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Germans and Jews of Bessarabia: Two Fates, Two Tragedies

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Abstract: The article analyzes issues related to the resettlement and co-existence of two peoples – Germans and Jews within the territory of Bessarabia. Despite significant differences in the historical past of these peoples, they are united by many different factors, among which are both successes and tragedies.

Keywords: Germans; Jews; history; Bessarabia; fates; tragedies

The mentality of any ethnos historically develops in close contact with other peoples who are appointed to be neighbors by the will of chance or fate. It is quite often when economical and administrative interests, socio-cultural traditions of neighbors are intertwined in wars, marriages, migration and other forms of communication.

After the annexation of Bessarabia to Russia in 1812, the need for the settlement of its southern part, Budjaka, was emerged and from where, all the Nogai population residing there went to Turkey. The need to settle the steppe territories pushed the tsarist government to organize the state colonization of new lands.

Despite the fact that some representatives of the German people moved to the territory of Bessarabia from the second half of the 18th century, their mass resettlement also coincides with the moment when the province entered the jurisdiction of the Russian Empire.

On November 29, 1813, Russian Tsar Alexander I published a manifesto listing the rights and privileges for the colonists invited from the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. In 1814, 31 German families from the Warsaw Duchy were allowed to leave for Budjak. The main reasons for this resettlement were the economic decline in

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Poland after the Napoleonic wars, the oppression by Polish landowners and the desire of the Polish church to convert Protestant Germans to Catholics.

According to the historian Petr Shornikov, the Germans who arrived in Bessarabia spoke different dialects of the German language, among which were the North German, Swabian and “Hohdoych” (Shornikov, 2011, p. 151).

From 1814 till 1842 about 9 thousand Germans moved to Bessarabia; they arrived not only from the Duchy of Warsaw, but also from Pfalz, Bavaria and Switzerland. Most of them came from Wirttemberg. They were basically farmers and artisans. In place of resettlement, they saw quite an unpleasant picture: the steppe full of wild animals and covered with so high grass that it was impossible to see a horseman in it, somewhere one could see poor hovels and shepherds, who tended sheep (Tsyganenko, 2013, p. 152).

The Germans began to build their settlements, known as colonies. At first colonies had just ordinal numbers, later they got names: Tarutino, Artsyz, Paris, Leipzig, Teplitsa, Wittenberg, Grunwald. Around 1850, the Germans began to name their settlements according to their views: Hoffnungstal (literally – Valley of Hope) Glückstal (Valley of Happiness), Fridenstal (Valley of Peace), or according to their religious motifs: Gnadental (Valley of Mercy).

Tarutino became the center of Bessarabian Germans, with a population of 8,000 people. There had been created two German schools for boys and girls who studied separately, an institution for the training new teachers and a library; there was also established publication of three German newspapers. The church and family brought up in children such qualities as godliness, esteem for elders, worship of their customs and traditions. German scholar W. Schmidt believes that Bessarabian Germans turned out to be pioneers, introducing rational nature management and innovative methods for developing and improving agricultural production with state support (Schmidt, 2008, p. 96).

At that time, life in the German colonies was developing fairly steadily. By the mid-1950s, the total number of German colonies in Bessarabia had reached 25. In general, many German colonies achieved a high level of well-being (Khryashevskaya, 2008, p. 17). The Germans actively engaged in agriculture and trade. According to the All-Russian population census of 1897, they constituted 3.1% of the population of Bessarabia, while 97% of the settlers lived compactly in German villages, traditionally called colonies (Berg, 1918).

German settlers were loyal Russian subjects. During the wars, many of them fought on the side of the Russians and laid their heads on the battlefield. This is evidenced by materials from the archives of the Bessarabian community in Stuttgart.

However, during the whole period of life in Bessarabia the German settlers had the role of temporal inhabitants. Their lives and well-being depended all the time upon the political climate in Europe. Periods of peaceful and prosperous life were interrupted by the periods of troubles and tragedies.

German historian K. Stump believes that by the beginning of the First World War in the south of Ukraine there were 885 colonies, of which 89 were in Bessarabia (Stumpp, 1925, p. 12).

