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**FROM NATIONAL TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY
TO INDEPENDENCE OF ESTONIA:
THE WAR AND REVOLUTION
IN THE BALTIC REGION, 1914-1917¹**

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INTRODUCTION

Although the interactions between imperial management and nation-building, on which this part of the collection focuses, can be understood from century-long perspectives, one should not ignore the fact that the Russian Empire fell apart not as a consequence of chronological contradictions between imperial and national principles, but rather in a peculiar conjuncture of events caused by World War I and the subsequent revolutions.² How were these long-term and conjuncture factors combined to affect Estonians' quest for autonomy and independence? This chapter is devoted to this very question.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the three major political actors in the Baltic region, that is, the Baltic German elite, Estonian and Latvian nationals, and the Russian imperial authorities were involved in two serious problems of the region – the agrarian issue and regional self-government. In comparison with the agrarian question, to which policy-makers and intellectuals both in the imperial metropolis and the Baltic region began to pay attention as early as the 1840s, the question of regional self-government was relatively new for contemporaries, and

¹ This article has been supported by the Estonian Science Foundation grant No 5710.

² This point has been stressed by Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (München, 1992), pp. 267-299; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, (Stanford, 1993), pp. 43-55; Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford, New York, 2001), p. 57.

continues to be studied much less intensively than the agrarian issue even in the recent historiography.

Not only the power triangle of the three aforementioned actors but also the pan-European development affected the development of regional government. The Estonian nation emerged as a new identity in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was a part of a common process of modernization and nation-building in Eastern and Central Europe. The national identities of Estonians and Latvians inevitably conflicted with the Baltic Germans' pan-Baltic identity – an identity based on the noble estate corporation (knighthoods, *Ritterschaften*) with medieval and colonial background, supported by the Russian autocracy. At the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of self-determination became gradually popular among Estonians, who pushed forward this principle with particular boldness during and after the 1905 revolution. There were three possible trajectories of the emerging of Estonian nation's self-determination: (1) at a minimum, cultural autonomy, (2) more or less limited territorial autonomy, and (3) in its highest form, a nation state. Each of these possibilities required new institutional structures substantially different from the existing ones.³

The first step for the Estonian and Latvian national movements was to (re-) establish a geographic native-land concept, based on the ethnic Estonian or Latvian settlement. A sentimental conception of the native land as the "home of a nation" formed the basis for a petition to the emperor as early as 1881, when Estonians first submitted their political appeal to unite the counties settled by Estonians in the then existing Estland and Livland Provinces into a new ethnicity-based unit – "the Province of Estonians." This idea, which would have been a step towards future Estonian territorial autonomy, faced open hostility from the Baltic German elite. The same idea re-emerged at the end of 1905, when the first national body of representatives of Estonian parishes and societies called for a national-territorial autonomous government, based on general suffrage.

Before World War I there were about 1.1 million people living in Estonia (Estland and the northern part of Livland). Over 90 percent of

³ Ea Jansen, "Tagasi ajalukku [Back to the past]," *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* [*The Past. The Journal of Historical Culture*] 2/19 (2003), pp. 134-135.

this population was Estonians. Every fifth member of the population resided in towns, half of them in the provincial capital of Estland, Tallinn. The majority of the population was literate; according to the 1897 census 91.2 percent could read and 77.7 percent could also write, one of the highest rates in the Russian Empire.⁴ Due to agrarian overpopulation in the Baltic provinces a large-scale emigration of Estonians had started in the middle of the nineteenth century, mainly directed to other parts of the empire.⁵

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BEFORE 1917 AND THE STRUGGLE FOR REFORM

The Baltic institutions of government were based on the privileges given to the Baltic German elite by the princes in the Middle Ages. The knighthoods and their legislative bodies, Diets (*Landtags*), were organs of a single class. Four Baltic knighthoods existed as separate organizations, and were hardly coordinated with each other. Nor did the areas governed by the knighthoods coincide with either the provinces (*gubernii*, *Gouvernemangs*) as state administrative units or with the ethnic boundaries of the indigenous population. There were hardly connections between municipal and rural governments.⁶

Municipal government was based on modern legislation. The extension of the Russian 1870 municipal law to the Baltic cities in 1877 allowed new economic classes access to municipal administration.⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century the power in numerous Estonian

⁴ Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich*, pp. 255-256, 331.

⁵ On the eve of the Russian Revolution of 1917, there were nearly 200,000 Estonians living in the empire outside the Estonia. Over half had settled in St. Petersburg province and by 1917 their number in Petrograd may have reached 50,000. Before the collapse of tsarism in 1917, Estonians' lives in Russia had reached also a high level of internal consolidation and organization. See: Toivo U. Raun, "Estonian Emigration within the Russian Empire, 1860-1917," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 17:4 (1986), pp. 350-363.

⁶ Carl v. Schilling, Burchard v. Schrenck, eds., *Baltische Bürgerkunde I* (Riga, 1908), pp. 157-226.

