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ARTICLES

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ON THE HISTORICAL IDENTITY OF THE ESTONIANS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN ESTONIA

Abstract
The article gives an insight into the challenges related to shaping the historical identity of the Estonian people in a broad historical perspective, with particular regard to the period when a sovereign Estonian state was being built after restoration of independence in 1991. Among the main issues related to "elaborating the past", as discussed in the later part of the paper, are the revival process of Estonian statehood in the last years before the fall of the Soviet Union, rehabilitation of victims of Communist terror, as well as the question of Estonian citizens who served in the armed forces of both the German and Soviet regimes. The paper gives an overview of both the legal and symbolic elements of Estonia's politics of memory, the history of commemorating the victims of the German and Soviet regimes, and the controversies and discussions that broke out over the Estonian ethnos in the Baltic Sea, as stipulated by a traditional vision of the Estonian history of ethnicity. Finally, the article examines the repressed nature of Estonian national existence before an independent state was created in 1918, while evaluating the authoritarian governments of 1934–1940, the Soviet annexation (1940–1941, 1944–1991) and the German occupation (1941–1944).

Keywords: Estonia, historical identity, Communism, independence, German occupation, Soviet annexation

Estonia became a free country in 1991 after fifty years of Soviet rule. The USSR's annexation of the Baltic countries took place in the wake of a secret protocol appended to the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact signed by Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialists Republics in 1939. This document divided the whole of Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. Although the Third Reich collapsed in 1945, most of the countries and territories which, back in 1939, had been incorporated into the Soviet sphere of influence and were formally annexed in 1939–1940, were still part of the Soviet Union until its demise in 1991. The historical identity of present-day Estonia and its people developed in the aftermath of World War II and the half-century long annexation that followed. In 1918, the Estonian state gained independence after the World War I, mainly due to the period of national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, the country's rapid economic growth and the strengthening cultural spirit among members of Estonian society. Estonia found itself somewhere on the verge of German and Russian statehoods, later to fall under the dominance of both empires. Nonetheless, what manifests itself to a lesser extent is the periods of impact exerted when Estonia was under the authority of Sweden, Denmark and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth many centuries before.

While examining Estonia's dealing with its legacy of the Soviet occupation and annexation, and the occupation by the National Socialist Germany (1941–1944), we may gain an insight into the contemporary historical identity of the Estonian people and their state: an identity that surged back in the 19th century, and which since that time has been both consciously and deliberately formed. Therefore, the growing sense of the Estonian people's national identity should be analysed through the lens of their confrontation with the Baltic Germans, representatives of whom were considered an upper social stratum; the processes shaping Estonian nationality during the interwar period, especially under the authoritarian government of 1934–1940; as well as the struggle to preserve the national identity under Soviet annexation. The article focuses on the historical identity of the Estonian people and on how they reviewed their past, starting from the first phase of regaining independence

(1986–1987) in the following three aspects: the restitution and continuity of Estonian statehood; the remembrance of people who fell victim to the totalitarian regimes; the new state's support for those who had suffered during the Soviet regime; and the Estonians' military service under German and Soviet commands in World War II, as both army conscripts and volunteers.

In Estonia, the terms *historical policy* and *politics of history* are not widely used due to their apparent Orwellian tone – they suggest a policy aimed at changing something which really happened. The terms *memory politics* or *politics of memory* are used instead.

General remarks

On February 24, 1918, the Republic of Estonia was publicly proclaimed as an independent country. The Estonian people had never before had their own state. From 1206 to 1227, Estonia, which fiercely resisted the Crusaders (mainly from Germany, Sweden and Denmark), found itself under foreign control. Southern Estonia came under the domination of the Livonian Order, the Archdiocese of Riga and the Diocese of Tartu, while its northern part fell under the governance of the King of Denmark and the Diocese of Osilia (the Diocese of Osilia, with the capital in Haapsalu, was founded by the papal legate Cardinal William of Modena, and corresponds to the present-day areas of West Estonia and the West Estonian Archipelago), whilst the larger cities belonged to the Hanseatic League. In 1346, the King of Denmark sold his lands to the Livonian Order. During the Reformation, Lutheranism was first adopted in the cities, and later also in the rural areas. In the aftermath of the Livonian Wars of 1558–1583, northern Estonia came under Swedish rule, southern Estonia became Polish-Lithuanian, while the islands (Saaremaa and Muhu) were handed to Denmark. Following the wars fought between Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first three decades of the 17th century, Estonia's mainland became Sweden's domain; so did the island of Saaremaa, which passed under Sweden's crown as part of the Swedish-Danish Treaty of Brömsebro of 1645. In 1710, Russia conquered Estland and

Livland. In February 1918, Estonia was occupied by the army of imperial Germany, while they withdrew from the country after the Compiègne agreements were concluded.

Between the 18th and 20th century, Estonia was one of the three Baltic Governorates of the Russian Empire. The Estonian Governorate occupied the northern part of present-day Estonia; the Livonian Governorate covered the territories of southern Estonia, the island of Saaremaa and northern Latvia; while the Courland Governorate, a territorial unit created in 1795, encompassed the western lands of present-day Latvia and those located south of the Daugava River. Among the upper social classes in the Baltic governorates were the aristocracy, the Lutheran clergy and the wealthy burghers, all of whom were Baltic-German descendants of crusaders and 13th-century Hanseatic merchants, as well as the aristocracy, nobility, merchants, clergy and intellectuals who had arrived from both neighbouring countries and those located farther away. Their privileges were acknowledged by both the kings of Poland and Sweden, as well as the Russian tsars. The Estonians and Latvians who represented the indigenous population belonged to the peasantry. Finally, serfdom (i.e. the peasants personal dependency on their feudal superiors) was abolished by a set of decrees issued by Tsar Alexander I in 1816–1819, while the decrees of the 1850s formed a legal basis for small landownership for the peasantry, while setting limits on how much land one farm could own (such restrictions still existed in some form up to the 20th century, and the last paragraphs of the peasantry legislation were only declared null and void when legal reforms were passed in the second half of the 1930s).

Both linguistic and class divisions were convergent, with social advancement meaning Germanisation, while social decline was equivalent to either Estonisation or Latvianisation. German was widely recognised as the official language. The process of Russification, which had commenced back in the 1880s, narrowed down the autonomy of the Baltic Germans. Russian emerged as a compulsory language both in the bureaucracy and in schools, from the lowest grades to the university; but the local governments in the rural areas remained for substantial range under the rule of the

knighthoods (German: *Ritterschaften*) of the Baltic German landed aristocracy until the fall of the Russian Empire. Four knighthoods: Estonian, Livonian, Curonian and of Saaremaa – had broad responsibilities in local government, local justice, taxation, supervision of religious issues (they nominated the non-clergy-members of the consistories), education and other minor matters. While local justice and education were taken over by the state during the Russification reforms, the local taxation and religious issues remained in the hands of knighthoods until 1917. The cities were governed by the councils (*Rat*) of burghers until 1877, when Russian urban legislation of 1870 was expanded also to the cities of Baltic provinces.

The German, Estonian and Latvian languages were spoken by the Lutheran clergy, and the Baltic Provincial Law (*Provinzialrecht der Ostseegouverments*) was in force back then (see Kasekamp 2010).

The census of 1897 showed that 88.7% of the population of the Estonian Governorate declared Estonian as their mother tongue, 83.3% of the inhabitants of the Livonian Governorate spoke Estonian and Latvian, while the latter language was regarded as native by 75.1% of the population of the Courland Governorate. In Estland, German was identified as the first language by 3.9% of the population, compared to 7.6% of all the inhabitants of the Livonian Governorate. 79.3% of all people in the Livonian Governorate and 89.7% of those living in Estland declared themselves Lutherans. During the period of Russification in the Livonian Governorate, the process of converting Latvian and Estonian peasants to Orthodoxy ended with much more success, as the percentage of Orthodox Christians among the local population eventually rose to 14.4%. The literacy rate among Lutherans reached about 90% (for more, see "Population distribution by religion and regions in 50 Russian governorships in the first general census of the Russian Empire of 1897", Estonian Governorate: General Census 1897 Estland Language, General Census 1897 Estland Religion; Livonian Governorate: General Census 1897 Livonia Language, General Census 1897 Livonia Region). At that time, the lands of present-day Estonia were home to slightly less than a million people.

