the beginning of the conference, the delegates⁵ filled out questionnaires (written in the Russian language) comprising 16 questions (see Appendix no. 2). On the basis of the answers of those 160 participants, in this paper we will try to define certain particularities of the group portrait of the Bolsheviks from MASSR in 1924. This portrait should be relevant because at that moment those participants were the people which the Party trusted to succeed in creating the autonomous republic of Moldavia. The context was favourable because three years had passed since the victory in the civil war and there was no real opposition at Moscow or in the neighbouring regions for the Bolsheviks.

Hereinafter I propose several lists and graphs which will contribute to building the first image of the group profile of the Bolsheviks from MASSR. Later this image can be developed or contested, but in any case it will represent a point of comparison for the evolution of the MASSR and of its staff's elites after 1924.

From 160 participants at the First Moldavian Conference, 12, a minority, were women. I summarized some data on them in a table which contains such columns as year of birth, education, Party's membership and experience. The last one refers especially to the illegal activity until October 1917 and to the military service in the Red Army (abbreviation – RA). The most unusual person from these 12 was Ekaterina Arbore, the daughter of Zamfir Ralli-Arbore, a Bessarabian with leftist opinions, who emigrated first to Western Europe and later to Romania, where he also wrote important scientific books on Bessarabia.

2 Bubnovski, Buchyushkanu, Galitski, Krivorukov, Merener, Popovich, Frolov, Shishkevich, Avgust, Oborochnya, Sidorenko and Subbotin.

3 ASPORM, Fund 49, inv. 1, file 6a, p. 13-14.

4 Firstly it was established on 7 December 1924, but because of the contradictions between the local Bolsheviks it was postponed for 11 days. ASPORM, Fund 51, inv. 1, file 5, p. 3.

5 There are no questionnaires of the Bolsheviks' guests from Odessa.

Table no. 1. Data on women delegated to the First Moldavian Party Conference⁶

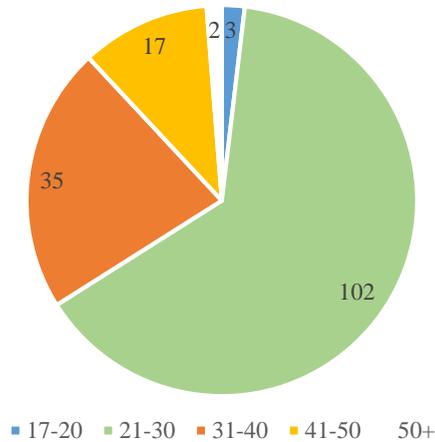
	Name, surname	year of birth	education	Party membership	experience
1	Arbore Ekaterina ⁷	1876	higher	communist in Romania since 1895, Party member since 1919	Driven away from Russia in 1894, persecuted in Romania in 1917-1918, expelled in 1924
2	Benenson D.E.	1896	the lowest	since 1919	1 year and 8 months in RA. Had activity in Odessa until October 1917, then was under German arrest for two months
3	Blomber Lidia S.	1902	the lowest	since 1924	2 years in RA
4	Ledak Eva I.	1896	the lowest	since 1924	----
5	Shupak Maria	1900	secondary	since 1924	----
6	Veselovskaya Iulia N.	1884	the lowest	since 1924	5 years in RA
7	Vizdovskaya Alexandra I.	1901	the lowest	since 1 March 1921	----
8	Zonskaya-Kogan Maria I.	1894	self-taught, housewife	Since 1920, but received legitimation in 1924	Was in illegality during 1919-1920 in the proximity of Balta. Was under arrest
9	Kamenetskaya Ala	1903	the lowest	since 1922	-----
10	Manzhulina Nadya C.	1903	the lowest	since 1919	5 years in RA
11	Telina Ekaterina I.	1888	secondary	participated in the strikes from 1905	1 year in RA
12	Taran Rozalia M.	1895	householder	since 1921	3 years in RA

In our opinion, the next graphs are relevant for the group profile of the MASSR's Bolsheviks – age groups, types of education they had, social origin, experience in other parties, the revolutionary experience on the territory of Bessarabia and Romania, the military service in the Red Army, and others.

