

POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE GERMANS FROM THE BANAT HIGHLAND 1918–1940

Petru Flavius BOZU

The History Museum of the Banat Highland, Reșița, România

Rudolf CRISTIAN

“Eftimie Murgu” University of Reșița, România

Abstract: The case studies represent an important segment of the analysis carried out on the political life experienced by the German minority from the Banat Highland during the interwar period. An attentive analysis of the events lived by certain members of this community, reveals the fact that the relationship of this ethnic group with the Romanian authorities was, especially during the reign of King Carol the Second, lacking harmony. Based on the imminence of the Second World War and on the expansion of the Third Reich's sphere of influence in South Eastern Europe, the friction between the studied ethnic minority and the Romanian state grew, taking acute forms in some cases. It is the duty of the serious researcher and of the impartial historian to expose both the rays of light and the cones of shadows from the studied time periods. Thus, the endeavor is beneficial to both the professionals from the social sciences and to the mundane readers. In the following pages we shall enumerate several cases from the mountainous Banat area which fit into the studied theme.

Keywords: political life, leaders, the Banat Highland, German minority, interwar period.

General context: Interwar Romania was significantly influenced by the two great totalitarian currents of the twentieth century: namely communism and fascism¹. Both political doctrines despised democracy as a demagogic, covert, and inefficient practice, insisting on replacing it with a regime represented by the dictatorship of the proletariat or the hegemony of a community selected according to certain biological and cultural characteristics. A classic example of this is the assassination of Liberal National Prime Minister I.G. Duke on the platform of the station in Sinaia, on December 29th, 1933².

This act represented the expression of a political revenge at the initiative of the Prime Minister to ban the Iron Guard on December 9, 1933 under the pretext, because the above-mentioned organization had a terrorist character. This act foreshadowed the wave of political assassinations unleashed by both legionaries and rulers at the end of the decade.

The National Peasant Party strongly opposed the establishment of a royal dictatorship, going so far as to seriously consider a political partnership with the far-right political party Everything for the Country. The two parties concluded a non-electoral pact on November 25, 1937, to win the next general election.

¹ Raoul V. Bossy, *Amintiri din viața diplomatică (1918–1940)*, Ediție și studiu introductiv de Stelian Neagoe, București, Editura Humanitas, 1993, p. 220.

² Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Mișcarea democratică din România întregită*, Iași, Editura Academiei R. S. R., 1983, p. 100.

The election held between December 28 and 29, 1937 represented the swan song of the parliamentary democracy in Romania. It was clear that the population had lost confidence in the democratic parties, giving an important endorsement to far-right parties. Neither party managed to reach the electoral threshold of 40% of the votes that would have allowed it to benefit from the first majority. The National Liberal Party, in the electoral cartel with the German Party, obtained 35.92%, the National Peasant Party 20.40%, the political party *Totul pentru Țara* 15.58%, the Christian National Party 9.15%.

The German party respected the political orientation of the minority it represents, allying itself with the ruling party³. These alliances were made based on pre-election agreements in the pages of which were inscribed a series of promises for the minority community in case their allies were to win the elections. These promises refer to the protection of the linguistic but especially cultural uniqueness of the Germans in Romania, implicitly also in Banat both in the plain and in the mountain area, of the observance of their rights of representation in the local administration, in education and justice at local level. and regionally in areas where they held numerical preponderance. Of course, after winning the elections, the different governments tried to evade some clauses of the electoral cartel agreements⁴. During the interwar years, under any government, of any party, the Germans held between 2 and 4 terms as senator and between 6 and 10 seats as representative⁵.

King Charles II had the opportunity to appoint a prime minister, leader of a political party with a small electoral base but accepted by public opinion for his recognized literary activity. This person was found in Octavian Goga, who became the President of the Council of Ministers, the Vice-President being the university professor of political economy A.C. Cuza. The monarch was able to quickly initiate a series of measures that would culminate in the establishment of the royal dictatorship, given that the government lacked social adherence and broad popular support. In these conditions, the members of the royal chamber and the representatives of the great local and foreign capital met on February 9, 1938 at the headquarters of the Finance and Great Industry Association in Bucharest where they finalized the details of the political act that was to take place the next day, inaugurating the authoritarian regime.

The political act of establishing the royal dictatorship was achieved by appointing a new prime minister in the person of Patriarch Miron Cristea on February 12, 1938. The state of siege and censorship became permanent elements of public life in the following years, civil and political freedoms and rights being drastically diminished. The government, named for calming public opinion as one of national unity, included seven former prime ministers as members without portfolios. Four parties professing the principles of parliamentary democracy agreed to delegate members to ensure that government portfolios were filled by specialists in various fields.

The new constitution promulgated on February 27, 1938, kept the appearance of a state governed by the principles of parliamentary democracy. Conceived by the well-known jurist Istrate Micescu, the new fundamental law kept the mask of a constitutional monarchy, although it concentrated many prerogatives in the person of the monarch. King Charles II changed the composition structure of the Crown Council, appointing former prime ministers, but also members of the “royal chamberlain”.

³ Thomas Schoen, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴ Hans-Heinrich Rieser, *Das rumänische Banat: Eine multikulturelle Region im Umbruch Geographische Transformationsforschungen am Beispiel der jüngeren Kulturlandschaftsentwicklungen in Südwestrumänien*, Stuttgart, Thorbecke Verlag, 2001, p. 127.

