

THE “BESSARABIAN QUESTION” OF 1918 IN THE MEDIA DISCOURSE OF ODESA AT THE TIMES OF UKRAINSKA DERZHAVA (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE NEWSPAPER “VILNE ZHYTTIA”)

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Abstract: The study is devoted to examining the interpretation of some ways to resolve the “Bessarabian Question” in the media space of Odesa during the period when Hetman P. Skoropadskyi was in power in Ukraine (based on the example of the daily socio-political newspaper “Vilne Zhyttia” (“Free Life”)). The scientific novelty of the article lies in the analysis of interstate relations in the Trans-Danube region at the end of the First World War through the prism of periodicals. Findings show that, between May and September 1918, out of nearly 90 articles on Romania-related themes published in the newspaper, about 60 were focused on Bessarabia.

The official information published in the newspaper primarily reflected Kyiv’s disagreement with the logic of resolving the Romanian-Ukrainian territorial conflict. Even after the conclusion of the Bucharest Peace Treaty (the Treaty of Bucharest), the hetman government regularly articulated an alternative point of view regarding the ownership of the former Bessarabia Governorate (Province), emphasising the multi-ethnicity of the region, the predominance of the Ukrainian population in some of its counties (povits), and the illegitimacy of the Sfatul Țării in making such decisions. Reports on the life of the people in Bessarabia usually contained a critical assessment of the Romanian authorities’ actions in the region, primarily in the sphere of socio-economic and educational policy. The overall conclusion of the analysed information leaves no doubt that the reflection of the editorial board of “Vilne Zhyttia”, and therefore of a significant part of inhabitants of south-western Ukraine, on the political, socio-economic and cultural prospects of the population of Bessarabia as part of the Kingdom of Romania appeared to be pessimistic.

Keywords: “Bessarabian Question”; “Vilne Zhyttia”; First World War; Odesa; Kingdom of Romania; Ukrainska Derzhava (the Ukrainian State); periodical press

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The geopolitical revolution in Central and Eastern Europe which matured during the First World War led to the emergence of national states on the ruins of former empires. The Ukrainian People's Republic (the UPR), whose legitimacy on the international arena was established by the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty on 9 February 1918, was one of such states. The proclamation of the UPR put on the agenda the issue of its borders. The leaders of the Central Rada (Central Council) proposed to resolve it based on an ethnographic approach. Thus, the south-western borders of the Ukrainian Republic were to be limited to Khotyn and, partially, Akkerman counties of Bessarabia Governorate.

However, this approach did not receive support from the Romanian government, which sought to implement its own statehood project according to which the whole Bessarabia should have been treated as part of the kingdom. Accordingly, Bucharest's decision to include the outlined historical and administrative unit into the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Romania provoked a negative reaction from the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian politicians.

Political discussions surrounding the “Bessarabian Question” were not covered in the works of Ukrainian historians for a long period of time, and Romanian-Ukrainian relations during 1917-1920 generally remained on the periphery of their scientific interests¹. The situation changed over the past two decades, with a series of publications focusing on the study of inter-state relations in the context of the end of the Great War², military actions in Bessarabia³, and focusing on direct resolution of the territorial dispute⁴. The

¹ T.Vintskovskyi, “Rumynskij vektor vo vneshnepoliticheskoy deiatel'nosti ukrainskikh pravitel'stv 1917 – 1918 gg.: analiz ukrainskoj istoriohrafiyi,” *Danubius XL* (2022), 59-71.

² M. A. Koval'chuk, “Dyplomatiia Ukrain's'koi Derzhavy u konteksti zavershennia Pershoi svitovoi vijny,” *Ukraina dyplomatychna: nauk. Schorichnyk / Dyplomat. akad. pry M-vi zakordon.Sprav Ukrainy, K., Vyp. 9* (2008), 197-230; O. D. Bojko, “Terytorii, kordony i administratyvno-terytorial'nyj podil Ukrain's'koi Derzhavy het'mana P. Skoropads'koho (1918),” *Rehional'na istoriia Ukrainy: zb. nauk. st. / NAN Ukrainy, In-t istorii Ukrainy, K., Vyp. 3* (2009), 216-232; M.Hedin, “Ukrains'ko-rumuns'ki vidnosyny naperedodni ta v period het'manuvannia Pavla Skoropads'koho,” *Visnyk Kyivs'koho natsional'noho lnhvistychnoho universytetu. Serii: Istorii, ekonomika, filosiia, K., Vyp. 17* (2012), 107-115.

