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The Beginnings of the Repression against the German Minority in Romania: A Case Study of Transylvanian Saxon Communities, 1945-1949.

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ABSTRACT

During the period between 1945 and 1949, the rural communities of Transylvanian Saxons experienced tragic circumstances. The repressive measures of the communist regime, installed with Soviet support, were varied and harsh. They ranged from the confiscation of goods – carried out under the provisions of the March 23, 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform and affecting a significant part of the ethnic German population – to intimidation, abuses, and terror. Following the decision of the Soviet authorities to deport them to forced labor in the USSR, many Romanian Germans who returned home, particularly after 1948, discovered that they had no future in their own country. They were denied basic rights such as the right to work, to an education, to a decent standard of living. After 800 years of settlement in Transylvania, the oppressive policies of the communist regime, the decline in living standards, as well as the agreements between the Romanian authorities and the West German government resulted in the massive emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania. This article is primarily based on documents in the Archive for the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives and the Romanian National Archives.

KEYWORDS

Ethnic Germans, minorities, 1945 agrarian reform, installation of communism in Romania.

Introduction

The history of Transylvanian Saxons spans eight centuries¹, but the communist regime that came to power on March 6, 1945 put an end to their presence by means of the repressive policies it adopted during the mid-1950s. Subsequently, the decline in living standards and the agreements concluded between the Bucharest regime and the Federal Republic of Germany led to the massive emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania. The exodus continued during the 1990s. Consequently, the German community in Romania presently consists of only 36,900 people².

Confiscation of goods, abuses, violence, and terror were elements of daily life during the installation of communist rule in Romania. In fact, the war was not over, but contin-

ued on the home front, in the name of class struggle against real or presumed enemies, who had to be liquidated. The authorities used various mechanisms for this purpose: expropriation, intimidation, maltreatment, and violence – including killings (Troncotă, 2003). The deportation of ethnic Germans to forced labor in the USSR, undertaken following pressures from the Soviet authorities, irremediably altered the relationship between the German community and the Romanian state. Nonetheless, the Romanian communist authorities, unlike those in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary, did not seek to drive them out of the country.

Alongside the rest of the population, Romania's ethnic Germans endured the horrors that accompanied the installation and consolidation of communist rule. The communist authorities applied a policy – dictated and su-

1) Originating from the Rhine and the Mosel River areas, the Transylvanian Saxons were invited as "hospites" by King Geza II of Hungary during the 12th century. During the Reformation, they converted to Lutheranism. This enabled them to maintain close contact with their native language. The Evangelical Church of the Transylvanian Saxons played a major role in forging the social identity of the community. This differentiation along confessional lines explains the autarchic and relatively closed character of the Saxon village social system. Until the middle of the 19th century, their socio-political status was defined by a set of medieval privileges.

2) By comparison, the 1930 census recorded 745,421 ethnic Germans living in Romania.



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3) In the 1920s, Transylvania had 5,113,124 inhabitants. Of these, 2,930,120 were ethnic Romanians (57.5%), 1,305,753, (25.53%) were ethnic Hungarians, and 534,427 (10.45%) were ethnic Germans – Saxons and Swabians. The statistical weight of ethnic Germans was particularly preponderant in the following districts: Arad (7.9%), Bistrița Năsăud (17.02%), Brașov (29.7%), Caraș-Severin (12.39%), Sătmar (12.09%), Sibiu (29.5%), Târnava Mică (17.93%), Târnava Mare (42.87%), and Timiș-Torontal (37.67%). Ethnic Romanians constituted the majority population in 15 out of Transylvania's 22 districts (The Minority Question in Transylvania, 1925).

4) The decree-law of November 21, 1941 concerning the founding of the German Ethnic Group established the

pervised by Moscow – that sought to destroy the bases of Saxon homesteads, precipitate their exodus to other rural communities in Romania, and dissolve traditional German rural settlements by forcing the inhabitants to look elsewhere for a chance to survive and an income to support their families.

Between 1918 and 1940, the Saxons provided the economic, political, and cultural leadership of the German community in Romania³. During the period in which the German Ethnic Group (GEG)⁴ exercised control, the organization applied intense pressure to downplay and equalize regional identities, emphatically insisting they all “belonged to the German people.” In May 1941, the group went as far as to prohibit the use of the terms “Saxon” or “Swabian”, even in dealings with the Romanian authorities⁵. During the Second World War, the German community in Romania came under the direct control of Berlin and participated in the Third Reich's war ef-

fort. The GEG became the vehicle for the transmission of funds to Berlin. These monies comprised taxes, excises, and other contributions paid by the ethnic Germans of Romania. By the end of 1943, approximately 60,000 ethnic Germans had enrolled in the Waffen SS and over 15,000 in the Wehrmacht, the Todt Organization, or the armaments industry. These numbers represented over 10% of Romania's ethnic German population, and their unprecedented regimentation in the Reich's war effort would have dramatic consequences.

The situation of the German community underwent a radical transformation after August 23, 1944. New laws came into effect that outlawed the German Ethnic Group, confiscated its goods, and sent numerous ethnic Germans to detention camps. Romania was now at war with Germany and ethnic Germans were considered a threat, particularly since the GEG was attempting to organize a resistance movement against Romania's new course. The reports of the Security Police Directorate describe the discovery and neutralization of 35 resistance cells on Romanian territory. These groups were composed of German military personnel and members of the legionary movement, and they were active even after the cessation of hostilities in May 1945. In total, 946 persons were arrested and subsequently remanded to the justice system (Moldovan et al., 2006). Furthermore, orders were issued for the arrest of GEG leaders and all ethnic German who continued to resist alongside them. On August 27, 1944, the Regional Inspectorates of the Gendarmerie received instructions to compile lists of all ethnic Germans over sixteen years old by requiring them to register with the local police or gendarmerie. Based on these records, many were deported to the USSR for forced labor.

