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**THE UNRESOLVED LAND ISSUE AS A FACTOR IN THE
SECONDARY MIGRATION OF UKRAINIANS DEPORTED FROM
ZAKERZONIA TO THE WESTERN REGIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN
SSR FROM THE CENTRAL, SOUTHERN AND EASTERN
REGIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR**

Abstract. This article examines the land factor as one of the main incentives for the re-migration of Ukrainians deported from Zakerzonian – who had been resettled in the eastern and southern regions – to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR between 1944 and 1947. Based on archival documents, statistical materials and regulatory acts, the article analyses the characteristics of the resettlement of migrants in the southern, eastern and central regions of the republic, as well as the impact of land provision on the course of their socio-economic adaptation. It has been established that the majority of the deportees were peasants, for whom land was not only the material basis of their existence but also a key element of their traditional way of life. It has been established that the measures declared by the Soviet authorities to provide resettlers with household plots were implemented inconsistently and were accompanied by significant organisational difficulties, delays on the part of local authorities, and the allocation of land unsuitable for full-scale farming.

It has been demonstrated that the decisive factor in the destabilisation of the situation for the Zakerzonians was not only a shortage of land, but also the impossibility of running individual peasant farms under the conditions of the establishment of the collective farm system. For a significant proportion of the resettlers, forced integration into the collective farming system meant a loss of economic independence, the destruction of established patterns of work and daily



life, and an intensification of socio-psychological maladjustment. It has been found that the administrative decisions of the Union and republican authorities took into account neither the economic specifics of the resettled community nor its attachment to traditional forms of land use, which significantly complicated the integration process. It is argued that it was precisely the unresolved land issue and the incompatibility of Soviet agrarian practices with the economic experience of the deportees that became among the main reasons for their unauthorised departure to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR, where elements of individual land use persisted for longer. It is concluded that the secondary migration of the 'behind-the-line' population demonstrated the limited effectiveness of Soviet resettlement policy and revealed a contradiction between the administrative mechanisms of integration and the real needs of the deported peasantry.

Keywords: deported Ukrainians, Zakerzonnia, Ukrainian SSR, the land question, Soviet resettlement policy, secondary migration, repeat migration, the collective farm system, socio-economic adaptation, the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR, the post-war period.

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НЕВИРІШЕНІСТЬ ЗЕМЕЛЬНОГО ПИТАННЯ ЯК ЧИННИК ВТОРИННОЇ МІГРАЦІЇ ДЕПОРТОВАНИХ ІЗ ЗАКЕРЗОННЯ УКРАЇНЦІВ ДО ЗАХІДНИХ ОБЛАСТЕЙ УРСР ІЗ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНИХ, ПІВДЕННИХ ТА СХІДНИХ РЕГІОНІВ УРСР

Анотація. У статті досліджено земельний чинник як один з головних стимулів до повторної міграції депортованих із Закерзоння українців, яких поселили у східних та південних областях, до західних областей УРСР у 1944–1947 рр. На основі архівних документів, статистичних матеріалів і нормативно-правових актів проаналізовано особливості розселення переселенців у південних, східних і центральних областях республіки, а також вплив земельного забезпечення на перебіг їхньої соціально-



економічної адаптації. Встановлено, що більшість депортованих становили селяни, для яких земля була не лише матеріальною основою існування, а й ключовим елементом традиційного способу життя. З'ясовано, що декларовані радянською владою заходи щодо наділення переселенців присадибними ділянками реалізовувалися непослідовно й супроводжувалися значними організаційними труднощами, зволіканням місцевих органів влади та виділенням непридатних для повноцінного господарювання земель.

Доведено, що визначальним чинником дестабілізації становища закерзонців була не лише нестача землі, а й неможливість ведення індивідуального селянського господарства в умовах утвердження колгоспної системи. Для значної частини переселенців примусова інтеграція до колективної форми господарювання означала втрату економічної самостійності, руйнування усталених моделей праці та побуту і посилення соціально-психологічної дезадаптації. Виявлено, що адміністративні рішення союзно-республіканської влади не враховували ані господарської специфіки переселенського середовища, ані його прив'язаності до традиційних форм землекористування, що істотно ускладнювало процес інтеграції. Обґрунтовано, що саме невирішеність земельного питання та несумісність радянських аграрних практик із господарським досвідом депортованих стали одними з основних причин їхнього самовільного виїзду до західних областей УРСР, де довше зберігалися елементи одноосібного землекористування. Зроблено висновок, що вторинна міграція закерзонців засвідчила обмежену ефективність радянської переселенської політики та виявила суперечність між адміністративними механізмами інтеграції й реальними потребами депортованого селянства.