³ I.Tatarynov, “Bojovi dii na Rumuns'komu fronti ta Bessarabiia (kampanii 1916-1917 rr.),” *Naukovyj visnyk Izmail's'koho derzhavnoho humanitarnoho universytetu: zbirnyk naukovykh prats'. Serii: Istorychni nauky Vyp 40* (2019), 180-186; I. Tatarynov, “Vijs'kovi dii v Pivdennij Bessarabii u 1918 r,” *Naukovyj visnyk Izmail's'koho derzhavnoho humanitarnoho universytetu: zbirnyk naukovykh prats'. Serii: Istorychni nauky Vyp. 61* (2023), 54-70.

⁴ O. Ponomar'ov, “Bessarabs'ke pytannia v ukrains'ko-rumuns'kykh vidnosynakh u 1917-1918 rr.,” *Visnyk Kyivs'koho natsional'noho universytetu im. T. Shevchenka №89-90* (2007), 44-48; Ya. Popenko “«Bessarabs'ke pytannia» 1918-1920 rr. v robotakh zakordonnykh doslidnykiv,” *Humanitarna paradyhma №1* (2018), 61-67; V. Savchenko,

leitmotif of the explanatory diagrams in most such publications is the fundamental premise that the conflict-prone situation between neighbouring states can be resolved through the unilateral absorption of Bessarabia.

Similar ideas can be found in the monograph of S. Suveica, who performed a thorough analysis of attempts to resolve the “Bessarabian Question” from a broader political and chronological perspective. She concluded that the ways to solve the stated problem manifested the limitations of the international relations system after the First World War that prevented effective resolution of all the consequences that emerged after the collapse of the empires. And the situation in Bessarabia demonstrated the significance of the fear factor in the face of the Bolshevik threat. At the same time, according to the researcher, Romanian politicians tried to rely on historical arguments, cultural kinship and the need for stability, which did not significantly affect the psychological attitude of many residents of the region, who regarded the union as annexation rather than voluntary unification⁵.

The reflections of the region’s population on the formation of the Romanian-Ukrainian borderland at the end of the First World War can be reconstructed through the heuristic capabilities of the periodical press. The pages of periodicals reflected not only the official point of view, but also the considerations of local political and public figures. Therefore, the analysis of the mass media of 1918 that dealt with research into negotiations between Romania and Ukraine, and the reaction to such research in Ukrainian circles, has significant scientific potential, allowing us to broaden our understanding of socio-political processes in the North-Western Black Sea region at the end of the global war.

The newspaper “Vilne Zhyttia”, a mouthpiece of Society “Sotsialistychna Prosvita” (Socialist Education) in Odesa, was one of the resources that reflected the situation. The editorial board was influenced by one of the most influential political organisations in the country – the Ukrainian Social Democratic Labour Party (the USDLP), and the editors-in-chief of the publication included, alternately, prominent figures in Odesa socialist circles, such as M. Slabchenko (historian, future member of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences), V. Murskyi (journalist, future representative of the Ukrainian People’s Republic government in Istanbul), L. Burdyn (publicist). Considering the results of the elections to the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly following

“Sfatul Tseryj, Tsentral’naia Rada i Rumcherod: konflykt interesov v Yuzhnoj Bessarabiyi (dekabr’ 1917–fevral’ 1918 gg.),” *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* № 4 (112) (2017), 102-107; T.Vintskovskiy, H.Levchenko, “The «Bessarabian Question» of 1918 in the Media Discourse of Odesa during the Period of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (Based on the Example of the Newspaper *Vilne Zhyttia*),” *Danubius* XLIII (2025), 211-227.

⁵ S. Suveica, *Post-imperial Encounters: Transnational Designs of Bessarabia in Paris and Elsewhere, 1917–1922* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 418-419.

which the USDLP gained significant support from its voters⁶, one can confidently state that the editorial staff of the publication conveyed the worldview of a significant portion of the city's residents and the people of the region as a whole⁷.

