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GRAIN EXPORT FROM UKRAINE: ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL DURING PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN BREST-LITOVSK

Abstract. *The purpose of the research is to define how much grain, according to the calculations of German and Ukrainian government experts, Ukraine could have exported in the first half of 1918.*

The scientific novelty of the research is seen in the fact that for the first time in historical science, actual material on the topic is systematized and analyzed, conclusions and generalizations are reasoned.

Consideration of the topic leads to the following conclusions. Until 1914, Ukrainian provinces within the Russian Empire produced about 19 million tons of grain annually, of which 4.8 to 5 million tons were exported outside the empire. During the First World War (1914 – 1917), grain production in Ukraine decreased and there was less export. According to the estimates of the German side, Ukrainian stocks of export grain at the beginning of 1918 had from 2 to 8 million tons, and according to the data of the Ukrainian side, it was from 1 to 3.3 million tons. Based on these calculations, at the negotiations in Brest-Litovsk, Ukrainian, Austro-Hungarian and German delegates agreed that Ukraine was able to sell Germany and Austria-Hungary 1 million tons of grain by July 31, 1918. These obligations of the Ukrainian side were recorded in peace treaty of February 9, 1918 and in the protocol of February 7, 1918, which supplemented the peace treaty.

Keywords: *First World War, Ukrainian People's Republic, German Empire, Austria-Hungary, Brest-Litovsk Peace Conference, international trade, food export.*

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ЕКСПОРТ ЗЕРНА З УКРАЇНИ: ОЦІНКА ПОТЕНЦІАЛУ ПІД ЧАС МИРНИХ ПЕРЕГОВОРІВ У БРЕСТ-ЛИТОВСЬКУ

Анотація. *Мета пропонованого дослідження – з'ясувати, яку кількість зерна, за обрахунками німецьких і українських урядових експертів, Україна могла відправити на зовнішній ринок у першому півріччі 1918 р.*

Наукова новизна результатів дослідження пов'язана з тим, що вперше в історичній науці систематизовано та проаналізовано фактичний матеріал із теми, аргументовано висновки й узагальнення.

Розгляд теми підводить до таких висновків. До 1914 р. українські губернії у складі Російської імперії виробляли щорічно близько 19 млн т зерна, з яких за межі імперії експортували 4,8–5 млн т. У роки Першої світової війни (1914–1917 рр.) зернове виробництво в Україні зменшилось, однак і експорт скоротився. За оцінками німецької сторони, українські запаси експортного зерна на початку 1918 р. становили від 2 до 8 млн т, а за даними української – від 1 до 3,3 млн т. Враховуючи ці розрахунки, українські, австро-угорські й німецькі делегати на переговорах у Брест-Литовську погодилися, що Україна спроможна продати Німеччині та Австро-Угорщині 1 млн т зерна до 31 липня 1918 р. Ці зобов'язання української сторони були зафіксовані в мирному договорі 9 лютого 1918 р. та у протоколі 7 лютого 1918 р., який доповнював мирний договір.

Ключові слова: *Перша світова війна, Українська Народна Республіка, Німецька імперія, Австро-Угорщина, Брест-Литовська мирна конференція, міжнародна торгівля, товарообмін, експорт продовольства.*

Problem statement. As is well known, the hope of obtaining food supplies from Ukraine was one of the main factors that prompted Austria-Hungary and Germany to officially recognize the Ukrainian People's Republic, enter into negotiations with it at the Brest-Litovsk diplomatic conference, and sign a treaty of peace and friendship. But why did the governments of the central powers think the Ukraine was capable of providing the agreed amount of grain? Why exactly that much? How did the parties make preliminary calculations and how did they agree on them? Clarifying these questions is vital.

Research analysis. These questions remain unanswered in the historical literature. The political significance of Ukrainian bread exports to the Central Powers has been thoroughly covered in scholarly works on the Brest Peace and Ukrainian-German and Ukrainian-Austrian relations during the WWI. Particularly, this was discussed in recent works on this topic - in collections of articles and monographs by domestic and foreign historians¹. At the same time, the purely economic aspect of the Brest Peace Talks is poorly understood.

The purpose of the study is to determine how the Ukrainian and German governments assessed the possible volume of grain exports from Ukraine on the eve of the Brest Peace Treaty (early 1918).

