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BUKOVYNA IN THE STRUCTURE OF GOODS IMPORT OF INTERWAR ROMANIA

Abstract. In the interwar period, the importance of Bukovyna as a centre for the import of goods increased. Chernivtsi became an important centre for the import of goods to a large part of Romania, supplying imported goods to all the neighbouring counties of Bukovyna.

Import grew rapidly during the 1920s, but the Great Depression almost completely halted import of manufactured goods and luxury goods. The economic crisis of the late 1930s also had a negative impact on the main indicators of import.

First of all, merchants from Chernivtsi imported various machines for industry, electrical goods, and photo and radio goods. Car trading of European and American brands developed. Merchants of Chernivtsi after World War I also successfully imported fabrics and textile products. «Colonial» goods (coffee, tea, tropical fruits, cocoa, mackerel, and rice) and mineral waters were popular. Stationery, fiction writing and scientific literature, musical instruments, glass and porcelain products, various medicines and chemicals, coal and coke, raw materials for soap production were imported.

Keywords: Bukovyna, Chernivtsi, Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi), interwar period, goods import.

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БУКОВИНА У СТРУКТУРІ ІМПОРТУ ТОВАРІВ МІЖВОЄННОЇ РУМУНІЇ

У міжвоєнний період зросло значення Буковини як центру імпорту товарів. Адже їхній потік через Чернівці значно збільшився після Першої світової війни. Цьому сприяли транспортна інфраструктура, вдале географічне положення, торгівельна мережа та досить розвинута банківська система.

Якщо до війни імпорт обмежувався лише необхідними для жителів Буковини товарами, то потім Чернівці стали важливим центром для імпорту товарів у значну частину Румунії, постачаючи після приєднання імпортні товари у всі сусідні повіти Буковини.

Імпорт стрімко зростав протягом 1920-х рр. Але «велика депресія» майже повністю загальмувала ввезення промислових товарів та предметів розкоші. Негативний вплив на основні показники імпорту мала й економічна криза кінця 1930-х рр.

В першу чергу, торговці Чернівців імпортували різні машини для промисловості, зокрема обладнання для пекарень, обробки деревини та бляхи, машини для вишивки і гаптування. Імпорт

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машин та устаткування йшов з Чехословаччини та Польщі. З Німеччини, Чехословаччини, Австрії, Італії та Швейцарії завозили електротовари: електромотори, генератори, електроосвітлювальні прилади, фото- і радіотовари. Розвивалася торгівля автомобілями європейських та американських марок.

Торговці Чернівців після Першої світової війни також успішно завозили тканини і текстильні вироби з Чехословаччини, Німеччини та Англії. Популярними були "колоніальні" товари (кава, чай, тропічні фрукти, какао, скумбрія, рис) та мінеральні води. Їх завозили з різних країн Європи і навіть з Перу, Цейлону, Колумбії, Китаю, Індії, Алжиру, Аргентини, Персії (Ірану), Бразилії та Єгипту.

Також в досліджуваний період з країн Європи імпортувалися канцелярські вироби, художня й наукова література, музичні інструменти, вироби зі скла і порцеляни, різноманітні медикаменти та хімія, вугілля і кокс, сировина для виробництва мила.

Особливу роль у торгівлі краю (у тому числі й імпортними товарами) відігравали ярмарки. В міжвоєнний період здебільшого в повітових містах дедалі активніше розвивалися магазини, кафе, ресторани та розважальні заклади, які були одним із основних «споживачів» продукції імпортного походження.

Ключові слова: Буковина, Чернівці, Ґріґорє Ґіка Воде (Неполоківці), міжвоєнний період, імпорт товарів.

Formulation of scientific problem and its significance. Noting in previous publications¹ the important role of Bukovyna in the formation of internal and external trade relations in interwar Romania, we drew attention, first of all, to the fact that during 1918-1940 the region had an important role in the country's foreign trade. This was primarily facilitated by the geographical location, transport links², banking infrastructure³ and the presence of two customs offices: in Chernivtsi and Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi)⁴, through which passed all foreign trade of the specified region, as well as the whole of Romania⁵.

Analysis of recent research. At the same time, we, as well as other authors, were not previously concerned with the problem of importing goods through Bukovyna customs and their further implementation on the territory of interwar Romania⁶. Therefore, taking into account this fact, as well as the fact that after February 24, 2022, the importance of the studied region in the import trade flows of Ukraine increased significantly, which also contributes to the return of scientists to the experience of previous years regarding the establishment and expansion of such operations, the aim of our article – to determine the place of Bukovyna in the structure of imports of interwar Romania.

Presenting main material. Despite the fact that the region was traditionally an intermediary in the trade of agricultural products, forest and livestock⁷, in the interwar period its importance also increased as a centre for the import of goods, because their flow through Chernivtsi increased significantly after World War I.

If before the war, imports were limited to goods necessary for the inhabitants of Bukovyna, then Chernivtsi became an important centre for importing goods to a large part of Romania, supplying imported goods to all neighbouring counties of Bukovyna, Bessarabia and Northern Moldova after the accession⁸.

