Schnitzler's journalistic career was closely intertwined with larger political developments. Its vicissitudes indicate major shifts in the role of politics in broadcasting. Declared anti-Nazism enabled Schnitzler to receive journalistic training at the BBC German Service during World War II. It also allowed him to rise to a central position in British-controlled post-war radio in Germany. Declared Communism caused him to lose this position at the onset of the Cold War. Schnitzler's relocation to the East was part of a larger regional concentration of political elites. Parallel to the pressure curve of the Cold War, his career went through a second complete cycle of success and subsequent failure.

When the Allies seized Germany in 1945, they brought with them not only their collective visions for a new German state, but also their national cultural beliefs. Traditional regional differences within Germany were now crisscrossed with new lines of difference between the four zones of occupation. Not only was Lower Saxony traditionally different from Bavaria, but new cultural differences arose between the British and the American, the Soviet and the French zone. This new type of regionalism became particularly virulent in the field of radio broadcasting that had to be rebuilt from scratch in all four zones.

Post-war broadcasting was, in administrative organization and programming, fundamentally different from National Socialist radio. It also did not revert to the practices of Weimar Republic radio. In the vacuum that arose in 1945, each zone of occupation established its own broadcasting model. They differed from each other significantly, particularly in their relationship to the political sphere. While the Soviets favoured a centralized, firmly censored model, the Americans established a strictly decentralized radio landscape. The British military administration sought to build a network of radio stations modelled after the BBC Home Service – centralized, publicly
financed, and politically independent. In many respects this became the dominant model for post-war broadcasting in West Germany. In the spring of 1945 the nucleus of British-controlled broadcasting in Germany, Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) in Hamburg, was staffed with a team of BBC German Service journalists from London, which included Karl Eduard von Schnitzler. They constituted the core leadership of the newly founded station, designated to support British re-education efforts by producing informative, politically unbiased programmes.

Compared to his BBC colleagues on the Hamburg team, Schnitzler's engagement with the German Service in London had been brief. He came to the BBC in 1944 as a POW volunteer – with no previous journalistic experience. But he was quickly discovered as a gifted broadcaster and given the necessary training. In 1945, after working at the main NWDR location in Hamburg, he was transferred to Cologne. There he assumed the offices of Associate Director and Head of the Politics Department. For somebody of his background this was a surprisingly fast career track, and it indicates the confidence with which the British NWDR leadership entrusted him. Today, however, Schnitzler is not remembered as a brilliant BBC or NWDR journalist, but rather as the infamous star of East German political TV commentary. In 1947 Schnitzler left both the NWDR and the West for the Soviet-occupied sector of Berlin. Initially he worked as a political commentator for the radio station Berliner Rundfunk. In 1960 he was promoted to chief commentator for the state-run East German TV. For the remaining twenty-nine years of the GDR's existence he served as author and host of 'Der schwarze Kanal', an anti-Western propaganda programme.

Even though Schnitzler spent most of his working life in East Germany, a closer look at the entire trajectory of his career is valuable for a number of reasons. From his early days at the BBC German Service to his final days in the GDR, Schnitzler worked almost exclusively as a political commentator. Political commentary is not by definition unbiased reporting. It reflects opinions that are likely to replicate themselves in the public sphere. The genre can thus be a powerful tool in steering public opinion. How many opinions a particular political system is willing to accept is a useful indicator for its degree of tolerance and openness. Even in pluralistic societies, some issues are usually open for discussion, while others are deemed