⁶ Source: ASPORM, Fund 49, inv. 1, file 7.

⁷ Because the Ekaterina Arbore's questionnaire is missing from the file containing the 1924 questionnaires, I used the information she filled out before the second Party's Conference on 30 October 1925. ASPORM, Fund 49, inv. 1, file 85, p. 1.

Graph 1. Age groups

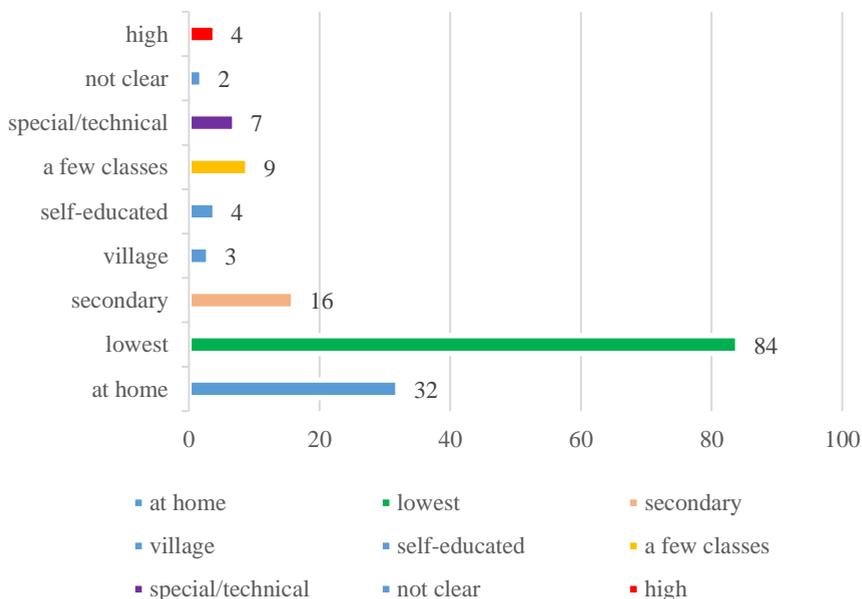


The eldest persons were Kosvin (54 years old), Slobodyanyuk (48 years old) and Shendrievski (52 years old). The questionnaires reveal that Osip Markovich Kosvin (54 years old), pertained to a workers family, was an ex-Socialist-Revolutionary and a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1918. He was not enlisted in the Red Army, but had revolutionary activity in Odessa in 1917 and after October 1917 he was pursued and arrested. Piotr Avk. Slobodyanyuk (48 years old), also from a workers family, was a Bolshevik since 1918, he was not enlisted in the Red Army, but participated in the illegal movement from 1900 in Odessa and was placed under arrest by the Denikinists. Leontiy Zahar Shendrievski (52 years old), also pertained to a workers family, was a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1917 and was not enlisted in the Red Army. In 1905 he participated in some actions at Tiraspol, was in jail for five months and a half and was exiled to the Kherson region for two years as a result of his agitation in the Army and of spreading revolutionary announcements.

It is necessary to underline the following fact: the members of the Presidium who were chosen on the first day of the conference had the average age of 38.12 years old (data was preserved for 8 out of 12 persons). The data on the average age of the members of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) from Ukraine, chosen at the conference could be even more relevant – 33.27 years old (data was preserved for 22 out of 29 persons).

The Bolsheviks' answers regarding education are very important for their profile. What was more important for the Party—education or the loyalty of the members despite the very low level of education? Graph 2 shows a clear tendency concerning this issue.

Graph 2. Education



At the category “a few classes” I included such responses as: 1 – “1”, 1 – “4 Romanian classes”, 1 – “4 town school elementary classes”, 1 – “3 town school classes”, 1 – “3 classes”, 1 – “2 town school classes”, 1 – “2 classes”, 1 – “town school not finished”, 1 – “5 classes”.

