

Political religions in the 20th century

The *Heim ins Reich* action

Case study: Bukowina's German ethnics' road back to Germany

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Members of the German community in southern Bukowina can be differentiated according to the approach they made in World War II. On the one hand, there are those who opted for emigration to Germany (the so-called *heim ins Reich* action) and who constituted the majority of the community (45 000-50 000).¹

On the other hand, there are those who stayed in Romania, along with the Romanians, who are of course a minority (3000-4000). Of course, one question can be: why and what determined some Germans to go to Germany and others to stay in Romania? Can we talk about National-Socialism/doctrinal beliefs for some and fidelity to the birthplaces (Heimat), implicitly Bukowina/Romania for others? Or can we talk about opportunism for some and pragmatism and realism for others?

In historiography these topics have been treated in two separate books by Mariana Hausleitner. The issue of ethnic Germans who opted for 'heim ins Reich' is documented in *Much of the Mixture has been taken*.² On the other side, the cases of some of those who decided to stay in southern Bukowina are presented in *An Atmosphere of Hope*.³ Practically, in the second book are presented cases of ethnic Germans (but not only Germans) from all over the Romanian state from 1940-1944 who helped and saved the Jews from deportation and implicitly annihilation. Tangentially, several situations in Bucovina are reached. But the subject of this book is not only Bukowina and not only the ethnic Germans from Bukowina. For these reasons, a deepening of the situation of ethnic Germans who remained in southern Bukowina is necessary. What determined the 3000-4000 ethnic Germans to remain in Romania? Is it possible to speak in their case of patriotism, or only in the case of those who

¹ Daniel Hrenciuc, *Acasa in Reich. Stramutarea germanilor din Regatul Roman*, Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2018.

² Mariana Hausleitner, 'Viel Mischmasch mitgenommen': *Die Umsiedlung aus der Bukowina 1940. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, Buchreihe der Kommission für Geschichte und Kultur Deutschen in Südosteuropa, Band 43, 2018.

³ Mariana Hausleitner, *Eine Atmosphäre von Hoffnung und Zuversicht*, Lukas Verlag, Berlin, 2021

decided to go to Germany? What does patriotism mean for an ethnic German in Romania led by King Charles II or/and King Michael I? What does Vaterland mean for an ethnic German in Romania? What does patriotism mean for a German, the acceptance of the mosaic formed by the complexity and diversity of the communities in his native country regardless of their religion, culture, language? In whose cases can we discuss about pragmatism or opportunism?⁴

These are the main questions that this research seeks to answer. From a methodological point of view, the analysis of primary sources is indispensable. Therefore, for the documentation of the *heim ins Reich* action⁵, I have read relevant documents from the Federal Archives of Freiburg im Breisgau⁶ and Berlin Lichterfelde as well as the Archive of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. Thus for example, in the Archives of the Berlin Institute of Foreign Affairs (Deutsches Auslandwissenschaft Institut Berlin), articles from this period 1940-1941 are preserved.⁷ However, they are written in favor of German propaganda and implicitly of the regime established in Bucharest after September 6, 1940. I also researched the Archives in Poland, in Lodz and Poznan,⁸ as well as in France in Strasbourg.⁹ I analyzed also the situation of ethnic Germans in both sides, southern¹⁰ and northern¹¹ Bukowina. But the documents from the three (former) prefectures in southern Bukowina remain unexplored: Campulung Moldovenesc, Suceava, Radauti. They are currently in the National Archives (*Arhivele Nationale*) in the city of Suceava and have (still) unique sources about inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations.¹²

Although it is a subject whose development took place about 80 years ago (1940-2011), it is still a topical issue in the context of historical research.¹³ In addition to the main

⁴ Paul Milata, *Intre Hitler, Stalin si Antonescu. Germanii din Romania in Waffen SS*, Editura Schiller, Sibiu, 2018.

⁵ Emilian Dranca, "Heim ins Reich. O complexă și istorică promisiune mesianică. Mutarea germanilor din Bucovina în cel de al III-lea Reich", în *Lucrările Conferinței Naționale Philohistoriss*, noiembrie 2016, Facultatea de Istorie și Filozofie, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, *Revista Philohistoriss*, Anul III (2017), Nr. 5, Editura Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2017, pp. 200-222

⁶ Emilian Dranca, "Mittleuropa 1940, distrugerea și dispariția unei societăți. Studiu de caz: Bucovina" în *Revista de istorie a evreilor din România*, Editor Anca Tudorancea, Nr.2 (18), 2017, Editura Hasefer, București, 2017, pp. 71-91

⁷ "Das Buchenland Eine Wiege des Rumänentums, in Bukarester Tageblatt", 01 Dezember 1941; Rumänien – Die Lage der Landwirtschaft in der Nordbukowina, in Aussenhandel, 14 August 1941; Schicksale im Buchenland, Bukarest Tageblatt 3 August 1941; Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld, R/4902/2762

⁸ Emilian Dranca, "Etnicii germani din Bucovina in Arhivele din Lodz", in *Glasul Bucovinei*, Cernauti-Bucuresti, An XXV, N3. 100, 4/2018, pp. 37-47

⁹ Emilian Dranca, "Coloniile etnicilor germani din Bucovina in Franta", in *Glasul Bucovinei*, Cernauti-Bucuresti, An XXVI Nr. 101,102, 1-2/2019, pp. 58-68

¹⁰ Emilian Dranca, "Emigrarea etnicilor germani din sudul Bucovinei" în 1940 în *Revista Glasul Bucovinei*, Cernăuți, Nr. 99 (3/2018), Revistă finanțată și editată de Institutul Cultural Român București, pp. 7-17.

