This article traces the migration patterns of the Russian-Germans across international borders from their initial settlement in the Russian Empire starting in 1763 up to the present day. In particular it analyses the reasons behind these migration flows. Both push and pull factors motivated the immigration of ethnic Germans to the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A similarly complex combination of such factors spurred the various waves of emigration by Russian-Germans out of this territory during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This article seeks to illuminate the primary causes of these migrant flows. It covers the main waves of German immigration into the Russian Empire including the initial settlement in the Volga region from 1763 to 1769, the establishment of the Mennonite colonies in Ukraine from 1789 to 1809 and the migration of German speakers to the Black Sea area from 1804 to 1856. It examines the various waves of emigration out of the territory of the former Russian Empire starting in the 1870s and continuing until today. The article goes on to analyse the immigration of Russian-Germans to the Americas from Tsarist Russia from the 1870s until the First World War. Then it deals with the various waves of Russian-German emigration under the Soviet regime starting in 1917–21 and reoccurring later in the 1920s, 1940s, 1970s and finally from 1987 to the collapse of the USSR. Finally, it examines the emigration of Russian-Germans from Russia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia and their settlement in Germany until 2006. Special attention is given to the history of Stalinist repression and later discrimination against the Russian-Germans as factors in their desire to emigrate.

Immigration into the Russian Empire

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Russian Empire proved to be a chief destination for people fleeing religious and political persecution and looking for safety or economic security. It became a haven for hundreds of thousands of such people from Central Europe despite the horrible conditions endured by most of its native population. Colonists from Europe received special rights and privileges from the Russian government while most Russian peasants lived in
abject poverty and bondage as serfs. Soon after ascending to the Russian throne in 1762, Empress Catherine II sought to attract European immigrants to the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire would continue this policy for over a century. The multiethnic Russian Empire became even more diverse with the addition of closed communities composed of foreign colonists and their descendants. 

Empress Catherine II deliberately encouraged immigration into the Russian Empire by European Christians. She desired to settle the frontier lands near hostile Asian nomads with settled European farmers. She issued a few vague invitations in 1762, but then on 22nd July 1763 she promulgated a comprehensive manifesto offering all Christian foreigners desiring to settle in the Russian Empire free land, freedom of religion, temporary exemption from taxes, interest-free loans, internal self-government and permanent immunity from military conscription (Auman and Chebotareva 1993:18–21). Agents and touts from the Russian Empire toured through Europe promoting this offer to prospective immigrants. The populations of the German-speaking states of Central Europe were particularly receptive to these incentives. This region had just suffered through the Seven Years’ War and many of its inhabitants welcomed the Russian Empire’s guarantees that they would no longer be subject to high taxes, conscription and religious persecution in their new place of residence (Walters 1982:33–37). During the next five years a wave of settlers, mostly from Hesse, arrived on the shores of the lower Volga near Saratov (Stricker 2000:165). By 1769 they had established 104 colonies with 22,246 people (Kabuzan 2003:32–33). Each of these colonies received a communal land grant that could be redistributed periodically for use by the village elders on the basis of how many able-bodied workers each family had. This form of land tenure thus closely resembled that of the traditional Russian mir. Notably, though, these colonists did not owe any labour or other obligations to the nobility, unlike the large number of Russian serfs in the empire. They lived in self-contained and self-administered colonies centred on individual Lutheran or Catholic churches and largely maintained the language, culture and customs they had brought with them from Central Europe (Kloberdanz 1975:209–22; Long 1988). The Volga became the first of two areas of large-scale German settlement in the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century.

The second area of large-scale German settlement in the Russian Empire was the region around the Black Sea in present-day Ukraine. Much of the territory around the Black Sea was under the rule of the Crimean Khanate until the rule of Catherine II. In 1783 Catherine II annexed the territory of the Crimean Khanate (Fisher 1978:55). This conquest opened up the territory to large-scale European settlement. A few years later, the first large-scale German migration to the Black Sea region began. Large numbers of Mennonites from West Prussia settled in the Black Sea region between 1789 and 1809. The Mennonites and later German settlers in the region received individual family grants of land from the Russian government, rather than communal land grants like the Volga Germans (Bruhl 1995:17). By 1810, some 18,000 Plattdeutsch-speaking Mennonites settled in what is now Ukraine and established the colonies of Chortiza and Molotschna (Belk 1976:36). The Mennonite settlers received a charter of privileges from Catherine II’s son Tsar Paul I on 6th September 1800. This charter included
permanent immunity from military service (Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland 2007). On 20th February 1804, Catherine II’s grandson Tsar Alexander I issued a new invitation to Christian foreigners to settle in this territory (ibid.). These immigrants were required to demonstrate that they had agricultural or other skills that would benefit the Russian Empire before they could settle. The chaos of the Napoleonic Wars from 1804 to 1815 provided the same incentives for people from Central Europe’s German-speaking states to emigrate that the earlier Seven Years’ War had inspired. By 1820 another 50,000 immigrants from Baden and Wurttemberg took advantage of the invitation of Tsar Alexander I (Kabuzan 2003:50). Between 1804 and 1856 about 100,000 German-speaking immigrants settled in the Black Sea region of the Russian Empire (Stricker 2000:165). Other immigrant waves in the nineteenth century included Bessarabia after 1813, Georgia after 1817, and Volhynia\(^2\) after 1831 and again after 1863. Volhynia was the last region in the Russian Empire to receive a large influx of German-speaking settlers from Central Europe. By 1880 some 170,000 had arrived in the region from Poland to purchase land confiscated from Polish nobles by the Russian government (ibid.). The influx of large waves of German immigrants from Central Europe into the Russian Empire lasted over a century, from 1763 until the 1880s (see Table 1).