⁵ Wolfgang Miede, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

The regime of parliamentary democracy suffered a severe blow on March 14, 1938. At that time, the sovereign initiated a decree-law banning political parties, clubs, and political associations. The pretext was, of course, like many undemocratic regimes, the defense of order in the state⁶. The measure was meant to be effective in combating far-right political organizations, but it also affected democratic parties by banning political demonstrations of any kind.

The vacuum in Romania's public life created by the ban on political parties was required to be filled as soon as possible. King Charles II wanted to channel the political force of the various currents, groups, and factions in a direction favorable to his authoritarian regime. The logical consequence was the creation of a single party meant to bring together all the supporters of the sovereign, regardless of whether they were part of parties located at the extremes of the spectrum of political options.

On December 15, 1938, the new party was proclaimed by a decree-law under the name of the National Renaissance Front. All other political parties were outlawed, with the new party's organizations being the only ones entitled to submit electoral lists of candidates during local, regional, or state elections. The supreme leader of the National Renaissance Front was the monarch who exercised his prerogatives through the National Superior Council and the three Secretaries General. All hierarchical structures were occupied by the appointment of cadres without the slightest possibility of choice⁷.

According to the electoral law promulgated on May 9, 1939, the age eligible for voting was increased from 21 years to 30 years for literate citizens. As the number of voters decreased, so did the number of elected officials. This reduced the spectrum of political representation and allowed the monarch to form a set of electoral lists composed mainly of people devoted to his authoritarian regime. It should come as no surprise that the National Representation elected on June 1 and 2, 1939, proved to be very docile to the sovereign's political plans. The fact that the National Renaissance Front was the only political party that could participate in the elections also contributed to this fact. Economically, the new party was supported by representatives of major industrialists in the country who wanted to maintain British and French financial hegemony, and socially enjoyed the endorsement of personalities of artistic life, who believed that the royal dictatorship was a viable alternative to the rise of the legionaries. .

The legionary movement was based on the beginning of its activity on the support of many young people who could be used in the case of utility works for infrastructure development but especially in the case of public policy actions involving the participation of many people. The authoritarian regime of King Charles II sought to disrupt this social base of the Iron Guard by attracting students to an organization under the direct control of the government. This was achieved by the creation of the National Student Front on December 18, 1938. This measure against the members of the All for the Country Party, the name at that time of the Legion of Archangel Michael, would not be by far the harshest.

The government has launched a drastic punitive action against far-right sympathizers, accused of representing the interests of fascist states in Europe. These will culminate, on November 29–30, 1938, with the assassination by order of the sovereign of Captain Corneliu Zelea Codreanu together with a group of relatives known as Nicadori and Decemviri. It was those legionaries who had assassinated Prime Minister I. Gh. Duca in 1933 and a political rival of the Captain, named Mihail Stelescu in 1936. The legionnaires' response invariably followed. On September 21, 1939, the President of the Council of Ministers, Armand Călinescu, fell under the bullets of a death squad. The new Prime Minister, General Constantin Argeșanu had the

⁶ Pavel Brebu, *Zona județului Caraș-Severin*, s.n., 2002, p. 20.

⁷ Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, pp. 220–260.

ungrateful task of leading a bloody repression throughout the country, which had as final effect the elimination of the legionary leaders, but also the partial removal of the population from the authoritarian monarchical regime. This situation was due to the strong adherence that the legionary movement had among the population and the popularity of its charismatic leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu⁸.

The situation will change dramatically after June 28, 1940, when the legionaries had their first representative in the Council of Ministers. This was due to a last royal attempt to co-opt the legionaries into the Party of the Nation, a political party that had replaced the National Renaissance Front on June 4, 1940. The initiative proved to be a failure on the whole line of action of the legionaries wishing to eliminate King Carol II from the leadership of Romania.

The serious territorial abductions suffered by Romania during the summer of 1940 were considered consequences of the sovereign's inability to effectively conduct the state's foreign policy⁹. A series of politicians led by Iuliu Maniu and C. I. C. Brătianu demanded the removal of the king from the head of state and his replacement with the heir to the throne, Mihai. They were joined by Horea Sima, who was directly interested in the accession of the legionary movement to the government. Starting with September 2, 1940, the political leaders negotiated with the representative of the armed forces, General Ion Antonescu. Aware of the immense prestige that Ion Antonescu enjoyed in the armed forces, on September 4, 1940, the monarch entrusted him with the formation of the government, investing it the next day with dictatorial powers. This moment marks the end of the royal dictatorship, the new President of the Council of Ministers, forcing the monarch to abdicate on September 6, 1940 in favor of his son Michael, who was ascending the throne for the second time. The fact that the young monarch had only a representative role was illustrated by the situation in which General Ion Antonescu had taken the title of Head of State, a paradoxical phrase given the fact that Romania had a king in the exercise of his duties.

Historiography: The evolution of the German community in the mountainous Banat during the interwar years in terms of domestic policy is presented truthfully, making a comparison between these years and those of the dualism period. Of particular importance for this approach is the collection of studies edited by Josef Halmayer¹⁰.

Bishop Martin Roos presents the German community in Banat as a relatively closed group, at least in terms of family interaction, motivating his statement by statistical data showing that in 1918, marriages between Germans and members of other communities accounted for only 9% of all marriages, concluded within this minority community¹¹.

