

# **H**istorical Landmarks of the Romanian's Migration to Germany

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## **Abstract**

The external migration of Romanians after the fall of the communist regime was one of the processes that most influenced the social and economical landscape of our present. But even before 1990, there was a type of external migration, that of the ethnics, that lead hundreds of thousands of Romanian citizens outside the borders of our country. The aim of this paper is to highlight some historical moments that marked the departure of the German ethnics from Romania, and also to introduce the role of the migration networks in this process. Starting with a brief presentation of the origins of the Romanian communities with German origins, we intended to present the three waves of migration that characterise the path of the Romanian emigrants in Germany: the first wave, immediately after the Second World War, the second one during the communist regime, and the third one – after 1990.

**Key words:** *migration, networks, Germany, history, ethnicity.*

The way the population is spread around the world has been influenced by the numerous changes occurred by the evolution of natural, military, political or economic factors. The Roman Empire period coincides with vast human mass deployments made deliberately; the late fifteenth century coincided with the discovery of America, and significant migration processes to this new world; the

slave trade was encouraged by the need for cheap labour, as were the approximately 12 million people brought from Africa. Later in the nineteenth and twentieth century's migration flows were amplified. In less than a decade, only from Romania emigrated 14,070 people.<sup>1</sup>

In the European countries that were part of the communist bloc, since 1990, started a new era of migration resulting in fundamental economic and social implications. Additionally, in Romania, after the fall of the communism, a strong international migration process has developed, with certain features by the end of 2000, when the freedom of movement in the European space is granted: starting from very low international mobility, under the constraints of the totalitarian communist regime, but with the training provided by commuter type internal migration, Romanians rediscovered long-distance migration, once the borders were opened. After 1989 Romanians preferred multiple destinations depending on several factors: regional, economic and institutional<sup>2</sup>.

The peace treaties of Neuilly, Trianon and St. Germain after World War I, opened for Romania the path to being a nation state. If before that, the population was - with few exceptions - almost entirely homogenous, by the collapse of the dual monarchy and territories acquired in the 1913 after the Balkan war and now enshrined in the Treaties, there was a diversity of national viewpoint. After the Hungarians, the Germans now formed, with a share of 4% of the total population, the second largest group of national minorities. The Germans, however, were not united. The Germans' external linkages between the various parts of the country were the formation of the Great Romania. The oldest group of German people who settled in South-Eastern Europe was the Transylvanian Saxons. In the 12th century, they followed the call of

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<sup>1</sup>Institutul Național de Statistică (National Institute of Statistics), *Anuarul Statistic al României/Romanian's Statistics Yearly Book*, Bucharest, 2003, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Dumitru Sandu, *Barometru de Opinie Publică*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă/The Foundation for an Open Society, Bucharest, November 2001.

the Hungarian King Geza II who promoted the colonization of East Germans "Land beyond the Forest" (Terra Ultrasilvana) to protect themselves from the invasions of Mongols and Tartars. The name "Saxons" is not a clue about the origin - geographically - of the first immigrants. Their origin cannot be established clearly and accurately. It seems that they are, however, mostly natives of Rhenish-Franconian region of the empire.<sup>3</sup>

After the final collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians decided on the 1st of December 1918, in Alba Iulia, the annexation to the Romanian Kingdom. In the so-called "Resolution of Alba Iulia" big promises were made to the National Minorities ("*every person will study, manage and judge in its own language, by individuals of its own*") but which, in the periods that followed, had not been complied with by the governments of Romania. However, the Germans and the government have reached a fair coexistence<sup>4</sup>. At the 1930 census, 745.421 inhabitants of Romania declared themselves as German. The catastrophe of the Nazi regime and the consequences of its policy and of the World War II shook the existence of the German minority in Romania. As a result of the treaties between Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union, since 1940, thousands of Germans in the border regions of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were forced to leave their homeland, being taken "home in the Empire". Romania's surrender in August 1944 and the entry of the Soviet Army in Romania meant, for thousands of ethnic Germans, the need to seek refuge. The inhabitants of entire villages in Transylvania, Banat and the region of Satu Mare were leaving as refugees in long columns heading towards the West. In January 1945, the deportation to the Soviet Union started for many of those who remained in Romania. There were over 75,000 people affected; many of them have not returned home.

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<sup>3</sup>Mihaela Stănescu, Terra Saxonis - opt veacuri de amintiri, Revista "Descoperă", 26.06.2009.

<sup>4</sup>for detailed information about the German minority in Romania, see also [http://www.bukarest.diplo.de/Vertretung/bukarest/ro/06/seite\\_minderheiten.html](http://www.bukarest.diplo.de/Vertretung/bukarest/ro/06/seite_minderheiten.html), retrieved 15.09.2013.

