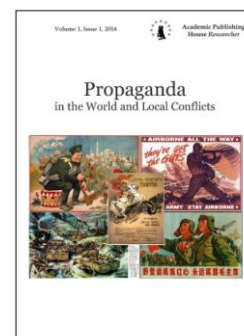


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Published in the Russian Federation
 Propaganda in the World and Local Conflicts
 Has been issued since 2014.
 ISSN 2500-1078, E-ISSN 2500-3712
 Vol. 6, Is. (2), pp. 59-67, 2016

DOI: 10.13187/pwlc.2016.6.59
www.ejournal47.com



The Annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina in the Pages of the Soviet Periodical Press (based on the Materials from the *Krasnoye Znamya* Newspaper)

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Abstract

The article makes use of the materials of the Soviet periodical press to give an insight into the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina to the Soviet Union. It particularly focuses on the operations which involved airborne troops of the Red Army and the rhetoric adopted by the Soviet press.

The materials used include the issues of the *Krasnoye Znamya* (The Red Banner) newspaper published between July 2 and 10, 1940. The article also resorts to scientific works on the subject discussed, which helped reconstruct the overall picture of the events at the time.

At the end, the author concludes that the materials of the Soviet periodical press, describing the integration of Bessarabia and Bukovina into the Soviet Union, are an important source which allows us, in retrospect, to have a closer look at these events. The periodical press enables us to analyze fields of action the Soviet propaganda acted in, as well as the propaganda rhetoric in the pre-war period. In the annexation period, the *Krasnoye Znamya* newspaper covers the following key topics in its propaganda articles: 1. The invincibility of the Red Army, 2. The main mission of the Red Army is the Liberator army, 3. Blackening the previous history of the annexed territories and portraying a magnificent vision of the future.

Keywords: Annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina, 1940, Soviet forces, *Krasnoye Znamya* newspaper.

1. Introduction

On June 28 – July 3, 1940, units of the Southern Front of the Workers 'and Peasants' Red Army completed an operation to annex Bessarabia and Bukovina to the Soviet Union. Following this operation, the Soviet Union received territories with an area of over 50 thousand sq. km and a population of more than 3.7 million people (Badakh, 2010: 96). Romania lost 17 % of its territory, and 18.9 % of the population. On August 2, 1940, a Law was passed on the formation of the Union of Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (Sulyak, 2015: 81).

2. Materials and methods

The materials used include the issues of the *Krasnoye Znamya* (The Red Banner) newspaper published between 2 and 10 July, 1940. It was a single sheet newspaper of the A3 format. Its price was 20 kopecks. The newspaper was considered to be the press organ used by the city committee of

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the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (AUCP B) and the Sochi city Council of People's Deputies. The newspaper had the circulation of 3.5 thousand copies. Its editorial office was located on 11, Voiskogo street, Sochi. The newspaper was printed in the Sochi USMK printing house. The article also resorts to scientific works on the subject discussed, which helped reconstruct the overall picture of the events at the time.

The study applies a retrospective method to evaluate the events in the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina in its historical continuity.

3. Discussion

The topic of the Soviet Union's annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina was not sufficiently covered in the historiography. And today, the historiography on the question remains inadequate. Most studies provide only cursory mentions of this campaign by the Red Army in the context of the pre-war situation on the eve of the Great Patriotic War. For example, such works include publications by M.V. Dyachenko (Dyachenko, 2009), M.I. Meltyukhov (Meltyukhov, 2000), a work by S.V. Pechenkin (Pechenkin, 2012), works by V.V. Repin (Repin, 2004; Repin, 2009), and a monograph by G. Roberts (Roberts, 2006). One of the few scholars who specifically addressed the topic of the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina was a Ukrainian researcher, Yu. Badakh (Badakh, 2010).

4. Results

Materials, published in the *Krashoye Znamya* can be divided into three main thematic categories: 1. The invincibility of the Red Army, 2. The main mission of the Red Army is the liberator army, 3. Blackening the previous histories of the annexed territories and presenting a magnificent vision of the future.

1. The invincibility of the Red Army

The operation on the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina was manned by 32 rifle divisions, 2 motorized rifle divisions and 6 cavalry divisions. 11 tank brigades, 3 brigades of airborne troops, 14 corps artillery regiments, 16 artillery regiments HCR (High Command Reserve), 4 artillery battalions with air support were attached to them.