Thus, this article is aimed at studying the formation of Ukraine's informational space during the reign of Hetman P. Skoropadskyi in resolving the territorial conflict between the Kingdom of Romania and the Ukrainian State. The aforesaid aim can be achieved by implementing the following research tasks: identification and classification of newspaper publications on the “Bessarabian Question” according to their thematic content and identification of trends in publicists' assessments around the topic of Romanian-Ukrainian confrontation.

The materials on Romanian issues published in the pages of “Vilne Zhyttia” were divided into three categories according to their sources of origin: information from the Ukrainian State Telegraph Agency (the USTA), which reflected the official position of the Hetmanate authorities; reports from “Vilne Zhyttia's” own correspondents about the life of people in Bessarabia; original texts, mostly from Odesa correspondents. Based on their subject matter, they are classified into materials reflecting the official position of the Ukrainian State on political, administrative, economic, educational and religious changes that took place in the new province of the Kingdom of Romania.

Having come to power in the Ukrainian State as a result of the coup d'état, Hetman P. Skoropadskyi and government institutions, from the very first days of their rule, publicly expressed their disagreement with the territorial changes that had taken place as a result of the annexation of Bessarabia by the Kingdom of Romania. Therefore, they took diplomatic measures aimed at the potential revision of the decision made and the adoption of one that would suit Kyiv. Even after the conclusion of the Bucharest Peace Treaty in 1918, Ukrainian state structures did not cease their information campaign in this sphere, accumulating evidence of real or alleged oppression of the population of Bessarabia by the Romanian authorities.

Thus, the USTA repeatedly reported about complaints received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (headed by historian M. Vasylenko from 3 to 20 May 1918, and then by his colleague – historian D. Doroshenko) from “various groups of the population of Bessarabia”, which emphasised the illegitimacy of the decision of the Sfatul Țării dated 9 April 1918. Therefore, they appealed to Kyiv with a request to support them, provide assistance and,

⁶ V. S. Hvozdyk, “Politychni rezul'taty vyboriv do Ukrain's'kykh Ustanovchykh zboriv na pivdni Ukrainy za doby Tsentral'noi Rady,” *Naukovi pratsi istorichnoho fakul'tetu Zaporiz'koho derzhavnoho universytetu*, Vyp. XXII (2008), 55.

⁷ Vintskovskyi, Levchenko, “The “Bessarabian Question”, 217.

through diplomatic negotiations, ensure inclusion of their territories into the Ukrainian State with a temporary replacement of Romanian troops with Austrian ones⁸.

Throughout May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held regular meetings on the “Bessarabian Question”, insisting on the need to return to its revision, but on Ukrainian terms this time. In particular, a new head of the Ministry, D. Doroshenko, when having a conversation with a USTA employee, reported on the preparation of a diplomatic note, which was to be delivered to the Romanian government in the near future. The note once again emphasised the ethnographic diversity of Bessarabia and Kyiv’s claims to its “Ukrainian counties”⁹.

Hopes for the establishment of Ukrainian control over certain areas of Bessarabia were also fuelled by journalistic reports about alleged promises made by certain high-ranking German officials to revise the main provisions of the “Bessarabian Question”. On one occasion, the surname of the Vice-President of the Reichstag, Hermann Paasche¹⁰ was mentioned. Another case involved certain government officials whose names were not even specified¹¹.

Another distinctive feature of newspaper reports on Romanian-Ukrainian relations after the conclusion of the Bucharest Peace Treaty was their coverage of economic components of inter-state relations – the relations that directly depended on the willingness of the leaders of both states to find a compromise solution to the territorial conflict. Despite the tense political situation, the governments of A. Marghiloman and F. Lyzogub communicated on the trade-related issues, focusing mainly on the import of goods from Romania to Ukraine that had been contracted before Bessarabia became part of the kingdom, primarily sugar beets, firewood, lime, dried fruit, and fish. They also focused on the exports of Ukrainian sugar, leather and agricultural tools¹².

However, on 19 June, a correspondent of “Vilne Zhyttia” reported on the decision of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Ukrainian State (headed by S. Gutnyk) to ban exports to the Kingdom of Romania of all goods, as the annexation of Bessarabia still continued, and therefore no political and economic agreements between the two countries were signed¹³. Negotiations on shipping rules in the Black Sea also proved difficult¹⁴. In particular, the editorial board of “Vilne Zhyttia” claimed that the Romanian authorities did not allow

⁸ *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 17 travnia, 30 travnia, 1918.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 travnia, 1918.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 chervnia, 1918.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8 chervnia, 1918.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9 chervnia, 11 chervnia, 1918.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21 chervnia, 1918.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 chervnia, 1918.

ships with Ukrainian flags to enter Akkerman¹⁵. However, on 12 July, the Odesa media outlet, citing German sources, informed about a Romanian-Ukrainian intergovernmental agreement on economic matters, without disclosing its contents¹⁶.

