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## National Minorities in the South of Ukraine During the Famine of 1932–1933

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The article is devoted to the issue of the situation of national minorities who lived compactly in the South of Ukraine during the famine of 1932–1933. The focus of the article is on the lives of German, Swedish and Jewish colonists who lived in national districts or had national village councils. The circumstances due to which natives of Central Asia (Uzbeks, Qyrgyz, and Qazaqs) find themselves at the epicenter of the Ukrainian Holodomor are also considered. It was found that all national communities were affected by the famine in Ukraine. Although they could receive a little help from their states and foreign charities (Germans, Swedes, and Jews), they had to hand it over to the MOPR or exchange it unevenly in Torgsin. They also faced repression in response to disclosing information that they were on hunger strike in consulates or foreign media. But despite everything, they still did it because of the difficult living conditions. Unlike other national minorities, the people from Central Asia ended up in the South of Ukraine as labor prisoners, so their life was much worse because in 1933 they were practically stopped being supplied with food.

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## 1932–1933 жылдардағы Ашаршылық кезіндегі Украинаның оңтүстігіндегі азшылық ұлттар

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Бұл мақала 1932–1933 жылдардағы ашаршылық кезінде Оңтүстік Украинада шағын өмір сүрген аз ұлттардың мәселесіне арналған. Мақаланың басты назарында – ұлттық округта немесе ұлттық ауыл кеңестері болған неміс, швед және еврей колонистерінің өмірі болып табылады. Сонымен қатар, украиндық Аштықтың (Голодомор) эпицентрине Орталық Азия халықтарының (өзбек, қырғыз, қазақ) қалай тап болған жағдайлары қарастырылады. Украинаның ашаршылық заманында сол аумақтағы барлық ұлттар зардап шеккендігі жайлы анықталған. Олар өз мемлекеттері мен шетелдік қайырымдылық қорлардан (неміс, швед, еврей) көмек сұрай алғанымен, оны МОПР (Революция күрескерлеріне көмек көрсету жөніндегі халықаралық ұйым, Халықаралық қызыл көмек) немесе Торсинге (Шетелдіктермен сауда жасау) тапсыруға мәжбүр болды. Сонымен қатар, консулдықтар мен шетелдік БАҚ-қа аштық туралы ақпаратты ашып айтқандары үшін құдалау мен репрессияға ұшырады. Бірақ осының барлығына қарамастан, өздерінің ауыр халдері салдарынан олар хабарлауға мәжбүр болды. Басқа ұлттарға қарағанда, Орталық Азияның халықтары Украинаның оңтүстігіне еңбек тұтқындары ретінде келген еді, сондықтан да олардың жағдайлары әлдеқайда нашар болды, себебі 1933 жылы оларды азық-түлікпен қамту мүлдем тоқтатылды.

**Сілтеме жасау үшін:** Кузовова Н.М. 1932–1933 жылдардағы Ашаршылық кезіндегі Украинаның оңтүстігіндегі азшылық ұлттар. *Qazaq Historical Review*. 2023. № 1 (3). 331–339-бб. (ағылшынша).

## Национальные меньшинства на юге Украины во время голода 1932–1933 гг.

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Статья посвящена вопросу положения национальных меньшинств, компактно проживавших на юге Украины во время голода 1932–1933 годов. В центре внимания статьи жизнь немецких, шведских и еврейских колонистов, проживавших в национальных округах или имевших национальные сельские советы. Рассматриваются обстоятельства, из-за которых выходцы из Центральной Азии (узбеки, кыргызы и казахи) оказались в эпицентре украинского Голодомора. Установлено, что от голода в Украине пострадали все национальные общины. Хотя они и получали небольшую помощь от своих государств и иностранных благотворительных организаций (немецких, шведских и еврейских), им приходилось сдавать ее в МОПР или непропорционально обменивать в Торгсине. Они сталкивались с репрессиями по обвинению в раскрытии информации о том, что они голодают, в консульствах или иностранных СМИ. Но несмотря ни на что, они все равно это делали из-за тяжелых жизненных условий. В отличие от других национальных меньшинств, выходцы из Центральной Азии оказались на юге Украины в качестве трудовых заключенных, и их жизнь была намного хуже, поскольку в 1933 году их практически перестали снабжать продуктами питания.