Later, Russian-German internal migration saw the establishment of new settlements in the Asian portions of the Russian Empire. A shortage of land in the Black Sea region for a rapidly growing Russian-German population spurred eastward migration towards Central Asia, starting in the 1880s (Krieger et al. 2006:9). The first Russian-German settlers arrived in Turkestan in 1880 (Krieger 2006a:10). Between 1882 and 1914, Russian-Germans from the Volga and Black Sea region established a number of new colonies in Kazakhstan, Siberia, Central Asia and the Urals (Krieger et al. 2006:21). In particular a famine in the Volga region from 1891 to 1892 stimulated significant Russian-German migration eastward (Krieger 2006a:51). The ethnic German population of the Russian Empire numbered over 2.3 million people by the start of the First World War (Eisfeld 1994:138). This large minority spread throughout the entire breath of the Russian Empire and successfully established communities in the Caucasus, Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

### Table 1. Main immigration waves of Germans to the Russian Empire (Kabuzan 2003:50; Stricker 2000:165).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Source in Central Europe</th>
<th>Destination in Russian Empire</th>
<th>Approximate number of migrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1763–69</td>
<td>Hesse</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789–1809</td>
<td>West Prussia</td>
<td>Black Sea region</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804–56</td>
<td>Baden Wurttemburg and Alsace</td>
<td>Black Sea region</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831–80</td>
<td>Northern Germany and Poland</td>
<td>Volhynia</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emigration out of the Russian Empire

The Russian government’s accommodation of the German colonists with exemptions from the draft and other privileges ended in the 1870s. After this time they sought to integrate them into the empire by removing their autonomy and special status, in a ‘Russification’ campaign initiated by Tsar Alexander II. The Russian Empire came to view the special status of the Volga and Black Sea settlements as ‘German islands’ in the Russian Empire, and as such a potential security threat following the unification of Germany in 1871. Russia wanted to incorporate these islands into the Russian state to prevent them from becoming extensions of the new German Empire. In practice this meant reducing the formerly privileged Germans to the same legal status as the Russian peasantry, freed from serfdom in 1861. Measures included the revocation of self-government, announced in 1871, and the introduction of conscription for Russian-Germans in 1874 (Eisfeld 1994:138). These measures and poor economic conditions sparked considerable emigration of ethnic Germans to the Western hemisphere. The USA, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Paraguay all became destinations for Russian-German settlers. In the 1870s some 15,000 Russian-Germans immigrated to the USA (Kabuzan 2003:63). The next decade another 20,000 arrived in the USA and 7,500 in Canada. By 1900 there were 50,000 Russian-Germans in the USA. From 1900 to 1915 another 137,600 ethnic Germans arrived in the USA from the Russian Empire (Kabuzan 2003:170–71). Today their descendants number over a million people.

End of the Russian Empire and the First World War

Tsarist repression of the Russian-Germans peaked during the First World War. An anti-German pogrom in Moscow on 27th May 1915 killed three Russian-Germans and wounded forty (Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland 2007). A series of ‘liquidation laws’ passed in the same year banned Russian-Germans from owning or leasing property in the western and southern regions of the empire (Auman and Chebatoreva 1993:36–44). As a result, the ethnic Germans had to sell their lands and terminate their leases quickly in Volhynia, Poland, Bessarabia, Crimea and the Caucasus. The Russian government forcibly relocated some 200,000 Russian-Germans from these regions by rail to the Volga and Siberia during 1915 and 1916 (Eisfeld 1994:138). The overthrow of the Tsarist regime prevented such deportations from being applied to the entire Russian-German population.

The chaos of the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent Civil War from 1917 to 1921 inspired another wave of Russian-German emigration. Approximately 120,000 Russian-Germans left the region at this time to immigrate to Weimar Germany (Sinner 2000:25). The German government had included the right of Russian-Germans to ‘re-migrate’ to Germany in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 19th February (3rd March) 1918. On 29th May 1918 the German authorities established the Office for German Return Migration and Emigration to assist Russian-Germans in this undertaking (Oltmer 2006:434). It issued special
documents placing their persons and property under the protection of Germany (Eisfeld 1985:157). This office operated not only in areas of Ukraine occupied by Germany but also in the city of Saratov in the Volga region, deep behind Russian lines. Some 30,000 Russian-Germans emigrated from areas of the former Russian Empire east of the German line of control by 1921 (Sinner 2000:25). The other 90,000 Russian-German emigrants came from the regions of the Russian Empire ceded to German control from February to November 1918. Out of the 120,000 ethnic German emigrants from all parts of the former Russian Empire during 1918–21 about 60,000 settled permanently in Germany and the other 60,000 soon left and settled in the USA, Canada and various countries in Latin America (Oltmer 2006:435). This group included several thousand politically active émigrés who made their way from the Volga to Germany (Krieger 2006a:172).

Here they joined a larger group of Russian-German activists and scholars from other regions of the Russian Empire that included people such as Karl Stumpp and Georg Leibbrandt (Fleischhauer 1981:D1070). During the 1921 famine another 2,000 to 3,000 Volga German refugees out of some 70,000 displaced people (Long 1992:524) ultimately made their way to Germany (Oltmer 2006:436). At this time, the German government sought to prevent the admission of these refugees and severely restricted the numbers allowed to settle in Germany (Oltmer 2006: 436–38). The end of the famine halted most Russian-German emigration after 1922.

