

# Industrial production of the interbelic German from the Banat Highland

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**Abstract.** The historian Fernand Braudel considered that geography dictates history because a certain region or a certain state requires a characteristic of its economic life. Commerce was often called in mercantilist period the blood that provides life of the nation. These data imply progress in terms of demographic beyond doubt, especially in the employment of the German minority living in the urban communes of the Banat Mountain. We retain the dual nature of their occupations, with farm work kept in the background, but the main plane dominated the gradual effect of industrial labour and business activities. Along with farmers, most Germans residing in villages and hamlets in the mountains of Banat were devoted to jobs in the service sector and small crafts area. They worked both as employers and employees in the stores and workshops in rural and urban areas where they resided. Working as sellers, barbers, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, butchers, tanners, plumbers, painters or as doctors, dentists, teachers, lawyers, they have contributed to the development of material and spiritual not only their own minority but of communities within which they were born and prospered.

## 1. Introduction

Realising a truthful narration about the German community of the Banat Highland in the interwar years, as it had happened, to quote the historian Theodor Mommsen, proves a necessary endeavour, especially since the works of the last decades treating the German community in Romania have done this generally, without allotting a space aside for this micro region [1].

Analysing the works that have touched, even in passing, the history of the German community in the interwar Banat Highland, we may state that many of these, of more recent or more remote date, have insisted either on the politic element of this minority, sometimes also on the economic one, without giving much importance to the social or cultural one. That which has been written so far on this subject, is in some cases correct, in some not, but in both situations still insufficient, as it has not touched the depth of the problem in all its aspects: economic, social, political and cultural. In these conditions, the endeavour of the author of this doctoral thesis was to discover much information from



the primary sources, to give them back to the historiographical circuit, to analyse and interpret them [2].

Over the centuries, a series of historians, not without merit, have committed the frequent error of stating that the German population of the Banat is totally composed from Swabians, originated from the area of Württemberg or from Alsace and Lorraine. The error is explainable by the names given to the Germans from the Banat area, during the Austro- Hungarian dualism. Under the influence of some writers from Germany and Austria, such as Adam Müller Guttenbrun, the name “Swabian” received an honourable prerogative, namely that of the colonist who subdued the elements of nature. At the beginning of the 20th century, many more authors considered that the Germans from Hungary are divided in the Saxons from Transylvania and the Swabians from Banat [3].

The error of placement for these writers refers to the omission of other groups of German colonists who came from: Bohemia, Burgenland, Carinthia, Moravia, Slovakia, Styria, Tirol and Zips, and who were settled in the mountainous region of the Banat. Those who were colonised in the 18th century and were no ethnic German, underwent a germanisation process in the 19th century, ending up considering themselves as members of the said ethnic group in the 20th century. They were perceived as German by the members of the Romanian majority who did not differentiate on the region of origin their forefathers had come to the Banat Highland and did not see them as specific Austrians, Styrians, Tirolians, Bohemians, Moravians or Italians. Some authors such as: Engelmann, Bell, Herrschaft, Lupșiasca, Petri, Schöffler și Windhager have not considered the work of the historian Țintă, either because they wrote their own books before the period of creation of the said scholar, or because they had no access to his writings. Whatever the reason, the result found itself in the often-encountered confusion of the interwar and post war historiography, to culturally assimilate the Germans from the Banat Mountains (Austrians, Czechs and germanised Italians) with the Swabians from the plain area of the province (Württembergers, Alsatians, Lorrainians and Rheinlander) [4].

The scientific endeavour to identify the sources, to go through the bibliography and to write my doctoral thesis was characterised by a close cooperation between all information sources, the edited as well as the inedited ones. This way, in which the researcher uses in close cooperation the older and newer information sources bears the name Hugging Technique, was being originar from the Anglo-Saxon linguistic space, where it had been erroneously attributed to the historian Samuel P. Huntington. Of course, this scholar, famous for his work *The Clash of Civilizations*, did not invent the said technique, it being created by the historians of the *Annales School*: Lucian Febvre and Fernand Braudel, between 1922 and 1929. Concretely, the technique supposes the doubling of the bibliographic information by the archivist ones, which support and check the narration in every chapter of the paper[4]. Thus, the data from books and articles, contemporary or from the studied époque, have been completed, verified and debated. The conclusions were thus logically structured and would enjoy an increased scientific value [5].