In the pages dedicated to Roman Catholic clergy and teachers in the Diocese of Cenad, the author makes numerous references to the harassment they had to endure from the Hungarian crown authorities if they were suspected of any pro-German action or attitude. Punitive measures ranged from abusive dismissals and slander campaigns in the press to fines and custodial sentences. Often those who protested abuse were replaced by teachers or clerics who knew only Hungarian. Many of the citizens who were not native speakers of Hungarian expressed in writing or orally their hopes for a calmer community existence within the constitutional framework provided by the laws of the Romanian state. These hopes were to be nurtured by

⁸ Andreas Hillgruber, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁹ Gheorghe Barbul, *Schimbarea alianțelor României: de la Titulescu la Antonescu*, Iași, Editura Institutul European, 1995, p. 120.

¹⁰ Josef Halmayer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 253.

the promises of some politicians from Banat but also from the Old Kingdom during 1918 and 1919.

This fact is also highlighted by the work of Ion Bolovan and Sorina Paula Bolovan regarding the Germans in Romania. The paper includes important statistical data on the German population in Banat, both in the plain and in the mountains. The accession of the Germans from Banat to the Great Union, the establishment of the German People's Party, *Deutsche Volkspartei* as well as the evolution of the community in parliamentary plan as a loyal and stable political group of the country are presented succinctly, with much balance and sense of historical responsibility. The interwar legislation of the Romanian state enshrined the granting of citizenship of civil and political rights to all inhabitants of the country regardless of nationality, mother tongue spoken, or confession practiced.

The action materialized in deeds: if in 1922 71 publications appeared in the territory of Greater Romania, in 1934 there were already 176 publications. The opening in 1927 of the study complexes called Banatia, the largest educational center of its kind outside the borders of the German state, positively boosted the development of cultural and social life within the German community of Banat. The members of this minority, whether they were inhabitants of the mountain or plain area, took advantage of the educational possibilities offered by this center¹².

The 1930s and 1940s represented in terms of time the zenith of historiography with nationalist tendencies related to the German community in Banat. An example is obvious in this respect: Starting from the pan-German political ideas of the first decade of the twentieth century, the writer Nikolaus Hans Hockl develops a reaction to the Hungarianization policy to which the community of which he was a part until 1918 was subjected¹³. Unfortunately, the discourse has strong nationalist characteristics and slides quite easily to the racist side¹⁴. The volume edited by Josef Rieß analyzes the political and cultural situation of the Germans in the mountain Banat, defined distinctly from the Swabians by Dr. Kaspar Muth.

Evolution of the German minority from the Banat Highland 1918–1940: Within the “Union of Germans in Greater Romania”, “*Verband der Deutschen in Grossrumänien*”, starting with 1921, the members of this minority from Banat had 25 representatives, 10 from the mountain area and 15 from the plain area¹⁵.

During the interwar years, the German community in the mountain Banat was organized socially but also politically based on the following structure: The basic cell was formed by the Neighborhood Associations within the same street or in the same neighborhood called *Nachbarschaften*. These were grouped in 32 Associations per locality, *Ortsgemeinschaften* at the level of Caraș and Severin counties, being in their turn included in 5 *Bezirksgemeinschaften* or Mesh Associations at the level of the same counties. The latter were coordinated by the “County Association for Caras and Severin”, “*Gauamt Karasch und Gauamt Severin*” which was subordinated to the “People's Council of the Germans in Banat”, “*Volksrat der Banater Deutschen*”, which in turn elected a “Committee” called “*Hauptamt*”. Elections were held in “General Assemblies” called “*Volksversammlungen*”¹⁶. The number of “Local Organizations of the Germans in Banat”, “*Ortsgemeinschaften*”, increased progressively from 70 in 1922, to 120 in 1923 and to 139 in 1927. For the year 1928 we register in Banat 4 “County Organizations”, “*Gaugemeinschaften*”,

¹² Vasile C. Ioniță, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹³ Hans Nikolaus Hockl, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁴ Josef Rieß, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁵ Karl Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 93.

28 “Network organizations”, “Bezirksgemeinschaften” and 186 “Local organizations”, “Ortsgemeinschaften”.

In 1923, Julius Boitner was elected leader of the German community in Oravița. Also in the same year, Max Mischung, a native of Jamu Mare, was elected for Resita, whom the newspaper “Arader Zeitung” honored with the statement that he was the leader of the Germans in that city: “Führer der Deutschen in Reschitz”¹⁷. Max Mischung died in 1928, his funeral being an occasion for political manifestation of the Germans in the cities. On January 8, 1927, Karl Kalkbrunner was elected leader of the “Council of Germans in Caraș County”, “Gaurat Karasch”. He lived in Oravița. On April 1 of that year, Adalbert Kina was elected leader of the “Council of Germans in Severin County”, “Gaurat Severin”. His domicile was in Lugoj.

In 1928, the Germans from Banat Montan elected the following people as political representatives: the editor Heinrich Anwender from Lugoj, Mathias Mischung from Orenzdorf, the farmer Johann Lippert from Orenzdorf, the mine owner Karl Eweraser from Caransebeș, the writer Otto Alscher from Orșova, the farmer Wilhelm Roponn from Baldau, Secretary Philip Jahn from Bozovici.