We wrote about the fact that the export trade of Bukovyna began to improve since 1919, and since the mid-1920s to the beginning of the 1930s it was on the rise, which corresponded to the dynamics of Romania's foreign trade⁹. However, it should be noted that similar trends were observed with the import of goods. Like exports, imports also grew rapidly during the 1920s. But the Great Depression almost completely stopped the import of manufactured goods and luxury items¹⁰. The economic crisis of the late 1930s also had a negative impact on the main indicators of imports.

Let's consider the main categories of goods brought to the region. First of all, merchants from Chernivtsi imported various machines for industry, in particular, equipment for bakeries, wood and sheet metal processing, embroidery and quilting machines. Machines and equipment were imported from Czechoslovakia and Poland. Of these, 40% were sold in Bukovyna, 24% – in Bessarabia, and 36% – in Moldova¹¹.

The main consumers were rather the rural population, which bought half of the import of iron products, 30% – construction and 20% – industry. Trade in the industry was in the hands of 5 large firms. One of them was a joint-stock company with foreign capital¹².

However, the drop in the price of foreign products on the domestic market by 12-15% at the beginning and by 20-25% at the end of 1930 complicated the development of the industry. In many cases, difficulties also arose due to problems with loans (reduction or termination of lending), delays in payment of invoices by merchants¹³.

And in 1931, Chernivtsi trade in nails and wire supplied itself with products of Romanian production. The reduction of foreign imports occurred thanks to the opening of the metallurgical complex in Brăila¹⁴.

In 1933, there was a slight revival in the import of metal products and equipment, in particular thanks to the import of agricultural inventory from Germany and metal pipes, which were completely exported from abroad, since there was no corresponding production in Romania¹⁵.

In 1935, the growth in sales of these products was over 20%. Although many of the industry's goods began to be produced in Romania, but, despite transport costs and customs duties, German ones were cheaper, which enabled them to withstand competition on the market¹⁶.

The end of the Romanian rule in the region, marked by a new round of the economic crisis, was also characterized by a certain decline in the import of metallurgical goods (mainly due to a reduction in construction) ¹⁷.

In the interwar period, through Chernivtsi customs for the population of Bukovyna, Bessarabia, and Moldova, from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland were imported electrical goods: electric motors, generators, electric lighting devices, and photo/radio products. In 1931, the import of electrical equipment decreased by 40%¹⁸.

Since 1924, the car trade has been developing. Most of them were imported in 1930, more than 150 cars of the brands «Fiat», «Steyr», «Chevrolet», «Ford», «Chrysler» and «Pontiac».

But already in 1931 there was a decline by 60%. In the same year, most of the firms engaged in this type of business were liquidated. Instead, only 4 remained, which were concentrated in Chernivtsi. The sale of auto parts also decreased, by 30-40%. This was caused by the fact that only half of the cars sold in the region before 1931 were used¹⁹.

Chernivtsi merchants after World War I also successfully imported fabrics and textile products from Czechoslovakia, Germany and England. Chernivtsi trade provided goods to all of Bukovyna, Bessarabia, Northern Moldova and a number of other Romanian cities.

However, in 1930, this industry suffered the most, when the import of its products decreased by 60%. In the following years, the reduction of textile imports continued. This happened as a result of a fall in the purchasing power of urban and rural residents, who were forced to abandon many goods due to a decrease in the standard of living²⁰.

The construction of many textile factories in Romania became the reason for the further reduction of the import of these products. Local factories met the needs of the markets. Although for industry also were imported cotton threads²¹.

As for «colonial» goods (coffee, tea, tropical fruits, cocoa, and mackerel) and mineral waters, their import also grew in the 1920s and exceeded 100 million lei per year. And already in 1930, it decreased by almost a third²².

At first, «colonial» goods were imported both through Galați and through Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi) from England, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Spain, France, Peru, Ceylon, Colombia, China, India, Algeria, Argentina, Persia (Iran) and Brazil²³.

Subsequently, Chernivtsi merchants began to buy them exclusively in Galați, as their price was lower there²⁴. In 1931, despite the continued reduction in the import of these goods, American apples began to be delivered²⁵. Mineral water was imported from France, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, rice – from Alexandria (Egypt)²⁶.

Also, during the studied period, stationery, fiction writing and scientific literature, musical instruments, glassware and porcelain were imported from European countries. In general, things were going well here until 1930, when the Romanian government introduced high customs rates for these products²⁷. If since 1918 to 1930 the import of literature increased every year, then in 1931 there was a sharp decline²⁸.

Throughout the interwar period, various medicines and chemicals were brought to Bukovyna and neighboring Bessarabia from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Japan, and the Netherlands. Only in 1935, there was a significant reduction in the import of this type of product, as Romanian production was started²⁹.

For the needs of the Romanian metallurgy, coal and coke (fuel) were brought from Silesia (Poland) through Bukovyna. Raw materials for soap production were imported from Germany³⁰.