Resisting Germanisation: The surge of Estonian national identity

As was universally acknowledged, the national consciousness of the Estonians was born in the spring of 1857 when Johann Voldemar Jannsen (1819–1890), the editor of the first Estonian-language weekly *Perno Postimees*, opened the first edition of his paper with the greeting "Welcome, dear Estonian people!" Back then, it was rather unusual to perceive the Estonians as a nation. A person's status was at that time defined by their social position, with most Estonians belonging to the peasantry and living in villages. An important role in shaping the national emancipation of the Estonian people was played by their resistance to the Baltic German landowners and their privileges. Only a small group of Estonians, who had attended middle schools and universities, underwent the process of Germanisation. Although this tendency dropped off dramatically in the second half of the 19th century, Estonian nationalists continued to see Germanisation as a thorny issue well after World War I.

The "ancient independence" of the Estonians (i.e. the state of tribal freedom in the period prior to the 13th-century conquests of the Estonian lands, as mentioned in medieval sources) was subject to historical research, with Estonian primary school textbooks also focusing on the matter.

In 1868, Carl Robert Jakobson (1841–1882), a representative of the Estonian intellectuals and one of the leaders of the national movement, created the popular myth of "700 years of slavery", a thesis that exerted a huge impact on Estonian historical identity. He wrote about periods of light, darkness and dawn, seeing the period of light as Estonia's former freedom prior to the 13th-century conquest, that of darkness as the time of serfdom under Baltic German dominance, while finally defining the dawn as the Estonian national awakening under the protection of Russian Tsar Alexander II. Jakobson saw the Russian tsar as a defender of the Estonian people's interests and an ally in their fight against the Baltic Germans (Jakobson 1870, pp. 19–28ff.). Both Russian society and the empire's central authorities were increasingly negative about the ever-broadening autonomy of the German-speaking Baltic Sea governorships (see the discussion between Yuri

Samarin and Carl Schirren: Samarin 1868, Schirren 1869). The Estonian defiance of the Germans developed their national self-consciousness until the Republic of Estonia was eventually established. An attempt was made to create a Baltic Duchy in 1918, during the German occupation, an attitude that continued to shape the nation's consciousness: after the October 1917 revolution in Russia, Estonia's Baltic Germans submitted a formal request to Germany to admit the country under its protection. The intention was for the former territories

Ceremony at the War of Independence monument on August 23, 2017. Tallinn Freedom Square. © Martin Andreller

of the Estonian and Livonian Governorships to become parts of the United Baltic Duchy (*Vereinigtes Baltisches Herzogtum*), a new state to be led by the Duke of Mecklenburg. Nonetheless, the German Revolution of 1918 toppled the imperial regime, burying the idea of setting up the Baltic Duchy.

Shortly after being liberated from German occupation in November 1918, Estonia became a target of the Red Army's offensive. The Estonian War of Independence (*Eesti Vabadussõda*) against Bolshevik Russia was concluded by the Treaty of Tartu, signed on February 2, 1920. But in 1934, Estonian lawmakers decided to turn 23 June – St. John's Day (Jaan) – into a national day to mark the day of victory, a decision which has remained in force until now (Public Holidays Act 1934; Public Holidays Days Act 1998).

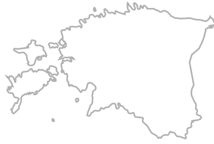
On June 23, 1919, the Estonian forces fighting in the Battle of Cēsis (in Latvia) defeated Germany's *Freikorps* Iron Division and the Baltic *Landswehr*, forcing them to retreat. With the consent of the Entente, German forces fought against the Red Army on Latvian soil. Estonian-German clashes stemmed from the essential differences in their strategic goals. As early as 1919, Estonian society saw the victory over the Baltic *Landswehr* as a struggle that eventually put an end to the "700 years of slavery". The Estonian Constituent Assembly (*Asutav Kogu*), a legislative body elected in April 1919 to draft a Constitution for the new Estonian state, enacted the Land Reform Act in October 1919. This was a radical land reform bill that liquidated large estates, which were usually owned by the Baltic Germans, members of the former upper social class; the Land Reform Act stripped the former landed aristocracy of all the economic foundations of their existence.

A new wave of anti-German sentiments broke out on the Soviet side during the period of the Soviet annexation and World War II, when the concept of Estonian history and the Soviet theory of class struggle found common points in Estonia's early resistance to the Germans (*Saksa* 1947). To mark the 600th anniversary of the Saint George's Night Uprising (*Jüriöö*) in 1943, this day was declared in the Soviet Union as a historic holiday of the Estonian people (for either approximately 25 thousand of Estonians evacuated in 1941 to distant regions within the Soviet Union – mainly "Party and Soviet workers", but also engineers, industrial specialists and railway workers,

or those forced to join the Red Army; it did not apply to the people forcibly deported or imprisoned in 1940–1941), as a national festivity intended to encourage Estonians to stand against the "German Fascist robbers and invaders" (Kruus 1943). On April 23, 1343, on Saint George's Night (*Jüriöö*), the Estonian people sparked off a mass uprising against their German invaders, but the popular revolt was eventually quelled. In the 21st century, a new light was shone on the date when Estonian lawmakers proclaimed 23 April as Veterans Day in 2012, a nationwide holiday which has been an official Flag Day since 2014 (Flag Act 2014). Veterans Day is celebrated across Estonia to honour the Estonian men and women that served in foreign missions to Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries, and to commemorate those who fell fighting against the enemy.

The country's centuries-long resistance to Baltic Germans is an inherent part of its citizens' day-to-day consciousness. Present-day Estonian historians have ceased to see the country's "700 years of slavery" as a state that persisted from the 13th to 19th century, and now rather view it as a period of the ever-increasing dependency of the Estonian peasants, a phenomenon that culminated in the first half of the 18th century. There is also a consensus that the seven-century domination of Baltic Germans in Estonia transformed the country into a part of the European cultural sphere. Among the prominent figures that are now being highlighted are scholars, writers, seamen, military commanders, and other notables, all of whom descended from Estonia's Baltic Germans, and whose legacy has now become accepted as a subject of study. Nevertheless, a new study published in 2012 on the Middle Ages in Estonia (13th–16th century) has still met with harsh criticism from Estonian society and nationalist historians, even though it was compiled by a group of young historians on the basis of the latest research into the medieval history (*Eesti ajalugu II* 2012). What raised the ire of the critics was that the scholars referred to the early 13th-century period of German conquests as that of the "North-East European Crusade" instead of the "Ancient Fight for Freedom". This stemmed from a belief that the authors had failed to clearly take the side of the Estonian people. Another reason for the criticism was that the 13th-century Estonian people were not seen as an archetype of the Estonians and their state as formally established in 1918. Those

who spoke out against the publication argued that the Saint George's Night Uprising of 1343 had been downgraded to an ordinary peasant revolt, although Estonian historiography had long seen the event as one of the most important episodes of the Middle Ages in Estonia. A series of romantic novels written by Eduard Bornhöhe, an Estonian writer, describing the events of the 1343 uprising had been textbook reading at primary schools for almost a century (first editions Bornhöhe 1880, Bornhöhe 1890).



The Republic of Estonia: The process of Estonianisation and developing national identity

The first Estonian Constitution, adopted in June 1920, handed over large powers to the parliament (Estonian Constitution 1920). But at that time the country's political stage supported many political parties, all of which were embroiled in a conflict over how to govern Estonia, a turmoil which, along with the serious economic situation, led to political instability and frequent governmental crises. No institution was formed to balance that of the head of the state, with the prime minister serving representative functions. The Great Depression of 1929–1933 deeply upset the Estonian economy. Under the Land Reform Act of 1919, Estonians were entitled to conduct their farming activities on single farms. During the crisis many farmers went bankrupt, due to Estonia's loss of its share on the export market as the parliament delayed efforts to devaluate the Estonian kroon. Support for the Union of Participants in the Estonian War of Independence (*Eesti Vabadussõjalaste Keskliit*), a right-wing populist movement founded in 1929, started to rise although the grouping had no formal representative in the parliament. In autumn 1933, a new draft constitution put forward by the members of the Union (referred to as *Vapsid*, the derogatory abbreviation) won a referendum providing for the establishment of a position for a head of state with great powers, while reducing those of the parliament. The revised Estonian Constitution of 1933 came into force in January 1934. On 12 March, shortly before the new head of state was to have been elected in April, in a vote

that would most likely have been won by a candidate of the Union of Participants in the Estonian War of Independence, a bloodless military coup was staged by Konstantin Päts, who served as Estonia's prime minister. Between 1934 and 1940, he ruled an authoritarian government together with Johan Laidoner, the commander-in-chief of the Estonian Armed Forces, and Kaarel Eenpalu, the minister of internal affairs. In 1938, a new semi-presidential constitution, modelled on the example of Polish constitution, came into force (Marandi 2007), with a new parliament being elected. Päts took the post of president, and political parties remained forbidden until the end of Estonian independence in the summer of 1940.