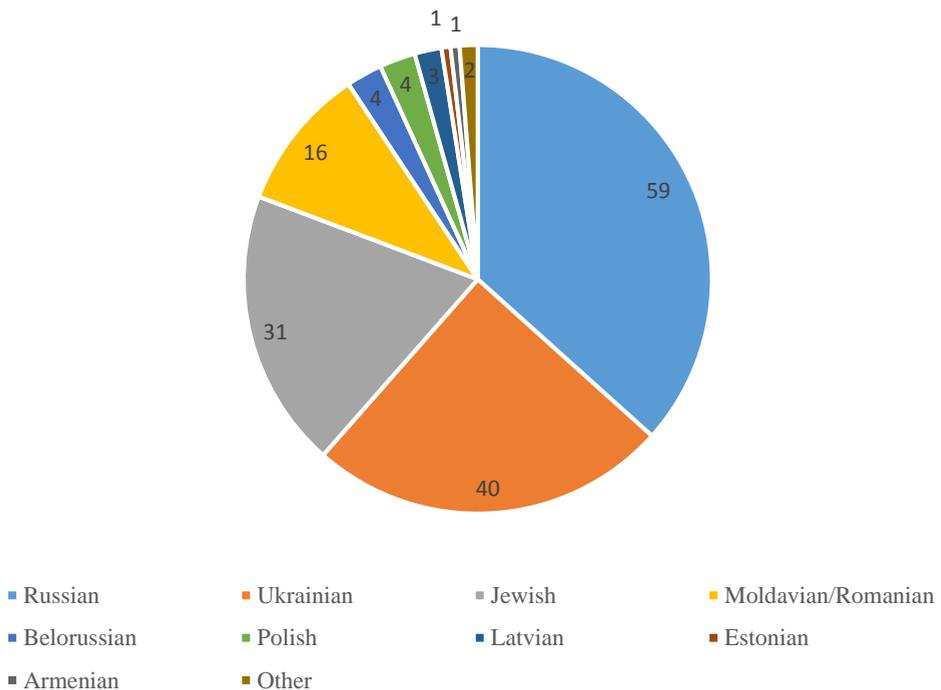
The answers referring to special/technical studies were: 1 – “5 agricultural classes”, 1 – “4 years of vocational school”, 1 – “3 semesters as worker”, 1 – “elementary technical”, 1 – “workers’ faculty”, 1 – “the Party’s instructor in Sverdlovsk”, 1 – “technical railway [school]”.

The only four persons who enjoyed a higher level of education were Ekaterina Arbore (see Table 1), Frolov, Stroev and Timush.

Table 2. The intellectuals delegated to the First Moldavian Party Conference

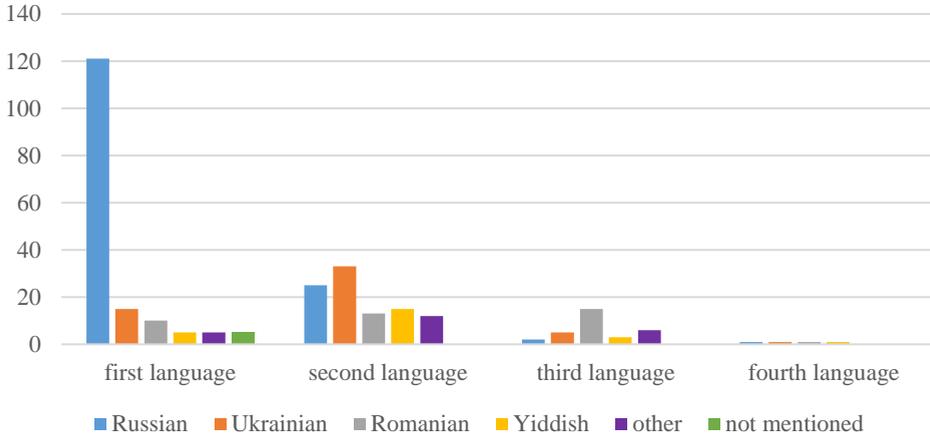
name, surname	age	social origin	language skills	in party since	experience
Frolov Aleksandr	35	intellectual	Russian	1918	He was a member of the illegal movement in Bessarabia, Odessa, Kherson and Nicolaev since 1908. Before October 1917 he was sentenced to hard labor for life.
Stroev	39	intellectual	Russian, Romanian	January 1920	He participated in the illegal movement beginning with 1904. He was repressed after October 1917.
Timush Deonisiy	42	intellectual	Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian	1917	He activated in Siberia since 1905. After October 1917 he was arrested for six months in Siberia.