⁷ Bradley D. Woodworth, "Civil Society and Nationality in the Multiethnic Russian Empire: Tallinn / Reval, 1860-1914" (Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2003).

towns passed from the Baltic Germans to the emerging Estonian elite. The most important landmark in this development was the shift of Tallinn's City Hall to the control of Estonian bourgeoisie and intellectuals at the end of 1904.⁸ Estonians' take-over of Tallinn continued until the end of Tsarist rule and this was a background for winning a new self-government law from the Provisional Government. These electoral successes in cities demonstrated Estonians' political maturity and consolidated their self-confidence. The experience the Estonian leaders gained in the urban municipal government granted a most important precondition for obtaining broader self-government rights in 1917.⁹

Up to 1917 Estonia was divided into two provinces: Estland and Livland, with Saaremaa, which had been a province but later became a special district of Livland. Participation in the Diets was limited almost exclusively to members of the noble corporations (immatriculated nobles or *Ritterschaft*). The structure of the leadership of all three Diets was essentially the same. The jurisdiction of the Diets included virtually any local matter. The Diets elected provincial, county and parish servants responsible for financial, judicial, police, church, education, and other affairs from among the nobility.

The Russification of the police and judicial institutions in 1888-1889 eclipsed the Baltic-Germans' overlordship in the police and courts at the provincial, district and parish level. Only peasant courts with jurisdiction over minor issues at the township (*volost'*) level remained intact. Estonian peasants were also represented at the parish level.¹⁰ This was more significant in Livland, where in 1870 parish administration was divided into two separate bodies under the leadership of noble estate owners: a parish assembly for dealing with general issues and a separate council for handling ecclesiastical and educational affairs. The lowest

⁸ Toomas Karjahärm, "Eesti linnakodanluse poliitilisest formeerumisest 1870. aastate lõpust kuni 1914. aastani (linna- ja duumavalimiste materjalide põhjal) [On the political formation of the Estonian urban bourgeoisie from the end of the 1870s to 1914 (based on municipal and дума election materials)]," *ENSV Teaduste Akadeemia Toimetised. Ühiskonnateadused [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR]* 22:3 (1973), p. 267.

⁹ In view of the fact that the Baltic Germans regarded the Estonians as politically immature, it is worth noting that soon after Estonians were elected into local government, they also found their way into the Russian State Duma; in the first three Dumas there were 3 or 4 deputies and in the last one – 2 deputies.

¹⁰ There were 105 parishes in Estonia in 1917.

level of the local government, the peasant township and village community (*Gemeinde*), were constituted as a special unit for the peasantry after the abolition of serfdom. The reformers planned to gradually give the peasantry, under the control of estate owners, a degree of self-government, especially in dealing with everyday lawsuits. The Baltic township reform of 1866 gave peasants greater independence from noble tutelage. The new law granted voting rights not only to all the peasant owners and tenants who paid taxes, but also to one representative for every ten landless men. The enfranchised members elected the township officials and a township assembly, which served as the legislative body and guaranteed an equal number of seats for the landed and landless. The jurisdiction of the township government included police functions, the administration of taxes, common property, schools, care for the diseased, aged and unemployed township members. The experience of practical democracy that Estonian peasants gained in the course of township government, which lasted sixty years, is hard to overestimate.

Since the end of the 1870s, leading Estonian politicians had argued for the introduction of the Russian zemstvo system, referring to the relatively early extension of the Russian municipal law of 1870 into Baltic cities in 1877. The representation of peasants in the zemstvo, although its functions were rather limited, evoked hope in Estonians of gaining majorities in local government bodies; therefore, the introduction of zemstvos remained a tactical slogan even at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ideally, Estonians dreamed of full autonomy, similar to that enshrined in the Finnish constitution, under a Diet representing all social classes. The Baltic-German elite strove to retain as many of their privileges as possible by preserving the *status quo*. As the conservative land counselor Arthur v. Richter noted in the Livland Diet in 1875, "although our old order is an anomaly in Europe but it is a single guarantee that we as Germans and rulers can continue our existence here."¹¹

The Baltic Germans' hostility to radical local government reforms proceeded not so much from political analysis of the knighthoods, as from their centuries-old habits of ruling the peasants, whom they viewed as a childlike rabble. However, the Estonians, like the Latvians, became

¹¹ Reinhard Wittram, *Meinungskämpfe im baltischen Deutschtum während der Reformepoche des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Riga 1934), pp. 72-73.

more and more convinced that they had the right to participate in local management. The Baltic Germans could block Estonians' and Latvians' attempt to change the system until the beginning of the twentieth century because they were, in fact, good managers in rural administration. Even Russian officials admired Baltic Germans' administrative skills and their spirit of service (*Dienstethos*) to their noble community. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the emergence of a new industrial society made the Baltic system of government an anachronism.¹² As the American historian Heide Whelan has pointed out, during the industrial breakthrough the members of the Baltic-German nobility as great landholders adjusted well to the new economic relationships, but they could not do so in the social-political sense.¹³

During the 1905 revolution, Estonian liberals demanded democratic elections of deputies to the provincial governments on the basis of universal suffrage. Peasant townships and municipal governments were to be included into an integrated system of local government. Estland and the Estonian part of Livland were to be united into one national province and Estonian was to be introduced as the language of administration in local government. Reorganized local governments were to have legislative rights in local matters and to be freed from the tutelage of the central administration. The reformed government in autonomous Estonia was to have wide jurisdiction over such issues as directing the local agrarian policy, popular education, social order, the judiciary, social insurance, and local finances. Konstantin Päts (1874-1956), the leader of Estonian radical constitutionalists and democrats, attached special importance to taking local government out of the hands of Germans. He did not favor the Russian zemstvo system but supported the Finnish model.¹⁴

However, the Estland and Livland nobilities were not ready to concede more than the establishment of a county Diet and the reorganization of the provincial Diet to include the representatives of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, small property owners and tenants, with an electoral system that would make these Estonian small landowners an

¹² Jansen, "Tagasi ajalukku," p. 136.

