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Recent Studies on Past and Present II. Power, Belief and Identity

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The Repatriation of the Germans from Latvia and Romania at the Beginning of World War II

Some Comparative Aspects

BOGDAN-ALEXANDRU SCHIPOR

THE DIFFICULTIES and the ultimate failure of the tripartite negotiations between the Soviet Union, France and Britain in the summer of 1939 made a Soviet-German agreement even more likely. Since early August, the contacts between Berlin and Moscow had become increasingly close. Unlike the British and the French, the Germans were ready to take into account Kremlin's "vital interests" in Eastern Europe and the Baltic area.¹ Therefore, the Soviets decided to accept the German proposals and to send back, politely, the Anglo-French mission that was to negotiate and possibly conclude a Tripartite Treaty.²

The Soviets, however, interpreted in their own way the German offer, and Stalin stated in the meeting of the Politburo of CP (b.) of U.S.S.R. on August 19, 1939 that Germany had accepted Moscow's full freedom of action in the Baltic countries, the restitution (sic!) of Bessarabia and the assignment to the Soviets of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, as a zone of influence. According to the Kremlin leader, the only question that remained open was that of Yugoslavia.³

The actual demarcation of spheres of influence would be made upon conclusion of the Secret Additional Protocol to the German-Soviet non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939. Thus, the Germans recognized Moscow's interests in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland – beyond the line of the rivers Narva, Vistula, San – and Bessarabia. At least for now, Lithuania belonged to the German sphere of interest, but Lithuania's rights over the Vilna region were recognized.⁴

The military defeat of Poland and its disappearance as a political entity required the conclusion of a new agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union. The

border between the two great powers was thus defined by the Treaty concluded on September 28, 1939, following a second visit of Ribbentrop to Moscow.⁵ This was the situation the Soviets took advantage of to get Lithuania in return for the Warsaw and Lublin regions, which were ceded to Germany.⁶ It seems that this time Stalin was satisfied with the new territorial gains, declaring to Khrushchev that the Soviet Union had *de facto* right over the Baltic countries and Finland.⁷

The Soviets had already begun to apply a new political line in the three Baltic States. Under these circumstances, the Estonian Foreign Minister Karl Selter was invited to Moscow on September 24, 1939, to sign a commercial treaty. Instead of such a document, the Soviets demanded the approval for military bases – army, naval and air – of the Red Army and the Red Fleet on the territory of Estonia and the conclusion of a Mutual Assistance Pact.⁸ Estonia accepted Moscow's requests by signing on September 28 the respective Mutual Assistance Pact, supplemented by a Secret Protocol.

Upon the conclusion of this document, the Soviets seemed to have overcome a psychological threshold in their policy towards their western neighbours.⁹ The Estonian example speaks for itself. The Soviet Union was prepared to threaten and use force to impose its “protection” and “support.” The mutual assistance pacts concluded later with Latvia, on October 5, 1939 and with Lithuania on October, 10 were obtained without resorting to force.¹⁰ These treaties contained broadly similar provisions with the document signed by Estonia and they provided, as clear as possible, that the sovereignty of the three Baltic States would not be impaired, and their political and economic systems would not undergo changes.¹¹

One can ask why Moscow chose this, apparently subtle, way to project its influence abroad. First of all, perhaps, to show the advantage – in terms of security, but not only – that could be gained by the states that accepted the Soviet “assistance.” Thus, the possibility was created that such a “model” would attract others, such as Finland, Bulgaria or Romania.¹² In fact, just two days after the conclusion of the mutual assistance pact between the Soviet Union and Lithuania, on October 12, 1939, the Bulgarian Minister at Berlin informed the German Foreign Ministry about the proposal already made by Molotov to the Bulgarian authorities to conclude a mutual assistance pact, a proposition initially rejected by Sofia, then conditioned by the presentation of more concrete proposals by the Soviet party.¹³

In the West, the public opinion condemned in categorical terms the fact that the Germans conceded the Baltic area to the Soviets, qualifying it as a “historical and moral disaster,”¹⁴ perhaps even more serious considering that Hitler himself had emphasized in *Mein Kampf* that the Baltic area represented a space in which the *Reich's* influence had to prevail.¹⁵ Under these circumstances, the mutual assistance pacts concluded by the Soviets were considered to be no more than the

means of imposing a protectorate that could end the independence of three Baltic States.¹⁶ Moreover, at least in the French press, there were speculations regarding a possible annexation of the three Baltic States by the Soviet Union.¹⁷ Basically this meant that the Red Army troops were right in front of Eastern Prussia, dominating an area where the prevalent German influence was to be replaced by the Soviet influence. Further proof that things were as such is *The Agreement on the Transfer of Latvian citizens of German Origin in Germany*, concluded on October 30, 1939 between Germany and Latvia and through which 49,885 Latvian citizens of German origin were “repatriated” to Germany.¹⁸

