

# Andreas Schmidt and the German Ethnic Group in Romania (1940 – 1944)

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The worsening domestic and international situations of Romania in the summer of 1940, as a result of the effects of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, military victories achieved by the Wehrmacht in the West, as well as territorial concessions to the USSR, Bulgaria and Hungary, were ably speculated by the leadership of the Third Reich, which compelled the government in Bucharest to make new economic and political concessions, including the “regularization” of the status of the German minority in Romania, in accordance with Berlin’s projects for this geographical area. As a result, concomitant with the outcome of the Second Vienna Arbitration on August 30, 1940, the head of the German Foreign Office, Joachim von Ribbentrop, compelled the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mihail Manoilescu (1891-1950), to sign an agreement covering the legal status of the German minorities within Romanian territory. The Romanian authorities agreed: 1) to treat the members of the German Ethnic Group “equally in all aspects”; 2) to ensure their ability to develop their German character, according to the 1918 Alba-Iulia declarations.<sup>1</sup>

The implementation of the August 30, 1940 agreement would be aided by important events in Romania the following September to November: King Carol II’s (1893-1953) abdication, General Ion Antonescu’s (1882-1946) assumption of power together with the Legionnaire Movement / Iron Guard (the so-called “National-Legionary” regime, from Sept. 1940 to Jan. 1941), the arrival of the German Military Mission, and last

1 See the text of the agreement in *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1945, Band X Die Kriegsjahre, Dritter Band 23. Juni bis 31. August 1940*, Frankfurt am Main, 1963, document 413, p. 484.

but not least, Romania’s signing on to the Tripartite Pact (November 23, 1940). These developments irreversibly placed Romania within Germany’s sphere of influence and, therefore, afforded Berlin the opportunity to determine the fate of the ethnic Germans in Romania. The first consequence was the replacement of the old leaders—those thought “moderate”—with radical national-socialists who would be obedient to and ready to follow unconditionally the orders they received from the Reich. Thus, the leader of the German minority, Dr. Wolfram Bruckner (1903–1979), was replaced on September 22, 1940 by a rapidly rising figure, Andreas Schmidt (1912–1948).<sup>2</sup> This young man’s appointment—28 years-old, unremarkable, lacking political experience, but well connected with the upper leadership of the SS<sup>3</sup>—had sinister consequences for the German minority in Romania in the following four years. Following commands received from the “Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Central Office for Ethnic Germans from Abroad,” Andreas Schmidt, shortly after taking power, embarked on a reorganization of the German

2 Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității București [National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives], Information collection, folder 262164 (Andreas Schmidt), vol. 2, f. 7. Letter from 22.09.1940 to the head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz, addressed to Andreas Schmidt (cited hereafter as CNSAS).

3 See Andreas Schmidt’s account of his life, written 06.02.1944, published by Paul Milata, *Der Lebenslauf des „Volksgruppenführers“ Andreas Schmidt*. In: „Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde“, 28. (2005), p. 70-76; According to the German historian Heinz Höhne, Andreas Schmidt was an “ultra-Nazi, a prototypical young fanatic, intoxicated with the cult of Hitler.” Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf. Die Geschichte der SS*, München, Weltbild, 1984, p. 425.

minority's leadership structures, marking the official start of the "alignment" process (Gleichschaltung) of the German Ethnic Group in Romania, a process which included the adoption and faithful application of then-current German political, economical, and cultural models.<sup>4</sup> Thus, following agreements with the Iron Guard (the principal dialog partner within the National-Legionary government from September 1940 to January 1941), during a sumptuous ceremony held on November 9, 1940 in the Transylvanian city of Mediaș, the "National Socialist German Workers Party of the Ethnic Germans in Romania" (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien [NSDAP der DVR]) was founded, at which occasion Andreas Schmidt presented the principles on which the new legal status of the German Ethnic Group would be based.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of a new, Nazi-based political formation for ethnic Germans contravened Romanian laws in effect at that time, which prohibited the creation of political

organizations and parties. This paradoxical situation is explained by the fact that approval of the status of the German Ethnic Group—as announced by Andreas Schmidt over the course of October 1940, and modified by common accord with the Council of Ministers Vice-President Horia Sima (1906-1993) in the first days of November 1940—was delayed by General Ion Antonescu until the second half of November 1940, in spite of repeated requests by the commander of the Legionary Movement.<sup>6</sup> In the end, on November 21, 1940, Decree-Law 3887<sup>7</sup> officially consecrated the German Ethnic Group and offered it extensive prerogatives, by declaring the organization a "Romanian legal entity by public law." Along with the fact that this decree legalized the functioning of the German Ethnic Group, the act offered the new German minority leadership, in this case Andreas Schmidt and his collaborators, the support necessary to organize the German Ethnic Group along the National-Socialist model, to place it under the leadership of the Third Reich, and last but not least, to remove opponents (real or imagined) to Nazi-style leadership. In the period that followed, as it extended its organizational structures into the entire community<sup>8</sup>, the German Ethnic Group (Grupul Etnic German [GEG]) quickly established almost total

4 Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918–1944* [Contributions to the History of Transylvanian Saxons 1918-1944], Sibiu, Editura Hora, 2001, p. 238; see also references throughout Johann Böhm, *Die Gleichschaltung der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien und das 'Dritte Reich' 1941–1944*, Frankfurt am Main–Berlin–Bern–Bruxelles–New York–Oxford–Wien, Peter Lang, 2003.