After establishing the authoritarian regime, the issue of Estonian historical identity re-emerged. Among the few national symbols in the public space there were monuments to those who had fallen in the War of Independence. Located usually in parish cemeteries, these statues had been erected back in the 1920s, while commemorative plaques were unveiled in schools or public institutions to pay tribute to workers or students who had died in the war. The monuments to the War of Independence were most often inscribed with the names of parishioners killed during World War I as well.

The Memorial of Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940–1991. Tallinn seashore. © Martin Andreller

Despite all this, work to construct a nationwide monument in commemoration of the War of Independence began, though the statue was not completed by 1940 (War of Independence Memorial Act 1936; War of Independence Memorial Act 1938). After Estonia underwent Soviet occupation and annexation in 1940, the ruling Communist party ordered the demolition of most of the country's monuments honouring the men who has fallen in the War of Independence. Although some of the memorials were restored during German occupation, they were yet again destroyed after the end of the war. In 1987/1988–1991/1992, the urge to revitalise the monuments to the War of Independence emerged as one of the first nationwide actions at ground level (Strauss 2002–2005).

According to the 1934 census, Estonia was inhabited by 1.13 million people, of which 88.1% were Estonians, 8.2% Russians, 1.5% Germans, 0.7% Swedes, 0.5% Latvians and 0.4% Jews (Estonian General Census 1934, p. 47ff.).

In 1934–1938, Kaarel Eenpalu served as Estonia's Minister of Internal Affairs. Among his priorities was the reinforcement of Estonian national identity. He established the State Propaganda Office, which had the mission of organising several nation-wide campaigns, the boosting the birthrate and Estonianising Russian and German first and family names, as well as those of farms. The Office's duties also included the beautification of homelands, with people being ordered to care for the appearance of peasant farms, settlements and cities, as well as efforts to show off Estonian successes abroad. Among the Office's most successful programmes were those to Estonianise family names, as evidenced by the fact that in 1934–1939, out of 330,000 Estonian people with German or Russian family names as many as 200,000 voluntarily decided to change their original family names. Yet another program involved making all citizens display a national flag in their households (*Igale talule Eesti lipp*). Thousands of such Estonian flags survived in secrecy through the Soviet period, when Estonia's blue-black-white tricolour was strictly forbidden (Hiio 2012, pp. 31–57). In October 1934, Estonian lawmakers enacted a law that defined the Estonian nationality. According to the document, those whose father or grandfather were included on the lists of members of Estonian rural municipalities before

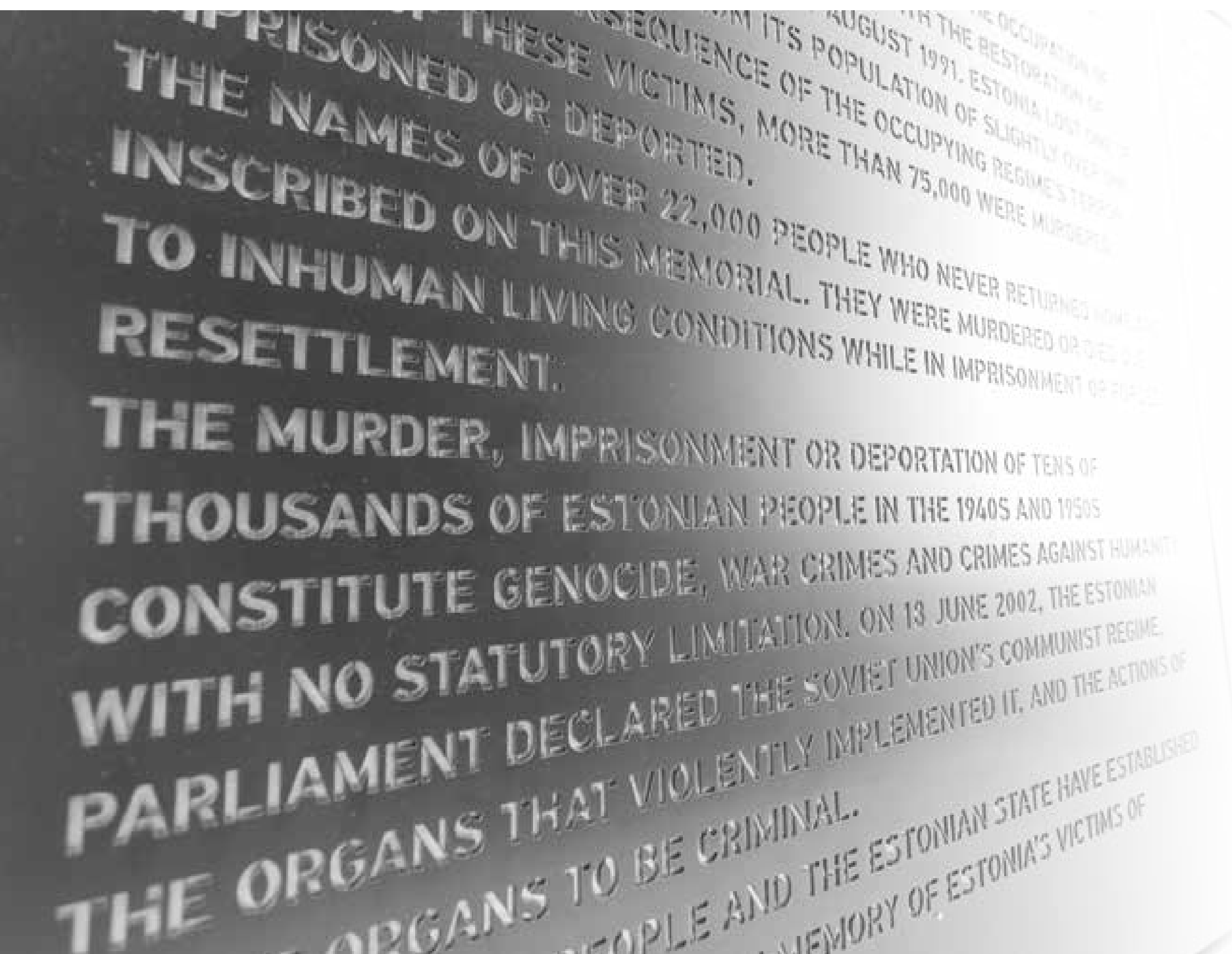
1917 were acknowledged as Estonian nationals, meaning that nationality was defined by a person's or his/her father's or grandfather's peasant state (Estonian Nationality Act 1934). The matter need some explanation: prior to 1917 the population of Livonian and Estonian governorates was divided between clergy, nobility, burghers and peasantry with their own member lists. Rural municipality was a form of self-government only for the peasants class. Most of peasants were ethnic Estonians, the higher classes were Baltic Germans. There were compact Swedish and Russian rural municipalities on Estonian Western coast and islands resp. Western bank of Lake Peipus. They were excluded from Estonian nationality and sustained their right to remain ethnic Swedes or ethnic Russians according to the Act of National Minorities of 1925.

Estonian President Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid is laying a wreath on the Memorial of Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940–1991 during the opening of the memorial on August 23, 2018. © Martin Andreller

Under the authoritarian regime, all these campaigns were meant to modernise the state while promoting national ideas and shaping national identity, a solution that at least partly helped the Estonian people to survive the half-century Soviet annexation.

Some writers and scholars began searching for signs of the Estonians' former statehood in the times prior to the 13th-century conquest. In 1935–1936, Jüri Uluots, a distinguished professor of international law at the University of Tartu and the Estonian prime minister from 1939–1940, published a study into 13th-century agreements concluded between Estonians and representatives of other nations (see German

The texts on the Memorial of Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940–1991 are in three languages: Estonian, English and Russian. © Martin Andreller



translation of Uluots 1937). In 1936, August Mälk wrote *The Lords of the Baltic Sea (Läänemere isandad)*, a novel devoted to Estonian participation in the Viking expeditions (Mälk 1936). The novel's topic happened to coincide with an increasing interest in the subject from many Estonian historians. The destruction of the Swedish town of Sigtuna in 1187 was seen as one of the symbols of Estonian power in the pre-conquest period. However, according to the chronicle's entry, those who achieved it were pagans, and every pagan nation in the Baltic region was at that time in competition (see Rebas 2015, summary in German: "*Was passierte mit Sigtuna im Jahre 1187? Wer waren die Paganes?*").