The pages of “Vilne Zhyttia” featured numerous articles on the mood of some people of Bessarabia caused by changes in their usual living conditions. One of the first and relatively large reports on this matter was published by the Odesa periodical on 18 May. It reported on the arrival to the city of Mr. Barbutsa, a member of the Soroky County Peasant Committee, who, after visiting the Odesa Council of Workers’ Deputies, stated that ‘there is a prevailing tendency to gravitate towards Ukraine’ in his region. And that he was sentenced to death by the Romanian authorities as a supporter of this movement and a delegate to an unnamed congress in Chisinau. His account also included stories about the shooting by a firing squad of eight people in the village of Sofia¹⁷ who protested against annexation of Bessarabia by the kingdom, the shooting of a chairman of the workers’ council, Mr. Makarov, in Soroky, and the shooting in Yedinets of three Jews who had been abused for no reason. The newspaper's editorial board did not verify the aforementioned episodes, latently leaning towards recognising their veracity¹⁸.

Negative sentiments regarding the situation of the population of Bessarabia were further exacerbated by a report on the liquidation of Ukrainian government structures and public institutions in Akkerman County. Citing the words of Mr. Zimin, an assistant to the local commissioner for trade and industry, the Odesa periodical informed its readers that “Romanians expelled the Ukrainian commissariat from Akkerman <...> since Bessarabia is part of Romania”. Therefore, the commissariat and customs service moved to Ovidiopol¹⁹.

Controversial notes appeared in the media even within a short period of time. For example, one of the notes said about stabilisation of the political situation in Bessarabia, in particular, “cessation of deportations and requisitions of peasants' property, because apparently there had been an order to do so”. The note also stated that there was no coercion of people to change their citizenship. At the same time, it mentioned that bread prices remained consistently high, and there was a real threat of crop failure because of drought²⁰.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4 lypnia, 1918.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12 lypnia, 14 lypnia, 1918.

¹⁷ This most likely refers to Sofia, a village that is now part of the Drochia district in the Republic of Moldova.

¹⁸ *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 18 travnia, 1918.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26 travnia, 1918.

²⁰ Ibid., 4 chervnia, 1918.

However, other articles noted the opposite – the practice of grain requisitioning not only remained in force, but was also accompanied by bloody clashes, for instance, in a Jewish agricultural colony of Vertiuzhen near the station of Florești²¹, and also in Orhiiv²² and Akkerman Counties²³. According to some published rumours, the local population was so afraid of being forced to swear allegiance to King Ferdinand I that they stopped attending church because of the fear that such a procedure might be organised during church service²⁴.

The religious aspect continued to be further analysed by the editorial board of “Vilne Zhyttia”. On 6 July 1918, two short articles appeared in the newspaper. Their titles (“The Struggle Against the Clergy” and “The Removal of Bishops”) and content reflected the general critical attitude of Ukrainian society towards the way life was organised in Bessarabia under Romanian rule.

The first article reported on the unwillingness of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church to transfer to the jurisdiction of Moldovan Metropolitan Pymen (Petru Georgescu) and to conduct church service in Romanian. This provoked “open repression” against the clergy and its further migration outside the kingdom. The second article supplemented the previously published information with details about the removal from office of Archbishop Anastasius of Chisinau, who, according to the newspaper’s correspondent, was already in Moscow at that time, and about expectations of a similar decision regarding Bishop Deonisius of Izmail²⁵.

An extended version of Metropolitan Pymen’s decisions was published by the Odesa media ten days later. It was a reprint of the text by Archpriest F. Kyryk from another local newspaper – “Rodnaya Strana” (“Native Country”). The newspaper was known for its more balanced assessments, emphasising the inadmissibility of the fact that a significant portion of the clergy with Russophile views remained outside the Romanian Orthodox Church, because “the political annexation of Bessarabia quite expectedly entails church annexation too”. Therefore, according to the author of the text, during the negotiations in Iași they let Archbishop Anastasius understand that “it was time to stay under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Synod”²⁶.