On June 28, Soviet rifle and tank units crossed the Soviet-Romanian border. On the morning of June 29, the 204th brigade of airborne troops was landed in the town of Bolgrad using 99 TB-3 aircraft of the 209th heavy air brigade. In total, 1372 people were air landed.

The *Krasnoye Znamya* reported July 2, 1940: "KIEV, June 29. Advancement of Soviet forces in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina is running smoothly. Today, the Soviet forces have entered the towns of Storozhinets and Hertz in Northern Bukovina, and occupied the Novoselytsia and Lipkany stations (both on the Prut River, south of Hawtin). Mechanized units approached the Prut River, 55 kilometers south-west of Mogilev-Podolsky, and entered the area of the Pyrlitsa town, 80 kilometers north-west of Kishinev. Parachuted airborne units occupied the city of Bolgrad in southern Bessarabia, a few kilometers away from the town of Reni, at the confluence of the Prut River and the Danube" (Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2).

On June 30, the 201st airborne brigade (809 paratroopers) was airdropped in the Izmail city. The operation involved 44 TB-3 aircraft with 809 paratroopers on board. Of these, 240 people landed at the city airport and 509 people were parachuted. Three aircraft (60 people on board) had to return to their airfields due to technical reasons.

On July 1, units of the 204th airborne brigade occupied the Cahul town.

The use of airborne units allowed Soviet divisions to rapidly reach the new border with Romania. In this regard the newspaper reported: "KIEV, June 30. Soviet forces fulfilled their mission in the northern part of Bukovina and reached the established border with Romania.

In Bessarabia, Soviet forces are completing their entry to the area of the new border with Romania, that is, in the area of the Prut and the Danube Rivers. Mechanized units took control of the Ungheni railway station on the east bank of the Prut River, in front of the Jassy city. The motorized infantry supported by tanks entered the Cahul town on the Prut and to the Reni town at the confluence of the Prut and the Danube. Airborne units occupied the Izmail city on the Danube River.

Soviet forces are advancing everywhere as planned and without incidents” ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).

2. The main mission of the Red Army is the Liberator army

An important focus in the news coverage of the annexation process was given to the creation of the Red Army's image as the “Liberator” Army: “VORONITSY VILLAGE, BESSARABIA, June 29. A village, typical for Bessarabia. There are miserable ramshackle huts of poor peasants, cramming near large and spacious kulak houses. A school, the only cultural institution in the village, is located in a tiny hut. Inhabitants wear shabby clothes. But today, their faces are radiating overwhelming joy and happiness. Units of the Red Army have just entered their village. Tanks rattled in, mechanized infantry also arrived. Jubilant cheers immediately went up over the village. It is difficult to find words to describe the delight with which the people greeted their liberators. Soldiers were literally showered with flowers.

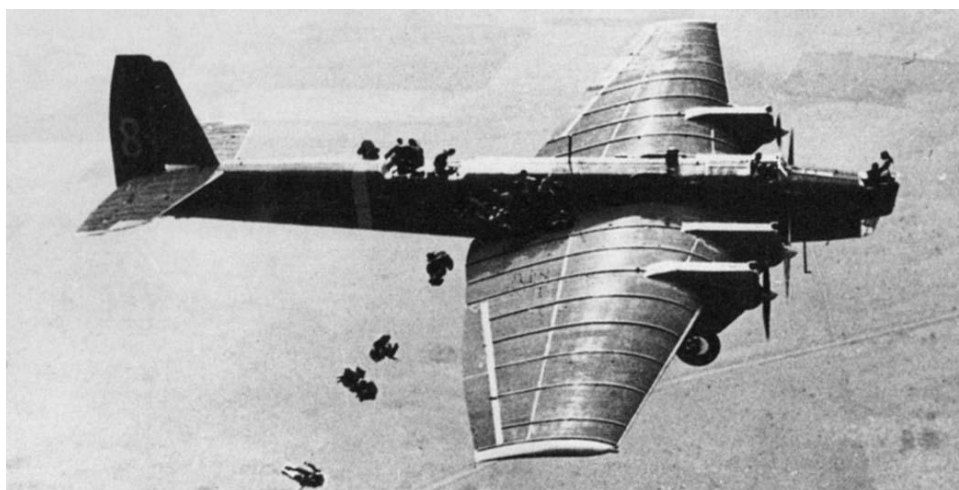


Fig. 1. The landing of troops from TB-3 aircraft

A rally started straight away without any fuss. Everyone, from young to old, gathered on the square in the center of the village. The villagers listened to the Red Army representatives eagerly, anxious not to utter a word. The speech by the Commissioner of the B. unit was more than once interrupted by jubilant cheers. He said that the dream of the working people of Bessarabia had come true – by the will of the Soviet people, they were reunited with the single family of Soviet citizens. Great interest was aroused by his account of a happy life that the collective farm peasantry led in the Soviet Union. The words of the commander, addressed to the rally participants, opened up prospects for their bright future.