In Banat Montan, the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the formation of strong German organizations. On March 22, 1930, a local organization had been founded in Văliug through the efforts of the leaders of Timișoara and Reșița, Erwin Schiller and Johann Urban. Among the Germans from the last-mentioned locality, involved in this approach, we mention Alois Imling, Stefan Moser, Johann Tanzer, Josef Faith. The organization of the Germans from Văliug also included the co-ethnic groups from Crivaia and Josefintal, two hamlets near the respective village. During 1930, the following people were elected as local leaders of the Germans from Banat Montan: Karl Berger and Franz Gebel in Oravița, Johann Schneider in Tirol, Michael Heimerl in Brebu Nou. Their duty was to instill: “to the entire population of Caraș County an activity crowned with a positive purpose complemented by a perfect harmony in living with its neighbors”¹⁸.

The ethnic Germans offered candidates in the July 1932 local elections: Ferdinand Spewak and Franz Stubnya in Anina and Alexander Orthmayer in Resita.

The interwar period represented the political apogee of the German community, in Romania, in general and in the mountainous Banat, in particular. Unlike the period of Austro-Hungarian dualism, in which the Germans had been discouraged, even humiliated, when they expressed their community identity, under the leadership of the Romanian state this minority discovered that it no longer had to fear or be ashamed of its linguistic and cultural heritage. Several historians, such as the scientist Nicolae Iorga in 1932, have repeatedly written about the good relations between the majority Romanians and the German minorities within the borders of our country. The Germans in Romania had been loyal to the double monarchy, and after 1918 they proved that they were reliable citizens of the entire Romanian state. Their homeland was Romania, whose laws they respected. The fact that the political leader of this minority, Rudolf Brandsch, was appreciated by King Charles II and considered one of the sovereign’s trusted advisers brought an increase of pride for the members of the German community in our country. Most Germans were bilingual and trilingual, cultivating mutually beneficial economic relations with members of the Romanian community¹⁹.

¹⁷ Alfred Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 101.

¹⁹ In the work of the author Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, references are made to the contribution of some elites for: „the political enlightenment of the German population”. We consider that the praises brought to them are too big compared to their real achievements. This fact becomes evident from the analysis of the following information presented in the pages dedicated to the political elite of the Germans from Banat Montan.

The fact that many of them had “predecessors”, i.e., friends, especially in Banat Montan, from the families of the majority, positively influenced the level of social harmony in the inter-war period.²⁰ To avoid political isolation, German leader Franz Adam Minich had decided to form an alliance with young Swabian politicians in Banat. The collaboration with Johann Beller had been facilitated by the mediation of Hans Eck. On February 3, 1935, Beller and Minich announced the formation of a common political group called the “German People’s Party of Romania,” the “Deutsche Volkspartei in Rumänien” (D.V.i.R.). One week later, 80 German delegates from Banat, both in the plain and in the mountains, approved the status of the new organization. Peter Kreling was elected chairman, vice-chairman: Johann Beller, general secretary: Franz Adam Minich, deputy general secretary: Hans Ewald Frauenhoffer, cashier: Andreas Konrad, controllers: Peter Warth and Nikolaus Hans Hockl. The party council consisted of 25 people. Peter Barth was responsible for the Arad area, for Dr. Franz Horger from Lugoj and for the Banat Montan area: the farmer Sepp Wingert²¹.

The D.V.i.R. for Severin County it was based in the city of Lugoj. Dr. Franz Horger and craftsman Michael Keppler were leading the German nationalists in the area. In Caransebeș the organization D.V.i.R. it was run by the merchant Sepp Igler, in Orsova by the doctor Adolf Novak. In Resita, the Social Democratic workers had banned a D.V.i.R. in the cities, which is why it took place at a campfire on a hill near the city. 12 people brought by Julius Baumann and Konrad Spindler participated. According to the writer Georg Hromadka, the local German nationalist leader for Resita became, quoted by Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, the worker Fritz Swoboda. In total, the D.V.i.R. had only 40 members in Resita. At Oravița the German nationalists were led by the merchant Franz Sittner.

Trade union workers did not like the presence of members of a nationalist political group with National Socialist doctrinal accents in their urban work and home centers²². They often put pressure on local mayors to ban Nazi rallies or to hinder public demonstrations. Given that most local councilors, deputy mayors and mayors were of a social-democratic political nature, elected with the massive help of trade unions, the boycott of D.V.i.R. it was not difficult to achieve. For example, in 1937, the regional meeting in Banat of the D.V.i.R. it could not be held in Resita due to the refusal of the mayor’s office to issue such an approval. The National Socialists had gathered on Driglovăț Hill, near the city, being ridiculed by the trade unionists for participating in the “Sermon on Driglovăț”²³. Before the general elections in November-December of that year, the gendarmes from Resita detained 12 young people who were wearing D.V.i.R. on the walls of buildings in Resita. They were sent on foot, under escort, to Timișoara, and once they arrived in that municipality, a day after the elections, they were released without any explanation, but could not resume their propaganda work for the benefit of their political group or vote for the candidates on the electoral list with whom they had sympathy.