The above-mentioned working technique was supported and completed by the research method mix, namely the micro- analytical and selective process, by which the hard points of thesis are fixed. The central research point was described, but also its surrounding environment as well as the relation: capital- province, city- village [6].

Naturally, this fact implied a rigorous filtering of the information found, both bibliographic and documentary. The narrations and descriptions, from the thesis as well as the conclusions part had to be supported by data taken from the read books, from the documentary researched funds but also from the publications of the age. The information gathered from a source have been carefully scrutinised, compared with similar ones from other sources, and, if there had been a corroboration, then they were used in the construction of the text. The used quotations, acting as examples from the publications of that age as well as from the documentary funds, if they were written in other languages than Romanian, then they were translated and inserted into the body of the text [7].

Beside books, studies and articles written by various: historians, sociologists, metallurgic and mining engineers, union leaders or journalists, the documentary funds contain inedited and interesting information, far too little researched so far. After consultations with MA Josef Wolf from the Institute

for Swabian History and Homeland Studies in Tübingen, Germany, (further on abridged I.D.G.L.), the author has reached the conclusion that within the research and writing system of the paper it is necessary to put into value the informational sources from diaries of personalities from the Banat but especially from the private collections of documentary funds found in the National Archives of Romania [8]:

1. The documentary funds researched in Caransebeş (The National Archives, County Branch Caraş-Severin, further abridged A.N.D.C.S.) have revealed brand new data on the German minority as it had been described in the official papers drawn up: by the police institutions from Băile Herculane, Caransebeş, Oraviţa and Reşiţa, by the administrative activity of the Prefecture of the Caraş county, by the agricultural banks from Bocşa Montană, Caransebeş and Oraviţa, through the documents drawn up by the Commission for Application of the 1921 Land Reform at county level, without omitting, of course, the ones connected with the activity of social protection and mutual support of the Pension Institute managed by the firm U.D.R. in the interval 1918-1930 [9].

2. In parallel, the data collected in Timişoara (The National Archives, County Branch Timiş, further on abridged A.N.D.T.), has revealed information about: the activity of the ethnic Germans in the Educational Inspectorate of the county Severin as well as their level of involvement in the agricultural production of the interwar years. The information found in the Archives of the Roman-catholic Bishopric (further on abridged A.D.T.) has not been neglected, revealing brand new data regarding the correspondence of different professional and cultural associations, formed by the German inhabitants of the plain and mountainous regions of the Banat in the interval 1929-1944 [10].

3. Very interesting from the economic and politic aspect proved the information gathered because of the applicative research, carried out in the documentary centres of Bucureşti (The Central Direction of the National Historic Archives, as well as, The Archive of the National Council for the Studies of the Security's Archives, further on abridged A.N.C.D.B. and respectively A.C.N.S.A.S.). Thus, the politic evolution of the studied minority can be found in the documentary funds containing information about: The Ruling Council, the Police General Direction, the Homeland and Foreign Ministries, as well as the Secret Information Service. The ups and downs of economic life, underwent by the said minority are described via the date from the files treating: the application of the Land Reform o 1921 in the counties of the Banat Mountains, but also via the industrial and commerce legislation adopted by the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate in the interval 1923-1938. Often, the economic problems were identified as cause for the political ones, and sometimes the latter overlap the first. This is the case of the events described in the documentary pages that deal with the historic evolution of the German minority from Romania between 1929 and 1940 and with the one of the German Ethnic Group 1940-1944. The information attest to multiple interferences between those two previously mentioned plains of existence with a strong extension into the cultural one and a profound influence over the social life [11].

The German community of the interwar Banat Highland is implicitly connected to the historic concept known as: past- present. Beginning with the theoretic explanation of the concept of history carried out by Rheinhard Koselleck and of the disparity of temporal phases, the author has described the life and evolution level of the said minority in the interval 1918-1940, insisting upon the named geographic area. Applying the latter concept, formulated by the same historian the author has drawn up a description of the mental collective under the influences of the politic, economic and social phenomena, specific to the respective age [12].

The historian Fernand Braudel considered that geography dictates history because it imposes on a region or a state a characteristic of its economic life. Commerce was often called in the mercantilist era the blood that assures the life of a nation [13].