For the German ethnics in Romania began demanding decades full of needs. While taking advantage of the general measures of liberalization in the sixties, the pressure on minorities regarding assimilation increased. External migration trends have become clearer, also due to economic conditions in the country. In the 70s and 80s, about 14,000 ethnic Germans left the country annually. After the fall of communism in 1989 and the recently acquired freedom of movement, the number suddenly exceeded 100.000.

The changes in Romania after 1989 brought with them not only an improvement in the bilateral relations between Germany and Romania (The Friendly Cooperation Treaty in April, 29th, 1992), but also a clear improvement and a new quality of framework conditions for the existence of the German minority. Their cultural, social and political integrity is now assured. Romanian Government recognizes through its laws and ordinances that modern protection of minorities insured is legally and politically required. In the new Romanian Constitution of 1991 the "national minorities' right to preserve, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity" is ensured. A "ministerial Council for the protection of minorities" is responsible for compliance with the new policy - in some respects even exemplary - towards minorities, and an undersecretary of state in the Romanian Government is responsible for the issues of the German minority.

Immediately after 1989, the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania (DFGR) appeared as a representative of the interests and as an organized union of the German minority. The Forum is present throughout the country, with a national structure with five regional forums and the local forums and centre. The community has German Youth Union (GYU) based in Sibiu, with organized youth groups and associations across the country. Moreover, the Evangelical Church and the Roman Catholic Church play an important role in the community of Germans in Romania, the majority of who belong to this minority.

In the census of the spring of 2002, more than 60.000 inhabitants of Romania declared themselves as Germans. The ethnic Germans who remained in Romania stand as a bridge and play an important role in the relations between Germany and Romania. The federal government consistently supports the minority in its mission in the cultural, economic and political education.

Although the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have brought a great increase of migration in terms of size, the migration of Romanians in Germany is not a phenomenon exclusive specific to the contemporary Romanian society; this migration route existed even in the communist period, and even prior to that, considering the significant communities of Romanian citizens of German origin living in Transylvania and Banat.

Three cases of ethnic migrations originating in Romania are relatively well documented in the literature: Jews, Germans and Hungarians, the first two cases even gaining certain notoriety due to the role played by the representatives of the communist regime in managing migration. Both the emigration of Jews and that of Germans were financially driven. And it was not just economic assistance (as claimed also by the Polish state to let the Germans leave) but the amounts paid per capita for each immigrant, amounts that always came through official channels, even enriching certain private accounts<sup>5</sup>.

The fact is that significant segments within both ethnic groups, in different periods, forms and contexts were treated unfavourably by the authorities on the basis of ethnicity. In both cases, the nation countries had a proactive immigration policy, which values the formal and institutionalized ethnic descent, and assist in effectively integrating the departure and destination. Moreover, for Israel, the Zionism was a relatively widespread pro-emigration ideology and assumed by significant segments of the population. In practical terms, the emigration of Jews ended up in the late 80s, and the one of

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<sup>5</sup>István Horváth, *Migrația etnică din România: între exil și căutare*, in "Sfera Politicii", no. 137.

the Germans in the early 90s, after the fall of communism and the suppressing of the Romanian state control over emigration.

The period of the Second World War and the years immediately following its conclusion represented a turning point in the evolution of the Germans in Transylvania. From a demographic perspective, during this period the first wave of emigration occurred. Based on the specialists' estimation, following repatriation, refugees, imprisonment and deportation between 1940 and 1950, a total of 250,000 ethnic Germans left Romania which means a lot, if we consider that in 1941 their number was 49,640<sup>6</sup>.

In the decades following the war, the German community in Romania had witnessed many transformations, particularly in terms of traditions and habits. Their traditional way of life has dissolved under the impact of the communist regime, and land expropriation, nationalization of property, forced industrialization and urbanization had cut the "root" of many Germans in Romania.

The trend of "homogenization", national assimilation, affected their cultural and spiritual autonomy, and all these combined with precarious living conditions of life, which contrasts with the image of a prosperous democracy represented by West Germany, prompted, on the backdrop of their consciousness of their German identity, massive emigration attempts. If there were restrictions that kept them from leaving during the communist era, with the removal of these barriers, since 1989, most ethnic Germans have left Romania, creating a major disruption in the socio-cultural and economic equilibrium of the areas in which they lived<sup>7</sup>.