¹³ Heide W. Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity. Family, Caste and Capitalism among the Baltic German Nobility* (Köln, 1999), p. 308.

¹⁴ T. Karjahärm, *Ida ja Lääne vahel. Eesti -Vene suhted 1850-1917 [Between the East and the West: Estonian -Russian Relations, 1850-1917]* (Tallinn, 1998), p. 498.

insignificant minority. Only in 1915, during World War I, which significantly weakened the position of the Baltic nobility, did the representatives of the Estland nobility agree to a compromise project based on equal representation of large and small property holders.¹⁵

In sum, by the end of the Russian empire the system of local government in Estland and Livland had become a mixture of the old and new. Some institutions were Russified (modernized); others were not. Although challenged by the central government, the Baltic German elites retained their firm control.¹⁶ For this reason, the question of local government, especially at the provincial level, stood in the center of the political struggle between the Baltic German elite and the national opposition for half a century.

WORLD WAR I: PROVIDING PRECONDITIONS FOR THE EXPANSION OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

During World War I Estonia became the closest rear for the Russian Northern Front and, similarly to other Northwest territories of the Russian Empire, was placed under the control of the Commander of the Northern Front. The whole area, Petrograd and Estland province in particular, had close contacts with the Baltic Fleet and the armed forces of the Northern Front. This was the area where reserves were located and where new troops were formed and exercised. Huge garrisons were situated in Tallinn, Narva, Tartu, Valga and Võru. During the war years, owing to the troops and Russian workers hired to work in military production, the population of Tallinn increased from 116,000 to 156,000. This caused a change in the urban population; the proportion of Estonians decreased from 72 to 58 percent, while the proportion of Germans decreased from 11 to 8 percent and that of Russians increased

¹⁵ Toomas Karjahärm, "The Problem of Reorganization of Provincial Self-Government in Estonia at the Beginning of the 20th Century," in *Bevölkerungsverschiebungen und sozialer Wandel in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands 1850-1914*, ed. Gert v. Pistohlkors, Andrejs Plakans, Paul Kaegbein (Lüneburg, 1995), pp. 249-260.

¹⁶ Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA, 1991), p. 61.

from 11 to 26 percent. Thirty thousand workers, 60 percent of the total number of Estonian industrial workers, were taken on to work in heavy industry in Tallinn.¹⁷

World War I radically changed the attitude of the government towards the Baltic Germans, who were accused of disloyalty and subjected to repression.¹⁸ This paralyzed their corporate life. No noble Diets met in the Baltic provinces during the war years before the 1918 German occupation. The Diets of Livland and Estland were the last to be held at the beginning of 1914, while the last Saaremaa Diet was convened in the spring of 1912.¹⁹ This was one of the key factors that made the Estland nobility agree to reorganize the Diet on the principle of equal representation of large and small landowners.²⁰ The war provided the national elite with unprecedented opportunities to gain experience through work in the media, local governments, cultural societies, and economic cooperatives.²¹ By the beginning of World War I Estonia was covered with a very dense network of various societies and cooperatives.

¹⁷ Sulev Vahtre, *Eesti ajalugu. Kronoloogia* [Estonian History. Chronology] (Tallinn, 1994), p. 132.

¹⁸ For detail, see: Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2003).

¹⁹ Meie Aastasada nr. 11, 8.02.1912; Peterburi Teataja nr. 54, 8.05.1912; Tallinna Teataja nr. 48, 28.02.1914; Olevik nr. 28, 8.03.1914; Päevaleht nr. 129, 11.06.1914; Tartu Päevaleht nr. 221, 13.09.1914.

²⁰ Tallinna Teataja nr. 77, 7-04.1915; nr. 241, 20.10.1915; nr. 290, 16.12.1915; nr. 1, 2.01.1916; nr. 148, 5.07.1916; nr. 194, 27.08.1916, nr. 287, 14.12.1916.

²¹ Jaanus Arukaevu, "Eesti ühiskonna organisatsiooniline struktuur 20. sajandi algul [The Organizational Structure of Estonian Society at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century]," *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Humanities and Social Sciences* 43:3 (1994), pp. 257-268; About voluntary associations in Estonia see also a special issue of the *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Humanities and Social Sciences* 42:3 (1993) and Ea Jansen and Jaanus Arukaevu, eds., *Seltsid ja ühiskonna muutumine. Talupojauhiskonnast rahvusriigini* [The Associations and the Change of Society. From Agrarian Society to the National Statehood] (Tartu, Tallinn, 1995). Kimitaka Matsuzato notes the natural tendency of warring governments to use peacetime public infrastructures, such as municipalities and cooperatives, to organize wartime mobilization of resources promptly and inexpensively. See his "Interregional Conflicts and the Collapse of Tsarism: The Real Reason for the Food Crisis in Russia after the Autumn of 1916," in *Emerging Democracy in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Mary Schaffer Conroy (Niwot: Colorado, 1998), pp. 243-300; Idem, "The Role of Zemstva in the Creation and Collapse of Tsarism's War Efforts During World War One," *Jarbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 46:3 (1998), pp. 321-337.