Graph 3. Ethnic structure



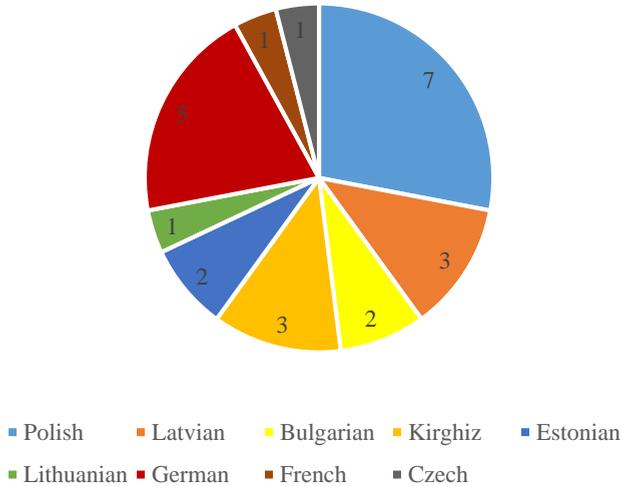
The two answers I included in the “other” category were – “no” and “Russian-Moldavian” (Staryi).

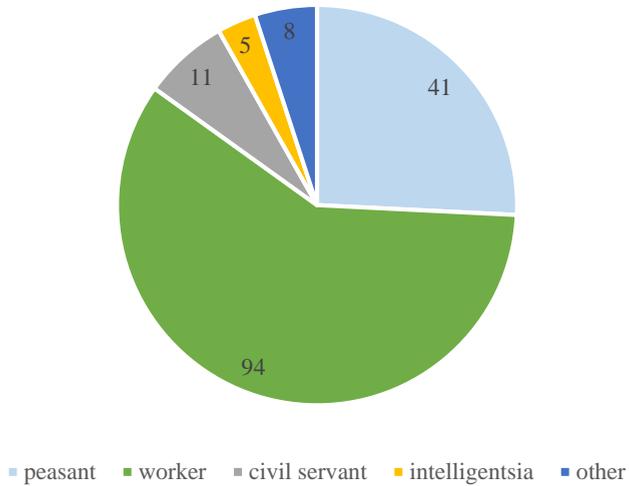
Graph 4. Spoken languages



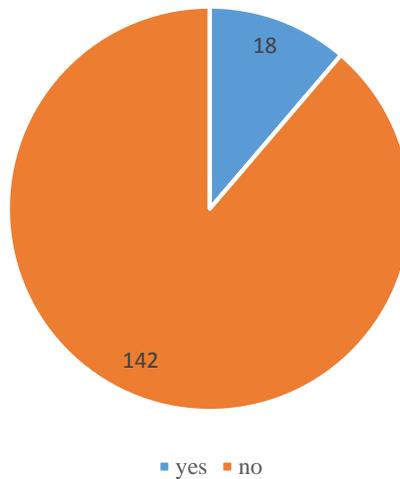
In the questionnaires there was no such answer as “Yiddish”, but “evreiskiy”, “evreisk.” and “evr.” In our opinion these delegates meant the Yiddish language.