When the commander finished, the floor was taken by Daria Tsyganyuk, an old peasant. Her fiery speech poured from her very heart.

“We have lived in the dark prison for 22 years. And you have been our only hope, our sons, our brothers, whom we could rely on and receive liberation. Many motherly thanks to you, red fighters. We, our children and grandchildren, thank you. Thanks to the man who has sent you, thanks to our dear Stalin!”

The rally ended. Cheers could be heard for a long time: "Long live Soviet power, long live dear Stalin!" The soldiers of the B. unit moved on, seen off by warm parting words.

First rallies of peasants and Red Army soldiers were carried out with the enormous enthusiasm in other villages of the Khotyn district” ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).



Fig. 2. The soviet cavalry on the march on the road in Bessarabia. June-July, 1940

The topic of the meeting with the Soviet army now dominated the pages. For example, the newspaper reported that "the Red Army units crossed the Cheremosh River. People met them with red banners, flowers, and generous hospitality. In one Carpathian village, soldiers were welcomed by peasants with red roses. The men gladly accepted the flowers. Today, we have driven across entire Bukovina. Spontaneous rallies took place in villages, towns and boroughs. As peasants are kissing and hugging soldiers with tears in their eyes, they say:

"We have waited for 22 years, every day and finally our waiting is over. Thank you, thank you!

Our native Ukrainian language is once again spoken in cities and villages. Northern Bukovina is rejoicing" ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).

Similar meetings took place in other locations throughout the integrated territory. In parallel to that, the propaganda rhetoric made efforts to identify aspects of the capitalist exploitation of the working population. "Bendery. For years, people of Bessarabia, forcibly torn from their homeland, have suffered under the yoke of the Romania. With hope, it looked at the Soviet Union and waited for liberation. The joyful day has come. The moment of the first meeting will long remain vivid in the memory. The population hospitably met its liberator – the Red Army – with flowers and red flags.

Jubilant residents welcomed the Red Army on the streets of Bendery. With tears of joy, people hugged each other and chanted heartily in the Ukrainian and Russian languages: "Long live the Red Army! Long live the Soviet country, long live great Stalin!"

Peasants of the Makarovka village learnt that the Red Army was going to free them from the hated yoke and gathered at the edge of the village. Everyone, from young to old, was looking forward to see the advanced units. A girl, named Hanna Damerchuk, stood there with other villagers. When cheers subsided, she appealed to the commander with a complaint. The local landlord and the tenant tormented peasants and beat both children and adults, and tenant Zelmanovsky beat peasant woman Nazarova. Hanna asked to severely punish the tenant and begged that the soldiers not leave the village" ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).

The press also paid attention to international consequences of the Soviet campaign and its reflection in the foreign press. For example, a news story, entitled "Bulgaria's reaction to resolution of Romanian-Soviet conflict," reported:

"SOFIA, June 30. Newspapers are dedicating whole pages to the peaceful resolution of the Soviet-Romanian conflict. All newspapers have published the TASS communiqué. They note the successful advance of the Soviet forces and the joy with which the population is meeting the Red Army.



Fig. 3. The soviet tanks BT-7 on parade in Kishinev. 4–6.07.1940

A Yugoslav newspaper *Vremya* stresses that all attempts by Romania to romanize Bessarabia for 22 years have failed. The newspaper writes in another article devoted to Bukovina: “During the Austro-Hungarian regime, Bucovina was one of the most neglected areas in the empire. It was abandoned, underdeveloped and led a wretched life in superstition and backwardness. The situation did not change under the Romanian rule. In this province, Romania tried to act only through the church. It turned out, however, that Bukovina is inappropriate for Romania.”

The press did not pass over the German periodical press and its interpretation of the Bukovina and Bessarabia events: “BERLIN, June 30. The German press has placed a number of articles devoted to the peaceful settlement of the Bessarabian question.

The *National Zeitung* newspaper writes: “The return of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to Russia completely eliminates the injustice of the Versailles Peace. Russia has never recognized the annexation of these areas and never doubted that these areas captured by armed force will again belong to her.