Suggestive for the presentation of the extent of the migratory flows between Romania and Germany are the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, which show the total number of Romanian immigrants who settled in Germany in the two analyzed

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<sup>6</sup>Anneli Ute Gabanzi, *Exodul germanilor din România: cauze, fapte, consecințe*, in „Xenopoliana”, V, 1-4-1997, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup>Cosmin Budeancă, Florentin Olteanu (coord.), *Sfârșitul regimurilor comuniste*, Argonaut Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2011, p.168.

time frames, that is the period 1980-1989 and respectively 1990-2003. We also considered appropriate to calculate the percentage that is the total of all these emigrants, just to show that the number of those who chose Germany as a country of destination was much higher than that of those who chose other destinations, even within the 1980-1989 period, representing more than half of all migrants.

**Table 1. Permanent emigration of Romanian citizens by country of destination (1989-2003)**

	Total	Germany	SUA	Hungary	Canada	Italy	Austria	France	Israel	Sweden	Greece	Australia	Others	
Total 1980-1989	Nr.	287753	149544	33931	27250	7495	3128	9275	4593	14629	4909	3131	3646	26622
	%	100	52,0	11,8	9,5	2,6	1,1	3,2	1,6	5,1	1,7	1,1	1,3	9,3
Total 1990-2003	Nr.	251681	81434	31748	25372	24894	19920	17683	12618	4882	3200	2450	2217	25263
	%	100	32,4	12,6	10,1	9,9	7,9	7,0	5,0	1,9	1,3	1,0	0,9	10,0

Source: TEMPO data bases, National Institute of Statistics, Bucharest, 2013 [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro) (consulted in 14.01.2013).



As seen from the data above, during 1980-1990 the number of Romanian immigrants who had established residence in Germany was superior to that of Romanian citizens who chose another country of destination, representing 52% of all migrants. Although in the next analyzed time interval the percentage had a significant fall to 32.4%, Germany remains the main migration destination for Romanians. This decrease is due primarily to the fact that after the fall of the communism in 1989, Romanian citizens were granted the freedom to travel abroad, freedom that did not previously exist and thus the possible destinations have diversified. Since 1989, there have been three periods corresponding to three trends of migration: the period between 1990 and 1994 was influenced by the migratory movement abroad; the period 1994-2000 was dominated by labour migration, and there are numerous cases of political asylum and underground; after 2000 there occurred a normalization of the movement of migrants<sup>1</sup>. Before 1989, Romanian citizens of German origins benefited from a special regime regarding the possibility to leave Romania on an indefinite term, with the purpose of settling down in Germany.

During the communist period, Germany had the largest share in terms of the destinations of migratory flows (in the early 1980s the two main destinations, Germany and Israel, represented approximately 80% of the total external migration)<sup>2</sup>. This fact was not the effect of an individual act of decision upon the migratory act, but rather the consequence of the "commerce" practiced by the communist regime willing to grant Romanian citizens of German origins the right to migrate, in exchange for a financial reward, paid by the German government to the Romanian state.

By the fall of communism, ethnicity was a factor structuring the Romanian migration space. This is explained by the immigration

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<sup>1</sup>Remus Gabriel Anghel, Istvan Horvath (coord.), *Sociologia migrației. Teorii și studii de caz românești*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2004. p. 46-57.

<sup>2</sup>Sorina Folea, *Fenomenul infracțional în Europa*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2009, p. 256.

laws formulated by the German Federal Republic and Israel, in postwar political context, which aimed to support and accommodate the migration of Jews and Germans from the communist states. This binds to the same extent to the migration status of the ethnic minorities in the communist and post-communist Romania, where the existence of ethnic minorities has been officially recognized: ethnic minorities have been mobilized in migration processes, which actually generated an instrumentalization of ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

A large number of people of German origin, also known as the "Swabian", lived in Banat, being brought here by the Habsburgs in the eighteenth century. Since the 1980s, Banat Germans began to leave for Germany; however, most of the exodus occurred after 1989. Although there were many villages where there were significant communities of ethnic Germans in the Banat region, in others there were only a few such families, which caused a large variations in the number of emigrants to that destination<sup>4</sup>.

In general, migrant networks facilitate migration by reducing the costs of such a process. New migrants are helped to cross the borders, to find a shelter and a job at the destination and to adapt in a foreign country. Being part of a migration network diminishes risks of such "adventures". Nonetheless, the absence of such networks does not eliminate migration. Their place is occupied by institutions that support the migration, which as well as networks, improve access to resources within an institutional framework. However, it is important to note that when referring to migration networks, the resource availability depends on the participation in such a network, and the distribution of information is much higher for the institutions that aim to help migrants.