Graph 5. Other spoken languages

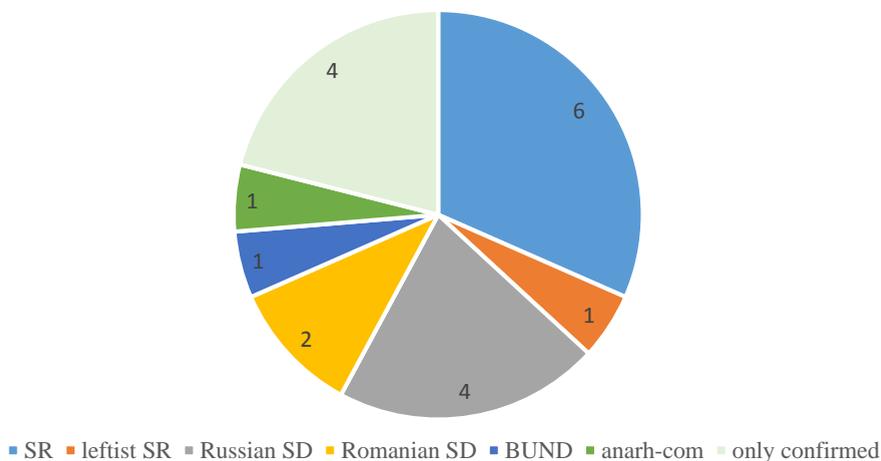


Graph 6. Social origin

The “other” responses were: 1 – “intellectual and civil servant”, 2 – “civil servant and peasant”, 1 – “other”, one was illegible, two persons did not answer and one wrote – “married” (probably he did not understand the question).

Graph 7. Membership in other parties

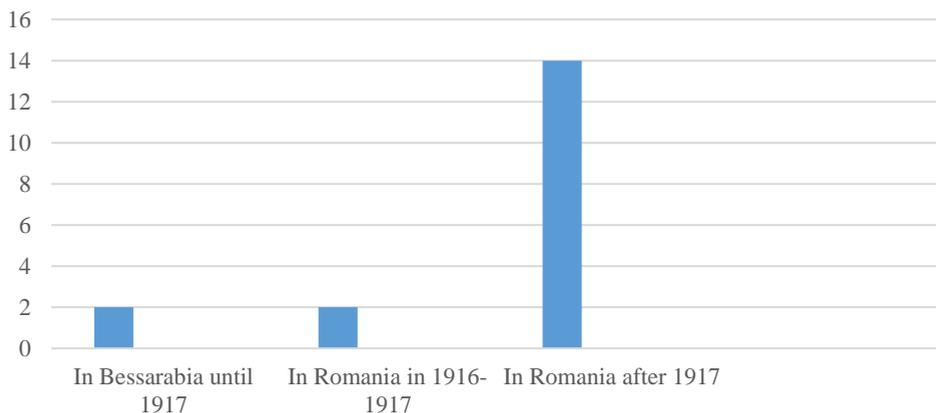
Graph 8. Other parties



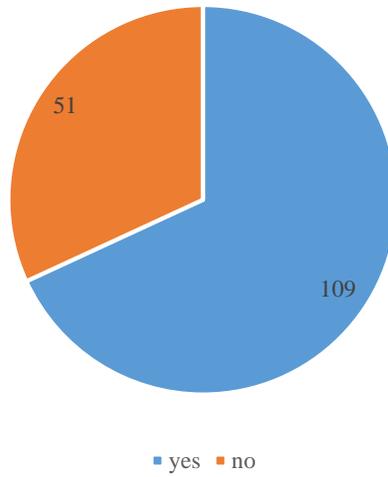
Note – SR = Socialist-Revolutionary, SD = Social-Democratic, anarh-com = anarchists-communists

There could be two explanations why the number of the persons who had been members of other parties until 1917 was so low: first, the average age (they were simply too young) and second, self-censorship (a number of persons probably censored themselves and provided wrong answers). For example Potiomkin, according to his later funeral notice in a newspaper, was a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party, but the response filled in the questionnaire from 18 December 1924 was “no”.