Estonia in World War II

During World War II, Estonia was first occupied and then annexed by the Soviet Union (1940–1941), came under German occupation (1941–1944) before finding itself again under Soviet domination in the autumn of 1944.

The usage of terms *occupation* and *annexation*, as both differ in the light of international law, is an important matter in Estonian discussions concerning Soviet rule in 1940–1941 and 1944–1991. To be precise, Estonia, as well as Latvia and Lithuania, was militarily occupied by the Soviet Union from June to August 1940, when all three countries were forcibly incorporated (annexed) into the Soviet Union. In common use, particularly in the speeches of politicians, the term 'occupation' is used when referring to the whole period of 1940–1991, and sometimes even until 1994 (when the last Russian troops left Estonia on 31 August).

It should be noted that the Soviet Union did not recognise most of the international treaties and agreements signed by Tsarist Russia. The legal rules of occupation were delineated primarily in the Fourth Hague Convention of 1899/1907. However, the Hague Conventions became part of common international law, also as stated during the Nuremberg Trial. Having left legal matters aside, the Soviets sought to avoid the impression of having militarily occupied the Baltic states, and they therefore staged the spectacle of *voluntary joining* (thus their annexation) the USSR in 1940.

Estonian men were drafted into the Red Army, or the Armed Forces of the Third Reich during the World War II.

In August 1940, the Army of the Estonian Republic was incorporated in the Soviet Army as the 22nd Territorial Rifle Corps (under a relevant Soviet Communist Party Politburo decision, and Semyon Timoshenko's order of 16–17 August 1940).

In 1941, 1944 and 1945, some 50,000 people were called up to serve in the Red Army; most of them became the members of the 8th Estonian Rifle Corps of the Red Army.

Initially, both divisions of the Estonian Rifle Corps remained under the command of generals of the former army of the Republic of Estonia; after the Velikiye Luki offensive operation of 1942–1943, a military campaign that saw major losses for the Corps, the Estonian officers were replaced by Estonian-born Soviet officers that had served in the Red Army prior to 1940 (cf. Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a).

About 70,000 Estonians were estimated to have sided with various German military units, including the Estonian SS-Legion (formed in Autumn 1942, was a core and training unit for all of the Estonian Waffen-SS-units, and an unofficial denomination for all of them), 3rd Estonian SS-Brigade (1943–1944), 20th Estonian SS Division (1944–1945), and the *Omakaitse* (Home Guard), along with police battalions and border defence regiments (cf. Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a; Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006b; Kasekamp 2010).

In 1944, 3500 Estonians, who fled to Finland from the German mobilisation in 1943, formed the 200th Infantry Regiment of the Finnish army, which fought against the Red Army in the Karelian Isthmus. In August 1944, the Regiment was deployed to Estonia (cf. Laar, Pillak, Rebas, and Saueauk 2010).

During World War II, Estonia lost approximately 20% of its pre-war population, including resettled ethnic Baltic Germans and ethnic Swedes who were evacuated to Sweden (both groups were native to Estonia, as their ancestors lived there since 13th century or even earlier), but also casualties – either killed or fallen in battles, political prisoners, people deported to the Soviet Union, or those who fled the Red Army as it approached Estonian territories in 1944. The figure of approximately 20% of Estonia's pre-war

population in 1940–1944 was reconstructed according to registrations of population from 1939, 1941, 1944 and 1945 (last Estonian census was carried through in 1934; the first Soviet one in Estonia in 1959). After that survivors began to return, especially in 1953–1960, and also from Germany in 1945–1949, forcibly or voluntarily. Figures for population loss should in absolute value include nothing but deaths: those who were executed, died in prison or in exile, killed in battle, etc. But there also arises a problem of estimating the losses inflicted by war, because thousands of people died due to natural causes at that time. Countries tend to experience a fall in their birthrates during wartime. In most cases one can see that population loss is only a figure in demographic statistics. When we make attempts to go into detail, there will be too many exceptions to allow a comprehensible generalisation to be made.

In 1944–1953, some 60,000 people fell victim to Soviet political terror. Approximately 35,000 were arrested on political charges, most of whom were sent to *gulag*s; more than 20,000 were deported in 1949, and several hundred in 1945 (ethnic Germans) and 1951 (Jehovah's Witnesses). More than 1400 Estonians and Latvians were deported in 1950 from the territories of Latvia and Estonia which were annexed to the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic in 1944 and afterwards.

Very few Estonians who had fled to Finland prior to 1944 succeeded in staying there, due to an extradition agreement between that country and the Soviet Union according to Soviet-Finnish armistice of September 1944.

As for Estonia, the forced migrations, or deportations were not *ethnic cleansings* in the precise meaning of the term, because the deportees were selected on a class basis, or because of their service to the Estonian state. Escaping to the West in 1944 was not seen as *ethnic cleansing* either; one must remember that a considerable part of the migrants were rank-and-file members of the German armed forces' Estonian units.

Following Joseph Stalin's death, in the second half of the 1950s *Gulag* prisoners who managed to survive and deportees were allowed to return to Estonia, though they were seen as second-class citizens until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Despite hosting a very small Jewish community, Estonia became an important place on the Holocaust map. In 1941, all 1000 Jews who had remained in Estonia were killed, and the country was designated as *judenfrei* at the Wannsee Conference in early 1942. In September 1944, the SS conducted a mass execution of 2000 Jewish prisoners at Klooga concentration camp, most of whom had been relocated to Estonia in 1943 from the Kaunas and Vilnius ghettos; they were not sent to the Stutthof concentration camp as it was initially planned. Images of the atrocities that took place in Klooga were among the first ever published in Europe to document the Holocaust (for more about the history of World War II and the post-war political repression in Estonia, see the above-mentioned book by Andrey Kasekamp, Kasekamp 2010. More details in Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a, Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006b).

An event of particular importance for the history of Estonian statehood was the attempt to restore the Republic of Estonia on 18–22 September 1944, in the brief period between the German retreat and the Soviet reoccupation. On September 18, 1944, Estonia's last pre-war prime minister Jüri Uluots appointed Otto Tief head of the government and asked him to form a cabinet. Earlier, Uluots had managed to escape Soviet repression and was tolerated by the German occupation authorities; they cared little about his plausible influence, yet in February 1944 sought to use him to back the German war effort, asking him to support publicly the general conscription. Pursuant to the Constitution of Estonia, he should have taken on the president's duties and responsibilities (President Päts, elected in 1938, was deported to Russia in July 1940; see Orav and Nõu 2004).

It should be noted that this occurred in line with the Estonian constitution of 1937/38, where the President of the Republic was also the head of the executive power, and the prime minister chaired the government. Under the 1937 Constitution, in the case when the President of the Republic was unable to fulfil his duties, such responsibilities were taken over by the prime minister, as Uluots did in September 1944, when he nominated Otto Tief deputy prime minister and tasked him with forming a government (cf. Presidential Decree No. 1 of September 18, 1944).

The members of the government included politicians from the former Estonian democratic parties who had evaded cooperation with both the Soviet and the Nazi occupation authorities, while putting their hopes in the Atlantic Charter and wishing that the post-war West would back attempts to restore the independence of the Baltic countries. Estonia's blue-black-white flag was raised over the Tall Hermann tower at Toompea Castle (the seat of the Estonian parliament and government in Tallinn), while Estonia's recovery of its independence was publicly declared on the radio (cf. Laar 2007). But when the Red Army reached Tallinn on 22 September, the Soviet Union refused to acknowledge the Republic of Estonia as a sovereign state; shortly afterwards, all members of the government were detained and sent to *gulag*s, and some were executed. Of all the European countries that fell under foreign occupation during World War II, the Baltic states were the only ones which independence was not restored after the war.

The present-day Republic of Estonia recognises the Uluots-Tief government as part of its legal continuity. In the Cold War era, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian diplomats who had been accredited to Western countries prior to 1940 sought to continue their activities on the basis of the USA and Western countries' policy of non-recognition of the Soviet annexations. Also, Estonia formed a government in exile in Sweden (Orav and Nõu 2004; Mälksoo 2003).

The identity of Estonia and Estonians during the Soviet annexation

An estimated group of 70,000 Estonians who had managed to flee the country in 1944 and settle in Western countries formed resilient refugee communities in Sweden, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries. They established organisations and schools, published newspapers, and cultivated pre-occupation attitudes while raising their children, in the hope that foreign domination would end and they would be free to return to their homeland.