During the Hetmanate period, articles by the “Vilne Zhyttia’s” own authors appeared quite late. The first of them was published only on 19 June 1918. Its author Ya. Levchenko presented the prospects for the region’s

²¹ Ibid., 9 chervnia, 1918.

²² Ibid., 2 lypnia, 1918.

²³ Ibid., 7 lypnia, 21 lypnia, 1918.

²⁴ Ibid., 8 chervnia, 1918.

²⁵ Ibid., 6 lypnia, 1918.

²⁶ “Chomu Rumuniia vyhnala rosijs’kykh iepyskopiv i sviaschenyiv,” *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 17 lypnia, 1918.

accession to Ukraine as an autonomy being as one of the most important matters on the state policy agenda. Since, in his opinion, “attempts to resolve the Bessarabian Question arose under exceptional circumstances”²⁷.

The interpretation of the specified phrase can be found in the extensive “Note from the Government of the Ukrainian State to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs” that was published in the same issue and signed on 5 June by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers F. Lyzogub and the Chief of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs D. Doroshenko. However, it was only made public by the UDTA on 17 June. During discussions with their Romanian counterparts, Ukrainian diplomats argued that the composition of members of the Sfatul Țării who had decided on Bessarabia’s union with the kingdom had been formed in conditions where it was impossible to organise “normal people’s representation”. Therefore, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova did not represent the interests of the entire population of the region and, moreover, made decisions under pressure from Romanian troops and contrary to the Entente’s statements about guarantees of the republic’s independence from Romania.

The second line of argumentation by the Ukrainian State government was formed within the context of appealing to the recent ideas of Ukrainian political elites from the socialist camp about the possibility of creating, on the ruins of the Russian Empire, a confederation²⁸ of sovereign democratic republics. At the same time, until January 1918, Bessarabia/the Republic of Moldova was regarded by Kyiv as a neighbour of Ukraine with which it had close economic and political ties. And after the proclamation of full independence of the UPR, “the Ukrainian government proposed to establish closer relations with the Republic of Moldova, granting it appropriate autonomous rights”. At the end of the “Note”, the Hetmanat’s authorities confirmed their commitment to the stated thesis, promising to grant ‘the entire population of Bessarabia political autonomy, which would provide the population with broad rights for its socio-political development and cultural self-determination’²⁹. This corresponded to standard characteristics of pathways for overcoming the political and legal conflict between Romania and Ukraine from Kyiv’s point of view.

It seems that the article by Ya. Levchenko aimed to explain to its readers the official position of the Ukrainian government in a concise and simplified manner. His system of arguments was largely based on demographic indicators, with no reference to their sources. It is worthwhile to mention that

²⁷ Ya. Levchenko, “Bessarabiia i Ukraina,” *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 19 chervnia, 1918.

²⁸ The terminology used at that time by theorists of the Ukrainian Revolution employed the term “federal union”.

²⁹ *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 19 chervnia, 1918.

this was the first instance when “Vilne Zhyttia” presented statistical data within the context of the Romanian-Ukrainian discussion regarding the outlined issue. The author noted that 920,919 Moldovans, 378,898 Ukrainians, 228,168 Jews, and 155,774 Russians resided in the province³⁰. Therefore, as the author concluded, the Romanian authorities had no right to ignore the political will of nearly 400,000 Ukrainians³¹.

An article by an unknown author with the telling title “Who should Bessarabia belong to?” used similar rhetoric. At the beginning of it, the author identified two key points in resolving the “Bessarabian Question”: international agreements and people’s will. A brief overview of the events of 1917-1918 led readers to conclude that a forceful scenario did prevail on the eve of the decision made by the Sfatul Țării on 9 April 1918, while international law provided for a specific procedure for holding a plebiscite – first, withdrawal of Romanian troops from a territory legally deemed as foreign, and then granting local authorities an opportunity to hold a referendum. The author expressed their personal opinion about possible outcomes of such a referendum in the final sentence: “Bessarabia should therefore remain within the Ukrainian sphere of influence”³².