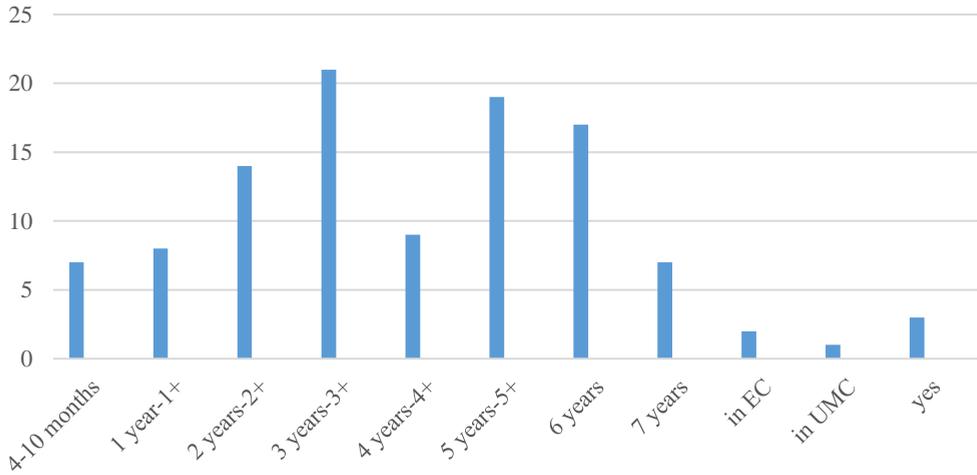
Graph 9. Revolutionary activity in Romania/Bessarabia



Graph 10. Military Service in the Red Army



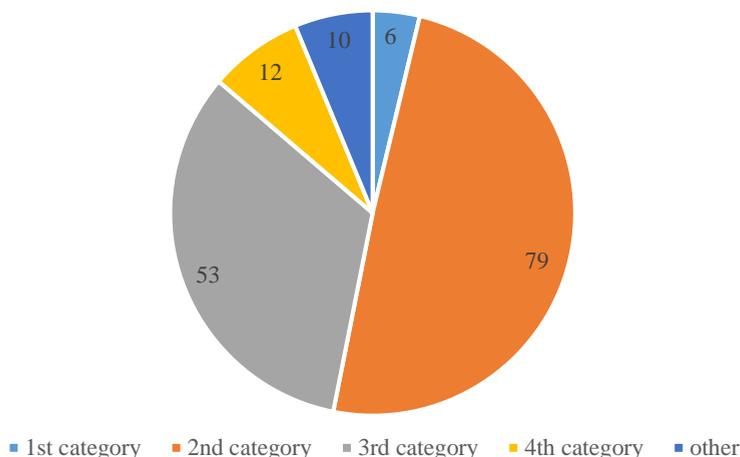
Graph 11. Period spent in the Red Army



UMC = Ukrainian Military County

EC = All-Russia Extraordinary Committee (secret police of the Bolsheviks)

Graph 12. Political level



Conclusions

Based on the graphs above, using data from the December 1924 questionnaires, the collective profile of the Bolsheviks who took part in the First Moldavian Party Conference in Balta, on 18-21 December 1924, can be described as having the following traits:

1. They were young: the participants in the age cohort between 21 and 30 covered 63.75% of the group.

2. The level of education was very low: only four persons enjoyed higher education, while other 16 people had secondary education.

3. Even if from an ethnical point of view the profile seems heterogeneous, in reality, two ethnicities, Russian and Ukrainian, were dominant: 61.87%.

4. The Russian language was familiar to at least 75% of the delegates (120 out of 160 persons).

5. With regard to social origin, 84.37% of the “Moldavian” Bolsheviks of 1924 came from peasants or workers milieus.

6. Only 11.25% belonged to other parties (Socialist-Revolutionary, Social Democrats and others) before October 1917.

7. The group enjoyed first-hand military experience because 68.12% of them had fought as soldiers and officers of the Red Army, or simply satisfied a military service because the Party required it.

8. A particular minority within the group was represented by the Bolsheviks who had illegal activity in Romania and/or Bessarabia until 1917 and after 1917 – 19 persons.