The statement of the basic material. During the WWI, the Central Powers faced acute food shortages. At that time, agricultural productivity declined significantly. If in 1913 the harvest of wheat in Germany amounted to 4.4, rye - 12.1, barley - 3.6, oats - 9.5 million tons, in 1917 only 2.2, rye - 7, barley - 2, oats - 3.6 million tons were harvested². And this is despite the fact that even before the war, Germany lacked its own grain: its agricultural complex provided about 90% of grain consumption³.

During the war years, Germany tried to compensate for the lack of domestic production by importing grain from the occupied territories and from countries that remained neutral⁴. Grain imports from abroad helped solve the problem, but only partially. In addition, they were getting smaller every year. Thus, in 1916, imports from the Netherlands and other neutral countries amounted to 20 thousand tons of grain per month, in 1917 - only 3 thousand tons⁵.

According to the forecasts of the Imperial Military Food Service, a significant shortage of food grain was expected to persist in 1918. At a meeting of the Prussian government on January 17, 1918, State Secretary of the Military Food Service W. Waldow stated that even if the food grain procurement rates in Germany were fully met, "then, according to calculations, there would still be a deficit of ½ million tons"⁶. The same amount of grain was also needed to feed horses in the army. According to the Prussian War Ministry, by the 1918 harvest, German troops lacked 0.5 million tons of grain fodder⁷.

Thus, in early 1918 Germany lacked a significant amount of food and fodder grain. As for fodder, the War Ministry hoped to survive until May with its own stocks and supplies from the occupied part of Romania⁸. Food grain was needed urgently, because otherwise the German government would have to reduce bread rationing in the spring of 1918. At a government meeting on January 17, V. Valdov noted: "The way it should be with the determination of the bread ration depends on the supply of bread grain over the next 2 months"⁹.

In addition, we should take into consideration that half a million of food and half a million of feed grains were needed only for Germany alone. It was also needed for the Allies, especially Austria-Hungary. The food situation of Austrian crown lands in early 1918 was cata-

1 Україна між самовизначенням та окупацією: 1917–1922 роки / упорядник В. Дорнік. Київ : Ніка-Центр, 2015. 544 с. ; Chernev B. Twilight of Empire. The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917–1918. Toronto, Buffalo, London : University of Toronto Press, 2017. 302 p. ; Der Friede von Brest-Litovsk vom 3. März 1918 mit Russland und der sog. Brotfrieden vom 19 Februar 1918 mit der Ukraine. Die vergessene Frieden: 100 Jahre später in der Blickpunkt gerückt / Hgb. von G.H. Gornig und A. Einfeld. Berlin : Duncker & Humblot, 2020. 253 S. ; Україна та Німеччина: міждержавні відносини : збірник наукових праць / ред. кол. В. Верстюк та ін. Чернівці : Сіверський центр післядипломної освіти, 2018. 384 с.

2 Брюнин В. Г. Внутриполитическая борьба в Германии летом и осенью 1917 года. Ленинград : Издательство ЛГУ, 1965. С. 33.

3 Kielmansegg P. Deutschland und der Erste Weltkrieg. Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1980. S. 172.

4 Бобилева С. Й. Історія Німеччини з давніх часів до 1945 року. Дніпропетровськ : РВВ ДНУ, 2003. С. 332 ; Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft im 20 Jahrhundert. München : DTV, 1973. Band 2 : Hardach G. Der Erste Weltkrieg. S. 133.

5 Afflerbach H. Auf Messers Schneide. Wie das Deutsche Reich den Ersten Weltkrieg verlor. München : Verlag C.H. Beck, 2018. S. 402.

6 Archivalische Forschungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeitsbewegung. Berlin : Rütten u. Loening, 1959. Band 4/III. S. 927.

7 Україна між самовизначенням та окупацією: 1917–1922 роки / упорядник В. Дорнік. Київ : Ніка-Центр, 2015. С. 265.

8 Ibid.

9 Archivalische Forschungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeitsbewegung. Berlin : Rütten u. Loening, 1959. Band 4/III. S. 927.

strophic. In January, the Austrian government had to cut the bread ration for the population¹⁰.