Life for the Russian-Germans in the Soviet Union improved greatly after the end of this famine. The early Soviet regime provided the ethnic German population living in the various regions of the USSR with a number of concrete benefits during the 1920s. Among the various Russian-German communities only the Mennonites, who rejected Soviet rule on religious principles, emigrated from the Soviet Union in significant numbers from 1922 to 1929.

Soviet Rule During the 1920s

The new Bolshevik government instituted a series of policies very different from that of the Tsars. Initially they sought to integrate all non-Russian nationalities in the former Russian Empire into the Soviet Union by providing them with national territories to promote socialist versions of their culture (Martin 2001). These administrative units ranged from village soviets to union republics and provided a way to integrate the diverse nationalities of the USSR into a single political and economic unit. These ethnic territories contained many of the symbolic trappings of nation-state formations. In particular they promoted the national languages of their inhabitants. To this end these administrative structures supported a large number of education, media and other institutions in the native languages of their titular nationalities. These institutions served to create Sovietised versions of the culture and history of these peoples and root them to their particular Soviet homelands. In turn these national homelands shared historical, political and economic links that tied them to Moscow and each other as a united socialist state. This policy, known as korenizatsii or nativisation, formed the basis for the national structure of the USSR.
Initially the Russian-Germans benefited from the policy of nativisation. They received an autonomous territory on the Volga as early as 19th October 1918 (Auman and Chebatoreva 1993:75–76). The Volga German Labour Commune allowed its inhabitants the unrestricted use of the German language in schools, local administration, legal matters and social life. Later, on 20th February 1924, the Soviet government upgraded this administrative territory to the Volga German ASSR (Auman and Chebotareva 1993:80–82). This territory came to support a large number of German-language cultural institutions. By 1939, for instance, the territory had a population of nearly 370,000 ethnic Germans and supported 446 German-language schools with over 117,000 students and 4,320 teachers (German 2000:247). The territory also supported institutions of higher education including a pedagogical institute and four teacher-training colleges (German 2000:254). It also supported a large number of houses of culture, clubs, newspapers, theatres, a book publisher, libraries, orchestras and radio broadcasts. Among the most impressive cultural institutions of the Volga German ASSR were its central library, museum and archives in the capital Engels (formerly known as Pokrovsk) (Krieger 2004:94–96). For the nearly 800,000 Russian-Germans in the USSR scattered outside the Volga German ASSR (see Table 2) there existed eleven smaller national districts in Ukraine, Crimea, the Kuban, Siberia, Georgia and Azerbaijan with a similar, but less impressive, array of cultural institutions (Stricker 2000:167). These structures aimed to create a Sovietised version of German culture rooted in the territory of the USSR.

### Emigration during the 1920s

The Mennonites rejected the Soviet experiment despite receiving significant cultural autonomy from the government during the 1920s. Many of them viewed continued residency in the Soviet state as incompatible with maintaining their traditional religious-based practices. In particular their rejection of secular education, military service and Soviet land reform led them into conflict with the new government in Moscow. An organised political movement for emigration thus emerged among the Mennonites in the Soviet Union during the 1920s.
Mennonite leaders, most notably B.B. Jantz, successfully mobilised enough political pressure to persuade the Soviet government to allow a mass emigration to the Western hemisphere. In 1923 four organised Mennonite groups left from the Ukraine to Canada with 4,874 people. The next year another 4,000 Mennonites left the Soviet Union for Canada individually. Smaller numbers left in the years after 1924. In subsequent years emigration became increasingly more restricted. Finally, after 1928 legal avenues of leaving the USSR ceased to exist (Toews 1967:141–203).

The end of legal emigration from the USSR led to a mass protest march of over 15,000 Mennonites in Moscow in September 1929 to demand the right to leave (Martin 2001:319–20). This demonstration and the continued presence of the Mennonite farmers in Moscow throughout November captured the interest of the German government (Oltmer 2006:439–40). On 19th October 1929 the Soviet government agreed to allow the Mennonites to emigrate if they left Moscow immediately, but the German government had not yet agreed to admit them. Temporary permission to enter Germany came from Berlin only after the Soviet regime began to forcibly expel the Mennonites from Moscow. At first the German embassy sought to persuade the Soviet government to defer the deportation of the Mennonites back to Ukraine and Siberia. These deportations began on 17th November 1929 and forcibly returned over 8,000 people in a week. On 18th November 1929 the German government issued permission for up to 13,000 Mennonites to enter Germany and the following day it appropriated six million Reichsmarks for their transportation and housing (Oltmer 2006:440). In response the Soviet regime allowed 5,461 of the Mennonites in Moscow to emigrate (Martin 2001:319–20). Initially they went to Germany via Lithuania and Latvia, starting on 30th November 1929 (Oltmer 2006:440). But the German government did not allow them to stay permanently because of its inability to integrate them economically. Instead, the German government housed them in temporary camps in Germany before they departed for Canada, Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina during 1930 and 1931 (Oltmer 2006:441). In total some 20,000 Mennonites left the USSR during the 1920s (Toews 1967:202). In many ways, the emigration movement of the Mennonites in the 1920s foreshadowed the general Russian-German emigration movement of the 1970s.