## 2. Analysis

Romania's industrial rebuilding after the First World War was uneven. This is obvious if we consider the following situation: in 1919, the production volume in the steel industry was 19.4% compared to 1913 although there were abundant resources. The insufficient development of the metallurgical

industry meant that it could only take part in the development of the local economy, and in 1924 it covered only 46% of domestic consumption. The extractive industry has seen significant improvements in terms of production. Notable progress has also been made in the extraction and processing of salt, copper, lead and other non-ferrous metals. Within the four-year food industry: 1924- 1928, the number of enterprises increased from 842 to 1,133, and in the textile sector from 377 companies in 1924 to 570 firms in 1928. In parallel, the industry had a high degree of automation, the 73,000 hp Used at the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century, being increased to 96,000 C.P. At the beginning of the fourth decade of the same century [14].

Fundamental to organizing the exploitation of subsoil resources was the Mining Law of June 4, 1924. Using the provisions of the Constitution of March 28-29, 1923, this legislative act strengthened the hegemony of the state over the wealth found in the basement of Romania. There was also a strong degree of control of domestic capital in joint ventures [15].

The National Peasant Government issued on 28 March 1929 the Law for the Amendment of the Mines Law of June 4, 1924. This law is in line with the policy formulated by the Political Revolution. Of "Open Gates!", Different from the liberal one entitled "By ourselves!". Although both economic doctrines aimed at the general progress and the development of the Romanian society, they were different in terms of the means and methods of achieving these desiderata [16].

The years of the global economic crisis have led to an economic recession marked by the decrease of the purchasing power of the population, but also by the reduction of state orders for products. This led to a decrease in production in some of the economic branches, for example: the steel industry, the coal mining industry, the manufacturing industry, the forestry industry, the construction industry, the average index of 57% [17].

During the period 1934-1938, the Romanian economy experienced an upward trajectory due to strong government involvement. This corresponded to the neo-liberal political doctrine of involving the government in the economy and to create a state of fact conducive to the development of domestic economic forces in the banking, industrial and export fields. However, foreign investment in finance and industry continued to be a major part of the capital that has run in these economic branches. In April 1935, the Romanian government concluded a contract with the Czechoslovak Skoda Factory for the supply of weapons to the Cugir and Resita plants [18].

The legislation of the liberal national government at the end of the interwar period had beneficial effects for the national industry. By Decree Law of May 10, 1937, the regulation and control of cartels was established regarding the establishment of new factories. For such an approach, the favourable opinion of the Ministry of Industry was needed, which exemplifies state control in some industrial branches such as arms production [19].

The Banat Mountains played an important role in the strategic interests of Romania and Germany, the interest being placed on the chromium ores located in this micro-region. The mandatory military organization of the industry, starting with 1939, involved the formation of industrial offices in industry branches, the presidents of the administrative boards being appointed by the government [20].

The outbreak of the second world conflagration led to the militarization of many firms and economic companies in the industrial, banking and commercial spheres. This is the case of enterprises: Astra Romana, Concordia, Colombia, Romanian-American Society. This element affected the flow of commodities and currency in the offices of the Banat Mountains. The German Kontinental A.G. Opened in 1940 a subsidiary of Otelu Rosu to produce the necessary parts in the oil industry [21].

The conditions given by the habitats of the population have concentrated the country's demographic weight in rural areas. This led to the situation where most of the able-bodied ones were engaged in agricultural activities. The destructive effects of the First World War were cancelled until 1922, after which the agricultural production had an ascending meaning. Laws for the implementation of the agrarian reform in Banat, Crişana, Maramureş, Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bucovina had a beneficial effect on agriculture in the region under discussion. Both in the mountain area and in the Banat plain area, 24,815 families belonging to the German minority were appropriated [22]. This

measure was in addition to the Law on the Establishment of the Agrarian Committee of March 1920 and the Act on the Establishment of the Municipal Slates in August 1920. For the German farmers in the Mountain Banat, who were mainly engaged in animal husbandry and fruit growing, the clear constitution and delimitation of some Grazing places had a direct beneficial effect on the evolution of their main occupation. In 1928 the cultivated areas were 20% larger than 1922.

The global economic crisis has led to the collapse of agricultural prices across the global commodity exchanges. The agricultural production, which in 1929 was worth ROL 88 billion, was only 30 billion ROL in 1933. The small property of 1 to 3 ha predominates in a proportion of 48.5%. Despite the 1921 Agrarian Reform, the world economic crisis has led to the plunder of many landowners in 1938, with 1 million peasants deprived of land. Inter-war legislation tried to help agricultural workers establish state pensions for those who reached the age of 70. We mention in this regard the Law on the Settlement of Laws of Ownership of 20 August 1929 initiated by the peasant national politician Ion Mihalache [23].