The development of Saxon migration movements is all the more obvious as the Saxons' history is marked as sedentary, unlike the

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<sup>3</sup>Remus Gabriel Anghel, Istvan Horvath (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup>Dumitru Sandu (coordinator), *A Country Report on Romanian Migration Abroad: Stocks and Flows After 1989*, study realised for the Multicultural Centre in Prague, available at [www.migrationonline.cz](http://www.migrationonline.cz), 2004, p. 23.

Romanian migrant groups that have a long tradition of domestic or international mobility. Mass emigration to West Germany, which started in the mid-twentieth century, is nothing like any ancient practices. Currently, the Saxons' mobility is created by the movements between Romania and Germany, a movement founded on migration networks that they have built between the two countries<sup>5</sup>.

Currently, the main destination for migrants from these areas is Germany. Those who have emigrated in the first wave (identified as the early 1990s) went through Austria, and spent some time living with people they previously knew. Later, few went to Germany without a formal contract of employment, because the preparation of the necessary documents was very difficult. Because people did not know each other, or they were not aware of other neighbours who migrated to Germany, it is difficult to estimate the intensity of this migratory phenomenon. However, it seems that in this area, it is not a mass phenomenon.

If in the first wave of migration to Germany the groups were relatively small, consisting of 2-4 friends, now migration is an individual phenomenon. Those who migrated to Germany in the first stage had difficulties finding a job, because they had no acquaintances that would recommend them to potential employers. As a consequence, the "safe" migration through recruitment companies is now preferred. When leaving under a contract of employment, the place of residence is known, as well as the period, work, pay, and all the other aspects. People get in contact with companies that mediate the link between companies abroad and workforce in the country, and migrate based on a contract. Therefore, the main methods used for migration by the population in this area are by companies located in Timisoara that facilitate contracts for work in Germany for 2-3 months. The jobs offered are in agriculture, construction or care for the elderly. The advantage of emigration

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<sup>5</sup>Remus Gabriel Anghel, Istvan Horvath (coordinators), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

under contract is the fact that if for those who migrate on their own or as part of a social network the Schengen Act imposes an obligation to prove the existence of means of financial support, in the first case workers receives a work permit, so such obligations do not apply. On the other hand, there are no contact persons at destination, unlike in the situation of migration networks. Migrants get to meet and know each other only when they get to their destination.

People claim that the lack of migration networks is based on individual characteristics, such as selfishness: "People from the region of Banat do not help each other...people are very envious around here" (A. I., 43 years old, and engineer at the Jiblea City hall). For example, according to the statements of people in the region, one of those who emigrated but constantly returned to the town has not helped anyone else migrate to Germany, and, even more, does not want to say where he lives and pretends not to know anyone else in the county. They also say that the impossibility to migrate without contract also has to do with the lack of money. It is impossible (some say) to migrate on your own to Germany, because in order to leave you need money.<sup>6</sup>

The Germans from Transylvania and Banat have disclosed to their fellow citizens an entire ideology about "how and where to emigrate". Their migratory behaviour, their networks and their livelihood (such as the marginalization they were suffering in German society), their success, their destinations in Germany, their European ideas will be reflected in the mobility projects of hundreds of thousands of Romanians who began to cross Europe in the early 1990s<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding the typology of the migration of Romanians, it was found that they travel within informal transnational networks which are used to exploit every available branch of the activity of migrants. Meanwhile, ethnic migration has turned into a circulatory one, already being proved that the migration of the ethnic Germans

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<sup>6</sup>Dumitru Sandu (coord.), op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Remus Gabriel Anghel, Istvan Horvath (coord.), op. cit., p. 87.

from Transylvania to Germany in the early 1990s has become a circulatory movement, the periods of activity in Germany are interspersed with periods of living in Romania<sup>8</sup>.

Studying the arguments underlying the choice of Germany as a country of destination, the specific factor is the migration of ethnic lineage linked historically to this country. Concerning the citizens of Romanian origin who migrated to Germany, the reasons for their selection are similar to those of the ones choosing other states as destination.

Between the fall of the Ceausescu regime in December 1989 and the spring of 1990, half a million Germans left Romania for West Germany, in what can be called the most amazing modern ethnic migration in Europe. In the seven cities and 250 houses in the Saxon Land, in Transylvania, not less than 90% of Germans have packed up and left behind eight centuries of history, taking the road west to a country very few knew. This return was metaphorically called "return to the fatherly earth" by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, a German politician<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>John Salt, Current International Migration Trends, CDMG, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup>Lumea uitată a sașilor transilvăneni, available at <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/lumea-uitata-a-sasilor-transilvaneni-870129.html#ixzz0cvyJwQtv>, retrieved 04.09.2013

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