Ключові слова: депортовані українці, Закерзоння, УРСР, земельне питання, радянська переселенська політика, вторинна міграція, повторна міграція, колгоспна система, соціально-економічна адаптація, західні області УРСР, повоєнний період.

Statement of the Problem. One of the under-researched issues in the history of the deportation of Ukrainians from Zakerzonia to the Ukrainian SSR remains the impact of land-related factors on the subsequent migration of the deportees between 1944 and 1947. Despite the measures formally declared by the Soviet authorities to provide land to those deported to the southern, eastern and central regions of the Ukrainian SSR, in practice their implementation was accompanied by delays, the allocation of unsuitable plots and the practical impossibility of running an individual farm under the collective farm system. For the majority of resettlers, who were peasants, this meant the loss of their familiar economic way of life and made full adaptation in their initial resettlement areas



impossible. Consequently, there is a need to ascertain to what extent the unresolved land issue became a determining factor in the mass unauthorised migration of residents from the restricted zones to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR.

An analysis of recent studies and publications. The issue of the resettlement in the Ukrainian SSR of the Ukrainian population deported from territories that became part of the Polish People's Republic following the end of the Second World War occupies a prominent place in contemporary Ukrainian and Polish historiographical discourse. Despite the existence of a substantial body of academic work devoted to the Soviet authorities' resettlement policy, the specific mechanisms, practices and regional characteristics of the resettlement of deported Ukrainians within the Ukrainian SSR remain insufficiently researched to this day.

Published documents from the collections of the Central State Archives of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine and the Central State Archives of Public Associations of Ukraine form an important basis for contemporary research. These materials contain directives and regulations, statistical data, government correspondence, as well as documentation from resettlement commissions, enabling the reconstruction of the main mechanisms for implementing Soviet resettlement policy at the local level. The use of this body of sources also makes it possible to identify the specific features of the regional resettlement of the deported population and to gain a deeper understanding of the administrative and organisational foundations of their integration into the socio-economic space of the Ukrainian SSR.

A significant contribution to the academic study of this subject was made by the Polish historian of Ukrainian origin, Yevhen Misilo. In his two-volume study, he conducted a thorough analysis of the background, course and specific features of the resettlement processes, thereby substantially broadening the scope of sources and interpretations in the study of this topic.

The documentary collection **Deportations: The Western Regions of Ukraine in the Late 1930s–Early 1950s: Documents, Materials, Memoirs** is of great significance for the study of the resettlement of Ukrainians in the Ukrainian SSR; it contains a valuable body of sources and is accompanied by concise analytical commentary from the editors. However, despite the significant documentary value of these publications for reconstructing the administrative mechanisms of the deportation campaigns, the issue of the subsequent resettlement of migrants within the Ukrainian SSR is covered only fragmentarily. A more detailed analysis of this issue is presented in V. Serhiichuk's work **The Tragedy of the Ukrainians of Poland**, which examines the political and humanitarian consequences of the resettlement processes. Also deserving of



special attention is the three-volume edition by a team of authors led by Yuri Ivanovych Makar, 'From Deportation to Deportation. The Social and Political Life of Ukrainians in Kholmshchyna and Podlasie (1915–1947). Research. Memoirs. Documents', which significantly expands the source and conceptual basis for research into deportations and the associated socio-political processes.

At the same time, despite the existence of a substantial body of documentary material and comprehensive academic works, the issues surrounding the causes, main patterns and specific characteristics of the resettlement of deported Ukrainians in the southern, central, eastern and northern regions of the Ukrainian SSR remain insufficiently explored in historiography. This highlights the need for in-depth research into the regional characteristics of resettlement processes, the mechanisms by which they were implemented, and the factors that influenced the spatial distribution of the deported population within Soviet Ukraine.