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### Formulation of the problem

The problem of recognizing the famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine consists in defining the group of people who suffered because of the criminal policy of Stalin and the Soviet authorities in accordance with the articles of the UN Convention «Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide» [Convention 1948]. The proposed study will help to clarify this issue using specific historical examples. The author proceeds from the definition of the object of genocide as a «national group» namely all citizens of the Ukrainian SSR who became victims of the Holodomor [Convention 1948: 1–2].

### Research methodology

The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach. The reconstruction of the historical circumstances of the famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine is based on the work of researchers of the history of national minorities in Southern Ukraine (Alfred Aisfeld [Aisfeld 2011], Igor Ivankov [Ivankov 2004], Andrey Kotlyarchuk [Kotlyarchuk 2012], Yuriy Kotlyar [Kotlyar 2008], Yuriy Korohodskiy [Korohodskiy 2016]), and the author of this article. Archival sources (State Archive of the Kherson region) and collections of documents about the famine of 1932–1933 are involved. The legal analysis of the UN Convention «Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide» [Convention 1948] is used to determine the object of genocide. The methods of demographic statistics are used to analyze the materials of the population census in the USSR regarding the national composition of the population in retrospect (the First General Census of the Russian Empire in 1897 and the All-Union Population Census in 1926 [Troynitsky 1904a; Troynitsky 1904b; Krasilnikov, Kvitkin 1929]).

*The purpose of the study* is to use the example of the South of Ukraine, a region where various ethnic groups lived compactly: Germans, Jews, Poles, Swedes, as well as representatives of the peoples of Central Asia: Uzbeks, Qazaqs, Qyrgyz, who were deported at a special settlement, to show how exactly they suffered from hunger – genocide aimed at all residents of Ukraine.

### Presenting main material

Since the end of the 18th century, Kherson Oblast have been the location of colonies where Jews, Germans, Poles, and Swedes lived compactly. In cities and towns, the national majority

consisted of the Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish population. According to the 1897 census, in Kherson by language distribution, 19.6% of the population spoke Ukrainian and 47.2% Russian, 29.1% – Yiddish, in Beryslav – 72.9%, 4.3% and 21.7% [Troynitsky 1904a: 90–92], and in Oleshki – 21.7%, 69.5% and 8.2%, [Troynitsky 1904b] respectively. In rural areas, most of the population was Ukrainian speaking.

The 1926 census showed an increase in the share of the Ukrainian population in cities (in Kherson, 36 % were Ukrainian-speaking, 36 % Russian-speaking, 25.3% spoke Yiddish, 0.4% – German, in Geniches'k – 27.2%, 51.9%, 17.9% and 0.3%, respectively) and among the rural population [Krasilnikov, Kvitkin 1929]. This can be explained by assimilation processes in the direction of the Ukrainian majority and the recognition of the Ukrainian language as a native part of the population, which marked itself as “Russians” during imperial times. Economic transformations after 1917 played a significant role in the growth of the rural Ukrainian population. The distribution of former landlord land holdings among the peasants and the economically favorable period of the New Economic Policy led to a significant increase in the number of the population, which not only compensated for the losses from the famine of 1921–1923, but also exceeded the indicators of 1897 several times. However, this growth did not become stable due to the political and economic situation in the country.

The decrease in the share of Russians in the cities also occurred due to the loss of Kherson's provincial status, under which they held most of the administrative positions, in accordance with the principles of the internal policy of the Russian Empire. This share did not significantly increase in the interwar period only because Kherson was no longer the center of the province or region and, accordingly, did not need many officials. Therefore, the increase in the share of the Russian population of this city occurred after the formation of the Kherson region in 1944.