Where could the necessary amount of grain to be found? At that time, grain imports to Germany from neutral countries fell to 1,000 tons per month¹¹. Therefore, hopes had to be placed on the countries with which the Quadruple Alliance was conducting peace negotiations at the turn of 1917-1918: Russia, Romania, Ukraine, and Finland. Peace agreements between them and Germany had to include the restoration of trade relations. In December 1917, at the beginning of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, when they were still being conducted only with Russia, V. Valdov wrote to the head of the imperial government, Chancellor G. Hertling: "The situation of our grain and food supply requires [...] to put the possibility of importing grain from Russia [...] in the first place among all other desires [...]. Not to mention the situation of Austria, it is also crucial for us to be able to import grain for the further conduct of the war"¹².

It was imperative to achieve this, even at the cost of concessions on other issues, including the revision of borders. In his letter to the Chancellor, Mr. Valdov emphasized: "... Your Excellency is aware of how serious the situation with food and fodder supplies is in the current economic year and how much we have to fear further deterioration in the next year [...]. Therefore, it would be possible to make significant concessions to Russia in other areas in response to the promise of large supplies from Russia"¹³.

Russia, however, could invent little to help: it was suffering from food shortages itself. Ukraine was another matter. According to the economist B. Troijenfels, the German leaders, who remembered well the high export performance of Ukraine in the pre-war years, "had the embedded idea of Ukraine as a 'breadbasket'¹⁴.

How much grain would the German government want to receive from Ukraine? Of course, it depended on Ukraine's export potential. Before the war, the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire produced about 1.2 billion poods (1p.=16,3kg) of grain (19 million tons) annually, of which about 300 million p. (4.8-5 million tons) were exported¹⁵. Of course, during the war years, Ukraine's agricultural productivity declined, but there was still plenty of bread to go around.

How much? "Our estimates of the grain reserves available in Ukraine ranged from two to eight million tons," W. Blücher, an employee of the German Foreign Service, wrote in his memoirs¹⁶. Information on where the figure of 8 million tons came from is found in the memoirs of another knowledgeable high-ranking official, S. Velsen, one of the German military representatives in the Ukrainian state. Referring to the explanations received from the bread trader J. Meyer, S. Velsen wrote: "On average, exports from Ukraine before the war amounted to 5 million tons per year. During 1914-1917, that is, four years, there was no export. This amounted to 20 million tons. From this he [Meyer] considered it sufficient to deduct 50% for minimum production and maximum consumption, and so he counted 7-8 million tons for the new harvest"¹⁷.

Were these calculations really reasonable? Despite the arguments presented, the leaders of the Central Powers had serious doubts about this. Expressing skepticism in the German upper echelons, General M. Lyncker, head of the Secret Military Cabinet, wrote in his diary on February 4, 1918: "They probably hope to come to peace with Ukraine in the near future and then receive grain from there. The latter seems to me very doubtful"¹⁸.

10 Loewenfeld-Russ H. Die Regelung der Volksernährung im Kriege. Wien : Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky A.G. ; New Haven : Yale University Press, 1926. S. 395 ; Gratz G., Schüller R. Die äußere Wirtschaftspolitik Österreich-Ungarns. Mitteleuropäische Pläne. Wien : Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky A.G, 1925. S. 131.

11 Afflerbach H. Auf Messers Schneide. Wie das Deutsche Reich den Ersten Weltkrieg verlor. München : Verlag C. H. Beck, 2018. S. 402.

12 Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses der Deutschen Verfassungsgebenden Nationalversammlung und des Deutschen Reichstages 1919 – 1928: Verhandlungen. Gutachten. Urkunden. IV Reihe. Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918. Berlin : Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1927. Bd. 3. S. 16.

13 Советско-германские отношения от переговоров в Брест-Литовске до подписания Рапалльского договора : сборник документов. Москва Политиздат, 1968. Т. 1 : 1917–1918 гг. С. 23.

14 Treuenfels B. Die Reste der russischen Volkswirtschaft. Stuttgart : Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1920. S. 45.

15 Україна між самовизначенням та окупацією: 1917–1922 роки / упорядник В. Дорнік. Київ : Ніка-Центр, 2015. С. 266 ; Павленко Ю., Храмов Ю. Українська державність у 1917–1919 рр. (історико-генетичний аналіз). Київ : Манускрипт, 1995. С. 97.

16 Blücher W. Deutschlands Weg nach Rapallo. Erinnerungen eines Mannes aus dem zweiten Gliede. Wiesbaden : Limes Verlag, 1951. S. 20.