The German authorities wanted this transfer to be made as a single operation, the agreement itself, supplemented by an *Additional Protocol*, regulating the situation of the movable and immovable property that emigrants left behind and, as much as possible, the damage that the departure of the citizens of German origin would produce to the Latvian economy.¹⁹

According to the first article of the agreement, the Latvian government undertook to rescind the Latvian citizenship of the Latvian citizens of German origin who, voluntarily, would declare their willingness to renounce Latvian citizenship and to leave their residences in Latvia. They were to be welcomed in Germany and receive German citizenship immediately after the rescindment of the Latvian one.

The rescindment of citizenship could be requested by any person of German origin who was at least 16 years old. Spouses were to decide individually whether or not they opted to renounce the Latvian citizenship, while for minors under 16 years old the decision was to be taken by their parents or guardians. The Latvian authorities undertook not to hinder in any way and, moreover, to expedite the entire administrative process, the request to renounce one’s citizenship being exempted in this respect from stamp and chancery taxes. Moreover, the Latvian party undertook to release from service, upon request, the persons of German origin who served in the army or were civil, municipal or ecclesiastical servants.²⁰

Once they received the documents attesting to the rescindment of citizenship, either from the Latvian Interior Ministry or the diplomatic and consular representations – if such persons were outside Latvia – the Latvian immigrants had to leave by December 15, 1939, the expenses incurred being borne by the German state. From this obligation were exempted only those considered as essential for the proper functioning of enterprises, businesses, or key institutions.

At the same time, the Latvian authorities would create an *ad hoc* committee with the task of regulating the legal issues related to the Latvian properties of those who opted for emigration. The German party, in turn, created a stock company called *Umsiedlungs-Treuhand-Aktiengesellschaft*, with the acronym UTAG,

subject to the Latvian legislation on joint-stock companies, except for derogations listed in the Additional Protocol to the Agreement, relating to the movable property which could not be imported or exported.²¹

The immovable properties of the emigrants were to be taken up by the Latvian State, after a thorough inventory, but their management was entrusted exclusively to UTAG. They were to be assessed according to criteria mutually agreed upon by the two parties and liquidated until December 31, 1941. If the Latvian court and UTAG did not reach a common point view on the value of some goods, the agreement would be made at the level of the two governments.²²

The plants or businesses of the immigrants were also to be inventoried. From among these, those that were important for the smooth development of the German-Latvian trade relations were to be subjected to a separate bilateral agreement, while the management of the remaining businesses would be assigned solely to the Latvian authorities. However, the possibility of private agreements was not excluded. Moreover, if the Latvian party decided upon the liquidation of a company, the implementation of the decision was made in accordance with Latvian law, but fell within the competence of the company owner or UTAG. The liquidation of the Latvian associations, companies or profitable real estate that belonged to German parishes were also to be carried out according to the Latvian legislation.²³

A German-Latvian Joint Commission would handle the financial assets of the emigrants, contracted in Latvia. Those that had to be extinguished before the liquidation of UTAG were to be paid or warranted for a period not exceeding 10 years, and the cash and assets were to be paid into a special account created by the Bank of Latvia, while the debts of the Latvian side had to be paid in the form of additional exports of goods to the *Reich*.²⁴

The Latvian citizens of German descent who opted for repatriation were transferred to the region Posen, now Poznan, but the problems related to the property and assets that they have left behind were made difficult by the fact that in June 1940 the Soviet Union annexed the small Baltic state. The German authorities still tried to regulate this situation based on the good relations Berlin still had with Moscow, and this became the subject of a bilateral agreement, concluded on January 10, 1941. But the cooling of the German-Soviet relations and the outbreak of the war between two great powers annulled any possibility of a fair resolution.

As for the situation of the Germans in Romania, this was regulated a year later, in 1940. As I have pointed out above, it is possible that the Soviets had wanted to apply the model of mutual assistance treaties, as a first step towards the annexation in the case of Romania as well, but the Finnish interlude provided Bucharest with a respite.