Although the Romanian government clearly understood that it was necessary to return Bessarabia, it constantly cast the issue aside. This issue repeatedly brought about the aggravation of the relations between the USSR and Romania.

A special meaning of the events is that remedying the territorial injustices in south-eastern Europe eliminates the possibility of future conflicts.”

A *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* editorial wrote: “The Bessarabian question, which marred relations between Russia and Romania even before World War II, is now resolved on the initiative of Russia. Bessarabia was part of Russia for more than 100 years (1812-1919).” ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).

Meanwhile, the deployment of the Soviet troops on the new borders was completed by July 1. For example, the *Krasnoye Znamya* wrote: “KIEV, July 1. Soviet forces mounted defenses on the established border with Romania in northern of **Bukovina**. In **Bessarabia**, Soviet forces fulfilled their mission and reached the border with Romania all along the Prut and Danube” ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 2](#)).

In the article “In Soviet Bukovina,” a correspondent describes the entry of the Red Army into the Bukovina in brilliant colors: “CHERNOVTSY. The infinite avalanche of the Soviet army is moving along the five roads of Northern Bukovina armed with powerful weapons and equipment.

Infantry regiments are going, the cavalry are sweeping past, overland fortresses – tanks and armored vehicles – are passing. High in the sky – combat aircraft...” (Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 3). Particular emphasis is again put on the rapturous welcome of the Red Army: “The Liberator Army is received like own mother. Arrival of the Red is a happy event to everyone; soldiers are warmly welcomed and showered with flowers.

On the bank of the Prut River, on a high bridge, a huge crowd of peasants hail a column of cavalry. A woman in a worn-out linen shirt steps out on the bridge. She kneels, puts her hands to her heart, and makes a deep bow:

“Dear comrades, my dear...,” the woman muttered and burst into tears.

The column stopped. The fighter dismounted and pulled the woman from her knees. Continuing to cry, she tries to kiss the hand of the Red Army soldier. Gently pushing the woman away, the fighter unclasps an enamel badge with a portrait of Comrade Stalin from his shirt and hands it to the woman.

“That’s whom you should be grateful to!”

The woman takes the badge as a precious gift and kisses it.

... The cavalry long disappeared from sight, but the woman stands on the bridge for a long time, pressing to her heart the portrait of the leader.

Later we learned the story of the woman. Hanna Taderuk is a peasant from the Dubovny village. Her husband and she worked as hired farm laborers for many years until they bought a cow. But boyar Rumanian officers took away the cow from the poor Taderuks in the course of mobilization. Left without any means of livelihood, Hanna tried to drown herself in despair. The Red Army returned her life back to her, returned her the joy of life, which she never knew” (Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 3).

3. Blackening the previous history of the annexed territories and portraying a magnificent vision of the future.

The press also agitated Bessarabian peasants for joining the collective farm system (kolkhoz). For example, the article “A joyful meeting” described a meeting between members of a kolkhoz – collective farmers – and peasants from the annexed territory: «YASSKI VILLAGE, Odessa region, July 1. After they crossed by boat the Dniester, the guests – 20 Bessarabian peasants from the Krokmazy Chudarovo village – arrived to collective farmers from the farm 14 Richchya Zhovtnya (October the 14th). It is difficult to express in words how delightful the meeting was – cheers “Hurrah!”, “Glory to the Red Army”, “Long live our dear father Stalin”, handshakes, kisses.

A lively conversation started. The guests hung on every word of the collective farmers speaking of their prosperous life, the joys of the work at the collective farm and abundant harvests ripening in their fields.

“There is nothing we can say about our lives,” the guests said. All our wealth is patched clothes and poverty in each hut. We shall now live like people – in a Soviet way” (Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 3).

After military activities were completed, the time came to create a new government and Communist Party cells. For example, a short commentary “Rural interim committee” introduced the process: “TOLMACHI VILLAGE, Bessarabia. July 1. A group of collective farmers and senior officials from the Slobozia district, Moldavian ASSR, arrived in the locality. Village peasants greeted the guests with bread and salt. A rally was held yesterday, which was attended by 800 people. Speeches were made by laborer Kukol, peasant Barkar, clerk Smirnov and others. They vigorously welcomed the Bolshevik Party, the Soviet government, the Red Army and wise leader of peoples Comrade Stalin. Each mention of the dear name drew long thundering applause and cheers “Hurrah.”