The authorities had various proposals, plans, and legislative projects concerning the status of the German minority, particularly in regards to impounding their assets. The overall goal was to confiscate their houses and lands, as well as to concentrate the population in just a few localities. However, the practical

application of these measures encountered opposition in the field. It was also necessary to avoid severely disrupting agrarian resources and the harvest. This meant that the solutions could not be as radical as originally envisaged.

Fearing reprisals, many ethnic Germans left Romania in the autumn of 1944. However, towards the end of the year, they returned on rather their own initiative or because they were sent back under guard to the Romanian frontier by the Soviet command. The Soviet authorities disregarded the fact that the ethnic Germans who had left for the Reich based on the October 22, 1941 Romanian-German Convention had lost their Romanian citizenship, after being reimbursed for the value of the assets they left behind. The Soviets nonetheless sent them back to Romania. Those who had left under the terms of the May 12, 1943 Romanian-German Military Convention were able to retain their Romanian citizenship, while also becoming German citizens. As far as their property was concerned, the Armistice Convention – signed on September 12, 1944 – stipulated that the assets belonging to the Reich, to Hungary, or to their citizens must be preserved. It further mandated that they could be exported or expropriated only with the consent of the Soviet Military High Command. Moscow willfully misinterpreted this provision and insisted that this category of assets be turned over to the Soviet Union (Șandru, 2007).

In October 1944, the decree authorizing the restoration of the 1923 Constitution was modified to empower the Council of Ministers to prosecute and punish those responsible for the alliance with Nazi Germany, respectively those culpable for the “country’s disaster” and the war against the United Nations. To this end, special laws were to come into effect. Although the 1923 Constitution prohibited such a procedure, there were also serious discussions about confiscating the property of the guilty parties⁶.

Immediately after the events of August 23, 1944, the communists initiated an intense propaganda campaign in favor of agrarian re-

form⁷. Conditions at the local level deteriorated severely due to the land redistribution actions coordinated by the Ploughmen’s Front. The situation was aggravated by the presence of the Red Army, which had supplanted the local authorities in their role of maintaining public order. Its subordinates, however, robbed and committed numerous other abuses. Thus, for all practical purposes, the public authority of local Romanian administrative bodies had ceased to exist. Because the new authorities did nothing to prevent such acts, peasant land seizures and redistributions of large estates intensified after March 6, 1945. This was despite the fact that some of the occupied lands were state property (Dobrincu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

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The 1945 Agrarian Reform and the Condition of Transylvanian Saxons’ Rural Communities

The Agrarian Reform Law of March 23, 1945 failed to solve Romania’s agrarian problem. At most, it leveled the social structure. The communist authorities believed that the small size of peasant landholdings, as well as the lack of any criteria for distributing land with the goal of enhancing economic performance, would soon demonstrate the unavailability of such farms and offer solid arguments for the abolition of private property, thereby affirming the superiority of collective farming. Nevertheless, in the first years following their accession to power, the communists issued no public declarations on the subject of collectivization. They acted with prudence, rightly concerned about the predictable opposition this process would generate in the countryside (Prost, 2006). They focused instead on consumer cooperatives, on syndicates for the processing and commercialization of agricultural products, as well as on the common use of tractors. Throughout this initial period, the communists proclaimed themselves firm defenders of private property⁸.

organization as a public Romanian legal entity. It also stipulated that all Romanian citizens who had been recognized and recorded in the national registry as ethnic Germans by the group’s leadership belonged to the GEG.

5) ANIC, Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri – Serviciul Secret de Informații, dosar nr. 18/1936, f. 25.

6) ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Secția Cămarilor, dosar 28/1944, f. 22.

7) On February 10, 1945, in Scânteia, The Ploughmen’s Front published a manifesto calling on peasants to take matters into their own hands and implement the agrarian reform. The manifesto exhorted peasants to seize large estates, insisting that the government had no intention of granting them land. The next day, the Front’s representatives withdrew from the commission tasked with analyzing the modalities whereby the agrarian reform could be accomplished.

8) On December 23, 1945, during a meeting of the Ploughmen’s Front, Petru Groza affirmed that Stalin had told him that the Romanian peasants must choose their own path; that nothing should be done by means of coercion or force, and that he should avoid imitating the kolkhoz and sovkhoz type of farms. Before the elections of 1946, the communists continued to pose as defenders of peasant property. They maintained this stance until 1948. Beginning in 1948, there appeared numerous disparaging references to the individual peasant farm, initially in Russian sources and subsequently during the plenary session of the PMR (Romanian Worker’s Party) – which took place on March 3 – 5, 1949. During this session, the small peasant farm was characterized as “tottering and lacking in future

prospects compared to the Collective Farm, which will insure the genuine welfare of the agriculturalist!"

9) It is said that H.O. Roth told Petru Groza that German smallholders typically did not own more than 20 hectares.

10) On March 20, 1945, the Council of Ministers decided that explicit references to ethnic Germans would bestow a racial character upon the law.

11) The 1945 agrarian reform law expropriated 1,469 million hectares. Pursuant to Article 6 of the Decree-Law no. 187 of March 23, 1945, all agricultural stock (tractors, threshers, harvesters) located on these lands became state property. Landless peasants or those who owned less than 5 hectares were to receive land. The agrarian reform enacted by the government led by Petru Groza chipped away at the private property regime and contributed to the destruction of properties larger than 50 hectares.

The March 23, 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform affected over 60% of the ethnic German population in Romania. Several bills were under consideration at the time. Therefore, the references regarding German property owners vary according to the bill in question. In the first phase, it was proposed that the property of all those who had collaborated with the Reich be confiscated. Persons who had not colluded with the Nazis would have been allowed to keep a maximum of 20 hectares. The main criterion for expropriation was ethnic origin⁹. Petru Groza admitted that, initially, the intention was to confiscate all properties held by ethnic Germans. Subsequently, however, this idea was discarded as excessively “anti-democratic.”¹⁰ Other targeted categories were permitted to keep 50 hectares as personal property.

