

The resettlement of ethnic Germans from Dobrudja in 1940; Preparation, implementation and result of the action.

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After a brief introduction to the history of Dobruja German, the author begins:

The individual processes that led to the premature resettlement of the Dobruja Germans can no longer be precisely determined today. In the case of the Bessarabian and North Beechland Germans, the resettlement was understandable. These areas had fallen to the Soviet Union in June 1940, and the Germans there were waiting to be resettled in the Reich because they could no longer remain under the new rulers. The situation was different for the Dobruja Germans: they belonged to the Romanian state and there was no reason why they should leave their homeland. Only a few of them would have agreed with the idea of a general resettlement. - In fact, most of the Dobruja Germans would not have been willing to resettle under normal circumstances if they had been approached with the idea of being "brought home to the Reich". Those who wanted to leave Dobrudja had already come to the Reich for the most part in the summer of 1939 and the beginning of 1940 through the so-called pre-settlement - between 1600 and 1700 persons. In the thirties, the leadership of the German Voiksgruppen in Dobruja was faced with a problem that it could not solve on its own. How should the landless German peasants in Dobruja, who were endangered both economically and ethnically, be helped? The Gauleiter of the time had therefore advocated their emigration to Germany. There, laborers were sought, especially in the field of agriculture. However, this action was then discontinued; it was said that the ethnic group should not be weakened any further.

In the summer of 1940, there had been a pro and contra discussion about the resettlement in the respective authorities, until then the order came: the Dobruja Germans are to be resettled. In October 1940, a "state treaty" was concluded between the German Reich and the Kingdom of Romania for the purpose of repatriation of the Germans from the Southern Bechenland and Dobruja. No Dobrudschadeutscher was included in the drafting of the treaty, let alone even heard. This shows that the ethnic Germans were regarded as objects from the very beginning.

In the last days of October, the Resettlement Command of Southern Beechland and Dobruja was established in the Stahnsdorf camp in Berlin. It was divided into the area staffs Radautz, Gura-

humora and Constanta. The Dobruja Command arrived in Constanta on October 30. A branch from the Bessarabia Command had already been waiting here to start working together. The Constanta Territorial Staff consisted of almost 160 people: the Territorial Plenipotentiary, the 7 local plenipotentiaries (Dobrogea had been divided into seven local districts, Do 1 to Do 7), the heads of the various departments, the taxators, doctors, nurses, interpreters, drivers and the staff members in the staffs and in the Cernavoda control and shipping center. In addition, nearly 100 Dobruja Germans were assigned to subordinate work, including the newly appointed Gauleiter as liaison with the ethnic group. ¹. As was to be expected, the Gauleiter could not appear in the decision-making process on important issues.

After a short briefing of the commando members, the village sticksmen were sent out to the villages to inform the people that a commando had arrived to resettle the Dobruja Germans. The call of the Fuehrer was now also going out to the Dobruja Germans; everyone would like to hear this call, and whoever was willing to resettle should register. The Romanian state would take over the property, and each resettler should receive a property in Germany corresponding to his current property.

In the villages an appeal was posted in German and Romanian by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, Abteilung Umsiedlung, which spoke of leaving for Germany, which on the one hand said so little, but on the other hand was again so far-reaching. In the German villages it had struck like lightning. - "The resettlement will be carried out in a short time." - Even though there had been rumors of resettlement among the Dobruja Germans in the past weeks, no one had seriously expected it to take place. For a part of the ethnic group it would still have been debatable: for the landless, for the poorer; but now everyone was to leave. What was the decision to be made? "Shall we go or shall we not go?" was said everywhere. For the dispossessed, the choice was easier, and they said, "We'll go!" The haves said, "We stay!" Others were again undecided. - What was to be done? How should one dissolve one's economy in such a short time, from one day to the next? There was no end to the questions. And what about the security for us, what are they going to do with us, where are we going to go? The members of the resettlement command gave only vague answers to this. This was also depressing. - Leading men of the Dobruza German community met for consultations in Constanta. They wanted clarity, they wanted security; but there was no one to whom they could voice their concerns. Such a start was pointless with the resettlement commissioners. On the contrary, it provoked unpleasant reactions. - Outside in the villages, however, everything took its course.

The local officials were there and had begun their work. Those willing to resettle made a start. More and more registered, and everything happened as planned. Those who did not want to leave under any circumstances were suddenly outnumbered. There were families who wanted to stay behind, but they could not leave the community: the community was stronger than them. And in the end, they too went about sorting, selling, packing, and what was there not to do in those days!