On October 13th, 1935 were general elections for the leadership of the D.V.i.R. Meanwhile, the organization had expanded to all historical regions of Greater Romania, even though the number of its members remained small. Max Krieling was elected Honorary President, Aldref Bonfert: Executive President, Hans Beller and Waldermar Gust: Vice-Presidents, Franz Adam Minich: Secretary General, Hans Ewald Frauenhoffer: Deputy Secretary General. The headquarters of the political organization had been moved from Timisoara to Brasov²⁴. On June 7th,

²⁰ Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

²¹ *Idem*, p. 166.

²² *Idem*, p. 166.

²³ *Idem*, p. 168.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 169.

1936, Frauenhoffer succeeded Minich as leader of the D.V.i.R in Banat. On this occasion, the first D.V.i.R. leader was elected from Romania, Thea Heckl who oversaw the Caraş County organization based in Oraviţa²⁵.

The leader of the D.V.i.R., Fritz Fabritius, wanted a political body to ensure control over German workers in Romania. Given that most of them were members of trade unions and sympathized with the socialist or social-democratic political doctrine, it is understandable their aversion to the National Socialist doctrine and the political groups that enunciated it. To eliminate this problem, in 1936, the leadership of the D.V.i.R. founded the National Arbbeitsfront (National Labor Front) (N.L.F.)²⁶. It was legally recognized and registered among the political parties of the time. The national leader was Wolfram Arnold Bruckner and for the Banat area Rudolf Ferch. Meanwhile, the local political leadership of the D.V.i.R. changed in the November 10, 1936 elections, taking over the term: Josef Rieß: president, Peter Anton, Franz Reisinger, and Josef Krohn: vice-presidents, Hans Ersch: general secretary, Peter Ludwig: cashier.

The rigid organization, inspired by the National Socialist model, began to make its presence felt within the D.V.i.R. from Resita, which until 1937 had not had a very well crystallized structure. Emil Bohn was elected president, Josef Brat: secretary, and Stefan Neff and Hans Hudetz as leaders of the local youth group²⁷.

They started in November, the propaganda actions among the young Germans in the cities. On December 23 of that year, the National Socialists from Resita organized a public event attended by Lothar Frabritius and Franz Kräuter as delegates of the German community in Timisoara. Wanting not to provoke unionized workers in cities that were hostile to Nazi doctrine, the local organization of the D.V.i.R. He had stated his point in an article in the March 13, 1938, issue of the Reschitzaer Zeitung:

“We recognize the absolute need and importance of trade unions as the only legitimate workers’ association in the fight for legitimate economic rights. Our abilities should never push us, to be arrogant towards co-workers who are of another nationality. We want to give our colleagues of a nationality other than ours as much consideration as they are prepared to give us”²⁸.

With the takeover of the newspaper “Reschitzarer Zeitung” by activists of the D.V.i.R. led by Hans Jendl Jr. the political discourse of this daily has changed significantly. On October 1 and 3, 1937, the editorial office announced that the newspaper would focus on spreading Germanism. National Socialism was expressed through a series of articles entitled: “The Word of the Führer” “Das Wort des Führers”. From December 1937, propaganda supplements appeared: “German Woman”, “Die deutsche Frau” and “Our Youth”, “Unsere Jugend”. From March 20, 1938, the newspaper was printed in Gothic letters, and on April 17 of that year, to mark the three days remaining until the birthday of Chancellor Adolf Hitler, the newspaper “Reschitzaer Zeitung” published a tribute number printed in bright red ink²⁹.

In Banat Montan, following the decree of June 19, 1938 which provided for the dissolution of the assets of various political parties, organizations, associations, funds, and buildings of the German community in the locality and those of the newspaper “Reschitzaer Zeitung” had become the property of German lawyer Anton Steger. He had become the owner of the newspaper, and Hans Jendl remained editor-in-chief³⁰.

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 170.

²⁶ *Idem*, p. 181.

²⁷ *Idem*, p. 182.

²⁸ *Reschitzaer Zeitung*, Reşiţa, LII, Nr. 11- 13 martie 1938, p. 3.

²⁹ *Reschitzaer Zeitung*, Nr. 16 – 17 aprilie 1938, p. 3.

³⁰ Karl Ludwig Lupşiasca, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

As both the “German People’s Party”, the “Deutsche Volkspartei Rumäniens” and the “Community of Germans in Romania”, the “Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft Rumäniens” had dissolved themselves, the leader of this minority in our country, Hans Otto Roth, had spoken to King Carol II for restoration of a German Community with 4 sections. This was done on September 18, 1938 in Bucharest. Hans Schöpp, Hans Beller and Christian Kalmbach became Vice-Presidents, Herwart Schreiner – Secretary-General. On September 23, German deputy mayors were appointed in Timisoara, Sibiu, and Brasov. The section for Banatul Montan had been founded on October 8 of that year under the leadership of Franz Horger from Lugoj, Otto Alscher from Orșova and Robert Jendl from Resita³¹.

By the decree of November 20, 1940, the “German Ethnic Group”, the “Deutsche Volksgruppe Rumäniens” and the “German National Socialist Party of Romania”, the “National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei Rumäniens” received legal personality completely subordinating the German community to the war interests of the Nazi state. . The leadership of the Romanian N.S.D.A.P. for the Banat Mountain area was provided by Robert Jendl from Resita, Albert Seiz from Oravița, Friedrich Koppan from Caransebeș and Alfred Lammert from Orșova³².