During the First World War, the government of Tsar Nicholas II issued a decree confiscating property from Bessarabian Germans and deporting them to Siberia. Besides, the government required immediate removal of Germans to the 50 km zone from the boundary (Shityk, 2011, p. 42). The eviction was compulsory; German families were forced to leave their homes and households. The new homeland, which in the early nineteenth century with open arms took welcomed German immigrants, turned into an evil stepmother, which brought destruction, misery and hopelessness into the life of German families.

In general, the colonization of South Bessarabia by German colonists in the XIX-th century contributed to the high level of prosperity of their colonies. German colonists, raising their own well-being, helped to increase the material and cultural level of the local population.

Since 1918, Bessarabia was conjoined to Romania, and a new phase in the history of local Germans began, they had to accustom to the new old homeland. The most significant nationalities in Romania were Hungarians (about 1,500,000), Germans (about 750,000), Jews (725,000), Russians and Ukrainians (about 800,000), as well as Bulgarians, Turks, Gypsies. Thus, Romania was a multinational state, and the Romanian leadership needed to address the problem of national minorities, which was not easy (Kretinin, 2010, p. 238).

They went through a lot of trouble to defend their right to get education in their native language. It is interesting that even before the end of the First World War in Berlin, the question of the formation of German autonomy was considered. The Romanian newspaper "Romanian knows" (published in Chisinau) published information about the meeting on the postwar fate of the Bessarabian Germans,

during which it was proposed to group all the German settlements, forming a national territory (Ghibu, 1997, p. 112). But after Germany surrendered in Bucharest, they did not want to hear about any German autonomy.

Since 1920, the Bessarabian Germans were part of the German faction of the Romanian Parliament, created the "German Popular Council of Bessarabia" in Tarutino, which represented the interests of the German population of the region.

According to the 1930 census, 81,989 Germans lived in Bessarabia, 55,598 of which were in Akkerman County, where they accounted for 16.3% of the population (Pasat, 1994, p. 65).

The Romanian authorities did not take much care of the needs of the Bessarabian Germans. As a result of the agrarian reform (1920-1923), local Germans lost more than 64 thousand hectares of land. The government deprived the Germans and local self-government. The tax regime was tightened and tariffs for rail transportation were sharply increased, which significantly complicated the export of agricultural products. These in some measure undermined the well-being of the colonists, which forced them to leave Bessarabia. According to the estimates of the German researcher W. Schmidt, until 1932 Bessarabia left more than 19,000 Germans, which was almost a quarter of the German population of this region (Schmidt, 2008).

In the 30-s, among the Germans of Bessarabia, the desire to protect their national interests by political means was intensified, which led to the entry of their representatives into the National Socialist movement created by the Germans in Romania (1932).

Under the influence of the events in Germany in Bessarabia, a branch of the Romanian organization of the "revivalists" was created, in the Akerman branch of which by the summer of 1934 there were 117 active members and 437 supporters. In addition, the Germans also supported the Romanian right-wing radicals.

Since 1933, there have been increasing reports of the growing hostility of Bessarabian Germans to Jews. An extract from the counter-intelligence report of the Romanian troops in Bessarabia dated October 9, 1933 is typical: "(3) The Germans, calm, but as a result, they boycott the Jews 4) Jews. They intensively act against (Germans) through meetings and publications in the press. Boycott the German goods" (Shornikov, 2011, p. 156).

After 1940 (joining of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union) Bessarabian Germans had to accept Soviet citizenship or repatriate to their historical homeland. By the time of the resettlement to Germany, that is, by 1940, the Germans in Bessarabia had 25 main and 150 branch settlements. And again, ordeal and destitution fell to Bessarabian Germans' lot.

Preparations for repatriation were held under the slogan Heim ins Reich ("Home to the Reich"). More than 93,500 Bessarabian Germans settled on Polish land in the end of 1940 in accordance with the German-Soviet agreement, from where in 1945 they were moved again in 1945 to the current German federal states of Baden-Wuerttemberg. A lot of people were tempted by the possibility to get in a new old motherland not only the new land site, but the promised compensation as well.

However, the reality turned out to be not so rosy as Nazi propaganda promised. In the process of resettlement Germans suffered substantial losses: they were deprived of property, it was forbidden to take Soviet or Romanian banknotes with them. The bad luck of Bessarabian Germans still continued. Being settled mainly in the territories annexed by Nazi Germany, after 1945, they were forced to move again, but already to native territories German. Bessarabian Germans spent months in the transit and filtration camps. In Germany, they were not treated as Germans; they were called "the best of the Arabs", "the Balkan people". They had to start from a clean page, and it was the period of the World War II, when men were taken to the army, while women, children and old people found themselves in the situation of refugees and deportees. The resettlement to their historical homeland was for many Bessarabian Germans another tragic stage of their lives (Shcherbakova, 2013, pp. 106-108).