However, the national culture of the Kherson region was still more diverse than now when the Ukrainian population predominates in the cities and districts. The reasons for this are the curtailment of the policy of indigenization and the Stalinist political repressions of 1937–1938, which were carried out not only on a political, but also on a national basis. As a result, representatives of the Jewish, Polish, and German populations, including residents of the Kherson region, were arrested, shot, and deported.

During the Holocaust, more than 28,000 Jews were killed in the region, and after the end of the war, the Soviet authorities did not allow the evacuated Jews to return to their homeland, offering to settle the Far East – Birobidzhan [Kuzovova 2023: 239–240].

The German population of the region was deported to Germany during the Second World War, and after their return they were expelled from the borders of the Ukrainian SSR due to suspicions of helping the Nazis, even in the absence of evidence, that is, on national grounds. [Aisfeld 2011: 626]. In 1947, a significant number of the Polish population of the Kherson region was deported outside Ukraine, and Polish Ukrainians were resettled from Poland instead [Kuzovova 2023: 239–240].

The decrease in the share of the Russian population occurred because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cessation of the export of Russian managerial and labor personnel as part of the Russification policy of Ukraine, which was carried out by the USSR.

But among these events, there were reasons directly related to the Holodomor. In addition to deaths from starvation, the main ones can be called repression against the population of national colonies, as revenge for the international dissemination of information about the famine, and the loss of economic attractiveness of the region because of collectivization.

In the mid – 1920s, the policy of indigenization made the South of Ukraine attractive to representatives of many nationalities. Here, national districts began to be created, where it was possible

to teach children in their native language, publish their own press, and engage in public and economic activities aimed at the comprehensive development of the national community.

Aid to the colonists was provided by the foreign governments of Germany, the USA, Sweden, and Poland, and charitable organizations that took care of supplying agricultural machinery, providing soft loans, and helped with money, things, and food.

The collapse of the indigenization policy and the beginning of collectivization had a negative impact on the colonies. Their inhabitants did not immediately understand how much the state's attitude towards the colonists had changed and what degree of political and economic pressure awaited them.

The forced grain procurement of 1932 also applied to the colonies, that is, they were subjected to the same economic violence as the Ukrainian population: all grain and all food products were confiscated from them for failure to fulfill bread and meat procurement.

The colonists turned to their residents for help and were faced with the fact that the Soviet authorities, which carried out the export of grain abroad, in every possible way prevented the publicity about the famine disaster that occurred in the USSR. To stop rumors of its own bankruptcy, the Soviet government did not stop at repressions against those who wrote letters abroad with requests for help.

While charities tried to transfer aid after hearing about the USSR's famine, the Soviet government capitalized on currency speculation through the Torgzin network and demanded that colonists transfer currency and received aid to the MOPR fund.

Ukrainian non-governmental organizations abroad were denied such assistance in general, and the same fate awaited the initiative of the Russian emigration. But there were organizations that managed to help the starving, including those in the Kherson region.

The Swedes from the colony of Staroshvedsk'e in the Berislav district were among the first to report on the famine in the USSR in their letters to journalists. The publicity was helped by the fact that this national community maintained close ties with Sweden, as they were double re-emigrants. In the last wave of emigration, they were joined by Swedish communists with families who had never lived in the USSR before. The publicity about the famine, which was carried out by this small, up to a thousand people, national community, became a real international scandal, because at one time, in 1930, the Swedish emigrants motivated their departure from the «decaying» capitalist Sweden by the desire to build communism. Before the famine of 1932–1933, this case was widely used by the Communist Party of Sweden for its propaganda purposes [Kotlyarchuk 2012: 110]. Many Soviet officials lost their positions, the inhabitants of the colony themselves suffered repression, but some of them managed to escape from the USSR to Sweden. Thanks to the activity of this community, the world learned about the Holodomor in Ukraine.