The aim of this article is to examine the role of land in the resettlement of Ukrainians deported from Zakerzonian to the Ukrainian SSR between 1944 and 1947, and to assess its impact on the emergence of secondary migration from the southern, central and eastern regions to the western regions of the republic. Particular attention is focused on analysing the practice of allocating land to resettlers, the possibilities for running individual farms under the Soviet collective farm system, and identifying the link between the unresolved land issue and the mass unauthorised departure of Zakerzonian residents from their initial resettlement sites.

Presentation of the main research material. The most significant and primary reason that compelled Ukrainians deported from Poland to migrate to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR was the almost complete lack of residential and utility premises in the southern, northern, eastern and central regions. It was precisely this lack of housing that prompted the deportees to violate the laws of the time, which strictly prohibited leaving one's place of permanent residence. All those who moved to another location without authorisation were obliged to return to their place of registration. If necessary, this was done under police escort [1, p. 182; 2, pp. 28–41].

The lack of adequate housing was one of the most pressing problems faced by migrants from Zakerzonian during their period of adjustment to their new surroundings; however, it did not encompass the full range of difficulties they encountered in their daily lives and in establishing themselves socio-economically. No less important was the problem of the labour and economic integration of the deported population, the vast majority of whom were engaged in distinctly agrarian occupations. According to available statistics, over 93 per cent of the migrants were peasants, whose way of life, working practices and



economic models of subsistence were directly linked to agriculture. It is for this reason that working the land represented for them not only a familiar form of economic activity, but also a fundamental means of material self-sufficiency, which determined their established way of life, social identity and the mechanisms for the reproduction of the peasant household [3, p. 178].

For most residents of the Zakerzonia region, other forms of income not linked to the agricultural sector were not systematic in nature and were generally not regarded as a stable source of income. This was due both to a lack of relevant professional experience and to the general structure of their previous socio-economic existence, within which agricultural labour played a dominant role. In this context, the allocation of land for personal use took on exceptional significance for the resettlers, as it was precisely access to land that created the minimum prerequisites for economic recovery, meeting the family's food needs, and achieving partial economic stability in their new living conditions. The absence or scarcity of such resources significantly complicated the settlers' adaptation process, deepening their material dependence and social vulnerability [4, pp. 290–292].

The occupational and social composition of the deported population is also telling in this context. According to Soviet statistical data, the ratio of farmers to office workers and teachers was almost 1 to 300, whilst the number of industrial workers was only 1,817 [3, p. 178], which attests to the almost complete numerical predominance of the agrarian element among the resettlers. Such a disproportion provides grounds for asserting that the bulk of those arriving from Zakerzonia were primarily oriented towards the traditional peasant way of life; consequently, the land issue was not merely secondary but of a fundamental nature for them.

The conditions of resettlement, under which access to housing, land and means of subsistence remained limited, created systemic obstacles to the full settlement of this category of the population within the Ukrainian SSR [5, pp. 71–86].

Despite the exceptional importance of the land issue for resettled peasants, its prompt resolution was not a top priority for the local administrative apparatus. The legal framework of the Soviet resettlement process formally provided for a fairly clear mechanism for allocating household plots to the newly arrived population. In particular, in accordance with a series of resolutions of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolsheviks), the allocation of land to resettlers was to take place immediately upon their arrival at the settlement. In theory, this provision was intended to ensure the minimum conditions for the economic development of the new territory, to facilitate the swiftest possible integration of



resettled families into the production cycle, and to create the preconditions for their economic self-sufficiency [6, p. 123].

However, the actual implementation of these government decisions differed significantly from the officially stated intentions. In most cases, displaced persons did not receive land allotments immediately upon arrival, and the process of allocating them was delayed indefinitely. Local administrative bodies, particularly district land departments, often displayed organisational passivity and bureaucratic inertia: responsible officials did not visit the settlements where displaced persons were housed for months on end, and failed to carry out the necessary land registration procedures. This situation highlighted a significant gap between central directives and their implementation at the local administrative level, which, in the context of post-war instability, had particularly tangible consequences for the daily lives of the deported population [7, pp. 521–525; 5, pp. 21–24].