The text by “Vilne Zhyttia's” own correspondent from Akkerman was filled with even more optimistic rhetoric. It began with the line, “Here, they believe that Akkerman County will definitely become part of the Ukrainian state <...> and that people <...> will congratulate each other on the fact that Ukraine has not forgotten its children? So they are handling all their affairs as if the county had already fully joined Ukraine”. Next, an unnamed correspondent with the cryptonym N-v rigorously stated that there were no supporters of Romania at all, and that all matters should be addressed not to Chisinau, but to Odesa³³.

However, the optimism of such reports was immediately offset by the information from abroad, primarily from Romanian government circles, where senior officials insisted that the “Bessarabian Question” had been resolved once and for all³⁴. On 27 July, the Odesa newspaper, citing official media sources in Bucharest, informed readers about a note from the Ukrainian State’s government to the Kingdom of Romania proposing restoration of diplomatic

³⁰ According to the results of the 1897 All-Russian Census that considered a native language, the largest ethnic groups in Bessarabia accounted for the following percentages: Moldovans (46.6%), Ukrainians (19.6%), Jews (11.8%), and Russians (8.1%). At the same time, Ukrainians were the predominant group in Khotyn and Akkerman Counties, accounting for 53.1% and 26.7% respectively. K. Fortunatov, *Natsional'nye oblasti Rossiyi* (Sankt-Peterburh: Trud i Bor'ba, 1906), 11.

³¹ Ya.Levchenko, “Bessarabiia j Ukraina,” *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 19 chervnia, 1918.

³² “Komu povynna nalezhat' Bessarabiia,” *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 21 chervnia, 1918.

³³ “N-v. Dopys z Akermana,” *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 28 chervnia, 1918.

³⁴ *Vil'ne zhyttia*, 29 chervnia, 1918.

relations³⁵. De facto, this meant acknowledging the impossibility of resolving the “Bessarabian Question” in line with Kyiv’s scenario within the specified time frame. The same was also stated by Romanian officials, in particular, by the former Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, D. Ciugureanu³⁶.

A correspondent of “Vilne Zhyttia”, who used the pseudonym M. Sh., also penned some emotionally charged texts assessing the situation in Bessarabia. He interpreted it as a life under occupation, basing his narrative on two theses: 1) contradistinguishing the Moldovan and Romanian populations of the region, rigorously declaring about the former’s unfavourable attitude towards the latter, allegedly because of Romanian soldiers’ propensity for theft; 2) mass dismissals of state institution employees, mentioning a number of 5,000 persons³⁷. This correlated with previous reports about Bucharest’s decision to dismiss officials who worked in the postal and railway systems and other institutions, however, did not speak Romanian, which led to the near paralysis of such institutions³⁸.

The procedure for replacing some employees with others was explained in a post made by an unknown author. They claimed that, from 1 June 1918 onwards, a personnel rotation began at post and telegraph institutions throughout the whole of Bessarabia. Romanian became an official language of these institutions, and government agencies sent instructors to the new province in order to take control of the communications system³⁹. A mandatory condition for employees who wished to continue working was not only the requirement to master the official language within a few months, but also to take an oath of allegiance to the king and the constitution⁴⁰. A similar storyline reflected by “Vilne Zhyttia” told about rail transport and was supplemented by the thesis about replacing the railway track, a step, which, according to some rumours, was supposed to protect Romania from kerosene smuggling from Ukraine⁴¹.

In their article devoted to education M. Sh. also categorically stated that, despite the resumption of Ukrainian language courses in Akkerman (alongside with Romanian courses), the courses that had been banned by the new authorities in June, prompting Mr. Stepanov, a member of the county’s local council, to travel to Kyiv in order to take measures for ensuring their

³⁵ Ibid., 27 lypnia, 1918.

³⁶ Ibid., 4 serpnia, 1918.

³⁷ “M. Sh. Z Akkermans’koho povitu,” *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 21 lypnia, 1918.

³⁸ *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 6 lypnia, 21 lypnia, 1918.

³⁹ “Odyn iz dokumentiv rumuns’koho khazaijnuvannia v Bessarabii,” *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 24 lypnia.

⁴⁰ *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 31 lypnia, 1918.

⁴¹ Ibid., 27 lypnia, 1918.

continuation⁴², “Ukrainian teachers are resolutely joining the fight against insensitive oppressors”, because of the plans to close Ukrainian schools, meaning that teachers would lose their jobs. An alternative option considered by M. Sh. was the intervention of F. Lyzogub’s government in the educational process by demanding that Ukrainian-language school education in Bessarabia would receive an autonomous status⁴³. The attention paid to the language of instruction by Ukrainian teachers in Bessarabia intensified even further just before the 1918/1919 academic year, because, according to the information from “*Vilne Zhyttia*”, only a small number of them were able to comply with the government’s order to teach in Romanian⁴⁴.