**Stalinist Repression**

The position of the Russian-Germans deteriorated significantly during the 1930s and reached a nadir during the 1940s. The Stalin regime increasingly came to associate the Russian-Germans with the Nazi regime in Germany during the 1930s. The experience of the Spanish Civil War, in which Franco benefited from supporters behind republican lines, also influenced the Stalin regime greatly in evaluating its own ethnic minorities (Werth 2003:233). The Soviet leadership believed that extra-territorial nationalities in the USSR could serve as similar ‘fifth columns’ for their ancestral homelands. Legal nationality (ethnicity) in the USSR became based solely upon biological descent rather than ethnic culture and self-identification as a result of an NKVD decree on 28th April 1938 (Martin
2001:451). Previously, nationality had been determined by self-declaration. During 1937 and 1938 a series of national operations against foreign spies targeted national minorities disproportionately. The ‘German operation’ in 1937 and 1938 led to the arrest and conviction of around 38,000 Russian-Germans and the execution of close to 29,000 of these people (Okhotin and Roginskii 1999:70–71). This accounted for a little more than half of the Russian-Germans arrested and executed during these years. In total during the purges of 1937 and 1938 the proportion of Russian-Germans executed exceeded that of the general population of the USSR by a factor of more than eight times (Ibid and Popov 1992:28). Around the same time the Soviet government also eliminated all German national districts, schools, publications and other institutions in the USSR outside of the Volga German ASSR (Martin 2001:339–40). This assault upon the physical and cultural existence of the Russian-Germans intensified greatly during the Second World War.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Stalin regime systematically deported the Russian-German population (including those from the Volga German ASSR) west of the Urals to special settlement restrictions in Siberia and Kazakhstan during the autumn of 1941. Between 15th August and 25th December 1941 the NKVD forcibly deported 856,168 Russian-Germans from their traditional homelands to these regions (Milova 1995:63–69). A recorded 799,459 of these deportees arrived at their new areas of settlement still alive by 1st January 1942 (Bugai 1992:75). These deportees came under the strict surveillance and administration of the NKVD and later MVD special commandants. These police organs controlled their housing and employment assignments and enforced a separate and unequal system upon the deportees. In order to travel even short distances the special settlers needed special passes from the NKVD commandants. They had to carry special ID cards noting their inferior legal status and report regularly to the special commandants (Bakaev 1993; Bruhl 1995; Bugai 1992; Kokurin 1993). The deported Russian-Germans lived under conditions of punitive internal exile.

The material conditions endured by the Russian-German exiles were often lethal. They had insufficient housing, food, clothing and medical care. Hunger, cold and disease took a heavy toll among the deportees during the first months of exile (Milova 1995; Karpykova 1997; Shtaus and Pankrats 1997). In particular, epidemics of typhus combined with malnutrition proved to be deadly.

Initially, the NKVD sent almost all the deported Russian-Germans to collective farms in Kazakhstan and Siberia. Roughly equal number of Russian-Germans ended up in these two regions. By 25th November 1941, the NKVD had recorded 396,093 survivors arriving in Siberia and 310,195 in Kazakhstan (Milova 1995:147–48). By 1st January 1942, the number of deportees in Kazakhstan had increased to 385,785 or nearly half of the Russian-German special settlers from all European areas of the Soviet Union including not only the Volga region but also Ukraine, the North Caucasus, Transcaucasia, Moscow and other parts of Russia (Bugai 1992:74–75). The Soviet government dispersed the other half across the southern regions of Omsk Oblast, Novosibirsk Oblast, Altai Krai and Krasnoyarsk Krai, all in Siberia. Starting in early 1942 the Soviet government again relocated a
significant number of Russian-Germans in Siberia. Between January 1942 and October 1943 the Soviet government moved a recorded 66,763 Russian-Germans from southern to northern Siberia to work in fishing camps along the Yenisei, Ob, Indirka and Lena rivers (Bugai 1998:269). In total the NKVD relocated some 80,000 Russian-Germans or one fifth of those deported to Siberia in this manner (German and Kurochkin 1998:40). Most of these special settlers had to construct their own houses out of mud and received only minimal rations (Bruhl 1995:103–06). They suffered from unsanitary and unheated living quarters and lacked proper clothing for working in the freezing climate (German and Kurochkin 1998:40–42). As a result a large number of them died from exposure and disease.

The Soviet government also relocated a large portion of the adult Russian-German population from both Siberia and Kazakhstan to the Urals. During 1942 and 1943 the Stalin regime forcibly mobilised over 315,000 Russian-Germans into forced labour detachments collectively referred to by survivors as the labour army (German and Kurochkin 1998:67). Over 182,000 of these men and women worked in Gulag camps under conditions almost identical to those of criminal convicts (ibid.). The remainder worked in civilian commissariats under NKVD supervision. Those mobilised included both recent deportees and long-term residents of Kazakhstan and Siberia (Bugai 1998:39–44). The NKVD sent most of them to the Urals to fell timber, build metallurgy complexes, extract oil and manufacture armaments (Malamud 1999; Bugai 1998; German and Kurochkin 1998). By 1st January 1944, out of 225,045 mobilised Russian-Germans 119,358 (fifty-three per cent) worked in the Urals. This included 68,713 of the 106,669 (sixty-four per cent) men and women working in Gulag camps and 50,645 of the 118,376 (forty-three per cent) working in civilian commissariats (Malamud 1999; German and Kurochkin 1998:67). The inhumane forced labour, starvation rations and unhygienic barracks imposed upon the men and women of the labour army killed around 100,000 Russian-Germans (Eisfeld 2003:8). The piecemeal dismantlement of this system of modern slavery occurred only after the end of the Second World War.