17 Velsen S. Deutsche Generalstabsoffiziere im 1. Weltkrieg 1914–1918. Erinnerungen *Die Welt als Geschichte*. 1956. Heft 3–4. S. 289.

18 Kaiser Wilhelm II als Oberster Kriegsherr während des Ersten Weltkrieg – Quellen aus der militärischen Umgebung des Kaisers 1914–1918. München : Oldenbourg, 2005. S. 549.

What about the Ukrainian party? Did the Ukrainian diplomats who participated in the Brest-Litovsk talks confirm that Ukraine has a large amount of export grain? Yes, they surely did. According to the statements of Ukrainian delegates, the exportable grain surplus on the territory of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) amounted to about 3.3 million tons (200 million poods)¹⁹. At least 1 million tons could be firmly guaranteed, the Ukrainian side assured "orally and privately"²⁰.

Asserting that Ukraine was still rich in bread - capable of exporting at least 1 million tons of grain - the Ukrainian party, however, made an important reservation. The root of the problem, Ukrainian diplomats claimed, was not that there was a lack of grain - there was plenty of it - but that it was difficult to procure. At the beginning of 1918, government agencies, large agricultural producers (estates), and trading firms in Ukraine did not have large stocks of grain. The main owners of ready-made bread were peasants.

With this in mind, the UPR representatives argued, there was no hope that the procurement would be quick and smooth. It could not be that Ukrainian grain procurement agencies or large owners would take grain from the storerooms and hand it over to the Central Powers. Grain had to be collected in small batches throughout the country, dealing with a large number of small holders²¹.

It was also necessary to take into account their lack of interest in monetary compensation. During the war years, paper money in Ukraine lost its value, and in order to "lure" grain from the peasants, it was necessary to offer them not rubles, marks, kronas or karbovanets, but things necessary for everyday life and farming, "such as agricultural machinery, iron goods, etc."²².

Consequently, the Ukrainian party agreed with the German one that there was enough ready-made grain in Ukraine to export, but emphasized that there was only one way to procure

it: to exchange it with peasants for industrial products. The content of what Ukraine's representatives told their partners in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations about Ukraine's export potential is conveyed in an entry in the diary of the German diplomat H. Kessler, made after a conversation with a member of the Ukrainian delegation S. Ostapenko: "Ukraine still has large reserves; the peasants have them all. They would give them out only through a commodity exchange for iron"²³.

On February 5, 1918, when the draft peace treaty with the UPR was basically ready, German and Austro-Hungarian officials gathered in Berlin for a meeting to finally decide whether to sign it. During the discussion of its terms, the question of Ukraine's ability to secure bread exports was again raised.

The speaker was Austro-Hungarian economic expert G. Gratz. The minutes of the meeting recorded the main points of his speech: "We are asking ourselves whether Ukraine has sufficient reserves and whether they can be utilized. Negotiations with Ukraine have given a positive answer. The contract should be concluded in such a way that supplies are guaranteed. This is possible. The Ukrainians emphasize, however, that payment in cash will not reveal the reserves of the peasants. They have a surplus of money, but not enough goods. Agricultural tools are especially needed. It is noteworthy that horseshoes cost 9 rubles. Ukraine also needs to be sure that it will actually receive the goods. It agrees that payment, since it cannot be made immediately in goods, should be deferred in exchange for bank guarantees. She does not insist on payment in gold for non-delivery of goods"²⁴.

After this report by G. Gratz, who concluded that "negotiations with Ukraine gave a positive answer," and after V. Valdov's speech, who confirmed that "assistance from Ukraine is possible"²⁵, the question of whether the UPR had the amount of export grain needed by the

19 Україна між самовизначенням та окупацією: 1917–1922 роки / упорядник В. Дорнік. Київ : Ніка-Центр, 2015. С. 275 ; Treuenfels B. Die Reste der russischen Volkswirtschaft. Stuttgart : Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1920. S. 45.

20 Gratz G., Schüller R. Die äußere Wirtschaftspolitik Österreich-Ungarns. Mitteleuropäische Pläne. Wien : Hoelder, Pichler, Tempisky A.G, 1925. S. 149.

21 Крах германской оккупации на Украине (По документам оккупантов). – Москва: Государственное издательство, 1936. С. 24.