Investments in agriculture have remained relatively low and were mainly initiated by national peasant governments between 1928 and 1931. As the second world warfare was prefigured, the government took measures to boost agriculture. This was to ensure that a surplus of agri-food products would be stored within the strategic reserves of the state prepared for conflict cases [24].

One of the legislative measures referred to the organization of Chambers of Agriculture. The measure was adopted by the National Representation on July 1, 1930. The central idea of the normative act was the protection of cereal production by both the state and the private owners. The legislative act, although well intentioned, has failed to lead to increased small and medium-sized peasant production deeply affected by the crisis and increased taxes. The funds were simply insufficient to allow large-scale leasing of machinery for the selection of grain varieties and for the gradual removal of traction animals [25].

Apparent relief measures for agricultural workers did not stop, under the rule of Iorga-Argetoianu, on December 18, 1931, starting the first Law to suspend forced execution. In theory, the measure would protect small owners from the abuse of creditors and give them favourable time and conditions to pay their debts. In practice, however, the measure remained largely ineffective. The government was forced to formulate complementary solutions. One of these refers to the first Law on the conversion of agricultural debts in April 1932. The measure should, at least theoretically, provide debt repayments according to the terms and conditions of reimbursement [26].

The legislative measure of the Iorga-Argetoianu government was qualified as inadequate by the peasant national ministerial team, which is why they sought effective means to improve the material and social situation of the agricultural producers affected by the crisis. In October 1932, a first concrete element of these plans appeared, represented by a second Law on the conversion of agricultural debts. The practical applicability of this normative measure has been desirable, being completed in April 1933 with a Law on the regulation of agricultural and urban debts. The latter proposed the conversion of agricultural debts by 75% of their gross value, being an indisputable act of social justice initiated in favour of small agricultural owners who enjoyed wide support among the peasant national political base [27].

The Law on the Clearance of Agricultural Debt of 7 April 1934 deals with agricultural lending problems. Debt reliefs to the state or private institutions varied, depending on the economic level, between 50% and 70%. The rest of the borrowed amount was paid within 15 years with an annual interest rate of 3%. The measure has temporarily improved the material state for a part of the agricultural producers, but failed to fully remedy the catastrophic effects of the economic crisis on the population [28].

Our country suffered from the existence of an insufficiently developed road network. The frequent changes of governments, which affected the structure of line ministries, did not improve this situation. For example, the Autonomous House of State Roadways of the Ministry of Public Works and Communications was replaced in 1932 with the General Directorate of Roads. Between 1936 and 1938 425 km of roads were asphalted for the next two years, with another 1,800 km of roads being



programmed. The railway network was performing somewhat better, in 1939 repairing 11,410 km of railway at the Reșița and Bucharest plants. During the liberal national government, a series of railways were built, having a secondary economic aspect of passenger and commodity traffic, but of indisputable military and strategic value. These are two routes: Ilva Mica - Vatra Dornei, Resita – Caransebes [29].

From the point of view of transports and aeronautical communications, we mention the following: The communication and shipping routes were managed by an Autonomous Directorate of Waterways Communications founded in July 1929. It will be transformed in May 1934 into an institution named Commercial Administration of Ports and Communications on Water. In March 1936, the Ministry of Air and Navigation formed the following administrative subdivisions: the Romanian Maritime Service, the Danube Naval Service and the so-called commercial administration. The merchant fleet consisted of 5 passenger ships and 7 ships and cargo ships for the Black Sea along with 12 passenger ships and 19 freight tugs on the Danube. The Romanian State Air Operations included 6 international flights with operating contracts with 7 foreign partner companies [30].

Letters, telegrams and telephone services were managed by the Directorate-General for Post and Telecommunications, founded in April 1920. This body was later renamed the Post and Telephony Registry and ranked in May 1934 in the Ministry of Public Works. On December 12, 1927, the Broadcasting Directorate was established, which became the Romanian Broadcasting Society on November 1, 1928, and in 1940 there were 4 radio stations that took over broadcasts and newsletters from similar institutions from abroad [31].

Domestic and international, wholesale and retail trade followed the sinuous moves of global financial and banking developments. The period of economic rise from 1924 to 1928 followed the years of the world economic crisis: 1929-1933, to then make sensible increases in the trading of goods and services between 1934 and 1940 [32].