The Germans were neighbors of the Swedes – the Beryslav district was a place where national village councils were very common, because German and Jewish colonies were also located there. Unlike the Swedish community, the German colonists were also dispossessed. The Soviet government's attitude towards the Germans in connection with the strained relations with Germany was ambiguous. The German community in Ukraine not only shared the suffering of the Ukrainian people, but also felt Stalin's punishment of hunger on national grounds [Aisfeld 2011: 599]. Together, more than 250,000 Germans lived in the South of Ukraine in Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk regions.

From the letters of Sergio Gradenigo, we learn that the German colonists expressed a desire to immediately leave the territory of the USSR as early as November 1932 due to political and economic oppression. According to the Italian diplomat, the German government protested the

inflated ticket prices for those wishing to return to their homeland. It should be noted that the German colonists lived in Ukraine for more than a hundred years and considered it their homeland, but the anti-religious campaign, excessive food supply, collectivization and decentralization forced them to leave their native homes and flee to Germany [Shapoval 2007: 109–111].

Information about the famine of the first half of 1932 prompted the German public to become more active in providing monetary aid to their compatriots who became hostages of the communist regime. The considerable volume of this aid caused dissatisfaction with the Soviet authorities, who saw it as a source of resistance to collectivization and made all kinds of obstacles in receiving aid.

German researcher Alfred Aisfeld talks about 487,821 gold rubles, which came as aid to the starving Germans during April 1933 – April 1934 from Germany [Aisfeld 2011: 599]. Aid to the starving was subject to a double tax; the Soviet authorities called it «Hitler's aid» and forced them to refuse it, handing it over to the MOPR [Kondrashin 2011: 545]. Due to the Soviet «blockade» of aid and the campaign to silence the famine, losses among the German population amounted to about 20,000 people [Ivankov 2004: 60–66; Dizendorf 2006].

The German population in letters to consulates and relatives in Germany and the USA asked for help due to hunger, contributing to the spread of information about the Holodomor [Hencke 1979]. Thanks to the active activity of the German government, the question of providing aid to the starving in Ukraine and the North Caucasus was positively considered by the International Cross at the request of the League of Nations. Through the German government and the German charitable organization «Brüder in Not», representatives of the Ukrainian Diaspora led by Elisabeth Skoropads'ka tried to organize help for the Ukrainian population [Kondrashin 2011: 494–495].

But the position of the Soviet Union, which not only denied information about the famine through diplomatic channels, but also contributed to the spread of disinformation through pro-communist newspapers in France, Sweden, and the United States, including through an interview with the mayor of Lyon, Eduardo Herriot, who visited the USSR and Ukraine in August 1933, denied the famine, led to the fact that aid was not provided.

The German population was subjected to repression for spreading information about the famine.

*In the German districts of our region, a fascist-Hitler organization was exposed, which conducted counter-revolutionary espionage work, was engaged in sending provocative false letters to Germany about need, hunger and receiving money transfers from there. This organization was associated with the German consulate in Kharkiv. The material is very profitable for staging a public trial, which can be staged in such a way that the consulate remains out of the picture. I believe that the trial is expedient, wrote Mendel Khataevich to Lazar Kaganovich (July 20, 1934).*

As a punishment, Stalin and his henchmen decided to award 5 years of labor camps to each suspect [Kondrashin 2011: 555–561].

Despite all efforts, information about the famine leaked to the foreign press. Security authorities reported this with displeasure. In the review of the foreign press about the famine in Russia, concluded by representatives of the Soviet authorities on July 15, 1934, it was noted:

*The correspondent of the Jewish newspaper Vorwärts in New York claims that 40% of the Jewish population in Belarus and Ukraine died of starvation» (perhaps we are talking about publications of Mendel Osherovich, who visited Ukraine in 1933) [Kondrashin 2011].*

However, famine was not uncommon in the USSR, and the scale of the disaster was underestimated.