¹ The author was a cultural advisor in the leadership of the ethnic groups and himself a member of the Resettlement Commission.

It was a general departure. The surrounding peoples stood stunned: "What, you Germans want to leave? You want to leave your beautiful houses, farms and villages? That's impossible! How can you!" And now Romanians came and asked: "Did we do anything to you? Why are you leaving? Stay!" Leading Romanians intervened and tried to stop them, but in vain.

In the cities, the German peasants were predominant; they gave the streetscape its character. They came in with their carts and bought so much that soon there was nothing left to buy in the shops: no suitcases, shoes, bags, no fabrics, no coffee, tea, soap and the like. They bought in stock. They had been told they would do well to bring it all up to the empire with them. - The merchants, the Jews and Greeks, the Armenians and also the Romanians sensed that their time had come. They demanded prices that they would not have dared to take before. Now it was possible, the goods went so and so.

At that time, in the days of the resettlement, in addition to the many worries and some rejection, another thing could still be felt: a sympathy, even an enthusiasm for the German cause. Faith in Germany was the decisive factor in the pros and cons of the resettlement; without it there would have been no general awakening in Dobrudja. Our peasants believed in Germany and in the German people. For them, everything connected with it was beautiful and good and great. Germany, that was something like the sun in the sky. In the view to the sun, there was nothing in between that would have cast a shadow. Thus, most of the Dobruja Germans left their home quite confidently. After all, they were going to Germany!

The whole resettlement operation went as planned, smoothly, a masterpiece of organization. The two most important tasks were registration and taxation. - Through registration, the Dobruja Germans left the Romanian state, ceased to be Romanian citizens and were temporarily placed under the protection of the German Reich. Later, they were naturalized in an individual procedure and became German citizens. - The property of the Dobruja Germans was determined and estimated by the taxation. This property: land, buildings, living and dead inventory, supplies, etc. remained with the Romanian state. Romania had undertaken to pay the assets taken over to Germany. The payments were to be made mainly in kind, such as grain and oil. In fact, during the course of the war, Romania repaid these debts to a large extent through direct deliveries and through offsets on claims for German troops stationed in Romania. The Dobruja Germans thus have the right to make claims on the successors of the Reich.

The taxation of the Dobruja German assets is a rather murky chapter. Firstly, not all the property was included, and secondly, the resettlers were grossly overrepresented. The assessors brought with them no knowledge of the country and its people, and disdained everything that was not the same as in Germany. No consideration was given to the pieces that were already sold at low prices. The cash was paid in, but converted at the most unfavorable rate possible. Instead of 42

the Reichsmark had to be paid with 50 lei. A double disadvantage, then. The assessment of the soil was even more disastrous. A single short trip to the field was supposed to give the assessor information about the quality of the soil. The grading was then also after that: Best soil was used as inferior. - Furthermore, the assessors stuck too much to the issued guidelines, they did not have the courage to act according to the facts. - After the resettlement, the responsible authorities did not feel quite comfortable with the way the resettlers had been treated, and a now lengthy and costly re-registration and re-assessment was carried out.

Compared to other areas, there were much more favorable guidelines for the transportation of property. In any case, most of them did not make use of the given margin. The large luggage came on the Danube to Vienna and was piled up there in a large warehouse. When the resettlers received their boxes and bales after a few months, many of them were missing a lot. They had been looted on a large scale. Easily half of the resettlers were deprived of their cloth, wool, coffee, tea, and so on. In the report on the investigation initiated by the Viennese Gauleitung, there was also mention of the fact that the goods had to be secured before they spoiled! The people concerned never received any compensation. A first big disappointment for the resettlers in Germany!

Only a few days after the resettlement command started its work, the transport of the resettlers began. The Dobruja Germans were transported to the Cernavoda control and shipping point by 24 transport trains, a train from Fachria, a ship with Jacobsonstalers, trucks from the scattered settlements and the transport of the sick. The shipment lasted two weeks. From Cernavoda, 25 transports went exclusively by fast steamers to the Semlin camp near Belgrade. All DDSG fast steamers were used in order to avoid possible ice conditions at this time of year.