At the end of the Second World War hundreds of thousands more Russian-Germans joined the deportees living under special settlement restrictions in Kazakhstan, Central Asia and Siberia (see Table 3). The German military saved 350,000 Russian-Germans from deportation in 1941 (Berdinskikh 2005:73). The vast majority of this population – 324,600 – came from the Ukraine (Kabuzan 2003:103). The German authorities evacuated these civilians westward to Germany and German-occupied Poland from 1942 to 1944. The Allies later forcibly repatriated many of the Russian-Germans evacuated to Germany during the War. In total the Soviet authorities registered 203,796 repatriated Russian-Germans arriving alive in the USSR (Bugai 1992:75–76). Only 100,000 Russian-Germans managed to avoid repatriation, of whom 30,000 later emigrated to North and South America (Wiens 1997). The Soviet government placed these repatriates under special settlement restrictions and sent them variously to the Urals, Kazakhstan, Siberia, the Soviet Far East and Tajikistan (Bugai 1995:46–50). Thus virtually the entire Russian-German population of the European areas of the USSR in 1939 ended up as special settlers east of the Urals by 1946.
Table 3. Migration within and out of the Russian Empire and the USSR, 1874–1946.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Approximate number of migrants</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1874–1914</td>
<td>Black Sea, Volga, Bessarabia</td>
<td>USA, Canada, Latin America</td>
<td>300,000 (Wiens 1997)</td>
<td>Land hunger, famine and loss of special rights First World War deportations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915–16</td>
<td>Volhynia, Poland, Bessarabia</td>
<td>Volga, Siberia</td>
<td>200,000 (Eisfeld 1994:138)</td>
<td>First World War deportations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918–21</td>
<td>Ukraine and Volga</td>
<td>Germany, USA, Canada, Latin America</td>
<td>120,000 (Sinner 2000:25)</td>
<td>Treaty of Brest Litovsk ‘re-migration’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>Ukraine, Central Asia, Caucasus, Central Russia and Germany</td>
<td>70,000 (Long 1992:524)</td>
<td>Famine refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923–29</td>
<td>Ukraine and Siberia</td>
<td>Canada and Paraguay</td>
<td>20,000 (Toews 1967: 202).</td>
<td>Mennonites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>15,000 (Bruhl 1999)</td>
<td>Clearing of Germans and Poles from Polish border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–42</td>
<td>European areas of the USSR</td>
<td>Kazakhstan and Siberia</td>
<td>800,000 (Bugai 1992:75)</td>
<td>Second World War deportations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942–43</td>
<td>Southern Siberia</td>
<td>Northern Siberia</td>
<td>80,000 (German and Kurochkin 1998:40)</td>
<td>Mobilisation into fishing industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942–43</td>
<td>Kazakhstan and Siberia</td>
<td>Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan</td>
<td>315,000 (German and Kurochkin 1998:67)</td>
<td>Mobilisation into labour army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1944</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>350,000 (Berdinskikh 2005:73)</td>
<td>Evacuated by German military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–46</td>
<td>Germany, Ukraine, Belorussia, Baltics and Poland</td>
<td>Soviet Far North, Soviet Far East, Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan</td>
<td>200,000 (Bugai 1992:75–76)</td>
<td>Forcibly repatriated by Allies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the Soviet government imposed special settlement restrictions on the majority of Russian-Germans living east of the Urals prior to 1941. From 18th September 1945 to 6th November 1946 a series of NKVD decrees placed 105,817 local Russian-Germans living in these regions under this system of restrictions (Berdinskikh 2005:342). Another 40,773 Russian-Germans from these regions who had been mobilised into the labour army also received the status of special settlers upon their release (Berdinskikh 2005:343). This left 103,764 Russian-Germans in the USSR not listed as special settlers in November 1951. Omsk Oblast accounted for 45,244 of these people followed by Altai Krai (also in western Siberia) with 16,437 and Chkalov (Orenburg) Oblast in the Urals with 13,909. In contrast, there were 1,161,778 Russian-Germans in the USSR counted as special settlers at this time (Berdinskikh 2005:339). Thus over ninety per cent of all Russian-Germans in the Soviet Union came under the special settlement restrictions. This collective punishment of almost the entire population caused great disillusionment with the Soviet system and spurred a powerful emigration movement in later decades.

Deaths among Russian-German special settlers caused by malnutrition, disease and exposure remained high during the 1940s. Indeed, because of a larger and more vulnerable population, more Russian-German special settlers probably perished than did men and women conscripted into the labour army. The demographer D.M. Ediev (2003:294, 300) estimates the total number of excess deaths among the Russian-Germans from 1942 to 1952 as a result of poor material conditions in the special settlements and labour army at 228,000 people, or 19.7 per cent of their 1941 population. This massive increase in mortality greatly traumatised the surviving Russian-Germans: almost all of them experienced relatives perishing prematurely during this decade.