Let's return to the Jewish population of Southern Ukraine. A Jewish national district was created on the territory of the Kherson Region in the late 1920s, which had strong financial and technical support from Agro-Joint, which ceased its activities in the USSR only in 1938. How did it happen

that the Jewish population suffered from starvation when there was no such funding? As in the case of German settlements, and Germans and Jews lived side by side in the Kherson region, collectivization changed the structure of the colonies. Repression, the anti-religious campaign – all this made the life of Jewish farmers unbearable.

In December 1932, in connection with the disruption of the plan for grain and meat procurement, the delivery of goods to two districts of the Kherson region: Kakhovs'kyi and Kalinindorfs'kyi districts, in accordance with the letter of the director of Khersontorg to the state trade sector of the Odessa regional supply, immediately stopped.<sup>1</sup> In these areas there were places of compact residence of the rural Jewish population of the Kherson region.

Incidentally, we note that the eyewitness accounts reflect the relationship between the Jewish and Ukrainian populations during the Holodomor, and the main motive of the memories is recognition and gratitude for the help that the Jewish people provided to the Ukrainians during the tragedy that became common.

Considering the significant financial support provided through COMZET, the financial difficulties faced by international charitable organizations due to the global economic crisis should not be underestimated. The ability to support the Jewish population in currency decreased, and securities lost part of their value. No less important was the fact that the USSR was more interested in receiving currency loans than in the fate of Jewish settlers. The fight against Zionism was in fact a manifestation of Soviet anti-Semitism, therefore repression and disarmament, anti-religious policy became an integral part of the life of national collective farms.

The fate of the Jews who lived in the cities became even more tragic. On the example of Kherson, it is possible to trace the causes and consequences of the Holodomor for the Jewish urban population. Kherson, like many other Ukrainian cities, was punished for non-fulfillment of bread procurement. Relegation to the third category in 1932–1933 meant removing the population from centralized supply. As a result, only half of the city was provided with rations: and at a sufficient level – only for the town's party leadership. Documents of that time testify to the cessation of the supply of products to the city's trade network and the banning of spontaneous markets. We can follow the acts of registration of the deaths of Jews, that the victims of the famine were members of the families of shoemakers, wheelwrights, etc., that is, people who were engaged in handicrafts, or worked in the service sector and could not receive rations, like factory workers, and also could not buy food due to its lack or high cost, as well as pensioners. It can be assumed that in this way the state sought to suppress private initiative in cities. But we should note that the death rate from hunger among the families of workers of strategic enterprises was also high since their family members were not provided with rations. For the same reasons, we observe cases of death from starvation of Russians living in the city [Kuzovova 2023: 163–174].

Another national group also suffered human losses – at the height of the famine, special settlements were set up for Uzbeks and Qazaqs who were repressed in their homeland on the territory of modern Kherson and Odessa regions. They were supposed to start cotton farming in the South of Ukraine.

According to the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) No. 44 of June 20, 1931, three thousand «Kurkul» families from Central Asia were going to be deported to Ukraine. As a result, «3,520 Bai farms were sent to Ukraine, located, in addition to cotton state farms, in a number of livestock state farms» [Lebid 2019: 6; Pokrovsky 2005: 314–315]. The families were planned to be distributed as follows: Kakhovs'kyi district – 400 families, Khorlivs'kyi

<sup>1</sup> State archive of the Kherson region. FR-501 Kherson City Trade Association (Khersontorg), 1928–1938, 1944–1960, r. 1, issue 18 Correspondence with the State Trade Administration, «Ukrpostach», etc. for organizations and enterprises on mutual settlements, fol. 526–528.



district – 800 families, Skadovs'kyi district – 400 families, Holoprystans'kyi district – 300 families, Heniches'kyi district – 350 families, Novovasylivs'kyi district – 250 families, Novotroits'kyi district – 250 families, Akymivs'kyi district – 250 [Danilov 2001: 149–151]. But as we can see, an additional 520 families were added to the planned number of immigrants. According to calculations and «in accordance with the documents that reflect the displacement of resettlement of special settlers territorially and according to the sectoral principle, as of October 20, 1931, 14,914 people from Central Asia were resettled in Ukraine. Of these, 5,898 people (39,5%) are involved in cotton cultivation, 1,502 people (10,1%) in special technical crops, and 7,514 people (50,4%) in state farm associations in the grain and livestock sector» [Lebid 2019: 6].