The development of voluntary associations in Estonia had started in the 1860s. In 1914, there were over 500 associations and societies for agriculture, temperance, education, song and theatre in Estonia. In 1915, this number increased to about 900, mainly because of the development of cooperative activities aimed at providing credit and commerce. Through these cooperatives an ever-increasing part of economic life came to be controlled by Estonians and an overreaching network of Estonian economic organizations was built up.²²

One of the leading bodies of this trend was the Tallinn Committee of the All-Russian Association of Cities, founded in September 1915. Before long, this committee became one of the largest and most active regional committees of the All-Russian Association of Cities. Estonian liberal intellectuals guided the Tallinn Committee. The committee chairman was Michael Pung and one of the departments was headed by Konstantin Päts, a key figure in Estonia's independence. The Tallinn Committee supplied the future Republic of Estonia with six prime ministers and 17 ministers.²³ In August 1915, Jaan Tõnisson (1868-194?), another prominent Estonian leader, took advantage of the military failures and retreat and obtained the government's permission to found a new all-Estonian association with a broad sphere of activities, though officially under the modest name of the Temporary North-Baltic Committee for Relief for Refugees and Other War Victims.²⁴

This North-Baltic Committee was the first all-Estonian organization and its structure mirrored the institutional structures of Estonian society at large. District and parish committees were subjected to the central committee. The chairman of the local agricultural association or the cooperative society convened district electoral meetings, in which two representatives from every township, agricultural or cultural association, or a cooperative society participated. Parishes and townships in

²² Hans Kruus, *Eesti ajalugu kõige uuemal ajal II* [Estonian History of Most Modern Times] (Tartu, 1928), pp. 120-122, 140-150.

²³ Konstantin Lepp, "Toompea teenistuses [In Public Service]," *Mälestused iseseisvuse võitluspäevilt I*. [Memoirs of the Struggle For Independence] (Tallinn, 1927), p. 85; Ed. Laaman. *Konstantin Päts. Poliitika- ja riigimees* [Konstantin Päts. Politician and statesman] (Stockholm 1949), p. 85-86.

²⁴ On the politics and relief of refugees, see: Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, 1999).

turn created their own committees or executive committees. Thus, the North-Baltic Committee rapidly established local branches all over Estonia. Its branches were even more active in Estonian counties of Livland Province than in Estland Province.²⁵

INHERITING PUBLIC ACTIVITIES: THE EMBRYO OF ESTONIAN STATEHOOD

After the February Revolution, as elsewhere in the former imperial territories, the problem of political power became most pressing in Estonia, and the same "dual power" emerged between the Soviets and those owing allegiance to the Provisional Government in Petrograd.²⁶ Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies were elected in Tallinn on March 3 and elsewhere after that. Committees were established in the army and navy units (e.g. the Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet – Tsentrobalt). The Tallinn Soviet was a leading organ to which the majority of North-Estonian Soviets were subordinated. Along with workers, soldiers, and sailors, the Tallinn City Council and Estonian societies delegated representatives to it. At the end of March, the number of delegates rose to around 300. The Russian-Estonian ratio in it was 6:4, because the Soviet drew its membership to a large extent from the Russian troops and multinational labor force of large-scale industrial enterprises in Tallinn and Narva.²⁷

Popular political mobilization proceeded dramatically. From among the political parties that emerged in 1905 only the moderate Estonian Popular Progressive Party, headed by the newspaper editor-in-chief and the leader of the North-Baltic Committee, Jaan Tõnisson, continued its existence. Estonian branches of the Russian leftist parties that had suffered from repression emerged from the underground. In

²⁵ The establishment, organizational structure, and activity of the North-Baltic Committee are discussed in a seminar work by Mait Lind, *Põhja-Balti komitee* (Tartu, 1996).

²⁶ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, p. 99.

²⁷ See further in: Olavi Arens, "Soviets in Estonia 1917-1918," *Die Baltischen Provinzen Russlands zwischen den Revolutionen von 1905 und 1917*, ed. Andrew v. Ezergailis, Gert v. Pistohlkors (Köln, Wien, 1982), pp. 295-314.

a short time, parties and associations cropped up, all of which pledged their loyalty to the revolution and democracy; socialism became fashionable. A new generation of Estonian politicians stepped up alongside the old men of merit.²⁸ However, the liberal Provisional Government possessed state power. Amid general euphoria, the new authorities proclaimed all possible civil rights and liberties. The further destiny of the country was to be discussed in the democratically elected Russian Constituent Assembly.

In the internal provinces of Russia the Provisional Government dismissed the tsarist governors and appointed the chairmen of provincial zemstvo boards as its "Commissars." However, since in the Baltic provinces the conservative Baltic German Diets played the role of zemstvos, the government could not appoint the Diet leaders as Commissars. Instead, on March 5, the government named the Mayor of Tallinn, Jaan (Ivan) Poska (1866-1920), Commissar of Estland Province.²⁹ In favor of Poska's appointment were his Orthodox background and good relationship with the Russian elite in Tallinn, though he was one of the most determined Estonian national leaders. Despite the Soviets' attempts to subvert Poska, he was the only Provisional Government provincial Commissar who managed to keep the post until the Bolshevik Revolution.³⁰ Poska appointed Estonian public figures to the posts of county commissars and police chiefs, who immediately began to push out tsarist civil servants and take over the remaining local institutions of the Baltic German nobility.