The Russian-Germans had very little access to German-language cultural institutions after 1941 and were immersed in an almost completely Russian-language environment after this date. Russian dominated the education, media and working environment of the Russian-Germans. As a result Russian became the primary language of the group and few Russian-Germans born after the Second World War could speak German fluently (Dietz and Hilkes 1992:52–58). At the same time they continued to suffer from discrimination on the basis of their German ancestral origins. Legally, the Soviet government considered them to be Germans by nationality. On this basis the Soviet authorities restricted the residency of the Russian-Germans to east of the Urals until 3rd November 1972 (Auman and Chebatoreva:180) and also denied them access to higher education and thus desirable jobs (Krieger 2006). As a result, the Russian-Germans continued to be a predominantly rural population with a disproportionately small educated class. The Russian-Germans could not assimilate into the larger Russian nation legally. The concept of nationality remained racialised, with every Soviet citizen inheriting the nationality of at least one of his parents and having it marked on line five of his internal passport. This inherited ethnic designation and discrimination served to psychologically reinforce the German identification of the Russian-Germans even as they lost their German language and traditions.
The Federal Republic of Germany's Policy towards the Russian-Germans

The policies of the West German government created a pull factor regarding Russian-German migration that complemented the push factors stemming from the Stalinist legacy of continued discrimination and defamation. Unlike the Weimar government, which sought to limit the admission of Russian-Germans to Germany in the 1920s, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) opened its borders to those Russian-Germans who could get out of the USSR (Oltmer 2006:442). The Federal Republic of Germany came into existence in 1949; Article 116 of its Basic Law or Constitution defines as German for the purposes of acquiring citizenship any person of ‘German stock’ living within the territory that was part of the German state on 31st December 1937 (Senders 1996:149). This had the practical effect of extending the right to citizenship in the Federal Republic of Germany to ethnic Germans still living in parts of Poland as well as what became the German Democratic Republic (Ohlinger and Munz 2002:49). In 1953 the Federal Expellee and Refugee Law expanded the pool of ethnic Germans eligible to claim citizenship in the Federal Republic of Germany to those in the Soviet Union and other communist countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania, which also had sizeable German populations (Senders 1996:163). People of German descent in these states had suffered severe persecution as a result of their ethnic origins3 and hence the government of the Federal Republic felt an obligation towards them (Ohlinger and Munz 2002:49).

The Russian-Germans in particular had suffered from extreme repression under Stalin and continued discrimination under later Soviet rulers. Russian-Germans thus automatically received citizenship upon arrival in West Germany as well as special assistance to help them integrate socially and economically. The first Russian-Germans to benefit from this policy were those who had family members already living in West Germany. On 6th April 1958 the Federal Republic of Germany came to an understanding with the Soviet government regarding the reunification of Russian-German families that had become separated between the two states during the Second World War (Krieger et al. 2006:23). This agreement resulted in the emigration of 12,957 Russian-Germans from the USSR between 1958 and 1960 (Krieger et al. 2006:32). In essence, during the decades after its founding in 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany projected itself as a state for the German people including those people of German ancestry in Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia (Ohlinger and Munz 2002:58). The West German government thus presented West Germany as an alternative homeland for the Russian-Germans. This encouraged many Russian-Germans convinced that they had no future in the USSR to push for the right to emigrate and settle in West Germany as Aussiedler.4

The Emigration Movement of the 1970s

The abolishment of the Volga German ASSR and the various German national districts condemned the Russian-Germans to permanent second-class citizenship in the USSR. This persecution and discrimination made it clear to the Russian-Germans that they could never enjoy national equality within the Soviet Union. The memory of the Stalin years and the continued absence of full rehabilitation
served as the primary push factor for Russian-German emigration in later decades. Hence emigration from the USSR to West Germany became the favoured solution among Russian-German activists to the problems of forced acculturation and discrimination.

Starting in 1972, a movement arose among Russian-Germans to emigrate out of the USSR and settle in West Germany. A brief attempt by an early generation of activists in the 1960s to convince the Soviet government to restore the Volga German ASSR and its institutions had failed (Schmaltz 2002:113–86). This new movement sought to solve the two problems of continued loss of German culture while experiencing systematic discrimination on the basis of their ancestry through emigration.

During the 1970s the Russian-German activists believed that the group could revive its dying German culture, most notably the use of the German language, and receive protection from discrimination and defamation by settling in West Germany (Dupper 1983:1–8). In reality many of the Russian-Germans that have immigrated to Germany recently have remained linguistically and culturally Russian and have had difficulty acculturating to the language of their ancestors (Brown 2005: 629–30). This has led to popular discrimination and stigmatisation of the group in Germany on the basis of their Russian culture and origins.

The Russian-German emigration activists engaged in a variety of activities aimed at publicising their plight and embarrassing the Soviet government into allowing them to leave the USSR. These protest tactics included petitions, appeals to the UN and public demonstrations (Pinkus and Fleischhauer 1987:507–14). The Russian-German emigration activists deliberately emulated the older, stronger and US-backed Jewish emigration movement in this matter. Russian-Germans who moved to Estonia in the early 1970s in particular played an important role in spearheading the emigration movement. They even organised a demonstration in Moscow for which they were tried and sentenced in Kehra, Estonia (Case K-I-43, Estonian SSR Supreme Court). Peter Bergmann, Woldemar Schulz and Gerhard Fast began planning this protest in Valga, Estonia on 19th January 1974. The actual protest involved Ludmilla Oldenburger and her two sons Robert and Eduard chaining themselves to a lamp post in Moscow’s Old Square at 9:00am on 11th February 1974. In addition to Oldenburger and her children, this small demonstration comprised 27 protestors with 20 placards. The same organisers later staged a much larger demonstration at noon in front of the Hotel Viru in Tallinn, Estonia on 17th February 1974 (ibid.). Schulz later claimed that the second demonstration involved 250 people (Schulz 1996:36). Both of these demonstrations demanded that Russian-Germans be given the right to emigrate from the USSR and settle in West Germany. The procurator of the Estonian SSR opened a case to try the ringleaders who organised the protests in Moscow and Tallinn. His investigation took seven months (Case K-I-43, Estonian SSR Supreme Court). The subsequent trial took place in Kehra, Estonia, where Oldenburger and her family lived. On 7th August 1974 the Supreme Court of the Estonian SSR handed down strict sentences for the planners of the demonstrations. Bergmann received a sentence of three years’ imprisonment while Fast and Schulz were each given terms of two years. The court handed Oldenburger a suspended
sentence of two years (*Ibid.*). Such activism was not confined to Estonia. Russian-German activists also engaged in similar forms of protest in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Pinkus and Fleischauer 1987:507–14)