Leaders

Rudolf Lissy

Often, law enforcement agencies made detailed portfolios of citizens perceived as high-risk factors for state security. This is the case of Rudolf Lissy, a Romanian citizen, of German ethnicity, originally from the Tyrol commune, who came to the attention of the Gendarmes Caraș Legion, for his Nazi political activity. On October 21, 1939, the Head of the Police Station of Resita, Liviu Herlea sent an informative note to the Head of the Security Police Office, Traian Șiopu, demanding that the surveillance of the above-mentioned citizen be executed with discretion so as not to decompose the identity of the informant from commune Tyrol. According to a conversation in early October of that year, Lyssi would have mentioned to the informant, whose name was unfortunately not specified, that he was a sub-lieutenant in the 38th Howitzer Regiment, and since that time he was working as an accountant at the agricultural cooperative. from his hometown. He had registered 20 German ethnic groups in the N.A.F. organization, the National Socialist Labor Front, and he was going to enroll another 40. They were all neighbors of his, determined people, capable of using the weapon.

The informant also noted that the suspect did not express concern that he might be discovered by the gendarmerie. Rudolf Lyssi believed the punishment of three young Germans from Resita for shouting in the street: “Heil Hitler!” was an element of propaganda useful to the Nazi movement? In his conception: “it is better as it is now, for the Germans to be condemned and mistreated... to hate the Romanians. Also, by this method the faith of the adherents will be strengthened and thus they will be more hardened”³³.

More detailed information on the political activity of this citizen appears on November 1 of that year. We find out that the respective had been supervised since June 19 for his alleged Nazi propaganda, proving to be: “a book person – the baccalaureate, a fine propagandist and hitlerist agitator”. It is mentioned that twice a month he went to Timișoara and to Resita to receive and send instructions. He had formed a Nazi group of 20–30 Tyrolean workers, and it was

³¹ Idem, p. 252.

³² Ion Bolovan și Sorina Paula Bolovan, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

³³ A.N.D.C.S., Fd. L.J.C., Dos. 2/ 1939–1940, ff. 1–2.

recommended that the gendarmes from Tyrol, Surduc and Doclin localities would constantly supervise him³⁴.

The agent of perception Ion Iacobescu had notified the Legion of Gendarmes Caras on January 5, 1940, announcing that 4 days ago a party had taken place at the residence of Rudolf Lyssi in Tyrol, attended by 40–50 locals, with all the members in the group. the Nazi he was leading. Lyssi's deputy was identified in the person of Stefan Zigler from Surduc, hairdresser. The contact person of the two suspects was Georg Ruszicza from Resita. The police officer mentioned that the suspect Lyssi had several meetings with Johann Ollinger from Steierdorf – Anina last month³⁵.

On March 16, 1940, the suspect participated with Zigler Stefan and 16 other young Germans in the commune, in an agricultural examination conducted by: “teacher Josef Wendl from Timisoara”. The so-called agricultural examination had in fact been a pretext to convey to the Germans of Tyrol the orders and indications from their superiors in Timisoara³⁶.

Johann Ollinger

Interesting in terms of political but also social implications is presented the case of the engineer from Steierdorf – Anina Johann Ollinger, director and owner of the Aurora Banat Climatic Station in the locality. It had been mentioned in an investigation of the Legion of Gendarmes Caras. Staff Sergeant Ioan Ciobanu and Gheorghe Contor had informed the Gendarmes Legion Caras that Ollinger had sent the young Werner Weseli to Timisoara after Nazi propaganda material. Notary Daniel Dehelianu stated that the respective citizen had organized the German youth from the locality, through his daughter Eva, in a group with strong Nazi features.

The description of the Nazi propaganda in the locality had been mentioned by the Roman Catholic priest Josef Trittler, who used religious dignity to propagate prohibited political ideas within the congregation he leads³⁷.

On January 29, 1940, it had been communicated to the relevant bodies that Johann Ollinger had a discussion with a German language teacher, named Johann Jesenski from the capital, who invited him to a party in the German community to be held in Berzovia. It had been mentioned that the position of the German community in Banat regarding the conflict between the USSR and Finland was to be made known to the participants.

The political representative of the Germans from Banat, the Representative Franz Bissinger paid a visit to Steierdorf-Anina during the days of February 12 and 13, 1940, to inspect the cultural work of the German theater in the town³⁸.

According to the informative note made up by the Chief of the Gendarmerie in the locality, the person concerned remained: pp. “He was lodged overnight with Karl Schöner, leader of the Nazi organization in the commune, and the next day he left with a taxi”. During his stay in the town of Steierdorf-Anina, the German ethnic parliamentarian had been visited by the engineer Johann Ollinger and the priest Josef Trittler, known as Nazi instigators, of whom the law enforcement bodies had numerous documents. The topic of the discussions was: “the actions to be taken against the authorities, due to the fact that they are not always approved the requested positions, a fact considered by them as harassment”.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 31.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, ff. 49–50.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 170.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 30.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 69.