The Baltic states' independence was not restored. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – differently as the other countries of Eastern Block like Poland or Czechoslovakia – were

annexed as Soviet Republics into the Soviet Union. Therefore Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians who remained in their homeland were deprived of the – even defective (as in the countries of the Soviet Block) – sense of the separateness of their statehood, and were not offered anything else than allegiance to the Soviet state. The Soviet authorities prohibited the use of the blue-black-white colour combination and other national symbols. Russian-language classes were increased, while Russian also became widely spoken in other areas of activity, especially after the new Soviet constitution was adopted in 1977, seeking to create "a socialist state of the people" (Russian: *социалистическое общенародное государство*, as stated in the art. 1 of the Soviet constitution of 1977; the concept was similar to Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*) and the "Soviet nation". The Estonian people perceived the Communist regime as a continuation of the Russian Empire, hoping to see its imminent end. In 1945, 95% of all Estonian residents were of Estonian origin, but immediately after the Soviet re-annexation in 1944, mass immigration from the Soviet Union began. The 1959 census showed that ethnic Estonians made up 75% of the country, falling to 68% in 1970, 65% in 1979, and 62% in 1989. According to data from the 1989 official statistics, the population of Estonia was 1,565,662; compared to the 1934 census, the population growth was mainly due to the mass influx of population from the Soviet Union (Estonian Statistics 1959, Estonian Statistics 1970, Estonian Statistics 1979, Estonian Statistics 1989). Ethnic Estonians were threatened with becoming a minority in their own country, a state that prompted them to glorify Estonian culture, traditional rural life, history and the protection of nature. The pre-war times were – in the popular, not-official opinion – cherished as "a beautiful period for Estonia".

Estonians and immigrants formed separate communities with separate schools with Russian language of instruction for the latter. As a rule, immigrants did not pick up on Estonian language, and neither the majority of Estonians in primary and secondary school did not pick up Russian, mainly due to a lack of motivation, unskilled teachers (who were often the wives of Soviet officers; these were women with pedagogical education and with no knowledge of the Estonian language,

who arrived in Estonia for a time of rotation of their husbands) and obsolete methodology.

In terms of education and culture, Estonians saw themselves as superior to the immigrant population. Indeed, most immigrants were ordinary workers who had come to Estonia for better living standards than those available in the rest of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet authorities actively sought to consolidate their Communist history in Estonia. Most monuments to the War of Independence were removed, along with many others erected during the Republic of Estonia or even earlier. Commemorative plaques honouring Communist activists and Communist-related events were unveiled throughout Estonia, while streets were renamed. Monuments were set up at the joint graves of Red Army soldiers fallen in Estonia during World War II and people killed during the German occupation. Military cemeteries of German soldiers killed in Estonia were razed to the ground (see Kasekamp 2010; *Eesti ajalugu* VI 2005; Laar and Hiio 2018).

Patarei prison
Former Central Prison in Tallinn. Built as a coastal fortification with barracks for 2000 men, cannon chambers etc. is known as Patarei (Battery). From 1917/1920 to 2002 used as a prison. Together with criminals, the communists and right radicals were imprisoned here during interwar period, the victims of the communist terror 1940–1941 and since 1944 as well as the victims of National Socialist terror 1941–1944. Planned location of the International Museum for the Victims of Communism.
© Martin Andreller

The Estonians' reaction to this mass influx of people is viewed until today as one of the pillars of their national identity, particularly in regard to the belief that Estonians are an indigenous people on the southeast coast of Baltic Sea that settled these lands 5000 years before, and thus could be said to have lived in Europe for much longer than the Germans or the Slavs. Finno-Ugric languages are related to those spoken over the River Volga and the Ural Mountains, with similarities in archaeological cultures and folklore. This was later portrayed as part of the image of Estonia in books and documentary films by Lennart Meri (1929–2006), the former Estonian president, a traveller, historian, writer and film director (Meri 1976; films: *Veelinnurahvas* 1970, *Linnutee tuuled* 1977). Also, the Soviet propaganda thesis of "the historical community of the Soviet nations" was used paradoxically to solidify the national consciousness of Estonians. Later, although contemporary linguistic and genetic research into the case refuted the hypothesis that Estonians had been living in that area for 5000 years, but nevertheless 2000–3000 (Lang 2018), the thesis of Estonian indigenousness has remained deeply rooted until today.

After regaining independence

Attempts to restore Estonian independence – a process that goes back to 1986 – took the form of a people's movement when Gorbachev's reforms of *perestroika* and *glasnost* began. The Estonian Heritage Society (*Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts)*, established in 1986, was a cultural institution with the mission to restore the most important monuments and buildings which had either been destroyed or neglected at the time of the Soviet annexation. In spring 1987, a movement arose protesting against new phosphate mines in Estonia, in a bid to derail Soviet industrial plans. On August 23, 1987, on the anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact, people gathered in Tallinn to commemorate the loss of their independence while paying tribute to the victims of both totalitarian regimes. In 1988, a grassroots initiative gave rise to a sea of blue-black-white flags fluttering in the sky, and the "Singing Revolution" began. The Popular Front of Estonia (*Eestimaa*

Rahvarinne) was introduced to the public as an organisation that initially reflected moderate views while voicing support for Gorbachev's *perestroika*, followed by the creation of the far more radical Estonian National Independence Party (*Eesti Rahvuslik Sõltumatuse Partei)*. In November, the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) (Estonian: *Ülemnõukogu*, Russian: *Верховный Совет*) declared sovereignty, under which Estonian laws would take precedence over those issued by the Soviet Union (a deliberate play of words has been used here and further to translate the term *Ülemnõukogu*: the Soviet one is Supreme Soviet, but the free-elected in 1990 is Supreme Council – Estonian parlament during the transitional period of 1990–1992). On August 23, 1989, two million Baltic people joined hands, forming the "Baltic Way", a human chain stretching from Tallinn to Vilnius, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin pact; this undertaking had been coordinated by the National Fronts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In 1990, the Supreme Council of Estonia was elected in the first free vote since the Soviet annexation, as was the Congress of Estonia (*Eesti Kongress*), an innovative grassroots parliament. Only those who had hereditary Estonian citizenship had the right to cast the ballot to *Eesti Kongress*, i.e. people who had had such citizenship prior to the country's occupation on June 16, 1940, or their direct descendants. The same year saw many Estonians leave the Communist Party. On August 20, 1991, the Supreme Council of Estonia declared its formal independence during the Soviet military's coup attempt in Moscow. Back in 1988, both the reformist wing of the Estonian Communist Party and the Popular Front of Estonia had demanded greater autonomy within the framework of the supposed Estonian-Soviet union agreement (Russian: *союзный договор*; a planned general new basis for Gorbachev's reformed Soviet Union), although the nation was increasingly in favour of restoring the Republic of Estonia which had been legally established in 1918. And this is exactly what happened.

The Republic of Estonia was restored in 1991 as a subject of international law, with Western countries resuming the diplomatic relations with Estonia which had existed after World War I and during interwar period. The state revived the

principle of civil restitution. With the rebirth of the Republic of Estonia, those that held an inheritable right to citizenship were considered Estonian citizens, while the immigrant population who later arrived on Estonian soil sought to become Estonian citizens via naturalisation. The Republic of Estonia enacted the restitution of real estate, handing private property confiscated by the Soviet Union to landowners or their descendants (Kasekamp 2010; *Eesti ajalugu* VI 2005, pp. 398–403; Laar and Hiio 2018, pp. 91–154; Hiio 2017a, pp. 5–9).

Most Communist monuments and statues were removed in the first half of the 1990s, some of which were later displayed at a special outdoor exhibition at the Estonian History Museum (*Eesti Ajaloomuuseum*, Laurik-Teder 2019). The Lenin monument in Tartu was the first to be dismantled on August 23, 1990. The new Estonian authorities left untouched the mass graves of Soviet soldiers killed in World War II. It was not until the early 21st century that the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Estonia made efforts to honour the neglected war graves, as exemplified by wreath-laying ceremonies held on 9 May and 22 September, the day when the Red Army marched into Tallinn in 1944. German military cemeteries were restored under a 1995 Estonian-German bilateral agreement allowing the latter to maintain their war graves and places of burial on Estonian soil (Agreement concerning War Cemeteries 1995). Also, Red Army and German mass graves contain the remains of hundreds of Estonian troops who were killed in Estonia while fighting in the ranks of both armies.