The peasants elected an interim committee of 15 people. This was the first time when women were offered to participate in the social life and some of them were elected to the committee. Members of the committee are the best people in the village, who fought against the hated yoke of Romanian boyars. They include laborer Odorozha. He has languished in prison over 8 years for his underground political activities. He is 52.

“I have long thought that I am an old man,” he says. “Now I feel that has never been as young as in these historic days of the liberation of Bessarabia” (Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 3).

Already on July 4, Krasnoye Znamya published news items saying that the social and economic situation in the annexed territories had normalized. "SOROKI, July 2. People in the liberated town of Soroki have restored a normal life on the fifth day after the arrival of the Red Army.

In the rule of the Romanian occupation, the town was flagrantly disregarded, streets are dirty, roads crumble. Many streets are overgrown with weeds. The Romanian authorities have left the town a legacy of ditches dug in the middle of the streets.

The town is currently under reconstruction. The streets are being cleared of debris, ditches filled up, new roads laid. The town has arranged a hospital for 55 beds and is now refurbishing a facility for a movie theater. The brewery, 2 vegetable oil plants and 3 large mills are operating in the normal mode. All stores are open.

More than 800 unemployed residents have received jobs. There have been around one thousand jobless in here until recently. Only a few days will pass – and all of them will get a long-awaited work.

Hundreds of people living the town and nearby villages are turning to local authorities with various questions and suggestions. The youth propose to set up a theater and arrange a football pitch. Many peasants are complaining that the Romanian authorities have taken away their horses and cows. Wives and children of Bessarabian peasants mobilized in the Romanian army are asking to help their husbands and fathers return home.

Peasant committees have been organized in 25 villages of the Soroki district" ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 4](#)).

The newspaper also describes details of a Bendery rally: "BENDERY, July 2. The city stadium is festively decorated. The wind is stirring red flags. Columns of demonstrators are approaching the stadium. They are carrying with them portraits of party and government leaders. 5,000 new Soviet citizens – residents of Bendery – have come to the rally. The floor has been taken by railroad worker Melnichenko. He is gratefully thanking the Communist Party, Comrade Stalin and the Red Army for liberating the working people of Bessarabia from the yoke of the landlords and capitalists.

At the end of his speech, he exclaims: "Long live the great leader, beloved Comrade Stalin!" Enthusiastic prolonged applause is roaring in response.

Teacher Bychkov is making a speech on behalf of the intelligentsia. He is speaking of the miserable and powerless life of the working intelligentsia in Bessarabia under the rule of the Romanian boyars. Bychkov is urging the intelligentsia and all working people to honestly and selflessly devote themselves to work for the benefit of their socialist homeland.

Festivities were held after the rally, which lasted until late at night ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 4](#)).

The newspaper focuses on the subject of the life before and after the arrival of the Red Army in the short commentary "Tell us about the land": "KAMYANA VILLAGE, Northern Bukovina, July 2. On the road between Chernovitsy and Storozhnitsa, in a picturesque valley lies a large village – Kamyana. It has a happy time these days. The villagers with joy and delight greet the Red Army forces moving in a continuous stream.

A car stopped outside one of the huts in the village. Senior political instructor Chernenko gets out of the car.

A dense ring of peasants surrounded him, asking to tell them about the land.

They eagerly listen to Chernenko and his simple words, and then speak of what hard and hopeless lives they had under the heel of the boyars. Of 800 families in Kamyana, 400 had no land at all and 200 had starvation plots of 0.5 hectares.

Kamyana is a typical village in Northern Bukovina, which moaned under the unbearable burden of brutal exploitation and landlessness. Landlords and Romanian boyars, such as Flondr, Orenstein and others, who owned vast latifundia of dozens of thousands of hectares in meadow and forest lands, brutally took away last plots of land from peasants. In these acts, they were obligingly assisted by the Romanian authorities which imposed crippling taxes on Bukovina peasants.

A poor old man Shlemko of Kamyana says:

"We did not pay only for air. All other things were taxed. In addition to economic taxes, there were other taxes as well, such as: You did not get married until 27 – pay to the state, wives do not have children – pay for childlessness, and so on.

And now the land can be given to peasants for free, can't it?" The old hunched man asked overwhelmed with emotions.

"The land will be given! There are no and never will be landowners in the Soviet country."

The old man shook the hand of the political instructor.

"Be so kind, give Comrade Stalin, our heartfelt thanks for all, especially for the land," peasant Shlemko asked at parting" ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 4](#)).