Article 3 of the law defined the types of properties subject to nationalization and subsequent redistribution to peasants. The first category included: the assets and lands of Nazi collaborators of German descent who held Romanian and/or German citizenship; the goods and terrains of war criminals and of those responsible for the “country’s disaster”; the possessions and lands of persons who had left Romania after August 23, 1944 or were currently residing abroad (i.e., “absentees”). Furthermore, the law stipulated that the state would appropriate the assets and lands of all Romanian citizens, regardless of ethnic origin, who had volunteered to fight against the United Nations. Last but not least, the state would nationalize tracts over 50 hectares – including pastures, lakes, and marshes. Vineyards and forests were not included in this normative act.

After March 6, 1945, the Romanian Communist Party encouraged brutal and abusive behavior towards Romania’s German population. Persons who condemned this attitude were labeled “defenders of Hitlerism.” The property regime was modified in close connection to ethnic origin. The German population came within the purview of the agrarian reform legislation in accordance with the pro-

visions of Article 8, paragraph 9 of the above-mentioned law. The expropriation targeted all assets: houses, lands, agricultural stock, and farm animals. Previously, pursuant to Article 8 of the Armistice Convention, persons classified as “absentees” – a category in which German inhabitants who had left their homes during the war or during the retreat of German troops – were especially likely to fit in, lost their assets, which became “enemy goods.” These properties were managed by the Department for the Administration and Supervision of Enemy Goods (CASBI). If the assets belonged to “German subjects,” the profits accrued from leasing them were deposited at the Sovrom State Bank in Bucharest. Alternatively, the rents from properties belonging to “Romanian subjects of German origin” went into the CASBI account at the Bank for Savings and Consignations (Dobrinu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

The Law of Agrarian Reform¹¹ of March 23, 1945 specified that only ethnic Germans who had fought in the Romanian Army were exempt from nationalization. The language of the law described them as “entitled.” The rest of the ethnic Germans were allowed to live in their own homes, as long they paid rent to the state, now the new proprietor, and only until Romanian colonists moved in. The deployments of colonists constituted an attempt to “Romanianize” German communes and destroy their traditional solidarity. Nonetheless, the colonists did not receive plots to build houses. Moreover, they were in a precarious legal situation similar to that of the German population. For the state was considered the owner of all assets, hence master of the rural world. The documents reveal that ethnic Germans proposed to the authorities to build houses for the colonists in exchange for reclaiming title to their own homes. However, their offer was refused. It was only in 1956 that the German population was able to reclaim the buildings expropriated in 1945 (Dobrinu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

The communists insisted and succeeded in having all ethnic Germans be treated as an

undifferentiated bloc of Nazi collaborators. The norms governing the implementation of the agrarian reform law, published on April 2, 1945, stipulated that collaborationists were subject to complete expropriation. Consequently, the entire German community fell under the purview of this provision. This stipulation also extended to the following categories of persons: Romanian citizens who had been part of the German Army or the SS; their descendants and heirs; Romanian citizens who fled the country during the retreat of the German and Hungarian armies; Romanian citizens of German descent who had been members of GEG; all persons implicated in Nazi propaganda. The latter group was vaguely defined. This made possible the abusive categorization of some people, thereby making them liable for the full penalties of the law. As mentioned before, the law also targeted the descendants and inheritors of the categorized persons, although not even the relatives of war criminals were subject to punishment. Furthermore, it surely ignored the fact that the GEG had been a legal organization. Finally, yet importantly, ethnic Germans whose communist past dated to the party's underground days also fell within the scope of this punitive provision.

Although other categories of Romanian citizens were exempt from this measure, the Germans had their vineyards and forests confiscated under the provisions of the Decree-Law No. 187/ 1945. Postwar documents show that, in many villages and communes, both the local authorities and the other inhabitants actively supported the process of dispossessing ethnic Germans, whom they accused of collaborationism. In fact, they were masking their goal of taking over their assets. Consequently, the law was applied abusively. Persons of German descent had their tools, lands, cattle, and houses confiscated. Stripped of their personal possessions, they were left with no source of income¹².

In villages where ethnic Germans were the minority or away to forced labor in the USSR, resistance to the expropriation process was not

very strong. On the other hand, in areas where they lived in compact groups, opposition was significant and the process unfolded slowly, with fits and starts. Drawing on their tradition of solidarity, the Germans attempted to resist the pressures exercised upon them and defend their rights with all their might, especially since they faced the prospect of dispossession and the cessation of all income. Initially, they were able to exploit the weaknesses of a communist regime still in the early phase of consolidating its influence over Romanian society. The regime's relative lack of confidence was reflected in its actions. In the first stage, only the houses abandoned by Germans or those of notorious Nazi collaborators were confiscated. It was only after the regime established firm control over the country that it was able to implement firm measures that would affected the mass of the German population.

Priests and schoolteachers played a critical role in preserving the German communities' sense of solidarity. They vehemently opposed the arbitrary measures of the authorities, at least during the early phase when the balance of power was not irreversibly in favor of the regime. The (Lutheran) Evangelical Church sent the text of the agrarian reform law together with its own interpretation – which emphasized that the normative act did not mandate the confiscation of houses and their surrounding plots – to all its consistories. The overall assistance and legal support provided by the Church enabled the German population to resist pressures from the local authorities, gendarmes, or representatives of the agrarian committees. Consequently, the colonists feared to take over the lands and houses of ethnic Germans. The situation was similar in cases when the local Romanian population attempted to appropriate Germans goods. Therefore, in the rural world, in the villages inhabited by Germans, the atmosphere was tense and uncertain. Bishop Friedrich Müller undertook repeated démarches, not only with the Romanian authorities but also abroad, asking that the mistreatment of Romania's German population be stopped¹³.

12) ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Sectia Cancelarie, dosar nr. 28/1944, f. 24

13) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, nr. 3414, Uniunea Sasilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 334

At least during the first two years of communist rule, the situation of the colonists sent by the authorities to take over the properties of the ethnic German population was deplorable. They lacked sources of income, tools, even clothes. They were typically poor peasants, sometimes from villages neighboring German settlements, but generally from the southern part of the country. Many of them showed no interest in cultivating the land or in husbanding the goods they had received, which subsequently fell into disrepair. The farm animals confiscated by the state from the Germans were distributed to the colonists. However, the latter either lacked the ability to care for them or sold them to abattoirs or at the market. The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie reported numerous thefts of German possessions, as well as unauthorized occupations of their houses by Romanians and Roma from neighboring villages. Although they had received the lands and houses belonging to ethnic Germans, as well as all their goods, the colonists failed to establish prosperous farms. In the absence of help from the state, which was impossible at the time, the colonists tolerated the presence of the former owners who now worked the land in exchange for a share of the crop. On the other hand, the colonists felt insecure about holding rightful title to their newly acquired possessions, as they were considered usufructuaries of state assets¹⁴.

14) *Ibidem*, f. 6-7

The Law of Minorities was adopted on April 4, 1945. One month later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that the Council of Ministers instruct local authorities to prohibit the entry into the country of persons who did not hold or had lost Romanian citizenship – as defined by the new law. Nevertheless, in many instances ethnic Germans did manage to return to their place of residence. In these conditions, they could not be compelled to leave the country without the agreement of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission. For reasons that remain unclear, the commission did not agree with such measures. The number of Germans who returned to Romania was there-

fore significant. This contributed to an attitude of revolt against the confiscation measures enacted by the authorities.

Following the preliminary stages of 1944-1947, the repression intensified in 1948. The methods employed included arrests, assassinations, jail terms, forced domicile, and the social marginalization of opponents.

Approximately one million people endured various forms of incarceration such as prison, forced domicile, and deportation (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). Yet the repression had much larger dimensions. The families of those considered enemies of the regime also became a target. They were subjected to interrogations, searches, had difficulty in finding jobs, their children were expelled from school, etc. “The enemy constitutes the great justification for terror; the totalitarian state cannot survive without enemies. If they do not exist, they must be invented. Once identified, they deserve no mercy.” (Neculau et al., 2004: 307). Subsequently, the authorities became concerned that dispossessing entire villages and areas densely populated by Germans could result in an economic disaster, because their role in agriculture and typically efficient work could not be easily replaced (Docea et al., 2003).

Although proposals to confiscate the assets of all ethnic Germans in Romania and throw them into work camps were vehiculated at the local level, the Bucharest authorities discouraged such attempts during the period from the end of 1945 to 1946. This was due to the country’s dire internal situation. The central authorities emphasized that the previous attempts to resettle German communities with Romanian colonists resulted only in the destruction of patrimony and the failure to perform agricultural work effectively. This resulted in an extremely poor harvest and further destabilized Romania’s economy, which was already suffering under the strain of reparations payments to the USSR (Budeancă, Olteanu et al., 2008). The Minister of Interior Affairs, Teohari Georgescu, reported that only Germans considered a threat to the country’s

security had been sent to work camps – approximately 15,000 people. For the time being, he explained, the main problem resided in the completion of necessary agricultural works. He demanded that local authorities comply and that all measures must be subordinated to this imperative, at least temporarily. In this context, only those Germans who refused to work the land were to be sent to the camps (Docea et al., 2003).

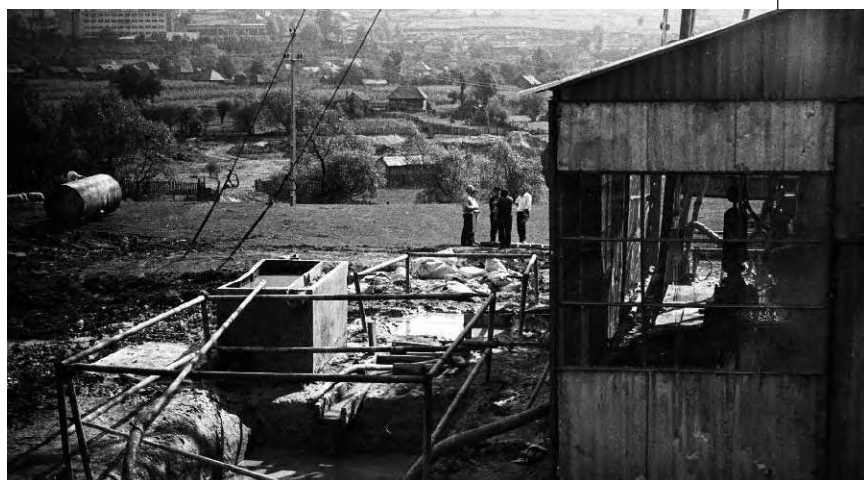
In October 1945, the Central Commission for Agrarian Reform issued Order no. 993, which clarified the norms governing the application of the Law of Agrarian Reform. These clarifications were necessary, given the fact that collecting the harvest and the seeding of fields needed to be accomplished in a manner as efficient as possible. In order to facilitate these operations, the colonization process was temporarily halted. In areas inhabited by ethnic Germans, two categories of persons were established. The first group consisted of persons who had left Romania and did not return until the cutoff date of May 9, 1945. Their assets were classified as state property, in view of the fact that they were regarded as abandoned. The second classification comprised persons already in the country. Their situation had to remain the same as when the order was issued (Docea et al., 2003). If they refused to till the fields, the Germans were accused of sabotage. Half the crop accrued to the state, while the classification system, together with the taxes levied by the authorities, disheartened the German population.