Restoring monuments and honouring Estonia's pre-war statesmen

In addition to reviving memorials to the War of Independence, a process that began in the late 1980s, new monuments were unveiled throughout the country to pay tribute to Estonia's pre-war statesmen, most often in the places where they were born. In most cases these individuals had fallen victim to Soviet repression. In 1939, a monument was erected at the birthplace of Konstantin Päts (1874–1956), and set up again in 1989. The solemn reburial of Päts' remains in Tallinn's

Commemoration at a memorial stone in Ertsma (Western Estonia) to nine Forest Brothers who were killed here in a battle on February 27, 1949. February 27, 2018. © Martin Andreller

Metsakalmistu Cemetery took place in 1990. In 2001, a monument to Jaan Tõnisson (1868–1941) was unveiled in Tartu, while three years later, in 2004, Estonia's first and so far only equestrian statue was erected in Viljandi in honour of General Johan Laidoner (1884–1953), Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Army in the War of Independence. Tõnisson was executed in Tallinn while Laidoner died in a Soviet prison in the Russian city of Vladimir on the River Klyazma; their remains have never been found (see brief English-language articles on the history of Estonia and Estonian statesmen on the *Estonica* webpage). The intention to build a monument in commemoration of Estonia's first prime minister Konstantin Päts, who in 1934–1940 led an authoritarian government of Estonia, sparked off heated public debate that is still taking place in the country. Those who were in favour of the memorial considered Päts's merits in founding the Estonian state, while critics pointed to his authoritarian rule, under whose leadership Estonia surrendered to the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 without any resistance. The War of Independence Victory Column was unveiled on Victory Day, June 23, 2009, on Freedom

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Square in Tallinn. Work on erecting the monument had been launched as early as in the 1930s. To mark the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Republic of Estonia, commemorative stones and plaques were set up around February 24, 2018 in honour of Estonian statesmen and the heroes of the War of Independence.

Commemorating the victims of occupation and supporting those who survived

Estonia lost roughly a fifth of its population in World War II (1939–1945). An estimated number of 60,000 people fell victim to Soviet political repression in the post-war period. In addition to the events of June 14, 1941, when a group of 10,000 people, mainly politicians, state officials, military commanders and social activities, along with their families, were deported from Estonia, the biggest act of post-war state terror took place on March 25, 1949, when over 20,000 wealthy farmers (stigmatized as *kulaks*), their families and family members of hiding or already arrested Estonia's resistance fighters were deported from the country. In 1940–1941, 7000 people were imprisoned because of political accusations, compared to over 35,000 in 1944–1953. Thousands of men, women and children sent to *gulag*s perished either in prisons or in exile. Those who managed to survive returned to their homeland in the second half of the 1950s, but some were not allowed to return until the 1980s (for more details, see Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a; Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006b).

The first organisations of formerly repressed persons were formed before independence was regained. To honour the 40th anniversary of the March in deportation on March 25, 1989, the Estonian Association of Illegally Repressed Persons Memento (*Eesti Õigusvastaselt Represseeritute Liit,* today known as the Estonian Memento Union, *Eesti Memento Liit*) was founded as an association for former exiles and political prisoners. The Memento Union comprises 16 associations and district chambers (Memento Webpage; *Memento* 2006, p. 12). In 1993, the Association of Former Students-Freedom Fighters (*Endiste Õpilasvabadusvõitlejate Liit*) was inaugurated in honour of students imprisoned in 1940s and

1950s for expressing anti-Soviet attitudes, who were sentenced to many years in *gulag* prison camps (Josia 2004). The year 2001 saw the establishment of the Estonian Federation of Former Political Prisoners (*Eesti Endiste Poliitvangide Liit)* that became a successful separate organisation. Most of the members of Memento were deportees, while the federation of political prisoners included men and women sent to the *gulag* camps on political charges, as well as members of the 1960–1980 resistance movement. Back in March 2009, Estonia had 12,918 people, or 1% of the country's total population, who had been issued repressed person's certificates (*Kui* 2009, p. 10). Born in forced exile into the families of political prisoners or deportees, the younger ones were in their thirties when Estonia regained its independence.

In Soviet times, former deportees had no freedom of assembly. On November 2, 1988, a ground-level initiative gave rise to the construction of the Pilistvere Memorial in Central Estonia, the country's first major monument commemorating the victims of repression. A cross of memory sits atop the tomb, piled up from stones brought from all over Estonia and places of exile to remember the Estonian victims of Communism. Around the mound are stones laid by the representatives of particular districts, as well as those in honour of the Forest Brothers (partisans who waged a guerrilla war against the Soviet regime), members of labour battalions (of the Red Army, created for forcibly mobilised men that were not trusted: Germans, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, etc.), Estonian citizens fighting against the Soviet Union alongside the Finnish army, and other people who struggled for freedom (*Kommunismiohvrite* 2011, p. 20). Every August, members of the Memento Union from all around the country gather at the Pilistvere Memorial to commemorate those who perished. 50 years after the Soviet annexation of Estonia, on June 17, 1990, the *Rukkilill* (Estonian: cornflower; Estonian national symbol) Monument was established at the Riga Hill (*Riiamäe*) in Tartu, becoming a memorial for the local residents to those who had fallen victim to repression. In Tallinn, celebrations commemorating the people deported from Estonia in 1941 and 1949 took place at the Linda Monument in Lindamäe Park (*Linda Hill*; according to Estonian folklore, Linda was the

On September 19, 1944 the SS-troops, leaving from Estonia, massacred near Klooga (40 km westwards from Tallinn) up to 2000 Jewish prisoners who were gathered together for transportation to the Stutthof concentration camp. Most of them were brought to Estonia in autumn 1943 from the ghettoes of Vilnius and Kaunas as slave labour in the oil shale industry in Northeast Estonia. The memorial was established during the Soviet period and renovated in 2013.
A detail of the renovated Holocaust memorial at Klooga.
© Vahur Lõhmus

wife of Kalev, the father of the hero of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*. She was believed to have heaped stones over his tomb, on which Tallinn, formerly known as Lindanisse, was built; Muttik 1990). Other monuments were unveiled close to railway stations in the towns of Keila, Jõgeva and Võru, from where Estonian people were deported to Russia. Initially, such memorials were erected as part of ground-level initiatives and financed from donations. Since the second half of the 1990s, the Estonian authorities have intensified efforts to take care of such places. Support for freedom fighters and the repressed today falls within the competence of the Estonian defence and justice ministries, while local governments also seem keen to build monuments and hold commemorative services.

Estonia's nationwide monument to the victims of repression was originally planned to be erected next to Tallinn's Town Hall Square (*Raekoja plats*), but on the 55th anniversary of the March

deportations, in 1994, a small commemorative stone was placed instead of the prospective monument (*Eesti Õigusvastaselt* 1994; *Ülemaailmne* 1995). The War of Independence Victory Column was opened in the summer of 2009 at Freedom Square in Tallinn (see above), hosting both official state ceremonies and those in honour of the victims of repression until 2018. The newly completed Victims of Communism Memorial in the Maarjamägi neighbourhood of Tallinn, some 4.5 kilometres from the city centre, was unveiled on August 23, 2018, to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Estonia's independence. The memorial lists the names of more than 22,000 Estonian people who lost their lives under the Communist regime, the majority of whom died in deportation and in *gulag* camps, and whose places of burial remain unknown. The memorial's middle part, "Journey", consists of a memorial corridor with names of the victims of Communism inscribed of the walls. Visitors who pass through the first part of the memorial head to the second section, the "Home Garden", which is filled with stones bearing inscriptions on places of imprisonment and deportation, alongside other relevant data. Close to the memorial is a monument in honour of the Estonian officers that fell victim to the Communist regime. (*Memoriaal* Website). Engraving people's names on memorial walls has a long tradition in Estonia. The state's politics of memory has focused on individual human beings: parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, all of whom fell victim to foreign repression. Like any other state, Estonia first and foremost recalls its people, citizens and inhabitants, their names and fates. Under the German occupation in 1941, the Director of the Office of the President of the Republic, Elmar Tambek, established the Centre for the Registration of Deported and Mobilised Estonians (German: *Zentralstelle zur Erfassung der verschleppten und mobilisierten Esten*, ZEV) to register people who had been removed from Estonia in 1940–1941 as prisoners or deportees, or called up to the army on Soviet orders. After Estonia regained independence, further data was collected by the Estonian Repressed Persons Record Bureau (*Eesti Represseeritute Registri Büroo*, hereinafter referred as the ERRB), an institution founded by the Memento Union. This was made possible thanks to research into the files of persons deported from Estonia or arrested for political reasons. The documents were brought to Estonia from the Soviet Union

at the beginning of the 1990s. Since 1996, the ERRB has published 14 volumes containing lists and brief biographies of the repressed Estonians (see Repressed Persons Records). In 2015, the newly elected government ordered a memorial to be erected. Though a new government came to power a year later, the ruling coalition included further work on the memorial in its political agenda. Alongside the Memento Union and the Estonian Ministry of Justice, the state entities responsible for building the memorial included the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory (*Eesti Mälu Instituut*, Mnemosyne Website). It was agreed that the walls of the memorial should contain the names of victims inhumed outside Estonia or whose places of burial remain unknown. Opened on August 23, 2018, the memorial became a place of personal remembrance for the victims' loved ones. The research continues today; to honour the 70th anniversary of the March deportations, a commemorative plaque with the names of 200 more victims of repression whose identity had been determined in the meantime was unveiled on the monument (Mihelson 2019).