An additional problem was not only the delay in allocating land, but also the quality and nature of the plots themselves. In a number of cases, plots were granted to resettlers on a temporary basis, which did not foster a sense of economic stability and did not encourage long-term settlement. Often, the land in question was unsuitable for effective farming, with low productivity or unfavourable natural characteristics. An equally significant obstacle was the geographical remoteness of such plots from the resettlers' places of residence, which considerably complicated their practical use, particularly given the lack of draught animals, farm implements and general material hardship [8, pp. 710–711].

Under such circumstances, resettled families often missed the most favourable time for seasonal agricultural work. The delay in the allocation of land deprived them of the opportunity to prepare the soil in good time, carry out the sowing campaign and lay the foundations for the future harvest. As a result, this not only undermined the economic viability of peasant farms but also provoked constant social tension. Conflicts arose both between the resettlers and local authorities, and in the broader context of interaction with the local population, where the issue of land distribution was particularly sensitive [9, pp. 31–38; 3, p. 137]. Thus, the issue of land allocation proved not to be a technical or secondary element of resettlement policy, but one of the key indicators of its practical ineffectiveness at the local level.

The issue of providing displaced persons with allotments, despite its importance, was not the most critical aspect of their adaptation to life under Soviet rule. The deported population viewed as a far more acute problem the fact that in the Ukrainian SSR, with the exception of the western regions in the early post-war years, actual individual land ownership was practically and legally impossible. For those from Kholmshchyna, Lemkivshchyna and other regions of



Zakerzonia, whose traditional way of life was based on a model of independent peasant farming, such a transformation of land relations meant not only a change in the form of economic activity, but also the destruction of the familiar social order, built on private labour, family farming and personal responsibility for the results of cultivating the land [10, pp. 297–310].

In Soviet Ukraine, the institution of private land ownership had by that time been effectively dismantled as a result of the previous collectivisation policy. By the late 1930s, a system had been established under which land was under the complete control of the state and collective farms, and any attempts to resist this model were harshly suppressed by punitive and repressive measures. In the minds of the settlers arriving in the Ukrainian SSR with experience of individual farming, such a system was perceived as fundamentally alien and unacceptable, as it deprived the peasant of the status of an independent landowner and reduced his role to that of a mere executor within the collective production system. The final consolidation of this model in the Soviet countryside, which took place in the previous decade, created a situation for the settlers where there were absolutely no alternatives in the organisation of agricultural life [8, pp. 709–711].

Under these circumstances, joining local collective farms became the only realistic way for most of the deportees to become involved in agricultural production. This meant having to work alongside the local population within a collective labour system, which ran counter to the previous experience of farmers from the Kholm and Lemko regions. For them, this transition meant not merely a change of residence or employment model, but a profound socio-economic and psychological transformation linked to the loss of economic autonomy. From being independent producers who linked their family's well-being to the results of their own labour on their own or individually cultivated land, they were gradually required to integrate into a collectivised system of agricultural production, where individual initiative was significantly restricted [11, p. 317].

At the same time, a significant proportion of the displaced people were psychologically unprepared for this type of economic existence. They attempted to secure the right to individual land use or at least to find ways of preserving elements of individual farming, but they soon realised the futility of such attempts within the Soviet administrative and legal system [9, pp. 39–41]. It was precisely this incompatibility between the traditional peasant mentality of the deportees and the collective farm model of labour organisation that was one of the most significant factors in their dissatisfaction with living conditions in the southern and eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR.

In this context, the western regions of Ukraine appeared particularly attractive to the resettlers, as the process of total collectivisation had not yet been completed there in the early post-war years, and elements of individual land



ownership and independent farming persisted for some time. For the deported peasants, this opened up the possibility of returning to more familiar forms of agrarian life, which corresponded to their farming skills, economic expectations and social notions of the status of a peasant.

This is precisely why, at the first opportunity, many resettlers left their initial places of settlement and attempted to move to the western Ukrainian region, where the chances of restoring at least a partially independent economic existence seemed significantly higher. Such mobility was driven not only by material hardships but also by a deep-seated rejection of the model of agrarian relations into which the Soviet state was attempting to integrate them [12, p. 252; 13, pp. 58, 141].