Despite obvious signs of irreversibility of Bessarabia’s union with the Kingdom of Romania, the editorial board of “*Vilne Zhyttia*” kept the column “News from Bessarabia” until its liquidation⁴⁵, refusing to incorporate it into the section on general Romanian matters. In early September 1918, the Odesa periodical published a report by the USTA on the appointment of K. Chebotarenko as a diplomatic representative of the Ukrainian government in Chisinau who⁴⁶ publicly denied Kyiv’s recognition of “the annexation of the Ukrainian part of Bessarabia to Romania”. The newspaper offered a description of the economic situation in Bessarabia made by its own correspondent. Its content differed little from the previous ones, emphasising the financial and other difficulties faced by the region’s inhabitants and state institutions in the summer of 1918⁴⁷. After 10 September, the political and social periodical ceased to exist.

Thus, the Odesa daily newspaper “*Vilne Zhyttia*” remains an important source of information that covers reflections of the Ukrainian State led by Hetman P. Skoropadskyi, and reflections of a significant part of Ukrainian society on pathways to resolve the “Bessarabian Question”. This is evidenced by its regular coverage of events surrounding this issue, as during May–September 1918, the periodical featured nearly 90 articles on Romania-related themes. About 60 of them focused on Bessarabian matters. They were divided into two main groups: information from government circles in Ukraine and Romania and articles about the state of Bessarabian inhabitants after the region became part of the kingdom, with the second group dominating over the first one.

⁴² Ibid., 18 chervnia, 1918.

⁴³ “M. Sh. Ukrains’ke uchytel’stvo v Akkermans’komu poviti,” *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 21 lypnia, 1918.

⁴⁴ *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 30 serpnia, 1918

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18 serpnia, 21 serpnia, 27 serpnia, 28 serpnia, 30 serpnia, 2 veresnia, 1918.

⁴⁶ Occupied a position of General Commissioner of the Ministry of Military Affairs of the Ukrainian State in Romania.

⁴⁷ *Vil’ne zhyttia*, 5 veresnia, 1918.

The official information primarily reflected Kyiv’s disagreement with the logic of resolving the Romanian-Ukrainian territorial conflict. Even after the conclusion of the Bucharest Peace Treaty (the Treaty of Bucharest), the hetman government regularly articulated an alternative point of view regarding the ownership of the former Bessarabian Province, emphasising the multi-ethnicity of the region, the predominance of the Ukrainian population in some of its counties, and the illegitimacy of the Sfatul Țării in making such decisions. At the same time, the texts of the USTA reprinted in “Vilne Zhyttia” do not contain even a single example of criticism of the position of the Central Powers, with whom the Kingdom of Romania agreed on new borders in Central and Eastern Europe, and with whom the UPR also concluded the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty on 9 February 1918.

The newspaper’s own correspondents usually wrote reports on the life of the Bessarabian people. They were united by their sharp and critical views towards the Romanian authorities’ actions in the region, primarily in the sphere of socio-economic and educational policy. The published texts mostly concluded that living conditions of the Ukrainian population in the region had significantly deteriorated because of requisitioning of agricultural property accompanied by bloody clashes with the military, sharply rising prices, low harvests resulting in a risk of famine, and since about 5,000 employees of the communications system, rail transport, and other institutions had lost their jobs because they did not speak Romanian.

The latter circumstance was described as a real threat to teaching staff being required to switch to teaching in the official language starting from the new academic year. An unobvious exception to the proposed logic of the presentation of materials was the thesis on the incorporation of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church into the Moldovan Metropolis. The thesis was accompanied by an explanation of the consequences of the ongoing influence of Russian priests in Bessarabia. However, this thesis was merely a retransmission of materials from another Odesa newspaper.

The overall conclusion of the analysed information leaves no doubt that the reflection of the editorial board of “Vilne Zhyttia”, and therefore of a significant part of the inhabitants of south-western Ukraine, on the political, socio-economic and cultural prospects of the population of Bessarabia as part of the Kingdom of Romania appeared to be pessimistic.