The inconsistency of actions between local sugar beet producers and manufacturers led to a decrease in sugar production in 1938. Instead, the sugar needs of consumers in Suceava district were covered by imports. Then 2 million 63 thousand 909 kg of it was brought from Poland³¹.

It should be added that imported goods were cleared at Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi) and Chernivtsi. Their total value in 1933 was 576 million 270 thousand lei. Of these, through Chernivtsi arrived

products in the amount of 403 million 600 thousand lei; in the amount of 97 million 670 thousand lei – through Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi), and in the amount of 75 million lei – through Galați and Constanța³². In 1935, imports amounted to 478 million 855 thousand lei³³. In 1936 – amounted to 454 million 775 thousand lei³⁴. It remained approximately at the same level in 1938-1939³⁵.

Taking into account the materials of our previous publication, we note that the commercial balance between export and import in 1933 was positive with a difference of 423 million 730 thousand lei³⁶. In 1935, the difference already amounted to 657 million 384 thousand 500 lei³⁷, and in 1936 it was a little more than 1.5 billion lei³⁸. During the years of existence of Suceava district, the commercial balance of the region was within 1-1.5 billion lei³⁹. In 1936, 20% of Romania's trade balance passed through the customs of Bukovyna⁴⁰.

As of the mid-1930s, 159 large and 71 small trade firms were registered in Chernivtsi County⁴¹. In 1937, Chernivtsi merchants even founded the trading marine company «Transmer»⁴².

Despite the significant increase in the trade balance of foreign trade through the customs of the region in the interwar period, smuggling through Romanian-Polish and Romanian-Soviet borders also flourished. A wide variety of goods were illegally smuggled: from food and alcoholic beverages to cattle. This problem manifested itself especially acutely in the first years after World War I, when the border guards did not have time to block the illegal ways of transporting goods, and the army joined in to help them⁴³. In border settlements, you could often hear the roar of machine guns firing at smugglers⁴⁴.

The development of the commercial sphere in general and the development of foreign trade in particular were to be promoted by the educational institutions operating in Chernivtsi during the research period: the Higher School of Trade⁴⁵ and the Private Trade Gymnasium⁴⁶.

Fairs played a special role in the trade of Bukovyna and neighbouring Bessarabia (including imported goods). They were held on the territory of the region throughout the year on some religious holidays, where, first of all, local merchants and merchants from other regions of Romania gathered. Businessmen of Bukovyna and Bessarabia also visited fairs outside the region. In general, 20-30 fairs were organized every month in Romania. Most of them lasted one day, but there were also which lasted several weeks⁴⁷. During fairs, as a rule, it was possible to visit industrial, agricultural exhibitions, exhibitions of electrical goods or other products, which often had an imported origin⁴⁸. We also have examples of participation in fairs by foreign merchants, in particular, from Poland⁴⁹.

In the interwar period, shops, cafes, restaurants and entertainment establishments, which were one of the main «consumers» of products of imported origin, were increasingly actively developed, mostly in county towns.

In this sense as real «Mecca» became the centre of Chernivtsi. Especially Iancu Flondor Street (now named after Olha Kobylianska), where were confectionery shops, three cinemas, and the largest bookstores, which were known throughout the region. The shops here «traded fabric, fur coats, shoes, as well as tailor-made clothes – but it was considered indecent to buy a ready-made suit at that time»⁵⁰.

In the newspapers of that time, you can find many advertisements of shops that sold watches, razors for shaving of world-famous manufacturers, jewellery, household items, musical instruments, toys, books, etc. ⁵¹

Conclusions. Consequently, as in the case of export trade, transport infrastructure, good geographical position, trade network and a fairly developed banking system allowed Bukovyna to strengthen its role in the trade of imported goods. In addition to the fact that products were sold to European countries through the local customs in Chernivtsi and Grigore Ghica Vodă (Nepolokivtsi), import went in the opposite direction to Bukovyna and other nearby counties of Romania at the time. Moreover, the trade balance was positive.

Import consisted of industrial machinery and equipment, agricultural products, metallurgical products, electrical goods, automobiles and spare parts for them, fabrics and textile products, various «colonial goods», fiction writing and scientific literature, office supplies, musical instruments, medicines and products of the chemical industry.

¹ O. Rusnak, *Bukovyna in the Structure of Goods Export of Interwar Romania*, in «History Journal of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University», 2023, № 1, p. 113-120.

² O. Rusnak, *Transport System of Northern Bukovyna and Khotyn Region in the Interwar Period*, in «History Journal of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University», 2019, № 2, p. 33.

³ O. Rusnak, *The State of the Banking System of Northern Bukovyna and Khotyn Region in the Interwar Period*, in «History Journal of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University», 2020, № 2, p. 110-112.

- ⁴ Rusnak, *Bukovyna in the Structure of Goods Export of Interwar Romania*, in «History Journal of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University», 2023, № 1, p. 114.
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