¹¹ Emilian Dranca, "Emigrarea etnicilor germani din nordul Bucovinei în 1940" în *Revista Glasul Bucovinei*, pp. 17-25, Cernăuți, Nr. 97 (1/2018), Revistă finanțată și editată de Institutul Cultural Român București, pp. 17-25

¹² Emilian Dranca, "The Holocaust of the Vatra Dornei Jews, March-October 1941: from dispossession of Goods to Ghettoisation and deportation" in *Holocaust. Studii si cercetari, Revista Institutului National pentru Studiarea Holocaustului din Romania "Elie Wiesel"*, Vol. XII, Nr. 1 (13)/2020, Bucuresti, pp. 95-119.

¹³ Otfried Kotzian, *Die Umsiedler: die Deutschen aus West-Wolhynien, Galizien, der Bukowina, Besarabien, der Dobrudscha und in der Karpatenukraine*, München, 2005 de asemenea Mariana Hausleitner, "Viel Mischmasch

sources found in the archives, it is worth mentioning the memoirs of the participants in the *heim ins Reich* action, which continue to be published more and more in recent years. In the latest issue of "Der Sudostdeutsch", Nr. February 2-20, 2019, the first fragment of Ferdinand Bessei's memoirs appeared written in 1984 (the year of his death), typed by his daughter Inge Jäger and made known to the general public only in 2019.¹⁴ The activity of the Institute of Bukowina at the University of Augsburg is also to be considered.¹⁵ Thus it can be considered that not everything has been said about what was *heim ins Reich* and its consequences. Thus, a curiosity about the "success" of this action, at least as interesting as many others, is the desire, of some ethnic Germans to return to Bukowina, implicitly in Romania, immediately after June 22, 1941. At least one example is necessary. But the list actually adds up to several thousand cases of ethnic Germans returning between 1941 and 1944. Others are effectively stopped and/or prevented from returning to Romania. For example, the case of Isidor Ungureanu, from Czernowitz, born on 04.06.1891, married and father of three children, located in camp 194 in Hirschberg, Hermsdorf Street, near Breslau (today Wrocław in Poland).¹⁶ He submitted a request on 12.08.1941 to return to Romania.¹⁷ The German authorities refused to approve his request. However, on 18.11.1941, his request to return to Romania was approved and he was moved to another camp near Katowice.¹⁸ In a letter addressed to the Immigration Center (Einwanderungszentralstelle) in Litzmannstadt (now Łódź, Poland) on 14.11.1941 Isidor Ungureanu motivates his request based on the fact that his sister, who is in Romania, lost her only son in the fights from Odessa and now has no material help or support. Of course this argument is quite debatable. However, in a second letter, dated 12.12.1941 and sent from Camp 69 in Annaberg, near Katowice, Isidor Ungureanu brings several arguments that justify his decision. Thus, he presents himself like an ethnic Romanian (Vollrumäne), only his wife being ethnically German. In this quality he mentioned that he will not be able to receive German citizenship.¹⁹ Ultimately, some hypotheses can be constructed and that remain to be confirmed or not by other more in depth research.

A first conclusion/hypothesis is given by the fact that action *heim ins Reich* was a failure, because less than a year after their departure from Bukowina, the ethnic Germans wanted to return. Secondly, it can be considered that the choice of ethnic Germans from Bukowina to leave in 1940 was not a strictly ideological one. The fact that there are thousands of people who after 22.06.1941 (the date of the outbreak of the German war against the USSR) want to return to Romania, show that these emigrations were determined mainly by

mitgenommen": *Die Umsiedlung aus der Bukowina 1940. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, Buchreihe der Kommission für Geschichte und Kultur Deutschen in Südosteuropa, Band 43, 2018.

¹⁴ Ferdinand Bessei, "Die Umsiedlung aus der Bukowina, 1940" in *Der Südostdeutsche*, Nr. 2-20 Februar 2019, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ <http://bukowina.phil.uni-augsburg.de/>

¹⁶ Archivum Państwowe w Łodzi, al. Kosciuszki 121, 90-441 Łódź, Fond *Einwandererzentralstelle*, Cota 591, Fila 27

¹⁷ Archivum Państwowe w Łodzi, al. Kosciuszki 121, 90-441 Łódź, Fond *Einwandererzentralstelle*, *An die Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Umsiedlung Einsatzführung Niederschlesien, Breslau, Gräbschnerstrasse, 61-65*, am 23.09.1941, Cota 591, Fila 18

¹⁸ Archivum Państwowe w Łodzi, al. Kosciuszki 121, 90-441 Łódź, Fond *Einwandererzentralstelle*, *An die Deutsche Umsiedlung und Treuhandgesellschaft m.b.H. Berlin, Mohrenstrasse 41-42*, Litzmannstadt, 18.11.1941. Cota 591, Fila 22

¹⁹ Archivum Państwowe w Łodzi, pl. Wolności 1, 91-415 Łódź, Fond *Einwandererzentralstelle*.

the presence of the Soviets at the country's borders. A third hypothesis is the precarious situation of the ethnic Germans in the camps where they were housed in Germany. This determined their massive dissatisfaction and the desire to return to their homelands. These are just a few observations that can be made at the moment, any other research having the potential to reveal new aspects of the history of ethnic Germans in Bukowina and implicitly in Romania.