These forms of public pressure, in combination with the West German government linking its relations with the USSR to the issue of Russian-German emigration, had some limited success. Between 1971 and 1980 the Soviet government allowed 63,204 Russian-Germans to leave the USSR and settle in West Germany (Polian 2004:209). Nevertheless, at the same time the Soviet government engaged in the ruthless repression of the leading activists of the Russian-German emigration movement. From 1974 to 1977, the Soviet regime sentenced over 40 such people to terms of imprisonment from six months to three years (Pinkus and Fleischhauer 1987:517–18). This repression successfully decapitated the movement and both Russian-German protests and emigration declined greatly during the early and mid 1980s. However, the ideas of the emigration activists became the majority view of the Russian-German population in the USSR. When they had the opportunity to leave the territory of the Soviet Union freely and settle in Germany, the majority of them took advantage of it.

**Mass Emigration Since 1987**

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the mass exodus of Russian-Germans had begun. On 1st January 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev, the reformist leader of the Soviet Communist Party, removed all restrictions on emigrating from the USSR (Schmaltz 2003:xxii). This meant in practice that any Soviet citizen with a foreign state willing to accept him could leave the USSR and settle elsewhere. This sparked a rapid rise in Russian-German emigration. The number of Russian-Germans arriving in Germany increased to 14,488 in 1987 compared to only 753 in 1986 (Krieger *et al.* 2006:32). This shot up rapidly to 47,572 in 1988, 98,134 in 1989 and 147,320 in 1990. Between 1990 and the end of 1999 a total of over 1,630,000 Russian-Germans arrived in Germany (Kabuzan 2003:89), representing 80% of the 2,038,341 Russian-Germans living in the USSR as recorded by the 1989 Soviet census (Krieger *et al.* 2006:29) (see Table 4). This number is somewhat deceptive in that some 20% of these arrivals in Germany were Russian and Ukrainian spouses and relatives (Polian 2004:208). Furthermore, a number of people of at least partial Russian-German descent did not state their nationality as German in the 1989 census but have done so since. Nevertheless, the majority of the Russian-German population of the former USSR has left the former Soviet states and settled in Germany since 1990. In the years 1989 to 1999 the Russian-German population in the former Soviet Union declined by over half to less than a million (see Table 5). This decline was not uniform. The Russian Federation went from 850,000 to less than 600,000 Russian-Germans, Kazakhstan from 950,000 to 350,000, Kyrgyzstan from 100,000 to 20,000 and Tajikistan from 30,000 to almost none (Polian 2004:208–09). Thus Kazakhstan and Central Asia lost considerably more Russian-Germans because of emigration than Russia proper during the 1990s.
Recent Restrictions on Russian-Germans Settling in Germany

The mass flow of Russian-Germans into Germany has continued into the current century. Referred to as Aussiedler (settlers from abroad) or Spaetaussiedler after 1993 (late settlers from abroad), these new arrivals have viewed their migration to Germany as a return to their ancestral homeland rather than immigration to a foreign country. German law initially supported this view, but since 1993 it has become increasingly restrictive. In 1993 the German government required the Russian-Germans wishing to settle in Germany to pass a German language proficiency test (Schmaltz 2003:xxxi). But non-German spouses and other dependent family members could still accompany Russian-Germans moving to Germany without proving any knowledge of German.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950–1989</td>
<td>253,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>147,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>147,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>195,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>207,347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>213,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>209,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>172,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>131,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>101,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>103,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>94,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>97,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>90,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>72,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>58,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>35,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,332,550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Russian-German population of the USSR/CIS, 1926–2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1,238,549 (Krieger 2006a:133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>1,151,602 (ibid.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1,427,232 (ibid.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,265,542 (Berdinskikh 2005:339–43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>1,619,655 (Ohliger and Munz 2002:74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2,038,603 (Ohliger and Munz 2002:74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,000,000 (ibid.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>830,000 (Krieger et al. 2006:33)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This figure is only for the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