The unresolved land issue, combined with other socio-economic and everyday hardships, became one of the key factors behind the mass exodus of settlers from the southern, central and eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR to the western Ukrainian region. For a significant proportion of the deported population, initial resettlement in these regions provided neither adequate conditions for economic recovery nor opportunities to resume their customary rural way of life. It was for this reason that secondary migration gradually took on a mass character and encompassed the vast majority of those resettlers who, during 1944–1945, had been sent to the eastern and southern regions of the republic.

Archival and statistical records show that by mid-1946 the scale of this resettlement was already considerable. As of 15 July 1946, 1,700 migrant families had left the districts of Zaporizhzhia Oblast for the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR, 1,500 from Mykolaiv Oblast, and 1,160 from Kirovohrad Oblast [14, pp. 338–339]. These figures indicate that this was not a matter of isolated cases of unauthorised relocation, but rather a sustained trend towards mass departure from the regions of initial settlement. The very fact of the simultaneous outflow of a significant number of resettled families from several regions provides grounds for viewing this phenomenon as a systemic reaction by the deported population to the unfavourable conditions of integration into a new socio-economic environment.

In the period that followed, this trend not only continued but actually intensified. Further data from the internal affairs authorities show a sharp decline in the number of deportees in those regions to which they had been deported as part of the initial resettlement. In particular, according to information from the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Department of Internal Affairs, as of 15 May 1947, only 903 of the 5,637 families resettled from Poland remained there. In the Stalino Region at the same time, there were 1,117 out of 3,044 families resettled in 1945, and in the Kirovograd Region – only 444 families out of 2,812 [15, pp. 97–100]. Such dynamics clearly reflect the profound instability of resettlement policy in its



practical implementation: the formally organised relocation of the population did not guarantee its actual settlement in the new territories.

The aggregate data on the scale of secondary migration as a whole are particularly telling. By early April 1947, of the 39,726 families evacuated from Poland to the eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR, 31,042 families had left for the western region of their own accord, accounting for 78% of the total [3, pp. 239–240]. This figure suggests that secondary resettlement was not a marginal phenomenon, but became the dominant pattern of behaviour for the majority of the deported population. The mass scale of this process points to a profound mismatch between the administrative logic of Soviet resettlement and the actual needs, economic interests and socio-psychological attitudes of the resettlers.

The quantitative data on the outflow of people from the Zakerzonja region to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR also indicate that the choice of a new place of residence was determined not by chance, but by entirely rational considerations. Western Ukraine was perceived by the resettlers as a region more akin to their previous economic way of life, cultural environment and model of agrarian existence. Unlike the southern and eastern regions, where the collective farm system was already an established form of organisation of rural life, the western region retained certain opportunities for individual farming in the early post-war years. It was precisely this that made it particularly attractive to the deported peasants, who sought not only to change their place of residence but also to find a socio-economic environment in which they could recreate their familiar ways of working and living [16, pp. 262–265].

Conclusions. Thus, an analysis of the material presented shows that one of the key factors leading to the re-migration of deported Ukrainians from Zakerzonja within the Ukrainian SSR was precisely the unresolved land issue, combined with the general socio-economic unsuitability of the conditions of their initial resettlement. The vast majority of resettlers were peasants, for whom working the land formed the basis of their economic existence; therefore, the timely allocation of land and the opportunity for individual farming were of decisive importance. However, the measures formally announced by the authorities were not properly implemented in practice: the allocation of household plots was delayed, resettlers were often given unsuitable or remote land, and in most regions of the Ukrainian SSR, individual land ownership was effectively impossible. No less important a factor was the psychological rejection of the collective farm system by those from a traditional peasant background, for whom the loss of economic independence meant the destruction of their familiar economic and social order. Taken together, these circumstances led to a mass unauthorised exodus of people from the ‘backwater’ regions to the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR, where they saw more realistic opportunities to

restore their familiar economic way of life, preserve elements of individual farming, and achieve relative social stability. Statistical data convincingly demonstrate that secondary migration took on a mass character and was a direct consequence of the ineffectiveness of Soviet resettlement policy at the local level.

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