The importance of the organizational structure that had developed in Estonia during the war became evident after the February Revolution. It was the leaders of Estonia's wartime public movement that guided

²⁸ Mati Graf, *Parteid Eesti Vabariigis 1918-1934. Koos eellooga (1905-1917) ja järellooga (1934-1940)* [Parties in the Republic of Estonia 1918-1934. With Antecedents (1905-1917) and Epilogue (1934-1940)] (Tallinn, 2000).

²⁹ Karl Siilivask, *Veebruarist oktoobrini 1917* [From February to October 1917] (Tallinn, 1972), p. 126.

³⁰ Reinhard Wittram, "Die baltische Frage als Problem der Russischen Provisorischen Regierung," in *Von baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten. Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Republiken Estland und Lettland 1917-1918*, ed. Jürgen von Hehn, Hans von Rimscha, Hellmuth Weiss (Marburg, Lahn, 1971), pp. 74-75. As deputy premier and diplomat in 1918-1919, he played a significant role in Estonia's drive to independence. He concluded the Tartu Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia in 1920.

Estonia's quest for autonomy.³¹ For example, on March 4, Jaan Tõnisson, the leader of the North-Baltic Committee, convened a meeting in Tartu, based on the Committee's organizational infrastructure, to discuss the new situation. This meeting authorized Tõnisson to send a telegram to the Provisional Government requesting autonomy and a new system of local government. In the following days Tõnisson and a Russian Duma deputy from Estland, Jaan Raamot, lobbied actively in the new corridors of power in Petrograd.³² On March 8, during their visit to Prime Minister Prince G. Lvov, they largely persuaded the prime minister, who authorized them to prepare a program for governmental reform in the ethnic Estonian territory. On March 9, a group of Estonian leaders from the Tallinn City Hall and the Estonian associations in Tallinn founded the Estonian Union for the cause of Estonian autonomy. Similar unions emerged all over the Estland Province. Local branches of the North-Baltic Committee played the same role in Livland.³³

During the same period, the newly appointed Commissar, Tallinn mayor Jaan Poska, a Duma deputy, Jaan Raamot, and the North Baltic Committee convened a conference of representatives from both town and county committees in Tartu. This conference discussed proposals addressed to the Provisional Government under the initiatives of Tallinn and Tartu leaders. Estonian leaders agreed that while autonomy was the eventual goal, they currently needed to target obtaining a minimal degree of self-government, acceptable for the Provisional Government. This meeting elected a delegation to draw up a draft of a law. This draft, without direct mention of autonomy, was submitted to the government on March 18. Estonian lawyers in Petrograd discussed the matter (a number of them worked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs), proceeding from the perspective of the federalization of Russia with Estonia as a

³¹ This topic was first and thoroughly discussed in the master thesis of a judicial historian Aleksander Looring. *Eesti riigi sünn* [*The Birth of the Estonian State*] (Tartu, 1939), pp. 38-62.

³² Wittram, "Die baltische Frage," pp. 71-72. German historian Karsten Brüggemann analyzed the consistent and tactful representation of Estonia's national interests in the Provisional Government's corridors of power. See his *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des "Einen und unteilbaren Russland," Die Petrograder Front des Russischen Bürgerkrieges 1918-1920* (Wiesbaden 2002), pp. 52-53. He emphasized that Estonian leaders took advantage of the brief political vacuum in Petrograd.

³³ Arukaevu, "Eesti ühiskonna organisatsiooniline struktuur," p. 267.

member state. This idea was spread by leading Estonians in Petrograd who were considerably more radical than those in the home country. On March 12, they established the Estonian Republicans' Union in Petrograd, requesting Estonia have its own Diet and government in a federalized Russia, general suffrage, and the use of Estonian in schools and courts.

To pressure the government, nationalist circles in Estonia and Petrograd organized demonstrations, the largest of which took place in front of the Taurida Palace on March 26. About 40,000 Estonians participated and among them there were more than 10,000 military men. The Estonians' declaration, submitted to the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, contained radical demands, such as political and cultural self-determination and that Estonia possess its own Constituent Assembly in a federative democratic Russia. Marching in a decent manner with dozens of orchestras and Estonian tricolors, the demonstration impressed the government, which had already been overwhelmed by revolutionary commotion. Four days later, on March 30 (April 12), 1917, the government decreed the regulation "On Temporary Measures of Administrative Management and Self-government in the Estonian Province," which gave Estonians a more favorable position than the other non-Russian peoples of Russia, with the exception of the Finns.³⁴ This decree unified Estland and North Livland with Saaremaa into one province, marking the birth of the political entity known as twentieth-century Estonia. Substantially, this was an Estonian national province. To mark new borders between the Estonian and curtailed Livland provinces, the decree prescribed a conciliation committee obliged to determine the will of the population in disputed territories. Thus the decree liquidated the traditional three divisions of the Baltic region and realized the vision that had dominated Estonian political thinking for the last half-century.³⁵

³⁴ A. Baron Taube, "Nationale Demokratie, sozialistische Arbeiterkommune oder gesamt-baltischer Ständestaat?" *Baltische Hefte* 6. Jg., Heft 1 (Oktober 1959), p. 10; Wittram, "Die baltische Frage," pp. 77-78.

