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Negotiating Loyalty: Bessarabian Germans from the Russian Empire to the Romanian Nation-State (1914–1919)

The aim of the paper is to clarify how the war and the regime change in Bessarabia was perceived by the German minority, what reactions were expressed and what kind of actions were taken in the period in-between the regimes, whether ‘emergency’ solutions were examined and help from the German ‘Motherland’ was sought. We aim to clarify what kind of expectations had the German Bessarabians from the new Romanian regime and how these related to the disappointments, losses and fears, generated by the Russian regime during the wartime, as well which strategies and mechanisms were used to negotiate the new economic, social and cultural status of the German minority within Romania. We claim that during the transition from the Russian to the Romanian regime the Bessarabian Germans were concerned with ensuring to the community members the respect of civil and political rights in exchange of loyalty to the new administration. The determination to obtain guarantees through negotiation was closely related to previous deprivation of property and civil rights, as well to the frustrations that during the short period of autonomy and independence the Bessarabian government was in the impossibility to guarantee to the locals security and stability. On their side, the Romanian authorities considered ethnic minorities, as well other social groups, vulnerable to the Bolshevik danger, these being expected to express instant loyalty and subordination in exchange of the guaranteed security.