The First World War negatively affected the trade balance in our country. Thus, in 1919 the figures were only 2.5% of the export and 37.7% of the average imports from 1910 to 1914. The balance of imports and exports tended to be net in favour of the former by 68.8% as against 31.2%. Through a series of banking measures meant to cover as much as possible the Romanian currency with precious metal in international transactions, a trade deficit was reduced from 583 million lei in 1919 to 156 million lei in 1921 [33].

From the point of view of public finances, we note that in 1922-1923 the first unitary budget was achieved for the whole of Romania. Public debt increased because of the world's first conflagration from ROL 1,400 billion in 1914 to ROL 20,000 billion in 1921. This is explained by the fact that the first amount represented the debts contracted only by the Kingdom of Romania in the territorial form 1914, while the second sum represents the debts of large Romania, a state entity existing after the acts of unification in 1918. In general, the external loans contacted during the peasant national governments attracted quite high interest rates of 8.9%. The preferred currency was US dollars along with French or Swiss francs. Overall, the interwar years have experienced significant fluctuations, in general the Romanian state is mostly indebted to both internal and external capital circles [34].

In the period immediately following World War I, anonymous banking companies increased from 487 in 1919 to 556 in 1921. Capital detained increased from 10 billion lei in 1922 to 24 billion lei in 1924. In Banat Montana, there were branches of the main institutions Banking and credit in the country. Well-represented at the micro-region level were the Romanian National Bank, an institution that controlled 25 banks and 52 industrial enterprises, the Romanian Credit Bank, a body holding the majority stake in 46 banking and credit companies, Marmorosch Blank Bank with 9 Affiliated banks and 58 industrial enterprises. They had branches at Oravița, Reșița, Caransebeș, Oțelu Roșu, Anina, Moldova Nouă, Orșova. Along with the credit institutions were represented in Banat Mountains: Banca Romaneasca and Banca Comerciala Romana [1].

Romania's situation must be integrated into the global economic situation. Like other states, the Romanian one attempted financial recovery measures. We mention in this direction the Law on Monetary Stabilization of February 7, 1929. This law regulated the issue of banknote and coin

issuance of the National Bank of Romania. Also in February 1929, the national-peasant government promulgated the Law on the modification of the state of the National Bank of Romania, a measure that tried to be a social policy act meant to increase the population's trust in the country's main credit institution [2].

Over the years of the overproduction economic crisis, the Romanian government has often appealed to foreign loans. The main partner of financial engineers came from the American, French, Belgian, Dutch, German, Austrian, Czechoslovak capital. Loans were typically made for 40 years with a fixed interest rate of 7.5%. Under extreme conditions dictated by the global overproduction crisis, the government used the reserves of the Romanian National Bank to pay salaries and budget pensions. Given the financial austerity measures dictated by the circumstances, these amounts proved to be insufficient, which had a negative impact on the purchasing power of the population [3].

With the establishment of the government chaired by Gheorghe Tătărașcu, there was a change in the country's economic policy. Loyal to the liberal national motto "By ourselves!", The government has launched a series of protectionist measures to boost exports from Romania, but also to reduce imports considered unimportant. We mention in this regard the Law on the Establishment of Machinery Factories and on Important Non-Manufactured Products for the National Industry of July 31, 1937. Thus, new industrial sub-branches were created, such as the steel tubes industry, the radio lamps industry, the electric cables industry, Dyestuffs industry, aircraft industry naval instrument industry. A year earlier, the government issued a law on the mandatory use of indigenous raw materials for commodities [4].

### 3. Conclusion

Regarding the economic context of the evolution of the Germans in the Banat Mountain during the interwar years, there is a general ascendant course in this area registered by this community. The line of material progress is highlighted by historian Otto Gräfner. The assertions are supported by solid statistical data, which shows that in the Banat Province, more precisely within the mountain microregion, about 25% of all craft enterprises and trade companies were owned by ethnic Germans. We can observe the occupational and economic differences between the mountain and the flats in the world, the first being 56% in the interwar period in industry and mining. The economic years 1921-1926 are presented in antithesis with the economic crisis of 1929-1933, which allows a comparative analysis in social and historical aspect [5].

The bankruptcy of some renowned banks, such as Marmorosch Blank Bank, is described by Otto Gräfner through the impact of the Germans in the Banat Montan urban centres. An important role for the German peasants in the mountain region of the region, fruit growers or livestock breeders, was the creation of the cooperative selling AGRARIA in 1935. This event allowed the capitalization of the positive agricultural quotas obtained on a series of products in 1934 [6].

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