The remaining in the Soviet Union Germans went through sending to Siberia, returned to the Bessarabian lands and began to build their lives anew: the houses were expropriated, property was plundered, the land was given out to the other people. Trying to establish life in their homeland Germans faced with a huge number of problems, which finally led to mass emigration of Germans to Germany in the 70s. of the XX century.

The history of Bessarabian Germans – is an example of a difficult, somewhat tragic fate of the German national minority in South-Eastern Europe. We have lost a huge layer of our multinational culture. The descendants of Bessarabian Germans, now living in Germany, often visit Moldova and Ukraine; as they want their children and grandchildren to know their origin.

First Jews settled down on the Bessarabian land in the end of 14 century. In early 16 century mass resettlement from German and Poland starts. By the end of 18 century Jews lived in almost all cities and in many villages of Bessarabia, and at the beginning of 19 century their amount on this territory was about 5000 families (more than 20 thousand people).

The Jewish people had their own communal management (kahal). The members of the community paid a special tax (rupte) to the treasury. The main spheres of business included trade and tavern keeping. Jews strictly followed all the religious regulations and traditions of the rules like restrictions in food, wearing of special clothes (Tsyganenko, 2015, pp. 157-158).

After the annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire in 1812, the region was included in the line of permanent Jewish settlement, i.e. the territory in the ranges of which Jews and Israelites were permitted to live. Since then the process of the Jewish resettlement to this territory started. Bessarabia became a home for a great number of Jewish families.

Educational statute of the Bessarabian region of 1818 defined the position of the Jewish people as a separate socially-ethnic group. They were reckoned among several classes – merchants, philistine and land lords. The right of the Jewish people to go into trade was also confirmed. Russian Government provided some enactments that assigned the lawful and religious status of the Jewish people, and stated the forms of their traditional work and way of life (Borshevsky, 2014, p. 25).

In 1835 Jews were allowed to use the owned by the state lands in unbounded way and to rent land plots. In consequence, from 1835 to 1853 in Bessarabia 17 Jewish agricultural settlements were established, with the developing wine-making and tobacco-growing businesses. But despite seeming positive changes in the status of the Jews, representatives of this ethnic group still felt oppression in educational, administrative and judicial spheres of life. In 1882 the law which allowed to buy and rent land plots was cancelled (Prokop, 2014, pp. 184-185).

According to the Paris treaty of 1856 the southern part of Bessarabia passed to the Moldavian principality and later was adjoined to the Romanian principality. After 1860 Jews were exposed to oppressions and deportations in Rumania. Thousands of families were forced to escape from their habitats. Sorrow and grief returned to Jewish families.

After the Southern Bessarabia was rejoined to the Russian Empire in 1878 local Jews were put in difficult position because they were not given an official status and such situation lasted up to 1892. According to the census of 1897 there were 228 168 Jews in Bessarabia, most of them (77%) living in cities and towns and doing small trading business and crafts (Lerner, 1901, p. 201).

In the second half of 19 – the beginning of 20-th centuries the territory of the members of Black Hundred organizations were spread in Southern Bessarabia, which led to the numerous massacres of the Jews and became a real tragedy for the Bessarabian Jews. The Massacres took place in 1862, 1907 and 1908 in Akerman (Belhorod-Dnestrovskii) and in 1872.

October 23-24, 1905 there was a Jewish pogrom in Ismail. Monarchists defeated one of the central shopping areas of the city. More than 220 buildings and shops were destroyed. According to the documents of the time, the pogrom caused great damage to the local Jews, and some of them were forced to stop their business altogether (MIIA, 1905, f. 2, d. 422). From October 22 to October 25, 1905, the Black Hundred pogrom was organized in Kiliya, as a result of which 7 people were killed and 14 were injured. The newspaper “Bessarabskaya Zhizn” on Nov. 5, 1905, reported about a high probability of bloody Jewish pogroms in Tarutino Akkerman Uyezd.

The pogroms were conducted using numerous threats and blackmail. So, from the documents it is known that the police chief of Akerman, walked through the apartments of the merchants and warned them: if in 24 hours he was not given 600 rubles, the pogrom would be repeated.