Recent Restrictions on Russian-Germans Settling in Germany

The mass flow of Russian-Germans into Germany has continued into the current century. Referred to as Aussiedler (settlers from abroad) or Spaetaussiedler after 1993 (late settlers from abroad), these new arrivals have viewed their migration to Germany as a return to their ancestral homeland rather than immigration to a foreign country. German law initially supported this view, but since 1993 it has become increasingly restrictive. In 1993 the German government required the Russian-Germans wishing to settle in Germany to pass a German language proficiency test (Schmaltz 2003:xxxi). But non-German spouses and other dependent family members could still accompany Russian-Germans moving to Germany without proving any knowledge of German.
The German government also first introduced a quota on the number of Russian-Germans allowed to settle in Germany in 1993. They set this number at 225,000 people a year (Oezcan 2004). This quota was actually fairly generous. The number of Russian-Germans to arrive in Germany in 1992 reached 195,576 (Krieger et al. 2006:32). The annual arrival of Spaetaussiedler from the former USSR to Germany reached its peak in 1994 at 213,214. After 1999 the German government reduced the quota for incoming Russian-Germans to less than half: 103,000 (Oezcan 2004). Between 1993 and 2003 the number of non-German family members to accompany Russian-Germans arriving in Germany increased from 20% of the total to 75%. A new law implemented in Germany on 1st January 2005 required all spouses and dependents of Russian-Germans wishing to move to Germany to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the German language (ibid.). The cumulative result of these measures is that the ability of Russian-Germans to leave the former Soviet states and move to Germany with their family has been effectively closed.

In particular, the new German law of 1st January 2005 has limited the recent admission of Russian-Germans and their families to Germany. By this date the number of Russian-Germans and their family members to settle in Germany since 1950 had grown to over 2,330,000 (Krieger et al. 2006:32). Nearly 450,000 of these Spaetaussiedler still managed to come to Germany between 1st January 2000 and 31st December 2005 (ibid.). However, in recent years, the number admitted to Germany has decreased greatly. In 2002 the number of Russian-Germans arriving in Germany declined to 90,587 people. In 2003 it dropped to 72,289 and then again to 58,728 in 2004, followed by a reduction to 35,396 in 2005. Finally, in 2006 only 7,747 Spaetaussiedler and their family members – the vast majority of them from the former USSR and a few from Romania and Poland – managed to settle in Germany (Volk auf dem Weg 2007). This largely reflects the tightening of the German requirements for resettlement. The German government estimates that there are still around 600,000 Russian-Germans living in Russia and another 230,000 in Kazakhstan (Krieger et al. 2006:33). Currently the German government has no desire to see these people resettle in Germany.

**Conclusion**

The Russian-Germans have a long history of eastward and westward migration motivated by famine, economic incentives and political oppression. Many of the initial settlers in Russia fled religious persecution in Central Europe. In the Russian Empire they established colonies first in the Volga, then in the Black Sea region, Bessarabia, Volhynia and finally in the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Central Asia and Siberia. These colonies maintained a separate social existence from the surrounding native populations. Many of them eventually became quite prosperous in comparison to other agricultural communities in the Russian Empire.

Land hunger in the Black Sea region during the 1880s and famine in the Volga in 1891–92 motivated the migration of thousands of Russian-Germans to eastern areas of the Russian Empire. Many Russian-Germans also left the Russian Empire at this time. In addition to the economic concerns that spurred internal migration,
emigration was also motivated in part by anti-German measures enacted after 1871. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries hundreds of thousands of Russian-Germans emigrated from the Russian Empire and settled in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay and Brazil.

In the twentieth century, ruthless repression at the hands of the communist government of the Soviet Union motivated more Russian-Germans to emigrate. The mass deportation of the Russian-Germans in 1941 and subsequent repression created strong national grievances against the Soviet government. The Stalin regime permanently removed most Russian-Germans from their ancestral homelands in the USSR, eliminated their national administrative structures and cultural institutions, and subjected them to various forms of legal discrimination. They lost much of their German culture, but continued to suffer persecution as a result of being of German descent. The failure of the Soviet government to redress these wrongs by allowing the Russian-Germans to return to their former homes and restoring the Volga German ASSR gave rise to an active emigration movement. The emigration activists of the 1970s concluded that the Russian-Germans would continue to suffer from continued national inequality and acculturation as long as they remained in the USSR. They thus pressed the Soviet government to allow them to leave and settle in West Germany. This conclusion became widely shared by Russian-Germans in the USSR. As a result, a majority of the Russian-German population opted to leave for Germany after free emigration from the USSR became possible in 1987.

The Russian-Germans have established numerous secondary diasporas outside the region of the Russian Empire. These diasporas have been established since the late nineteenth century by waves of transnational migration. Large numbers of people descended from Germans who settled in the Russian Empire now live in the USA, Germany, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay and Brazil, as well as in Russia and Kazakhstan. As a result of massive migration since the late 1980s, the largest concentration of people descended of German settlers to Russia is now in Germany, not in the territory of the former Russian Empire.

Notes

1 A dialect of German related more closely to Dutch in many ways than to modern High German.
2 An area in the north-western region of what is today Ukraine.
3 The Soviet deportation of the Russian-Germans to Siberia and Kazakhstan was one of two crucial events that shaped the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany regarding the admission and granting of citizenship to ethnic Germans (Brinkmann 2002:142). The other influential event was the flight and expulsion of over 12 million ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe into what remained of Germany and Austria at the end of the Second World War (Ohliger and Munz 2002:47). The territory that became the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 received nearly eight million of these displaced Germans. Nearly two fifths of these people were ethnic Germans who had lived outside the German borders of 1937 and had foreign citizenship prior to 1938 (Ohliger and Munz 2002:48).
4 Russian-Germans and ethnic Germans from other communist states such as Poland, Romania or Hungary settling in West Germany were known as Aussiedler, or settlers from abroad. As noted they had the automatic right of citizenship upon arriving in the Federal Republic of Germany.
References


**J. Otto Pohl** is Associate Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Central Asia. His recent research and publications have focused on the deportation of nationalities in the USSR to Central Asia. He is currently researching the history of various national minorities in Kyrgyzstan.