³⁵ Evald Blumfeldt, "Ühest magistraal-ideest Eesti ühiskondliku mõtte ajaloos poolsajandil enne 1917. aasta veebruarirevolutsiooni [On a Mainstream in the History of Estonian Political Thought before the February Revolution of 1917]," *Eesti Teadusliku Seltsi Rootsis Aastaraamat. Annales Societatis Litterarum Estoniae in Svecia VIII. 1977-1979* [Yearbook of the Estonian Learned Society in Sweden] (Stockholm, 1980), pp. 17-35.

It was obvious that the Provisional Government issued this decree only as an anti-German, wartime measure. Revolutionary Petrograd did not imagine that Estonian peasants were capable of governing their homeland independently. In other words, the government did not regard Estonians, in contrast, for example, to Ukrainians, as a threat to Russia's integrity. Even if this decree was a result of the Provincial Government's underestimation of Estonia, this was a decisive victory for the Estonian cause. Estonia was granted an autonomous political space bolstered by new administrative borders and institutions. This space would later serve as an important precondition for independent statehood. In the midst of the "people's spring" of 1917, when national autonomy was the demand of the day for the former empire's many nationalities, it even appeared that the Estonians were becoming more independent thanks to the changes within Russia proper.³⁶

The decree prescribed temporary zemstvo institutions, headed by the Estonians' Provincial Assembly (*Maapäev*, also *Maanõukogu*, zemskii sovet), consisting of deputies elected in counties and towns. The Commissar of the Provisional Government would administer the Estonian Province. The provincial commissar and the Land Council had the right to manage all local matters, to establish institutions and offices, to manage the citizens' interaction with state and local organs, to impose taxes and economic duties to the extent that was permitted by Russian legislation. Territorial administration was based on the principle of decentralization. Estonia was divided into autonomous administrative units, comprising towns and counties, parishes and townships. The new order in territorial administration contained features taken over from historically-developed practice. For example, there was no clear functional distinction between state administration and self-government. Each local government was authorized to choose its official language, though correspondence with governmental institution was in the official language of the state, that is, Russian. The decree of March 30 showed that the new Russian government was ready to cooperate with a new partner in the Baltic area – Estonian liberal intellectuals and nationalists – and had completely forsaken the Baltic Germans. The decree left no place for the

³⁶ Karsten Brüggemann, "'Foreign Rule' during the Estonian War of Independence 1918-1920: The Bolshevik Experiment of the 'Estonian Workers' Commune'," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 37:2 (2006), p. 212.

Diets of Estland, Livland and Saaremaa, which were to pass their functions to the emerging Estonian institutions. This is how the Baltic German nobility lost their exclusive executive power. After the decree of March 30, followed by a proclamation to boycott the elections to the Estonian *Maapäev*, the knightships completely played themselves politically out of the game. Subsequently, in the first half of 1917, as a by-product of Russia's political and social revolution, a "silent" national revolution took place in the province of Estonia, whose primary achievement was the deprivation of the Baltic-German nobility of power.³⁷

The absence of a clear distinction between administrative and self-governmental responsibilities, if interpreted liberally, might have led to the regional autonomous body controlling all administrative affairs in Estonia.³⁸ The right of self-government given to Estonia during the honeymoon of freedom soon appeared too far-reaching. The decree's liberal spirit made it such an alien element in the Provincial Government's policy in the borderlands that the officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs saw it as a silly mistake and tried to ignore it. Consequently, the enactment of the principles declared by the decree retarded. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, managed by the Constitutional Democratic Party, proposed to reform local government according to the *zemstvo* model and drew up a draft for Baltic *zemstvos*, the enactment of which would have been a virtual cancellation of the decree of March 30. Only the strong opposition of Estonian, Latvian, and Baltic German liberals prevented the government from withdrawing the decree. Eventually, on June 22, the government approved the law and instruction, based on the decree.³⁹

³⁷ Brüggemann, *Die Gründung der Republik Estland*, p. 54.

³⁸ Olavi Arens, "The Estonian *Maapäev*, during 1917," in *The Baltic States in Peace and War, 1917-1945*, ed. V. Stanley Vardys, Romuald J. Misiunas (University Park: Penn., 1978), pp. 19-30.