Attention to the topic of the new annexed territories fell sharply after July 4. For example, on July 7, Krasnoye Znamya published a news item about the new life and new rules: "KISHINEV, July 5. The district executive committee is having office hours. The corridors are filled with groups of people engaged in animated conversations. They are discussing dozens of questions regarding state, public and personal issues. The new life, new government, and new rules – all this has raised a lot of pressing questions and a stream of proposals. Everyone is eager to help their Soviet authority and bring the Bolshevik order to towns and villages of the liberated land.

A representative of the Soviet government in Kishinev, Diorditsa, is receiving visitors. They are coming into a room, some are timid and fearful, others are confident and businesslike.

A woman is coming in with two children, one in her arms; the other is clinging to her skirt. The woman is haggard and thin, with deep-set eyes; she is speaking of her plight in a broken voice. The ramshackle ceiling in the basement, where she lived, has collapsed tonight. She is now on the street together with the children with no shelter. The woman is being soothed and asked questions. The representative of the district executive committee is giving an order to immediately provide her with a room in the apartment of one of the rich men that fled. The woman is leaving saying the words of profound gratitude.

23 years ago Andrey Kozhukhar, a peasant from the Otak village, former Orkavsky district, was a member of the provincial executive committee of the Council of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies for the Bessarabia province. After Romania occupied Bessarabia, he was severely persecuted by invaders. With a secondary education in economics and agriculture, Kozhukhar could not receive a job in his professional field for 22 years. Presently village peasants have appointed him as peasant delegate and sent him to the town to find out what will happen with the land, what they should do with wealthy peasants who have hidden the bread, and with the poor who have no bread. When he has entered the reception office, Kozhukhar has taken out a shabby paper from his pocket – a membership card of the Bessarabian executive committee, which he has kept in a pot under the hut floor for many years.

"Representatives of the district executive committee will come to your village," the delegate receives and explanation. They will help you choose a new rural authority and address your most urgent issues.

Dusted and tired, brothers Ilya and Davyd Lyudmer – foremen at a Jassy weaving factory, Romania, appear in the office; they have just arrived with their families in Kishinev.

"We want to live and work in the USSR, in our homeland," Ilya Lyudmer says. We are happy that we are here now. For years we have worked for the owner and now we want to work for the people, for ourselves. Both of us are inventors and innovators, and we ask to provide us jobs in our field – we want to become Stakhanovites.

The brothers are feeling excited when they are leaving the reception office of the district executive committee. They have come to their homeland, and it has not disappointed their expectations.

The stream of visitors is endless. From 8 in the morning until 1 after midnight, representatives of the district executive committee are dealing with major and minor matters" ([Krasnoye Znamaya. 1940. July 7](#)).

On July 10, the newspaper published the last news item on the situation in the annexed territories; it described the meeting between Soviet writers and people working in the artistic sphere in Kishinev: "KISHINEV, July 8. Soviet writers carried out a meeting with the city intelligentsia and art workers. The participants paid great attention to the presentation on the Soviet literature. Ukrainian writers Le, Tadvov, Fefer, Kucher and others read out their works.

Bessarabian writers and art workers in their speeches spoke about outrageous forms taken by the struggle of the Romanian occupation against the Russian culture. It prohibited performing the works by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and other Russian composers.

“We had to perform the slopwork of mediocre Romanian composers or we were not allowed to work,” musician brothers Kogan said.

None of the local writers, who wrote in the Russian, Yiddish or Moldovan languages, was published.

Presently, the liberated people gets down to creative work with the help of representatives of the Soviet culture. The city is now organizing an art workers’ club” ([Krasnoye Znamya. 1940. July 10](#)).

After July 10, 1940, the Krasnoye Znamya newspaper published no reports on the life in Bessarabia and Bukovina – the territories became part of the Soviet state.

5. Conclusion

Summarizing the overview, it is necessary to note that the materials of the Soviet periodical press, describing the integration of Bessarabia and Bukovina into the Soviet Union, are an important source which allows us, in retrospect, to have a closer look at these events. The periodical press enables us to analyze fields of action the Soviet propaganda acted in, as well as the propaganda rhetoric in the pre-war period. In the annexation period, the Krasnoye Znamya newspaper covers the following key topics in its propaganda articles: 1. The invincibility of the Red Army, 2. The main mission of the Red Army is the Liberator army, 3. Blackening the previous history of the annexed territories and portraying a magnificent vision of the future.

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