On August 23, 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union contracted an alliance and agreed on a plan to divide Central Europe between these two totalitarian powers. The implementation commenced, when on September 1 and 17, 1939, respectively, the Third Reich and the Red Army attacked and partitioned Poland. In 1940 the Soviets annexed Romania's Bessarabia (and northern Bukovina), Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Despite a concentrated effort to conquer Finland, the Red Army managed to grab only 10 percent of the country's territory, though complete with its second largest city, Viipuri (Vyborg).

Map 27 focuses on the period of the German-Soviet alliance, which is unduly neglected, especially in Western historiography. The German-Soviet partition of Central Europe and the subsequent border changes entailed massive population engineering, coordinated with the political needs and aspirations of the ideologies of national socialism and communism. In this case, despite any differences between these two ideologies, their German and Soviet proponents executed forced emigration, expulsions, and forced resettlement (that is, numerous acts of ethnic cleansing) in accordance with the principles of ethnolinguistic nationalism. The perception of Central Europe's inhabitants exclusively through the lens of their Einzelsprachen (and at times, religions) as the measure of their identity (groupness) and potential (dis)loyalty constituted a common basis for German and Soviet demographic policies. This approach also informed the nationalist socialist Third Reich's allies, namely, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, and Slovakia.

Immediately in the wake of the German-Soviet conquest, partition, and occupation of Poland, thousands of Polish soldiers and refugees from the country's ruling elite sought safe haven in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania. Only Hungary and Romania, as Germany's allies, turned out to be relatively safe for Polish refugees. The Soviets annexed Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia already in 1940. A sizeable part of interwar Poland's officer corps was rounded up by the Soviets and exterminated in a preplanned act, which many (especially in Poland) assess as genocide. This event is symbolized by the 1940 massacre in the Katyn forest near Smolensk, where the majority were executed. Around a quarter of a million Polish Jews escaped from the German occupation zone of Poland to the Soviet Union, fearful of Berlin's program of instituted anti-Semitism. At the same time, the last wave of German Jews managed to flee to British Palestine and the Americas, despite the West's restrictions on Jewish immigrants. The partition of Poland and Central Europe complete, Germany agreed to evacuate German(ic)-speaking communities from the Soviet zone of Central Europe. In the framework of the program *Heim ins Reich* (Back Home in the [Third] Reich), they were resettled from Estonia, Latvia, or Bessarabia to the western Polish territories directly incorporated into wartime Germany. In addition, similar German(ic) communities were resettled from Italy's South Tyrol and the coastal areas of Romania and Bulgaria (Dobruja). Ironically, three or four years later they fled or were expelled again, when following the defeat of Germany in 1945, the country's eastern frontier was moved 300 kilometers westward to the Oder-Neisse line. Meanwhile, from the aforementioned incorporated Polish territories, ethnic Poles were removed to the former central Poland, which had been overhauled into Germany's semi-colony of the Generalgouvernement. Some Slavs (Kashubs, Mazurs, and Silemans) were retained and deemed to be “Germanizable.”

Generalgouvernement became a “dumping ground” for “racially inferior” Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians. The 1940 General Plan Ost predicted that the area's population would be starved to death, and the remnants expelled to a Slavic “reservation” in the east. The Lebensraum (living space), cleansed of its former “inferior” inhabitants, would be re-populated with “racially pure” (“Aryan”) German(ic) settlers. Hunger and starvation as the plan's main instrument shows that national socialist Germany actively learned from the Soviet example of holodomors (death by starvation), deployed in the early 1930s for accelerating collectivization in and for Russifying Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Kazakhstan. However, for a while, the “racially inferior” Slavs could be used for work. Hence, millions of Poles and Czechs were rounded up as forced laborers and dispatched to central and western Germany, severely deprived of working age menfolk, who had been drafted into the Wehrmacht (German Army).

In the Soviet occupation zone of Poland and Central Europe, the Kremlin engaged in its own version of demographic engineering. In order to produce a higher degree of ethnolinguistic homogeneity and to preventively neutralize any opposition to Soviet rule in reunited or enlarged Soviet Belarus and Soviet Ukraine, the local Polish communities were rounded up and exiled to Siberia and Kazakhstan. In addition, “ideologically unreliable” Belarusians, Jews, and Ukrainians were sent alongside them. In the wake of the breakup of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of their homeland of Subcarpathian Ruthenia by Hungary, some Orthodox Russophile Rusyns left for the
Soviet Union. They were joined by a number of Lemkos and Ukrainians from the German occupation zone of Poland. Ironically, as “uncertain elements,” most were exiled to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

In 1940 Berlin and Rome saw to an overhaul of some borders within the Axis camp. The idea was, first, to satisfy outstanding nationalist demands, and second, to make the beneficiaries of these border changes even more dependent on Germany and Italy. Both leading Axis powers guaranteed these alterations of state frontiers. Romania lost northern Transylvania to Hungary and southern Dobruja to Bulgaria. The involved nation-states committed to population exchanges (or mutual ethnic cleansing). Numerous Romanians from the ceded part of Transylvania left for Romania, while many Hungarians from the part of Transylvania remaining within Romania, decided to move to Hungary. Likewise, Romanians from southern Dobruja incorporated into Bulgaria went to Romania. In turn, Bulgarians from Dobruja remaining within the Romanian boundaries left for Bulgaria.

However, this new order in German-Soviet Central Europe did not last long. In 1941 Germany and its allies attacked its ally, the Soviet Union. Borders were altered again, and new acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide followed, as depicted on Map 28.