Year 2002 saw the publication of a list of Estonian citizens and inhabitants who had perished under the German occupation, among whom Holocaust victims and Estonian Roma were also identified (*Eesti rahvastikukaotused* 2002). In 2013, the Klooga memorial underwent extensive restoration to commemorate those who had died in the concentration camp, located some 40 kilometres far from Tallinn. The monument to the victims had been erected back in Soviet times; in 1994, the Jewish Community of Estonia (*Eesti Juudi Kogukond*; see Jewish Community of Estonia website) opened a new memorial place dedicated to the Jews killed in World War II. In 2013, an outdoor exhibition at the Estonian History Museum (*Eesti Ajaloomuuseum)* was opened close to the site (Klooga Exhibition Website).

The rehabilitation and support programmes for the victims of the Soviet regime coincided with the demise of the Soviet Union. In December 1988, mounting pressure from Estonian public opinion, alongside a local initiative from the Estonian Socialist Soviet Republic, led to the adoption of a law "On extrajudicial mass repression in Soviet Estonia during the 1940s and 1950s" (*Kohtuväliste massirepressioonide kohta Nõukogude Eestis 1940–1950-il*

aastail), a legal document that unconditionally condemned "extrajudicial mass repression", denouncing it as "unlawful acts and crimes against humanity" (Act on Mass Repressions 1988). Further legal achievements included numerous laws and provisions enabling the victims of repression to regain their rights and compensation for all losses incurred, a step that coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union (for example, the authorities initially evaded the restoration of full rights to men and women charged with political offences, as well as those who were sent en masse to *gulag* prison camps; for a detailed English-language overview, see Hiio 2017b, pp. 31–37).

The Estonian political parties unanimously agreed to restore the rights of the repressed. This area of activity was traditionally ascribed to the Pro Patria Union party (*Isamaaliit*, meaning literally Fatherland Union), under the leadership of Mart Laar (Estonian prime minister from 1992 to 1994 and from 1999 to 2002; his historical work played a major role in shaping the Estonian politics of memory: Laar 2006; Laar 2007; Laar 2008, Laar 2010; Laar and Hiio 2018a; Laar and Hiio 2018b), who also enjoyed support from umbrella organisations for the repressed. A vital function was fulfilled by Lennart Meri (1929–2006), president of Estonia from 1992 to 2001, whose early years (1941–1946) were marked by forced exile in Russia, to where his family was sent. Shortly before the end of his term in office in 2001, he held farewell visits to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the June 1941 deportations in all Estonian districts. While attending such ceremonies, President Meri took part in a series of meetings with former deportees, shook their hands and handed them "Broken Cornflower" (*Murtud rukkilill)* badges to acknowledge gratitude for their merits.

Following its victory in the 2003 parliamentary elections, the Res Publica Party, a political group founded back in 2001 that merged with the Pro Patria Union in 2006, formed the government, promoting efforts to improve the situation of the repressed as part of its political agenda. Passed in 2003, the Persons Repressed by Occupying Powers Act gave a full legal definition to unlawfully repressed persons and consolidated their allowances and benefits, as previously regulated by several legal acts.

Commemorating Estonians who fought on the fronts of World War II

Honouring people fighting on the frontlines of World War II and preserving the memory of those who perished is a matter of dispute within Estonia. Referred to as the "war of monuments", this approach was manifested by the well-publicised removal of a monument to the soldiers of the Red Army from downtown Tallinn in April 2007 (see Petersoo and Tamm 2008). The background to the "war of monuments" seems to accurately reflect the fate of Estonia during World War II. Trapped under alternate annexation and occupation from double totalitarian rule as a result of the secret protocol to the Hitler-Stalin pact, Estonians were called into service with both the Soviet and German armies.

As the Soviet Army was approaching the borders of Estonia in late January 1944, a general call-up of men born between 1904 and 1923 was proclaimed by Hjalmar Mäe, the Leader of the Estonian Self-Administration, under pressure from the heads of all the branches of German occupation authorities in the Ostland and Estonia (cf. Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a).

Still under pressure from the German occupation authorities, in a radio message on February 7, 1944 Estonia's last pre-war prime minister during 1939–1940 Jüri Uluots voiced his support for the general call-up, seeing the return of the Bolsheviks to Estonia as a far more serious threat than that posed to the country by the weakening power of the Third Reich (Uluots's radio address was also printed in the press, see Uluots 1944). This is why attempts were made to depict the 1944 call of duty not as an unlawful order issued by German occupation authorities, but as an attempt to defend the territory of Estonia.

It should be stressed that the Estonian Self-Administration is not usually treated as a part of the history of Estonian statehood. Both older literature and common knowledge tends to overestimate the power of the Self-Administration. As determined by the research of the working team of the so-called Max Jakobson Commission, based on German and Estonian archives, the role of the German Commissar's General authorities and the German *Sicherheitspolizei*

and *Sicherheitsdienst* was not as limited as it is sometimes described in Estonian-language literature (Hiio, Maripuu, and Paavle 2006a).

As a result of the 1944 call-up, an estimated group of 40,000 men joined the forces under German command. On the Soviet side, having suffered considerable losses during the Battle of Velikiye Luki of 1942–1943, the 8th Estonian Rifle Corps was deployed to the frontline in Estonia in September 1944. This decision prevented the formation from fighting in other battles, during which Estonian troops fought against each other, albeit within the ranks of Soviet and German armies. Most of them had been forcibly drafted to join Soviet and German, and this failed to raise public ire during the post-war period. But those who fought alongside the Red Army were seen as veterans, and as such they enjoyed some privileges, while men drafted into the German and Finnish forces who later stayed in Estonia were in many cases sooner or later arrested by the Soviet security services; many of them were eventually sent to *gulag* prison camps.

The remains of hundreds of Estonian troops were inhumed in Red Army mass graves in Estonia. After World War II, Soviet authorities ordered German war cemeteries to be razed to the ground. In 1995, Estonia and Germany concluded an agreement allowing the latter to restore their burial places on Estonian soil (Agreement concerning War Cemeteries 1995). German war graves contain together with German soldiers and officers the bodies of Estonian citizens that fought in the ranks of the Third Reich's armed forces.

The Bronze Soldier war memorial, unveiled in 1947 in downtown Tallinn, was an expression of a Soviet-wide policy of erecting collective monuments to the Red Army in the capitals of the Soviet republics (Kaasik 2006). It stood intact close to the National Library of Estonia until the early 21st century. Then the monument became the focus of attention, as the memory of the Great Patriotic War formed the foundations for the historical identity of a new Russia, especially for the Russian diaspora in Estonia which received considerable support from both Russian propaganda and the embassy. The Bronze Soldier became a meeting place for Russian-speaking inhabitants of Tallinn, who gathered at the monument on 9 May and 22 September (in observance of the anniversary

of the capture or liberation of Tallinn during the Soviet period). Soviet symbols and flags were gathered by the site, while people met by the memorial to sing patriotic Soviet songs. Young people wearing uniforms of the Red Army acted as a guard of honour at the monument, while teachers of Russian schools brought their pupils there. Estonian public opinion spoke out against these attempts to glorify the memory of the Soviet occupation authorities. The Bronze Soldier war memorial saw provocations staged by both sides and some disputes that needed to be settled by the police. The event acquired international notoriety. After the Baltic countries regained independence, Russian propaganda blamed Estonia and Latvia (as well as Lithuania, though to a lesser extent), for nationalism and the glorification of their fellow countrymen who fought alongside the SS foreign units. A series of propaganda books was published, most of which were the new editions of 1960s KGB propaganda materials (see Chernov and Shlyakhtunov 2004; *Estonia* 2007; *Pribaltika* 2009). While accusing the Baltic states of promoting Nazism, Russia sought to prevent or at least hinder them from joining the European Union and NATO. In 1998, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania established special historical commissions, partly to refute these claims.