On April 26 of that year, Detective Gruia Raichici wrote about Johann Ollinger: “Although he did not show up in Hitler actions, yet, as an affluent and focused Hitler, he was first on the subscription list of vouchers for the endowment of the army with the sum of 1,500 lei for the German meeting in Steierdorf, after which he enrolled his son Michael with 1,000 lei. He also makes 3–4 trips a month to Timișoara to visit his daughter, Eva, but in fact he takes money from the Germans from his hometown and receives propaganda materials”³⁹. The citizen concerned wanted to emigrate to the Reich as can be seen from the informative note dated February 11th. Staff Sergeant Gheorghe Cotruța, the Chief of the Gendarmerie in the Cacova – Gădinari village had intercepted a letter sent to the suspect by another son of his, Johann Jr., resident in Vienna, in which he urged his father to liquidate his wealth from Romania and to emigrate to Romania. Germany. For this purpose, the suspect was interested in selling the climatic station to the state or to the CFR, making a trip to Bucharest⁴⁰.

Josef Trittler

Particularly important in the Nazi propaganda activity were the people considered to be leaders of the German community in Banat Montan. These opinion-makers, as we call them today, were attracted by different methods to achieve the dissemination of national socialist doctrine among their fellow citizens. The clergy were especially targeted by the Nazi propaganda system, because of the social position and authority they enjoyed within the communities they led in religious matters. Sometimes they adhered to Nazi ideas and dealt with their spread.

Such was the case of the Roman-Catholic priest Josef Trittler from Anina, whom I spoke at length in the part of the thesis allocated to the religious elites of the German minority in the inter-war Banat Mountain.

The actions of the Roman-Catholic religious elite of the German minority in Banat Montan were not limited to social activities, they were manifesting themselves in the political area. In this area, unfortunately, the political option of some clergy was not always wise, many of them being attracted by the propaganda of the extreme right coming from the respective geographical area.

Particularly important role in the dissemination of Nazi theses was held by the persons considered as leaders of the German community in Banat Montan. These “opinion-makers”, in the current terminology, had been attracted by different methods for carrying out the dissemination of national-socialist doctrine among their fellow citizens. In particular, the clergy were targeted by the Hitler propaganda system because of the social position and authority held in religious communities. Sometimes they even adhered to Nazi ideas and dealt with their spread. This was the case of the Roman-Catholic priest Josef Trittler from Anina, mentioned in an informative note addressed to the Legion of Gendarmes Caras on October 23–24, 1939. The local notary Dehelianu informed the competent bodies about the priest in question:

“He continues to hide under Hitler propaganda with the particular resident Karl Schöner in the commune who is a hitlerist in focus”⁴¹.

The priest Trittler met weekly with Inspector Slovic and engineer Nelut in the house of singer Ludovic Arpad from the Roman Catholic Church to make “Hitler propaganda.”

The suspects were described as possessing high-performance radio stations with which they listened to the Reich news and repeatedly expressed their satisfaction with the disappearance of

³⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 185.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 139.

⁴¹ Arhivele Naționale, Direcția Caraș- Severin, Fondul Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, (prescurtat în continuare A.N.C.S., Fd. L.J.C, Dos.) Dosar 2/ 1939–1940, f. 21.

Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, who was insulted and called a “murdered judge”. On November 10, 1939, Staff Sergeant Gheorghe Contor transmitted the Legion of Gendarmes the note of the informant Ioan Crișan from Anina confirming that the suspects listened to radio broadcasts of the Reich, including the speeches of Adolf Hitler which they then commented in public⁴².

The file of the priest under supervision had been completed by an informative note of November 18 of the current year sent by Staff Sergeant Marin D. Răduca to the superiors. The cleric was suspected of encouraging young people from the locality to immigrate to Germany, being helped in this regard by the citizen Karl Schöner from the locality, who procured prohibited propaganda materials from Timisoara through the young Helene Petz⁴³.

The priest Josef Trittler had founded together with Karl Schöner and Francisc Franz a cooperative in the commune of Anina with a capital of 100,000 lei. The informative note of January 12, 1940 stated that the shareholders were only persons known for their political views. The leader of the communist group in the locality, the mining worker Rudolf Möser, had delegated to his colleague Cornel Urban at the beginning of January 1940 to the national-socialist leaders to inform them that the population, especially the mining workers, did not appreciate Hitler’s politics, especially because they did not want young people to be condemned and imprisoned for their misconceptions. Josef Trittler replied that this was irrelevant:

“They suffered and they will suffer, for Hitler he will suffer, they will fight, and they will suffer for him until the last drop of German blood”⁴⁴.

On January 10th, the same above mentioned had been handed to the young Victor Hupka, a character frequently mentioned in the following group of informative notes, a package with Hitler propaganda materials and a German military regulation. The so-called Hupka organized clandestine meetings of young Germans on the premises of the Kirșa factory and on Ponor Hill, as well as in the Anton Mudra hangar, where they carried out actions prohibited by Nazi propaganda.

Victor Hupka had come to the attention of law enforcement agencies because of his association with Trittler and Nazi propaganda. The informative note sent to Colonel Milicescu, the Commander of the Caraș Gendarmes Legion, on January 23, 1940, by the informant Francisc Rosen of Anina, describes some of the activities of the one under supervision. At the 1940 New Year’s Eve party, the so-called citizen along with other people of similar political convictions had started around 02-03: “to show up on their faces and to propagate their faces by chanting Nazi marches such as” Erika! “And” Wir gehen nach England! ” this being the gendarmerie patrol led by Staff Sergeant Gheorghe Vanca who testified in this regard. Victor Hupka had been identified as the leader of the young Germans in the locality, and his deputy was Otto Schöner. It should be noted that:

“These young people are still working in secret although they have been punished with correctional imprisonment and financial fines and under the urging of the most ardent Nazi priest Josef Trittler who urges them to work on, not to be afraid of punishment because for them it is a pride to suffer as Hitler has suffered who was eventually released from prison and is expected to inherit Europe”⁴⁵.