22 Ibid.

23 Kessler H. Das Tagebuch: 1880–1937. Stuttgart : Cotta, 2006. Band 6 : 1916–1918. S. 303.

24 Советско-германские отношения от переговоров в Брест-Литовске до подписания Рапалльского договора : сборник документов. Москва Политиздат, 1968. Т. 1 : 1917–1918 гг. С. 280, 281.

25 Советско-германские отношения от переговоров в Брест-Литовске до подписания Рапалльского договора : сборник документов. Москва Политиздат, 1968. Т. 1 : 1917–1918 гг. С. 281.

Central Powers was closed (although doubts did not disappear). After discussing a range of issues related to the Central Powers' policy toward Ukraine, the participants of the meeting decided to conclude the treaty with the UPR.

At the same time, on February 5, 1918, in Berlin, the Austro-Hungarian and German sides agreed to divide grain from Ukraine between them. The Joint Economic Commission agreed to adopt 1:1 as the general principle of this division²⁶.

Ukraine's obligation to sell grain to the Central Powers was enshrined in the documents signed as a result of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations - the peace treaty and one of the protocols that supplemented this treaty. Once again, we emphasize that these acts were not linked to an agreement on military assistance to Ukraine by the Central Powers. The statement that the UPR, in accordance with the Brest Peace Treaty, "undertook to supply food and raw materials to Germany and Austria-Hungary in return for their military assistance against Soviet Russia"²⁷ is not true.

According to paragraph 1 of Article VII of the peace treaty between the Ukrainian People's Republic and the countries of the Quadruple Alliance (February 9, 1918), the parties were to "immediately establish economic relations" and by July 31, 1918 (i.e., by the time Ukraine had a new harvest), to carry out "a mutual exchange of surplus of the most important agricultural and industrial products to meet current needs."²⁸

According to the minutes of the meeting of the Austro-Hungarian-Ukrainian commission for the preparation of the peace treaty (February 7, 1918), when discussing Article VII, paragraph 1, of the treaty, the Ukrainian side confirmed that, based on the data it provided, it stated that the Ukrainian People's Republic had at least 1 million tons of surplus bread grain and guaranteed its "timely [i.e., by July 31, 1918] receipt and shipment within the shortest possible time." Recognizing this, the Ukrainian delegation made a clarification: "however, the acqui-

sition and shipment depend on the fact that the Ukrainian grain producers receive an appropriate equivalent in the goods we need, and that the states of the Quartet will assist in the shipment and in improving the transport organization in Ukraine"²⁹.

Conclusions. According to German experts, in early 1918, Germany lacked at least 0.5 million tons of food grain. In addition to its own food needs, it was advisable for Germany to take care of the needs of its main ally, Austria-Hungary, which was on the verge of starvation in the winter of 1918. From the German point of view, the peace agreement between Ukraine and the Central Powers, the terms of which were agreed upon at a diplomatic conference in Brest-Litovsk (late 1917 and early 1918), had to include the resumption of Ukrainian food exports. Before the war, the Ukrainian regions of the Russian Empire produced about 1.2 billion poods of grain (19 million tons) annually, of which about 300 million poods (4.8-5 million tons) were sold abroad. During the First World War (1914-1917), grain production in Ukraine declined, but so did exports. According to German estimates, Ukrainian export grain reserves in early 1918 ranged from 2 to 8 million tons, while according to Ukrainian estimates, they were between 1 and 3.3 million tons. During the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, representatives of the Central Powers and the UPR agreed that Ukraine could sell at least 1 million tons of grain to Germany and Austria-Hungary by July 31, 1918 (i.e., before the new harvest). These obligations of the Ukrainian side were enshrined in the peace treaty of February 9, 1918, and in the protocol of February 7, 1918, which supplemented the peace treaty.

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27 Первая мировая война. Энциклопедический словарь / рук. проекта А.О. Чубарьян. Москва: Весь Мир, 2014. С. 133.

28 Советско-германские отношения от переговоров в Брест-Литовске до подписания Рапалльского договора : сборник документов. Москва Политиздат, 1968. Т. 1 : 1917–1918 гг. С. 301.

29 Ereignisse in der Ukraine 1914–1922, deren Bedeutung und historische Hintergründe / Hgb. von Th. Hornykiewicz. Philadelphia, 1967. Band 2. S. 208, 209 ; Gratz G., Schüller R. Die äußere Wirtschaftspolitik Österreich-Ungarns. Mitteleuropäische Pläne. Wien : Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky A.G, 1925. S. 149, 150.

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