The documents reveal that the local authorities were hostile towards ethnic Germans; an attitude encouraged by the propaganda of the Romanian Communist Party. In their reports, many officials insisted that other political forces were promising the Germans support against the repressive measures to which they were

subjected. They further maintained that Order no. 993 encouraged the German populace to mount fierce opposition against the regime's agrarian policy. They argued that the reforms measures implemented so far had failed to destroy the strong foundation of Saxons and Swabian homesteads and the solidary spirit of their communities. Local officials therefore proposed radical plans, some of which involved the forced resettlement of the ethnic German population in order to redeem marshes for agriculture. Alternatively, they floated schemes to relocate entire villages in remote areas so that they can be transformed into agricultural terrains. These proposals, however, lacked support from the central authorities¹⁵.

Nonetheless, contrary to the provisions of Order no. 993 issued by the Central Commission for Agrarian Reform, local officials continued to issue evacuation orders. In doing so, they were neglecting the fact that some German families had one or several members who had served in the Romanian Army or, alternatively, fitted into categories exempted by the law. In many localities, Germans were condemned en masse as supporters of the German Ethnic Group and of Nazi policies, without regard to any differences that may have existed amongst them. Any démarche to prove otherwise was not perceived as an attempt to establish the factual truth, but as a

15) ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Sașilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 15



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move to preserve one's wealth and enviable economic status in the community.

In many instances, the German population opposed the abusive actions of the authorities and intimidated the colonists into abandoning the houses and lands they had received. Many of those who defended their rights with conviction were returnees. Some had served in the German Army, while others had left during its retreat. Amongst them were even repatriates who had left as early as 1940 or 1941, under the provisions of certain Romanian-German agreements. Based on these facts, many local authorities proposed the evacuation of the entire German population from the region under their administration. To do otherwise, they argued, would render the agrarian reform almost impossible to accomplish.

Because of this precarious situation, there was a great deal of apprehension in the German community, the more so since the Czech and Polish authorities were already proceeding with the mass expulsion of ethnic Germans. They feared that the Romanian authorities were also contemplating this option. Their fears were not groundless; it does seem that the Minister for Nationalities, Gheorghe Vlădescu-Răcoasa, was drafting a bill towards this end. There was also a rumor circulating in the German community that the Romanian government was trying to obtain the Allies' consent for the expulsion of ethnic Germans to Germany (Docea et al., 2003). However, although there were voices demanding such a measure, the Romanian government never formally adopted such a policy. After January 1946, this issue was taken off the table. Nevertheless, the repressive measures continued. Ethnic Germans were still subject to arrest, confined to work camps, and deprived of rights and property. This was particularly the case after the enactment of Decree no. 6/ 1950, which mandated the internment of persons hostile to the regime in work units (Budeancă, Olteanu et al., 2008).

Between 1945 and 1947, the communists were constrained by the necessity of govern-

ing in coalition with other political parties. Hence, they were cautious about applying the quota system adopted from the Soviet model. Nevertheless, the state took firm measures to provision the towns, controlling the collection, transport, and commercialization of agricultural products. New laws came into effect, requiring peasants to retain a sufficient quantity of cereals and/or other plants necessary for subsistence and seeding. The rest had to be turned over to the state, under the threat of prison terms ranging from four to twelve years¹⁶. Hence, the period from 1948 to 1952 fully revealed the harshness of the regime (Ivan et al., 2009).

The communist strategy of acquiring control over the rural world was gradual. In order to prevent the loss of peasant support, the real goals were revealed only after the November 1946 elections. The drought of 1946 and the terms of the armistice accentuated the poverty of rural areas. The imperative of supplying the towns and the occupation troops, as well as the delivery of grain to the USSR and the adherence to other armistice terms, caused the government to alter the quota system, which became increasingly burdensome and abusive. New restrictive measures, designed to strengthen the control of the state, were adopted in 1947. It was the year 1949, however, that proved decisive in the unprecedented transformation of the Romanian rural world according to the Soviet model (Iancu, Țârpău, Trașcă et al., 2000).

Significant numbers of police and security forces were mobilized in order to preclude revolts and exercise control over the countryside. They were tasked with implementing the policies of the communist leadership and of reporting the "activities of the class enemy in the villages." Persons kept under surveillance by the Securitate (secret police) included even those responsible for organizing collective farms. The Securitate also reported if conditions for their establishment existed (Cătănuș, Roske, 2000). The accusations brought against presumed class enemies – whether fabricated or based on facts – were swiftly framed as sedi-

16) Law no. 68/ 1946 provided for the detailed regulation of the quota system. Decree no. 112/ 1948 instituted the State Commission for the Collection of Cereals, tasked with collecting, depositing, and transporting of cereals in order to insure the population's food supply. Decree no. 125/ 5 July 1948 stipulated that producers were obligated to sell their surplus to the state, in order to secure food for the "working population of cities and of regions lacking their own sources of supply." The decree applied especially to wheat, rye, barley, and oats. Producers' contributions increased proportionally to the cultivated area.

tion. Those accused were liable for severe penalties, including the confiscation of wealth, which was of particular interest to the communist authorities. It was only after 1956 that the inventory of goods seized beginning in 1945 got under way. Unfortunately, numerous objects of pecuniary and/or historical value had already gone missing, while the houses had been earmarked as premises for mayoralities, cultural syndicates, etc (Budeancă, Olteanu, 2009).

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The Impact of the 1945 Agrarian Reform on the Transylvanian Saxons' Rural Communities

The German community was especially affected by the process of agrarian reform. Although the law had a powerful impact by means of its formal provisions concerning certain categories of ethnic Germans, its implementation was marked by misconduct and flagrant disregard for the rights of ethnic Germans as Romanian citizens (Zach, 2005).

The colonization of villages inhabited by ethnic Germans proceeded systematically, while their opposition to this process manifested itself in proportion to their numerical density in the region.