⁴² *Ibidem*, f. 39.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, f. 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 94.

Victor Hupka

Young Victor Hupka came to the attention of law enforcement agencies because of his association with the Trittler priest and Nazi propaganda. The person and his activity in conjunction with that of Josef Trittler were discussed in detail in the part of the doctoral thesis describing the religious elites of the Germans in the Banat mountain area in the interval between the two world wars.

Regarding his political activity, we can mention the following, supported by the primary sources of researched information. The young Hupka sent Hitler propaganda material to the Germans living in the Valley of Miniș through the daughter of Anton Mudra, mentioned above. The informant Hanas Hărăguș conveyed on February 21, that the citizen under supervision determined: “the families of German concentration to intervene through their deputy at the Ministry of National Defense that all German miners in Anina be deconcentrated, because their families are without any help and without any a livelihood”⁴⁶.

Victor Hupka’s sentence of 6 months in prison was the subject of his letter of April 10 that year, sent to the head of the Nazi organization in Resita, Bruno Dvarzsak. The letter stated that the acts of the Nazi organization in Steierdorf – Anina will be made difficult during the absence of its leader. A group of 7 teenagers, 5 young and 2 young people had been sentenced to various fines of 900, 1,000 and 1,300 lei. Hupka had requested the visit of the Gauleiter in Timisoara or the Kreisleiter in Oravița to improve the situation and to set up a German cultural home in Anina⁴⁷.

On April 26, 1940, one Franciscan Rosen and one Rudolf Möser showed that the citizen Fritz Reicher had bought for the young Germans in the village, at the order of Victor Hupka, the one imprisoned in the meantime: “white socks, white shorts, shorts, for girls Tyrolean clothes, and for boys, light gray socks woven in high elastic, named by the population Hitler Strimfi, which can only be found in the store of the merchant Arnold Bastius, who is a hitlerist focused and who puts at their disposal the newest Hitler clothing, at affordable prices! ”. They also described how the young Fritz Reichert from Reșița together with Hupka had made daily bike trips to the Miniș Valley for Nazi propaganda purposes⁴⁸.

Their destination was mostly the meth factory in that area, where they gave instructions to the worker Paul Sandner who, together with Anton Mudra, had declared in public: “Romania will soon be deleted from the map of Europe and will be passed under the protectorate of Italy as Moravia under the protectorate of Germany”⁴⁹. On May 10, it was reported that the incarcerated citizen had received the visit of the young Ella Petz and on May 1 and 2 of that year that year he had been visited by: “Hitler’s attackers Josef Schmidt and Otto Reichert from Resita together with Paul Schneider”⁵⁰.

Anton Mudra

Anton Mudra, the innkeeper, had been the subject of detailed information in an anonymous letter to the Gendarmes Caraș Legion, denouncing the Nazi propaganda. It was stated that both inside the Eichel restaurant canteen in Steierdorf – Anina and within the methyl spirit factory in the Marginea neighborhood, Resita, the so-called citizen had banned political propaganda. Thus, he had repeatedly glorified the German Armed Forces as compared to the British and

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 124.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 176.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 183.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 191.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 184.

French ones, eventually presenting them in gloomy colors. Also, the hierarchical relations of the German armed forces were presented in a positive light in contrast to those of the Romanian army: “He said that in Germany officers, non-commissioned officers are very friendly with the soldiers, they do not beat them nor swear at them like the Romanians do”⁵¹.

Constantly Anton Mudra: “he was mocking the Romanian financial authorities because they make geysers with pumice.” From a family point of view, it was shown that he had a girl who was studying for a scholarship in Reich and did not want to return to Romania. In his restaurant, the newspapers and magazines were exclusively German because the employees from this place and from the factory: “all the craftsmen are only Germans who carry out Hitler conspiracies”. His main contributor to propagandistic actions is a worker Wilhelm Wagner, originally from the locality of Cârșă, on the Valley of Miniș, who had studied in Danzig, Germany and who: “also makes Hitler propaganda and manifests for Hitlerism”.

Conclusions: At the end of this journey, among the case studies dedicated to the political activity initiated and supported by some German ethnic groups from Banat Montan, we note how the taboos, envies, prejudices, and sympathies, specific to small urban centers in a mountain area have profoundly influenced the quality and quantity of information about the previously mentioned phenomenon. Both the representatives of the law and their collaborators brought a strong personal element to the investigations, so that the whole approach was marked by a strong degree of subjectivism. The domestic political context, dominated by the monarchical authoritarian regime, as well as the international one, under the hegemony of the second world conflict, profoundly influenced the political options expressed by some members of the studied community, but also the reactions of the local authorities. The social harmony generally maintained during the interwar years, between the citizens belonging to the ethnic majority, and those of the minority concerned, has suffered in some cases, falling victim to certain political discourses of authoritarian or extremist bill.

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⁵¹ *Ibidem*, f. 45.

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