The Peace Treaty signed by Finland on March 12, 1940 represented for the Soviet Union “the accomplishment of the task to secure its safety on the Baltic Sea,” as stated by Molotov on March 29, 1940, in a speech before the Supreme Soviet. On the same occasion, the Soviet diplomat stated that, as for the relations with Romania, although there was a non-aggression pact between the two states, and the seizure (sic!) of Bessarabia was never recognized by Moscow, there was no question of taking this region by force or worsening the relations with Bucharest.²⁵

However, mid-June 1940, Moscow presented their ultimatum to the Baltic States: to Lithuania on June 14, to Estonia and Latvia on June 16. This was followed by the annexation itself, and then, on June 26, 1940, the ultimatum to Romania. The authorities in Bucharest accepted, as it is well known, the Soviet terms, ceding Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and Hertza area, the last two territories not being included in the provisions of the Secret Additional Protocol of August 1939. On this occasion, Molotov was to declare that, on the contrary, the mutual assistance pacts concluded by the Soviet Union and the Baltic states in the autumn of the previous year “had not produced the desired results,” but, nevertheless, the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens, as well as those of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina became Soviet citizens “with great joy.”²⁶ Molotov also believed that the bilateral relations with Romania could now return to normal.²⁷

The German authorities, who had given their consent, in the previous year, to the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviets, requested Moscow on this occasion to address the issue of the approximately 100,000 ethnic Germans who lived in the region between Prut and Dnester. But Berlin was intrigued by the fact that the Soviet ultimatum to Romania also referred to Bukovina and Hertza area, territories where there also lived many citizens of German origin.²⁸ Their situation could be dealt directly with the Soviets, but the *Reich* leaders were also taking into account the repatriation of the Germans in Romania. As in the case of Latvia, this was the object of a bilateral Romanian-German agreement, published in the “Monitorul Oficial” of October 30, 1940. According to this document, that made direct reference to ethnic Germans from southern Bukovina and Dobrudja, any person of German origin from the abovementioned territories was entitled to seek repatriation. Once they received and registered the repatriation ticket, the applicant entered the care of the German state and was subject to the obligations under the Repatriation Convention. His property, movable and immovable, that remained in the country was transferred to the Romanian state, which paid compensation in accordance with market prices.

The outstanding debt of the repatriate to the Romanian state, generated by the abandonment of his or her wealth was resigned to the German government,

which also undertook to pay compensation. Finally, each repatriate was entitled to take, duty free, 50 kg of luggage, his or her spouse another 30 kg, and furthermore, each family could also take another 500 kg of large baggage.²⁹ For comparison, the Soviets allowed the ethnic Germans from areas it controlled and who had requested repatriation to take up to 50 kg large baggage, 30 kg hand luggage and 2.000 lei of all their belongings.

Together with the respective citizens, there were also expatriated to Germany parish registers, documents of some German associations, societies and unions, as well as those of the administrative authorities in the villages that were completely repatriated. To manage the entire relocation process, a German Repatriation Bureau was founded in Bucharest, its German acronym being D.A.S., whose employees had the status of diplomatic officials. In its turn, the Romanian party created within the Ministry of National Economy a Sub-secretariat of State for Colonization and Evacuated Population, which operated a General Commissariat for the Repatriation of the German Population. Its activity was to be supported by the local commissioners, the village mayors and the leaders of the legionary garrisons in the area.³⁰

As can be seen, the Romanian authorities did not impose restrictions on the citizens of German origin that opted for repatriation. Although they were losing a significant workforce and they took on a substantial financial effort by absorbing into the public debt the value of the repatriates' property, the Romanian authorities have adopted this attitude because they could use the assets and the inventory of agricultural land left behind by ethnic Germans to house and eventually to compensate, at least partly, the refugees from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and subsequently, those from north-western Transylvania, territories lost by the Romanian state in the fatidic year 1940. Because they lacked the necessary financial strength to purchase the real estate of the German repatriates and, on the other hand, because of the rich supply generated by this exodus, many properties were in the end assessed under the market price. Under these conditions, it is obvious that this was not due to the Romanian authorities' malice, and the German party understood and agreed with the reasons on which this fact was based.³¹

Unlike the case of Latvia, there were many Germans repatriated from Romania who later decided to return to their birthplace. Their situation was handled by the Sub-secretary of State for Romanization, Colonization and Inventory. In 1940 and 1941, the representatives of this institution have identified in concentration camps in Germany approximately 5000 people who decided to return to Romania. They were brought by train up to Vienna and then they were transported into the country on the Danube River. Afterwards, until 1943, 8 217 persons were found in this situation, among them being many who came from the territories annexed by the Soviets in 1940.³²

In retrospect, the political decision to repatriate the ethnic Germans either from Latvia or from Romania, irrespective of the administrative or legal measures that accompanied and facilitated it, created, on both sides, deep human and social distortions whose consequences can still be felt today.