The conflict between the German inhabitants and the local agrarian reform commission that erupted in the community of Richiș, located in Târnava Mare district, is a typical example of conditions in Romania's countryside in the year 1946. The dispute erupted when the authorities announced that circa 30 colonists from the counties of Alba and Prahova, as well as from the commune of Ighișul Vechi – Târnava Mare, would be quartered in the houses of Germans residents. The Evangelical priest Andrei Herbert, who was circulating amongst the gathered populace, requested that the commission actually show the orders mandating the housing of colonists and told the assembled crowd that they were meaningless. The General Inspectorate of the

Gendarmerie described the mood of the Richiș German community in note no. 37999/4 September 1946: "throughout this time, Gustav Stoltz affirmed in a loud voice that they will not allow colonists in their house even if blood was spilled. Ioan Schloser likewise declared that, if a colonist was lodged there, he will burn down his property."¹⁷

Shortly thereafter, the committee, led by the mayor, the notary, and the commander of the local gendarmerie, accompanied the 30 colonists to the houses assigned for their lodging. "However, the gates to the residences of all 30 Saxons were locked. In front of house no. 15 there was a group of Saxons who clamored loudly; a fact that determined the authorities to give up and to return to the townhouse." In order to end the resistance of the residents, the gendarme commander summoned Andrei Herbert to the town hall for interrogation. Alarmed by the detainment of the priest, the ethnic German population began a demonstration in front of the townhouse demanding his release. Various incidents took place, resulting in two wounded. In response, the authorities charged Andrei Herbert, Gustav Stoltz, and Ioan Scholer with sedition and requested that they be tried under arrest¹⁸.

Similar situations occurred in the majority of communities inhabited by the German population. This prompted ethnic Germans to send numerous petitions to the authorities, including to the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Interior Affairs¹⁹. Furthermore, following the abuses signaled by the Saxon Democratic Anti-Fascist Union from Sibiu, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie sent to the General Police Directorate a detailed report (no. 158784/15 January 1947) about the aforementioned cases. The report concluded that the majority of German grievances were unfounded²⁰.

As far as the district of Sibiu is concerned, records show that 70 Saxon houses were relinquished in the community of Șelimbăr. The former residents were compelled to relocate in 25 houses. The new lodging arrangements involved four to five families living in one house.

17) ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Sașilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 88

18) *Ibidem*, f. 89

19) *Ibidem*, f. 129

20) *Ibidem*, f. 170

The sources further indicate instances in which widows and disabled war veterans were forced to abandon their homes and/or were expropriated²¹. In the commune of Seleușul Mic – Târnavă Mică district – there was a dispute between the Evangelical Church and the local committee for agrarian reform. The latter had appropriated the parish house and used it as the town hall. The two sides eventually came to terms and the mayoralty evacuated the premises²².

Police reports abound in descriptions of abuses and violence directed at ethnic Germans by colonists or members of the agrarian reform committees. Because of the overall situation, many victims refrained from filing formal complaints. There were also instances, however, when those guilty of violence against ethnic Germans were deferred to justice²³. The memos and reports filed by the representatives of the German community, as well as the efforts of the Evangelical Church, motivated the central authorities to investigate the alleged cases of misconduct. However, the conclusions of the investigation were not surprising. Most complaints were deemed baseless.

In 1946, the Legion of Gendarmes from the city of Brașov investigated the abuses committed by the agrarian reform commissions in the communes of Cristian, Râșnov, and Codlea – Brașov County. Their report stated that most complaints lodged by the Saxon inhabitants were unfounded, and that the property seizures had been carried out in the spirit of the agrarian reform law. There was only one officially confirmed case of abuse perpetrated by the authorities tasked with implementing the agrarian reform. This was in Cristian, where the assets of the Evangelical Church had been confiscated. The report further shows that the violations committed by the administrative authorities had been investigated by the local gendarmes, and that some files had been cleared by the judicial system, while others were in the process of being closed. Moreover, the report emphasized that the *“abuses and so-called maltreatments are due to the well-known fact that the Commissions implementing the*

*agrarian reform legislation encountered great difficulties in the field, because in most instances the Saxons used different methods to resist the expropriation.”*²⁴ The inquests pertaining to the “alleged abuses and arbitrary proceedings of the administrative authorities while applying the agrarian reform” continued throughout October 1946, especially in cases involving war widows or veterans mobilized on the Western front after August 23, 1944²⁵.

There were also instances in which ethnic Germans, who were never members of the German Ethnic Group and had fought in the Romanian Army from the beginning of the war, were stripped of all assets. The declaration filed by Ioan Kilos from Râșnov on December 6, 1946 is revealing:

*... in the name of my son-in-law Otto Streidferd who, together with his wife Erna, née Kloos, was arrested on 13 January 1945 and sent to Russia for obligatory labor, leaving in the care of the undersigned [Ioan Kloos] a 5 year old boy. Neither my son-in-law, nor my daughter were enrolled in the German Ethnic Group. The aforementioned [Otto Streidferd] was mobilized from 1939 until the date of his discharge, rendering 1107 days of service on the field of battle with his unit, the 10th Mechanized Cavalry Regiment. All of the above statements can be confirmed by the Prahova Territorial Administration*²⁶.

Any attempt to seek justice from the authorities or the judicial system was destined to fail. The justice system had been purged and was now serving the new regime of popular democracy. Persons who had been arrested had to wait years until their trial date was set. The trials were politicized and often public, so that they may influence public opinion and discourage others from similar actions. The accused were presumed guilty and their sentences established in advance (Ivan et al., 2009).

