Clearly, the preservation of the ethnic identities and the *Volkstum* (folkdom) of a minority group is always immeasurably easier for the one group with a powerful outside protector, whether the latter be the erstwhile mother country or a racially related nation. Such was the case with the German minorities, the Volksdeutsche. The level of their kind-consciousness and national spirit truly reflected the climate of the day in Germany and Austria. However, to believe — as critics of Germandom often do — that there was a persistent policy, or, as it appeared to some, conspiracy even in pre-Hitler Germany to use the Volksdeutsche abroad as vanguards and outposts for an eventual German expansion would be a gross and misleading over-simplification.

Truly, there were, mainly since the beginning of the 19th century, plenty of professors, intellectuals, politicians and others in the Germanies who were intrigued with the status, potentials, and future of their kinsmen abroad. Many of them treated the matter from a purely academic viewpoint, mostly within the framework of Germanistics; many others however, preferred to link it with political schemes, entertaining ambitious and at times explosive-laden dreams. However, during the existence of the Holy Roman Empire and the ensuing federations there was never nor could there be a uniform “official” policy concerning the Volksdeutsche abroad, let alone any kind of a central project for expansionism that would include the latter.

As a matter of fact, to speak about a “German policy” or
rather “German foreign policy” is accurate only if in reference to matters that took place after the unification of the Germanies, a truism that curiously enough seems only too often to escape the attention of even serious students of the field.

As to the individual German states, there was no German state within the first Empire or in the federations between 1806 and 1871 in which the maintenance of cultural and other relations with the Volksdeutsche was institutionalized, let alone planned and directed by the state itself. The involvement of the pre-1871 German states was pretty much confined to keeping contact through their individual citizens or institutions with a comparatively small number of educated Volksdeutsche abroad by means of individual invitations to attend higher education at their places. Thus, the young Volksdeutsche in question was assisted to improve his education mostly by means of individual Austrian and later German fellowships and grants in Austria or in a German land, a fact that not only made his mother tongue and knowledge in Germanistics refreshed and polished, but left a lasting impact on his Weltanschauung and whole ego. Returning after a couple of years or so to his native country, he became a changed man, a modern Antheus, fortified if not newborn in his conscious Deutschbewusstsein. As far as Hungary was concerned, most of these young men came from the ranks of the Transylvanian Saxons (and to a lesser extent the Zipsers, but hardly any Swabians at all); the majority of them were clerics who studied for the Protestant ministeries in German universities.¹

The unification of Germany in 1871 did not bring any sudden and drastic change in that pattern. The attitude of the Reich toward the Volksdeutsche was, from its very beginning throughout the coming of Hitler more than a half century later, anything but (one may term) aggressively positive and was by no means consistent.

To begin with the first and greatest architect of modern German Realpolitik, Bismarck, little if anything was done during his long tenure in any respect, save the academic, with, for and

¹ A celebrated alumnus of this group was Stephan Ludwig Roth, the idealistic and able Transylvanian Saxon leader of the stormy period of 1848, who – because of his alliance with the Austrian imperial forces – was tried and executed by a Hungarian revolutionary military tribunal. It should be noted that he was the only member of the German minorities who met such a tragic fate in pre-1945 Hungary’s entire history.