5 For the internal and international contexts of the founding of the *NSDAP der DVR*, see especially Johann Böhm, *Das Nationalsozialistische Deutschland und die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1936–1944. Das Verhältnis der Deutschen Volksgruppe zum Dritten Reich und zum rumänischen Staat sowie der interne Widerstreit zwischen den politischen Gruppen*, Frankfurt am Main–Bern–New York, Peter Lang, 1985, p. 123–127; Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918–1944* [Contributions to the History of Transylvanian Saxons 1918-1944], p. 238–239

6 CNSAS, Information holdings, folder 210107 (Horia Sima), vol. 3, f. 47. Letter from Horia Sima on 07.11.1940 to General Ion Antonescu.

7 *Monitorul Oficial* [Official Bulletin] number 275, 21 November 1940. Decree-Law 3884 of 20.11.1940 for the constitution of the Romanian German Ethnic Group.

8 See the German Ethnic Group structures described in Harald Roth, *Die deutsche Jugend in Siebenbürgen, 1939-1944*. In: „Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde”, 10 (1987), p. 60-69; Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu. Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS*, Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau, 2007, p. 80-95.

control over the public life of ethnic Germans in Romania.

As was to be expected, later events would generate (more or less openly) hostile reactions, not only from the Romanian authorities but also, especially, from the Lutheran and Catholic churches. As a consequence, Andreas Schmidt's ascent to power was followed, after a campaign personally organized by the new GEG leader, by the removal or marginalization of notable figures in the German minority and church leadership—avowed opponents of National-Socialism such as the Lutheran bishop Viktor Glondys (1882-1949), the Episcopal Bishop Friedrich Müller (1884-1969), and Hans Otto Roth (1890-1953)—and their replacement by people obedient to Bishop Wilhelm Staedel (1890-1971). As a result, the German Ethnic Group achieved, in a relatively short time, "alignment" and the total dispossession of the Transylvanian Lutheran Church of its traditional place in culture and education. Therefore, as a result of a step-by-step process, an institution that had been fundamental to the secular existence of the German community in Romania was transformed into an annex of the Nazi leadership of the German Ethnic Group. The process of reorganization and "alignment" initiated by the new leader of the GEG was also influenced by German intelligence agencies active in Romania. If under the mandate of Wolfram Bruckner the GEG leadership had collaborated closely with OKW/Amt Ausland/Abwehr, as lead by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), Andreas Schmidt's appointment as head of the German minority was followed by a reorientation of its cooperation with German intelligence agencies. The new GEG leader opted for an even deeper collaboration with Amt VI-SD Ausland under the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA). Andreas Schmidt's decision, perhaps surprising at

first glance, is fully explained by the position of power and connections Andreas Schmidt had available within the SS leadership—through his family relationship with SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger (1896-1975)—as a result of his earlier collaborations with Amt VI of the RSHA. Likewise, Andreas Schmidt was active with RSHA Amt VI-Ausland in an "honorary" capacity as early as 1939, with the constant support of the fearsome head of the RSHA, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942). Andreas Schmidt's intention to pursue intelligence cooperation with SD-Ausland instead of OKW/Amt Ausland Abwehr stemmed from the meeting of concerns shown by prominent leaders of the SS, especially Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) and SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, to extend the Amt VI intelligence network abroad (including in Romania), to counteract the activity of OKW/Amt Ausland Abwehr, its rival intelligence agency. The period that Andreas Schmidt spent as head of the German minority would, in fact, prove extremely fertile for SD-Ausland's activity in Romania, with the GEG leader's indispensable support (political, logistic, financial) for the creation, extension, camouflage, and functioning of the SD-Ausland intelligence network in Romania. In the political context promoted by Andreas Schmidt and his leadership team, the project of transforming the Romanian German minority into a political and military instrument completely servile to the expansionist policy of the Third Reich included enlisting ethnic Germans within Romanian state territory into the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS. The Antonescu regime had long resisted pressure from Berlin to legalize the enlistment of Romanian citizens of German nationality, an attitude stemming from political and military considerations, as

well as, and not least importantly, a question of prestige. Even though it eventually proved necessary to concede to the Reich's pressure, Bucharest still attempted to preserve Romanian interests by every means possible, which caused many moments of friction in Romanian-German relations. The ethnic Germans' desire to join the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS stemmed, in the first place, from the difference in treatment they received in the Romanian army, antibolshevik sentiment, better net compensation in the German units, the attraction of Germany (even in the context of the repeated military defeats suffered in theaters of military operations during 1943-1944), community pressure, etc. The number of Romanian ethnic Germans—only in the Waffen-SS—has been determined at a minimum of 61,880 and a maximum of 65,240.<sup>9</sup> Romanian ethnic Germans in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS fought in practically all military theaters of World War Two, with greater involvement on the Eastern Front, which explains their considerable casualties. According to published sources, between 8 or 9000<sup>10</sup> to 15,000<sup>11</sup> ethnic Germans in the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS lost their lives either in battle or prison.

It is certain that the "Andreas Schmidt Era" was one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Romanian German minority. The dictatorial leadership of Andreas Schmidt and his collaborators in the German Ethnic Group—characterized by the elimination of

9 Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu. Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen SS*, p. 217.

10 Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu [The Social and the National in Ion Antonescu Government Policy]*, București, Editura Eminescu, 2000, p. 211.

11 Hans-Werner Schuster, „Der Wehrdienst der Rumäniendeutschen im Zweiten Weltkrieg”, In: *Siebenbürgische Semesterblätter*, München, 1987, Heft 1, p. 169.

real or imagined opponents, subordination and “alignment” of traditional institutions, transformation of the GEG into an instrument of Third-Reich policy in this geographical area—profoundly impacted the Romanian German minority during World War Two. The effects of the Schmidt Era did not end with his removal from power, which occurred with Romania's ending its alliance with Germany on August 23, 1944, rather it continued to hamper the entire German community in the postwar period, with effects visible unfortunately even today.

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