At the same time, however, the repatriations from Latvia and Romania represented an accurate indicator of the fate and the particular situation of these countries. The Germans in Latvia, for example, were generally happy with the possibility of immigrating to Germany, the measures taken jointly by the two governments encouraging and facilitating this process. Moreover, the repatriation of the Germans from Latvia was made in a political context in which the Soviet threat was not perceived as an immediate one, not even by the German authorities. As noted, there were bilateral provisions indicating terms of up to 10 years for the settlement of the situation. Under these circumstances, it is likely that the meaning given by Germans to 'spheres of influence' did not include the annexation itself, but other forms of domination. The Germans in Latvia could choose the repatriation in a political climate that did not anticipate Moscow's aggression. In fact, in 1932 Latvia had concluded a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union and in October 1939 one of mutual assistance. The Latvian State also concluded a non-aggression treaty with Germany in the summer of 1939. Thus, there was nothing disturbing – in fact it was normal – about the fact that Germany concluded a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1939.

Berlin, on the other hand, knew that the tiny Baltic state entered the Soviet sphere of interest. The Soviet-Latvian Mutual Assistance Treaty confirmed Moscow's decision to implement to the letter the Secret Additional Protocol of August 23, 1939, so the decision to repatriate the ethnic Germans from Latvia did nothing but confirm the decisions made by Molotov and Ribbentrop.

Beyond such a confirmation, otherwise inevitable, the repatriation of the Germans from southern Bukovina and Dobrudja, in 1940, was also determined by other reasons. The Germans were taken aback by the fact that the Soviets claimed and subsequently annexed the northern part of Bukovina and Hertza area. The negotiations regarding the repatriation of the Germans from Romania began almost immediately, and when they were completed in the autumn of 1940, the ethnic Germans from southern Bukovina, and not only, had enough reasons to opt for leaving for Germany. Romania had lost vast territories in a very short time, the waves of refugees and, with them, the news that came especially from the territories occupied by Soviets, were increasingly disturbing, so leaving for Germany was for many the option of a safer life for them and their families. The fact that many of these people returned later was determined not only by homesickness, but also by the fact that the Romanian domestic situation stayed somewhat stable and peaceful until 1943-44.

However, it remains certain that the repatriation of Germans from Eastern Europe in 1939 and 1940, beyond any similarities or differences, nuances or consequences, was only one element in the redefinition of the spheres of influence, a barometer of the Soviet-German relations and aggression. □

Notes

1. *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, (hereinafter, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*) Edited by Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie, Washington, Department of State, 1948, Department of State Publication 3023, p. 33.
2. The State University of Moldova, World History Department, *Polonezii în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial. Culegere de documente [The Poles During World War II. Collection of Documents]*, Editor, Introduction, Notes and Commentaries – prof. univ. Anatol Petrencu, Dr. Hab. of Historical Sciences, Chişinău, Cartdidact, 2004, p. 24.
3. *Ibidem*.
4. *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, p. 78.
5. Emilian I. Bold, *Războiul de iarnă sovieto-finlandez (30 noiembrie 1939-12 martie 1940)*, [*The Russo-Finnish Winter War (November 30, 1939-March 12, 1940)*], Iaşi, Universitas XXI, 2001, p. 59.
6. *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, p. 107.
7. Cf. Emilian I. Bold, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
8. *Ibidem*.
9. Saulius Suľiedelis, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Baltic States: An Introduction and Interpretations*, in „Lituanus”, Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences, Volume 35, No. 1, Spring 1989, < http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_1_02.htm >
10. *Ibidem*.
11. Edgar Anderson, *The Pact of Mutual Assistance between the U.S.S.R. and the Baltic States*, in *Baltic History*, Editors Arvids Ziedonis Jr., William L. Winter, Mardi Valgemäe, Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, Inc., Columbus, Ohio, The Ohio State University, 1974, p. 242.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 246.
13. *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, p. 124.
14. Renè Pinon, *Chronique de la Quinzaine*, dans „Revue des deux mondes”, CIX^e année, [1939], Tom 54, Livraison du 15 octobre, p. 733.
15. Cf. *ibidem*, Livraison du 1^{er} novembre, p. 132.
16. *Ibidem*, Livraison du 15 octobre, p. 733.
17. Gabriel-Louis Jaray, *Les États de la Baltique et l'accord germano-russe* (sic!), dans „Revue des deux mondes”, CIX^e année, [1939], Tom 54, Livraison du 1^{er} novembre, p. 32.
18. Later, an agreement on the same subject was concluded by Germans with the occupying Soviet forces, on January 10, 1940. See the bilingual facsimile *Likumun un*