In 1948, under increasing pressure from petitions and interventions from the German population, the Evangelical Church, or other organizations, the authorities tried to evaluate the stage and consequences of the expropria-

21) Ibidem, f. 173

22) Ibidem, f. 174

23) Ibidem, f. 175

24) Ibidem, f. 177-178

25) Ibidem, f. 180

26) Ibidem, f. 222

tion process. They likewise attempted to assess the Germans' socio-economic situation²⁷. In the opinion of the authorities, the expropriated German families were obligated to leave their homesteads after the eviction order was issued. Colonists or newly propertied peasants were to take their place. Practically, however, it was impossible to place the German families in other residences. Consequently, a compromise solution emerged. The ethnic Germans remained in their former homes and/or homesteads until the authorities assigned them other accommodations, or until they found another domicile on their own initiative. Many of the expropriated Germans managed to remain in their homes by reaching an understanding with the new owners.

Nevertheless, numerous disagreements arose between the newly propertied and the dispossessed Germans. The authorities intervened in favor of the former and evicted the Germans, who were still living in their former homes. For example, in the community of Apoldul de Sus, Sibiu district, 40 families were expelled. The homeless families were placed with other ethnic Germans who had not been expropriated. A somewhat similar situation existed in other communities throughout the district: 57 expulsions were registered at Tălmaciu; in the community of Bradu, there were 26 cases; in Avrig, only two instances were recorded. Most of these expulsions took place in 1945 and a few in 1946²⁸.

In 1948, numerous ethnic Germans returned to Romania from forced labor in the USSR. Thus, the number of expulsions rose dramatically compared to previous years, the more so since the authorities were eager to dispel the tensions caused by rumors that the German population would receive back the lands, houses, and goods confiscated under the terms of the agrarian reform law. On the other hand, the German populace was hoping for equal rights and a just settlement of their situation. In their interpretation, this meant the return of their houses and goods. The repatriates' attitudes are noteworthy. They regarded the confiscation of their assets as un-

just and insisted that German city dwellers had been spared such measures. At the same time, local authorities recorded conflicts between ethnic Germans and persons who had received their goods²⁹.

The Braşov Securitate Regional Directorate reported serious disagreements between the colonists and the German population, especially in the areas of Braşov and Făgăraş, which had received a large influx of colonists. The principal cause of conflict was the attitude of the colonists. They did not work the land they had received and resorted to the former Saxon owners or other members of the German community for agricultural labor. Moreover, although there were verbal agreements in place providing for the equal sharing of the harvest between the colonist and the person who worked the land, many colonists reneged on them because they desired the entire crop.

In addition, although they often lived on the same premises, the Germans expected the colonists to maintain and repair the buildings, since they regarded them as the new owners. On their part, the colonists demanded that the Germans maintain the houses. This they refused to do, arguing that the properties were no longer theirs. As a result, the neglected buildings decayed. Oftentimes, the colonists sold the agricultural stock – ranging from tools to farm animals – they had received. Other colonists were alcoholics or provoked fights and arguments, especially with the German population. Still others exhibited a complete lack of interest in maintaining their new assets, reasoning that the collectivization process would soon be underway. After documenting over twenty disputes between colonists and Saxons over housing, accusations of theft etc., the Securitate concluded that in the Braşov region “the general mood is very tense.”³⁰

Most times, the colonists reached an agreement with the former owners and worked the land together. The Germans usually paid the colonists in kind, either with a share of the crop or by helping maintain the homestead. The records of the Securitate men-

27) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 182

28) *Ibidem*, f. 355

29) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 356

30) *Ibidem*, f. 401

tion many such concrete cases³¹. Nevertheless, the very same records state that the Securitate did not have a complete picture of this phenomenon, because the agreements were verbal and kept secret. At the same time, the official inquiries reveal that in communities also inhabited by Germans the labor force for agricultural projects was recruited entirely from their ranks. On the other hand, the records describe the emergence of a new attitude in the German community: *“Following the establishment of the German Anti-Fascist Committee, the German population partially abandoned their attitude towards the settler and native population, and speak openly that, once enrolled in this democratic organization, they will regain, at least in part, their former properties, especially their houses.”*³²

Colonists who had sold the entire agricultural stock received from the state and were working the land with the help of ethnic Germans also appear in the records of the Securitate. The list is long, comprising tens of cases in several communes, especially in the Făgăraș region. The authorities were also concerned about cases such as those recorded in the sub-district of Ciuc, where the colonists had sold all the wheat and, because they lacked seeds, had left 90% of the agricultural land unseeded.³³

In the Cluj region, three conflicts were recorded in October 1949 between settlers and the German population; in Dedrad commune – Mureș district, six colonists were identified as working the land with the help of ethnic Germans³⁴. The document, written by the Cluj branch of the Securitate, also refers to previous conflicts, particularly those that had erupted in the summer of 1946, when some of the ethnic Germans who had fled the country in September-October 1944 began to return home and found their households and lands utilized by settlers or newly propertied natives.

Thus, in the commune of Terpiu-Năsăud, the returned Saxons started to demand their property rights, especially over houses and movable goods. Differences arose on these grounds, resulting in the eviction of the Saxons by the set-

*tlar and the newly propertied natives. At the time, the expulsion was carried out by means of brutal acts and, to this day, no Saxon dares to establish himself in this [formerly] purely Saxon community. The Saxons expelled from their native communes established themselves in Romanian communities – such as the case of the Saxons from Terpiu who settled in Blăjenii de Sus and Blăjenii de Jos.*³⁵

Because of the hostile climate and disputes with settlers or newly propertied persons, many refugee German families who had returned to Romania in 1945 left the country again in the period from 1946 to 1947. They crossed the frontier clandestinely in order to reach Austria or Germany (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). The authorities were particularly concerned about such cases in the communes of Satul Nou, Petriș and Chiraleș. There were also instances in which the economic situation of ethnic Germans was better than that of the colonists, mostly in the communities of Iad, Sângeorzul Nou, Lechința, etc., where state farms existed. This is because they were in a position to benefit from their training as viticulturists, veterinarians, and horticulturalists. As employees of the state farm, they were entitled to ration coupons, could eat at the canteen, and were exempt from taxes. The following example is illustrative: *“[...] the case of Grișier Toma from Iad commune, who practices the occupation of veterinary technician and for this reason the population respects him, [as well as] the case of Grosșer Ioan from Lechița, viniculture and fruit growing specialist, who is consulted not only by the populace, but also by the state farm, etc.”*³⁶