If you want to have good weather for such an action, the month of November is to be regarded as exceptionally late. In those days, however, it was as if the old homeland wanted to send the resettlers a last loving greeting. Almost all days during the resettlement the countryside was bathed in the most splendid sunshine. A magnificent distant view let everyone once again take in everything clearly. A deep blue high sky created a special atmosphere of consecration. Whoever drove through the country at that time will never forget those days.

The streets of Dobrogea saw many an unusual picture in those November weeks. First, there were the German cars. NSKK people helped to carry out the action according to the program, punctually to the minute. NSV people and Red Cross nurses were helping. A counterpart to the German exodus was the Romanian-Bulgarian resettlement. Bulgaria had also concluded a mutual resettlement agreement with Romania.² All Bulgarians from Northern Dobrogea had to move to Southern Dobrogea and vice versa.

2 The Romanian-Bulgarian population exchange agreement in question was a part of the Craiova Treaty of September 7, 1940, which regulated the cession of Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria.

Romanians and Macedo-Romanians from the south to the north. These resettlers, with their movable belongings, moved along the roads with difficulty on teams of oxen and horses. They lacked any support. - In some villages, the Macedo-Romanians moved into the houses of the Germans immediately after their departure, three or four families at a time. The different way of life of these resettlers meant that houses and farms were given to other purposes as before. Some villages, however, remained empty for the time being. They were guarded only by some soldiers, who were at the same time responsible for the care of the animals left behind. If one returned to an abandoned German village, one had the most unreal experiences. Dogs and cats jumped silently away from the visitor, horses stomped in front of the gnawed cribs and looked at the entrant, cows stood on high piles of pumpkins, chickens sat motionless under the corn barn, the doors were closed, nothing moved, one shivered in the most beautiful sunshine, and only at the end of the village one met two guards on the way back, and in one case they were Transylvanian Saxons in Romanian uniform.

In order to record the resettlement process in words and pictures, the command was also accompanied by reporters. However, most of the reports written at that time are so biased that today one can only read them shaking one's head. - The archives, church records, people's council records were collected and brought to Berlin with various exhibits. There some of them were shown at an exhibition. The church books were subsequently taken to Bydgoszcz, where they remained in January 1945, and the exhibits to a museum in Poznan; they too were lost. Only a few Dobrudschadeutsch documents were taken by private persons, but they were also almost completely lost.

On November 28, 1940, the resettlement in Northern Dobruja was completed. 13979 persons had been transported up the Danube via the leading port of Cernavoda. Just over two percent of Germans remained in Dobrudja. In the main, these were people who did not want to resettle. - The curtain had fallen on almost exactly 100 years of German life in Dobrudja.

In the transit camp Semlin the Dobrudschadeutschen were all gathered once again. From there they went by train to Graz, from where the individual communities were distributed to the resettlement camps. The Dobruja Germans were accommodated in more than 100 camps. Do 1 to Do 3, the northern Dobruja, came to the Gau Mainfranken. The population of Do 4 to Do 7, middle Dobruja, to the Gau Niederdonau. The village communities ceased to exist. Requests for reunifications were not considered.

The camp period was difficult. Many tragedies took place here. The accommodation was mostly bad, because often several families were crammed together in a larger or smaller room. The camps lasted for months, even years, for some until 1945. Those who were able to go to work were at least away from the miserable camp life. However, the military conscripts were called up after only a few weeks. Many of the appointed camp leaders were degenerate people who made life even more difficult for the inmates. Embezzlement was a daily occurrence among them. The Dobrud Germans were at the mercy of an apparatus from which they had no protection. The

Farmers experienced a disappointment at that time that could never be made up for. Again and again one heard, "If we had known what to expect, we would not have come."

In the summer of 1941 they were smuggled through, i.e. naturalized in an individual procedure. So-called "flying commissions" of the Litzmannstadt [Lodz] Immigration Center ran the individual through a series of offices and handed him the naturalization certificate at the end. The resettler had thus become a German citizen.

By the end of 1944, more than 15,000 Dobrudschadeutsche had been resettled. In Wartheland, in the administrative districts of Hohensalza and Litzmannstadt 4500, in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Mäh- ren 9000, in Southern Styria 500, in the Old Kingdom, Lorraine and Galicia 1000, and in 1945 there were still many Dobrudschadeutsche resettlers in the resettlement camps. Today, the Dobruja Germans live in a dispersion of the greatest extent: in Western and Central Germany, in Austria and Romania, in France and overseas. In Dobruja itself there are probably still a few hundred compatriots; however, their number has been increased by Banater Swabians and Transylvanian Saxons.