³⁹ See the journal of the special committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from May 26, 27, 28 and 29, 1917, in the Latvian State Historical Archive (LVVA), Stock 214 (Archive of the *Ritterschaft* of Livland), Series 1, Item 435, pp. 23-35. *Sbornik ukazov i postanovlenii Vremennogo Pravitel'stva* 1 (Petrograd, 1917), pp. 155-158; *Eesti Vabadussõda 1918-1920 [The Estonian War of Independence 1918-1920]* I (Tallinn, 1937: 2nd ed., 1996), pp. 549-551; *Suur Sotsialistlik Oktoobrerevolutsioon Eestis: Dokumentide ja materjalide kogumik [The Great Socialist October Revolution in Estonia: Documents and Materials]* (Tallinn, 1957), pp. 102-104. The law and instruction of June 22 were officially published as a special supplement to *Estliandiskie*

Based on these acts, two-stage elections to the *Maapäev* and the local councils were held in May and June. These elections stimulated the emergence of political parties on a broad social basis.⁴⁰ Although deputies from urban areas had not been elected,⁴¹ the *Maapäev* was convened on July 1 (14). In general, moderate political forces dominated in the rural and semi-urban areas, as well as Tartu, while the left wing proved to be stronger in the industrial cities of Tallinn and Narva. Sixty two members of the *Maapäev* represented all the political forces and national minorities. These deputies were divided into the socialist bloc, which dominated in numerical terms, and the democratic bloc, which was more prominent in practical organizing activity. The *Maapäev* unanimously agreed to adopt Estonian as its language of business. The first months of the *Maapäev's* activity were mainly devoted to organizational matters. A five-member administrative board (*Maavalitsus*, Land Government) was established.⁴² To the extent that the *Maapäev* succeeded the functions of the old noble institutions and *gouvernemang*, the staff of the administrative board expanded; the most important spheres of its activity were taxation, food supply, and schooling (the introduction of Estonian). The district councils also introduced analogous administrative boards, which employed new personnel mainly from among educated local people or from among lower self-government officials. This cadre policy made it possible to draw on the experience of the North-Baltic Committee functionaries.⁴³ Unfortunately, historians have not paid sufficient attention to the *Maapäev's* and other public institutions' organizational work in

gubernskie vedomosti, July 5, 1917. The law and instruction were temporary, valid until January 1, 1919. Even after the promulgation of this law and instruction, Estonian leaders faced the persistent opposition of Russian officials and the Soviets in Estonia. See Olavi Arens, "Soviets in Estonia 1917-1918," *Die Baltischen Provinzen*, pp. 295-314.

⁴⁰ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, pp. 100-101. See also: Graf, *Parteid Eesti Vabariigis 1918-1934*, pp. 21-75.

⁴¹ New city assemblies, scheduled to be elected at the end of July and the beginning of August, were to select deputies for the Assembly.

⁴² *Maanõukogu protokollid: 1. koosolekust 1. juulil 1917 78. koosolekuni 6. veebruaril 1919* [The protocols of the Maanõukogu [=Maapäev], from the First Session on July 1, 1917 to the 78th Session on February 6, 1919], (Tallinn, 1935).

⁴³ These matters are thoroughly described in memoirs of Ferdinand Petersen, high official of the Land Government and later minister of Estonian Provisional Government. See his *Mälestusi ja tähelepanekuid* [Memoirs and Observations] (Tallinn, 2001), pp. 128-170.

the face of the ubiquity of demoralized and corrupted Russian troops and the Soviets' aggressive activity.

The struggle for power between the *Maapäev* and the Soviets grew more critical in the late summer of 1917, particularly around the issue of Estonia's independence. It is important to emphasize that the *Maapäev* could not have begun to strive for independence without support from local authorities. Facing the growing threat of the German occupation, an extraordinary closed session of the *Maapäev* was held in Tallinn on August 25 (September 7). The majority of the reporting deputies were, as before, in favor of Estonia's belonging to a federalized Russia, but there were more arguments for independence than at previous meetings. This session adopted a resolution that in case of emergency the *Maapäev* would organize a foreign delegation to advocate the Estonian people's interests abroad.⁴⁴ This day can be considered the beginning of the independent foreign policy of Estonia.⁴⁵

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION URGING ESTONIA INDEPENDENT

An unpleasant surprise for the Estonian nationals was the Bolshevik coup d'état on October 25,⁴⁶ which abruptly severed the evolutionary development of the social activities of the Estonian public into national territorial autonomy. Led by their blind ideas of world revolution and the European Soviet Republic, the Estonian Bolsheviks categorically opposed Estonia's independence and proposed territorial "autonomy" within a centralized Russian Soviet Republic.

⁴⁴ The *Maapäev* granted official credentials to the diplomatic delegation in December 1917. These documents pronounced the word "diplomatic representative" for Estonia for the first time. From this time on, Estonia addressed the world as a sovereign state. Eero Mediainen, "Estonia and the World," in Jean-Jacques Subrenat, ed., *Estonia: Identity and Independence (On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics 2)* (Amsterdam, New York, 2004), p. 116.

⁴⁵ Eduard Laaman, *Eesti iseseisvuse sünn* [*The Birth of Estonian Independence*] (Stockholm, 1964; first edition in 1936), pp. 132-133; Mediainen, "Estonia and the World," p. 115.

⁴⁶ Joosep Saat, *Nõukogude võim Eestis: Oktoober 1917 – märts 1918* [*Soviet Power in Estonia: October 1917 – March 1918*] (Tallinn, 1975).