The tragic circumstances of the life and death of special emigrants, closely related to the famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine. One of the means of pressure on the local leadership was the transfer of expenses related to the maintenance of prisoners to the local budget. At the beginning of 1933, the leadership of the regions revised the norms for the supply of special envoys and gradually reduced their expenses. As a result, hunger begins among this category of prisoners. The investigation file of N.Khalikov, an Uzbek special settler, arrested by the Kakhovsky district department of the DPU on March 3, 1933, contains an accusation that Khalikov, a mullah in the past, is accused of anti-Soviet agitation and activities for saying that immigrants are given very little of food, from which Uzbeks are dying of hunger, «and everyone can die». For his words, the special settler was sentenced to 3 concentration camps. After the death of Stalin, special settlers finally left the Kherson region and returned to the Motherland.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that among all ethnic groups, deaths from starvation were observed in places of forced labor, where those accused of disrupting the grain harvest were sent, or simply by the definition of «kurkul» or «son of a kurkul», as stated in the death certificate. The number of records from hunger, dystrophy, exhaustion is simply amazing. We can assume that the prisoners in 1933 did not receive any food at all and could only hope for voluntary transfers from their relatives.

## Conclusions

So, using the example of Kherson Oblast, we can say that for each of the nations that shared the fate of Ukrainians in 1932–1934, the Holodomor became a tragedy with a national flavor.

We can use the example of the national groups that lived compactly in the South of Ukraine to see what problems they faced during the famine due to their national origin and peculiarities of life.

Thus, the Germans and Jews of Southern Ukraine relied on help from abroad. The German population hoped that the German government would intercede for them and help them avoid death by starvation. They actively wrote complaints about the actions of the Soviet authorities. In return, they were provided with monetary and food aid, which was often taken by the Soviet authorities in various ways, rightly or wrongly.

The Jewish population hoped for help from Jewish charities and spread information about the famine. But such information was often received with skepticism abroad, because the USSR denied the famine. Also, the opportunities of foreign charitable organizations were limited due to the economic crisis – the Great Depression.

The multinational population of Kherson suffered from hunger, because the city was cut off from the centralized food supply, and its food reserves were not small. Therefore, we can observe a

<sup>2</sup>State archive of the Kherson region. FR-4033 Office of the SBU in the Kherson region 1919–1999, r. 7, f. 847 Investigative case of N.Khalikov, a Uzbek special settler, arrested by the Kakhovsky RV of the DPU on 03.03.1933, fol. 24, 25, 27

large number of townspeople who died of hunger: Russians, Jews, Germans, Poles and others, among those who depended on social security.

The special settlers from Central Asia found themselves in a death trap, as they were labor prisoners and were completely dependent on the regional food supply, which was introduced during the famine.

Therefore, the opinion of Ludmila Hrynevych, expressed at the webinar of the German-Ukrainian Commission of Historians, «Can the Holodomor be considered genocide?» is quite correct. (September 24, 2020): «personally believe that the Holodomor was genocide and I support the position of those Ukrainian lawyers who believe that the object of genocide was a national group – part of the citizens of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, regardless of ethnic, religious and other features, as well as the ethnic group – Ukrainians of the Kuban» [Schulze Wessel 2020]. We can add that ethnic groups suffered additional repression due to international publicity about the Soviet crime of the Holodomor in Ukraine.

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