In the fall of 1905, Jewish pogroms swept through most of the villages and towns of Akerman County. Thus in the village of Kaplany, grocery stores and Jewish Shihverger stores were stolen in the amount of 96 rubles, Pasatir for 77 rubles, in the village of Railyanka – shops of local Jews for a total of 775 rubles were robbed. In the town of Bayramcha, 11 shops and 12 houses were destroyed. The loss amounted to 81,760 rubles. Virtually, the saving of Monashi by merchant M. Arnautov was completely destroyed (Kulchytska, 2002, p. 94).

At the same time there were introduced the restriction that made it difficult for the Jewish people to be accepted lawful citizens of the country. Despite all the difficulties, sorrow and pains, representatives of the Jewish people managed to

save their ethnic individuality, traditions and ceremonies almost without mixing with other nationalities.

In 1918 Bessarabia was joined to the Romanian Kingdom. In this period more than 40 Jewish political and religious organizations were formed, numerous international and local charity organizations were functioning, the number of agricultural settlements was growing. In the end of 1920-1930 anti-Semitic movements grew in Bessarabia. And again sorrow and grief came to Jewish homes that resulted in attacks and beating of Jewish students, establishment of restricting laws that forbade the Jews to be in most jobs. The number of Jewish population in Bessarabia reduced from 238 thousand in 1924 up to 207 thousand in 1930.

When in 1940 Bessarabia was joined to the USSR, the communist government, that declared freedom and equal rights to all the nations, closed all the Jewish social, party and public establishments; in schools teaching in Hebrew was also forbidden. A great number of Jews was arrested, subjected to repressions and deported to Siberia. Another chapter of the life of Jews in Bessarabia turned to blood and pain.

The most difficult period for the Bessarabian Jews is connected with the II World War. German and Romanian army occupied Bessarabia in the end of July 1941. Many of Jews managed to leave. So, from 8 thousand Jews who lived in Akerman at the beginning of the year nearly 4 thousand people ran away to the East. In Izmail from 3 240 Jews, who lived in 1940, after the Soviet army retreated only 700 people left.

In early autumn of 1941, the Governor-General of Transnistria ordered the creation of special camps in the eastern part of the occupation zone to accommodate Jews being moved from Bessarabia, Bukovina and Odessa.

1941-1943 is a tragic period of Jewish Holocaust in Bessarabia. Romanian army conducted mass shootings of Jews in all settlements. In July in 1941 in Akerman nearly 800 Jews were shot, and by the end of July almost all Jews of the town were executed (Shchukin, 2013, p. 211-212).

In this territory the Jewish ghettos were organized. Thus, in Izmail ghetto appeared in 1941, 25 July. According to the data on 1 August 1941 there were 159 people, and on 23 August there were 561. Ghetto existed till February 1942. In September-October 1941 mass Jewish deportation to Transnistria began, that was accompanied by the executions, humiliations and abasements of the Jewish people. According to the report of gendarmerie inspector in Transnistria by January 1942

119 thousand people were resettled from this territory. Bessarabia was announced the territory without Jews (Shchukin, 2013, p. 212).

After the liberation of Bessarabia, a part of the Jewish people returned here. It seemed that they at last got their liberty and perspective of happy life on the free country. But the Jewish people were again exposed to humiliations and destructions: Stalin's repressions, deportations to Siberia and Middle Asia, persecutions by People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, accusations in the connections with foreign reconnaissance.

Almost a hundred years of humiliations and tragedies of the Jewish people in the Bessarabian land made a major part of the representatives of this ethnic group to immigrate abroad. From the end of 60s XX-th a graduate immigration of Jews to Israel began.

In modern and independent Ukraine definite positive changes in the position of the Jewish people can be noticed, such as: there were formed the Jewish communities and communities of the Jewish culture, synagogues and Sunday schools were opened.

Two nations, Germans and Jews, are so different and so similar. Bessarabia became the second homeland for them. Here they developed, preserving cultural and ethnic traditions, their identity and language. Despite the fact that the history of the Germans and Jews of Bessarabia contains many tragic pages, the current generation of Bessarabian immigrants remember with love the homeland of their ancestors, they are eager to visit it, to introduce their children and grandchildren to the original and colorful world of Bessarabia.

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