Removing the Bronze Soldier became one of the burning issues before the March 2007 parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, who hailed from the liberal Reform Party, promised to tackle the issue shortly after the vote, while his main opponent, Edgar Savisaar, the Mayor of Tallinn and a member of the Centre Party, sought votes from the Russian-speaking citizens of Estonia, for whom the Bronze Soldier memorial was important. Ansip's Reform Party won the parliamentary vote, and in April 2007, the memorial site was surrounded with a fence while archaeologists began excavation works to determine the exact nature of the remains buried at the monument. After the exhumation, the remains of the Soviet troops were turned over to their family members in Russia, while others were reburied in a military cemetery. Heavy riots and brawls broke out on April 26 and 27 in downtown Tallinn as town's Russian-speaking inhabitants sought to defend the monument. Police forces dispersed the crowd. In the early hours of 27 April, the government decided to dismantle the monument immediately, fearing that more

Holocaust memorial at Klooga. Common grave of the victims, massacred on September 19, 1944. © Olev Liivik

serious riots could break out before Victory Day on 9 May. Three days later, the Bronze Soldier war statue was unveiled to the public at the military cemetery. Since then, Russian-speaking Estonians have held commemorative services of 9 May in honour of the Red Army soldiers who died in World War II at the relocated monument at the military cemetery. Shortly after its removal from the previous location, the memorial saw mass gatherings, though recent years have seen a gradual drop in the number of participants.

The relocation of the Bronze Soldier was forced; the course of the events coerced the government to move the monument hastily. In 2002, the city authorities in Pärnu unveiled a monument honouring the Estonian soldiers who fought in the German armed forces against the Soviet Union. The monument was still seen as controversial, which prompted the local authorities to remove it. But in August 2004, the same memorial was unveiled in a hamlet parish of Lihula, a step that Prime Minister Juhan Parts labelled a provocation. Due to pressure from several international organisations and embassies, the Estonian government ultimately ordered the stone to be removed in early September. A fight broke out

between the police and a crowd of protesters as the monument was being removed from Lihula (see *Estonia removes* 2002; *Estonia unveils* 2004; Statement 2004). Some three years later, leaving the Bronze Soldier war monument in its previous location would have sparked off a wave of accusations that the government was praising the soldiers who sided with the army of one occupier while neglecting those who had fought alongside the other.

In Soviet times, commemorative services were held on September 22, to celebrate the anniversary of Tallinn's liberation by Soviet troops from the Nazi invaders, but the Estonian parliament proclaimed this date as Resistance Fighting Day.

Estonia saw 22 September as the day when the Uluots-Tief government was forced to leave the country, with the Soviet flag being hoisted atop the Tall Hermann tower to replace the Estonian blue, black and white tricolour. September 22, 1944 also symbolically marked the beginning of the Forest Brothers' resistance movement (Public Holidays Act 2007).

Statement by the *Riigikogu* and the state commemorative services

The Estonians who had sided with the German and Finnish armed forces did not form any associations to bring together former soldiers until the beginning of the 1990s. They called for their fight for Estonian independence and against the Soviet Union to be acknowledged, citing Jüri Uluots's February 1944 address, in which he called Estonians to arms. The Estonian parliament (*Riigikogu*) adopted a relevant position on the matter in the following statement from February 2012:

> Paying tribute to the Estonian citizens. On the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and proceeding from the fact that according to international law, the legal continuity of the Republic of Estonia, which was occupied in World War II, was not interrupted, the *Riigikogu* pays tribute to the citizens of the Republic of Estonia who, in the years of Soviet or Nazi German occupation, acted in the name of the *de facto* restoration of the Republic of Estonia. The *Riigikogu* condemns the repressive policies of the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany and

> the activities of the persons who, in the service of these regimes, have committed crimes against humanity, irrespective of their citizenship and the location where these crimes were committed (*Riigikogu* Statement 2012; unofficial translation).

Ten years earlier, in June 2002, the Estonian parliament had denounced the crimes of the Soviet occupation regime in Estonia. The parliament stated that the crimes of the German National Socialist regime had been condemned both authoritatively and internationally, while the equivalent crimes of the Soviet Union's Communist regime have been not. As declared in a further part of the statement, on June 16–17, 1940, the Soviet Union carried out aggression against the Republic of Estonia based upon its secret pact with Nazi Germany.

> The *Riigikogu* declared the Soviet Union's Communist occupation regime's institutions and organisations which carried out aggression, crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as genocide, to be criminal, while emphasising that this does not mean the collective responsibility falls upon their members and workers. Individual responsibility for the crimes of a regime is not determined by one's membership in one of the aforementioned institutions and organisations, but instead by one's specific activities, for which everyone must first of all render his own ethical judgement.
> Judgement on individual participation in genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes can be rendered by the courts (*Riigikogu* Statement 2002).

Estonia's public and national holidays act includes several days to commemorate the victims of the 20th-century occupation regimes. In addition to Resistance Fighting Day, 14 June was also proclaimed as a Day of Mourning and Commemoration, with the Estonian tricolour displayed lowered half-mast or with a black ribbon as a mourning flag. June 14, 1941 is remembered across Estonia as the day when mass deportations began, with commemorations taking place to pay tribute to all those oppressed by Communist terror. Since adopting the European Parliament resolution of April 2, 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism,

Estonia has observed a Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communism and Nazism. The day commemorates victims of totalitarian regimes, specifically Communism and Nazism, while several other countries have adopted 2 April as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (Public Holidays Act 1998). International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January) has been marked in Estonia since 2003. National commemorations in honour of the March deportation (25 March) were held at the initiative of the Estonian people. Since 2011, candles have been lit in the cities' main squares on that day as signs of remembrance of the victims of the mass deportation.

Conclusions

The politics of memory pursued by both the Estonian people and the modern Estonian state, along with the development of their national identity, is linked to the historical position of Estonia as a country at the intersection of the German and Russian or Germanic and Slavonic cultural spheres. The national identity of the Estonians was shaped by their resistance to the Germans and Russians and their attempts to seek common affiliations with the Finns and, in a broader perspective, also with the Finnish and Finno-Ugric nationalities living in the Baltic region. In the 1930s, the Republic of Estonia was part of interwar Central Europe, coming under the influence of the tendencies that prevailed at that time. While under the authoritarian government of 1934–1940, Estonia sought national unity and the creation of an Estonian nation, as previously the sense of national belonging had been quite weak. In doing so, the national authorities launched a series of large campaigns that consisted in Estonianising first names and surnames, or honouring the Estonian tricolour far more solemnly than now. In 1940, Estonia lost its independence and was annexed by the Soviet Union. The annexation continued after World War II. The Estonians' national consciousness, already solidified by the 1930s campaigns, arose as one of the factors that helped the people survive the harsh Soviet times, up until in the 1980s, when an opportunity to restore statehood emerged.

Since the 1990s, Estonia has begun to pay more attention to honouring the victims of both totalitarian regimes, with particular regard to World War II, the Communist terror and the Soviet annexation, seeking to demonstrate Estonia's position and identity under both occupation and annexation. This was triggered by international pressure, because contrary to what happened to Nazi Germany in 1945 or after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia did not fail to review its Soviet past. Russia has blamed Estonia and other Baltic states for glorifying Nazism. In two statements, the Estonian parliament has expressed the state's stance on the crimes committed during the occupation and annexation. Opened on August 23, 2018, the monument commemorating Estonia's victims of Communism became a memorial place for all Estonian people who suffered under the terror inflicted by the Soviet occupation.

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...SEQUENCE ... ITS
...HESE VICTIMS, MO...
...ISONED OR DEPORTED.
...HE NAMES OF OVER 22,000 PE...
...NSCRIBED ON THIS MEMORIAL...
...O INHUMAN LIVING CONDITIO...
...ESETTLEMENT.
...HE MURDER, IMPRISONMENT...
...HOUSANDS OF ESTONIAN PE...
...ONSTITUTE GENOCIDE, WAR...
...ITH NO STATUTORY LIMITATI...
...RLIAMENT DECLARED THE...
...E ORGANS THAT VIOLENTL...
...ORGANS TO BE CRIMIN...
...PEOPLE AND...