Ministru kabineta noteikumu krajumus on November 8, 1939 in Janis Dagis, *Prezidents Karlis Ulmanis III.*, Riga, Ed. Latvijas Universitate, 1990, p. 529. A similar procedure was also recorded in the case of Romania, but the situation of our country, at the time, was different from that of Latvia in the autumn of 1939.

19. *Accord sur le transfert des citoyens lettons d'origine allemande en Allemagne du 30 octobre 1939*, <<http://www.letton.ch/lvrapatr.htm>.>
20. *Ibidem*.
21. *Ibidem*, Chapter VI of the Agreement.
22. *Ibidem*, Chapter IX of the Agreement
23. *Ibidem*, Chapter XIII of the Agreement.
24. *Ibidem*, Chapter XVIII of the Agreement.
25. V. M. Molotov, *The Foreign Policy of the Government*, A Report by the Chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs <Soviet of the Supreme session VI meeting> on March 29, 1940, State Publishing House of Political Literature, 1940, <<http://www.pp.clinet.fi/~pkr01/history/molotov.html>>
26. Cf. Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945*, s.l., Discus Books, Published by Avon, 1970, p. 111.
27. *Ibidem*.
28. *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, p. 155; see also p. 158.
29. Franz Wiszniowski, *Radautz. Cel mai german oraş din Ţara Fagilor [Radautz. The Most German Town in Beech Country]*, editor Franz Wiszniowski, Excerpts in free translation by prof. Ilie Vişan, p. 257-258.
30. Ştefan Purici, *Strămutarea germanilor sud-bucovineni şi impactul asupra societăţii româneşti(III) [The Relocation of the Germans of Southern Bukovina and its Impact on the Romanian Society(III)]*, in "Crai Nou", year XII, 2990, Tuesday, June 12, 2001, p. 3.
31. Idem, *Strămutarea germanilor sud-bucovineni şi impactul asupra societăţii româneşti(IV) [The Relocation of the Germans of Southern Bukovina and its Impact on the Romanian Society(IV)]Ibidem*

Abstract

The Repatriation of the Germans from Latvia and Romania at the Beginning of World War II. Some Comparative Aspects

Beyond aspects strictly related to political or territorial issues, the Soviet-German non-aggression pact signed on August 23rd, 1939 generated important demographic mutations in Eastern Europe, hard to foresee prior to the outbreak of the war. After the delineation of the spheres of influence and the new possessions of Germany and Soviet Union, Berlin tried to determine the German ethnics in Eastern Europe, including from territories obtained by the Soviet Union, to choose to return to Germany, considered the true homeland. This decision was the basis for an ample program for the repatriation of the German ethnics, first from the Baltic States and than from other countries, including Romania.

In the Romanian case, the German authorities, who had agreed in august 1939 to the annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union, asked Moscow on this occasion to solve the problem of the almost 100.000 German ethnics who lived in the region between Prut and Dnester. Berlin was intrigued by the fact that the Soviet ultimatum addressed to Romania in June 1940 referred equally to Bukovina and the Hertza area, territories on which also lived many people of German origin. Their issue could be solved directly with the Soviets, but the *Reich's* leaders also took into account the repatriation of the Germans from Romania.

But, obviously, we never lose sight of the fact that the repatriation of the Germans from Bukovina, Bessarabia or Dobrudja represented only a part of a much larger process which cannot be fully understood if we do not compare it, for example, to similar phenomena in the Baltic countries. The repatriation of the German ethnics from Latvia can emphasize both similarities and distinctions which, together, can form a more accurate image on an uprooted ethnic group seeking a new identity in the old homeland, animated by promises, hopes and dreams of a better life. However, it remains certain that the repatriation of Germans from Eastern Europe in 1939 and 1940, beyond any similarities or differences, nuances or consequences, was only one element in the redefinition of the spheres of influence, a barometer of the Soviet-German relations and aggression.

Keywords

repatriation, Germans, aggression, mutual assistance pacts, spheres of influence, Baltic States