Following the expropriations and abuses that took place based on March 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform, there was an acute housing shortage in the German community. Barred by the colonists from living in the houses that they had previously owned, many families of German descent were forced to seek shelter in school buildings, cultural centers, or abandoned parish houses. Particularly noteworthy cases occurred in the communes of Dumitra, Iad, Lechința, Sângeorzul, Nou Sâniacob, and

31) Ibidem, f. 402

32) Ibidem, f. 409

33) Ibidem, f. 404

34) Ibidem, f. 406

35) Ibidem, f. 408

36) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Sașilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 410

Dorlea – in the region of Cluj. As late as 1949, in Dorlea there were four families comprising roughly fourteen persons each living on the premises of the former German religious school. Although the authorities admonished them to vacate the school, both the locals and the settlers refused to take them in³⁷.

The Sibiu People's Security Regional Directorate estimated that a conflictual situation persisted between the colonists and the ethnic German population. There were various reasons for this state of affairs, but there were also cases, such the one in Gârbova, where the Provisional Committee had decided to evict and move to other housing all ethnic Germans who shared premises with the colonists, but the latter insisted that the German families stay. The two sides had come to an agreement, whereby the Germans gave the colonists various household goods in exchange for remaining on their former properties. The documents also detail 26 disputes between Saxons and colonists involving housing and/or the apportionment of the harvest, as well as 103 cases of settlers using Germans to work the land without even residing in the locality where they had been given property³⁸.

In the Deva area, yet also in the communities of Batiz, Reciu and Gârbova, colonists were given significant quantities of rye seeds, but they lacked the necessary agricultural expertise and compromised the harvest. Consequently, the Provisional Committees decided to stop giving settlers the necessary seeds. Furthermore, many colonists abandoned the homes they had received. Thus, the buildings fell into disrepair. German families therefore petitioned the authorities for permission to move back into their former homes, committing themselves to undertake the necessary repairs³⁹. The Cluj People's Security Regional Directorate reported in address no. 12/ 28263 of 10 November 1949 tens of specific conflicts between colonists and ethnic Germans⁴⁰. In the Făgăraș area, the situation was likewise tense (Roșca, 2007), as there was a great deal of resistance against the measures imposed by the authorities.

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Conclusions

After August 23, 1944, the repressive measures adopted by the Romanian authorities against ethnic Germans were applied without conviction. They were interned in camps or sent away to labor detachments. This lack of zeal annoyed the Soviets, who insisted on harsh actions that included deportations to forced labor in the USSR. In the period from 1945 to 1949, Romania's German community experienced tragedy. Its members were deprived of rights, regarded as enemies, and blamed for the country's catastrophic condition. Thus, they lived in constant fear of the forms and methods by means of which the communist authorities implemented their repressive policies. They were terrorized at the prospect of deportation to the USSR, of being sent away to labor brigades, of having their wealth confiscated – especially in rural areas. The label "Hitlerite" justified the unimaginable cruelties perpetrated on the members of this community, and, for that matter, on the entire Soviet occupied country.

Seeing that they were deprived of the right to work, to education, and to a decent life upon their return after four years of forced labor in the USSR, many ethnic Germans hardened their belief that they had no future in Romania (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). Some of them even asserted that the USSR had at least insured that they had food. People who described the terrible ordeals they were forced to endure came to the attention of the Securitate and, in some cases, were sent to labor camps. Others took the significant risk of trying to flee the country in the hope of reaching Austria or Germany. However, many ethnic Germans chose to stay in Romania, hoping that the situation will improve. The hostility towards the German population diminished in intensity after 1949, at least on the rhetorical level. This new course was dictated by the change in Moscow's discourse and methods. Following the creation of the two German states, the Soviets were trying to gain the sup-

37) *Ibidem*, f. 409

38) *Ibidem*, f. 416

39) *Ibidem*, f. 418

40) *Ibidem*, f. 421

port of the German population for their plans to reconfigure postbellic Europe. Unlike the mass expulsions of ethnic Germans that occurred in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary towards the end of 1944 and in 1945, in Romania their situation was entirely different. This fact is proven by the large number of ethnic Germans who fled Romania alongside the German Army in 1944 for fear of persecution by Soviet troops, but returned in 1946-1947.

Having come to power by force, the communist regime employed terror and repression in order to gain control over society. Because they were regarded as a threat to the regime, members of ethnic minorities, alongside outstanding personalities and regular people from all social categories, were deprived of rights, put under surveillance, arrested, deported, or killed (Ernu, Rogozanu, Şiulea, Țichindeleanu et al., 2008). The communist regime took radical decisions, targeting Germans for collective punishment as a distinct ethnic group by means of confiscating their wealth. Their opposition to the arbitrary expropriation measures decreed by authorities intensified the virulence of the repression against them. The objective of the communist regime was to eliminate the homesteads of the Saxon peasantry and deprive them of their livelihood, thereby forcing their move to cities in search of work – frequently to entirely different regions of the country. In this way, the unity and solidarity of the German communities from Transylvania and Banat would be destroyed. The Evangelical Church lent strong support to the community, but was unable to stop the devastation of the Transylvanian Saxon rural world by the communist regime.

After 1956, the regime adopted a more tolerant policy towards Romania's national minorities. However, the decline in living standards and the agreements between Bucharest and Bonn prompted the mass emigration of ethnic Germans to the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1970s. The exodus reached another highpoint during the 1990s. The census numbers help form an overall comparative picture. In 1930, 745,421 per-

sons identified themselves as being of German origin; the 1956 census recorded only 384,421 ethnic Germans; in 1992, the statistics mentioned only 111,301 persons of German ethnicity.

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