The Bolsheviks' Military-Revolutionary Committee seized control over Tallinn without any bloodshed. As in February, the course of events was in the hands of the revolutionary Russian military, soldiers and marines. On October 27, Bolshevik Viktor Kingissepp, representing the Executive Committee of Estonian Soviets, deprived Poska of power in the province, though dual power partly continued because the *Maapäev* and its parties remained active and Estonian national military units, created during the summer-autumn of 1917, were not dissolved – indeed even more of them were formed. Nevertheless, the Soviets rapidly instituted what they euphemistically called the dictatorship of the proletariat and started repressing their political opponents. The Bolsheviks' intolerance towards dissidents dispelled the last hesitation that the Estonian political elite had had concerning secession from Russia. In November-December 1917, leading Estonian politicians became increasingly inclined towards secession.⁴⁷ They believed that both the general international situation and the military-political balance in the Baltic Sea region were very favorable for minor nations, including the Estonians. Along with the evident collapse of Russia, Germany, aiming to weaken Russia permanently, seemed to support the independence of the Baltic countries and Finland.⁴⁸

On November 12, the Executive Committee of Estonian Soviets decided to terminate the opposition activities of the *Maapäev* and scheduled elections of the Estonian Constituent Assembly for January 21-22, 1918. Nevertheless, the *Maapäev* met on November 15, 1917 and declared itself “the single bearer of the supreme power whose decrees and regulations must be obeyed by every person in Estonia,” until the Constituent Assembly convened. Decrees, orders and regulations, irrespective of who issued them, were declared to be valid only when the *Maapäev* had

⁴⁷ The Elders' Board of the *Maapäev*, who on November 7 decided to convene the *Maapäev* by November 15, was obviously inspired by the information published in the media the previous day that the Ukraine Central Rada had declared itself the only power in the country, breaking away from Russia. See Mati Graf, *Eesti rahvusriik. Ideed ja lahendused: ärkamisajast Eesti Vabariigi sünnini* [Estonian National State. Ideas and Solutions: from the National Awakening to the Birth of the Estonian Republic] (Tallinn, 1993), p. 183.

⁴⁸ By this time political forces proposed various forms of statehood: a member state of Russia or Germany, an autonomous colony of Great Britain, a federal state with Finland and/or the Nordic countries, with Latvia and Lithuania, an Estonian (Baltic)-Scandinavian federation, and an entirely independent Estonia, guaranteed by the super-powers.

authorized them. Between the sessions of the *Maapäev*, the Board of the *Maapäev*, the Committee of Elders and the Land Government represented the supreme power. Responsibility for the final determination of the form of the state was placed on the Estonian Constituent Assembly.⁴⁹ At the end of the emergency meeting of the *Maapäev* the Bolsheviks forced the deputies to leave the assembly rooms.

Lacking its own means of physical resistance, the *Maapäev* had no alternative but to go underground. On November 19, by force of arms, the Executive Committee of Estonian Soviets took over the Land Government. However, the formation and implementation of new Soviet organs of power proved difficult and had not been completed by the beginning of the German occupation. Through its organs – the Board, the Committee of Elders and the Land Government – the *Maapäev* continued its activity semi-legally. County and town councils and their executive organs protested against the Bolsheviks' violence. On December 31, 1917 – January 1, 1918 (13 -14 January 1918), a meeting of the Committee of Elders of the *Maapäev* and the representatives of all non-Bolshevik parties passed a resolution "To Declare the Independence of Estonia in the Near Future."

When the peace talks between Soviet Russia and Germany reached a deadlock, the German troops began a major offensive on the eastern front on February 18, 1918. The ruined Russian Army could barely slow the German offensive. The full occupation of Estonia took a matter of days. In anticipation, the Committee of Elders of the *Maapäev* decided to establish Estonia's independence during the military interregnum and approved the text of the Manifesto of Independence. They formed a Rescue Committee with special credentials, consisting of the representatives of larger parties, who were to succeed the whole supreme power until the situation normalized. The German troops penetrated into the continental part of Estonia from the previously occupied archipelago and overland from North Latvia, without encountering any serious resistance. The remains of the collapsing Russian Army and the small Red Guard contingents retreated, and the Estonian division abstained

⁴⁹ Laaman, *Eesti iseseisvuse süünd*, p. 162; Aleksander Looring, "Eesti riigi esimene eelkonstitutsioon. Selle süünd, analüüs ja kaasegne ning hilisem tõlgendus [The First Preconstitution of the Estonian state, its birth, analysis, contemporary and more recent interpretation]," *Õigus [The Law]* 1 (1939), pp. 1-30.

in the German-Russian conflict. The Soviet activists were evacuated by the Baltic Fleet, from Tallinn via Helsinki to Petrograd. Before the arrival of the German troops, units formed by Estonian officers took Estonian cities under control, and power shifted to revive Estonian self-government. Estonian troops held power in Tartu the longest, namely February 20-24.

On February 23, before the Germans' arrival, the Rescue Committee issued the declaration drafted by the Committee of Elders of the *Maapäev*, known as the "Manifesto to All People in Estonia." The Land Council of Estonia (*Maapäev*), referring to the nations' right to self-determination, declared Estonia an independent democratic republic within its historical and ethnic boundaries, and neutral in the Russian-German war.⁵⁰ However, this declaration could be realized only after the end of the German occupation, and only be completed after the victorious War of Independence against Soviet Russia.

DECLARATIONS OF "INDEPENDENCE" BY THE BALTIC KNIGHTHOODS

The events of 1917 caused a growing anxiety among the Baltic Germans, who first adopted a wait-and-see attitude. At the beginning of March the Committee of the Estland Knighthood recognized the Provisional Government and called upon the population to obey its orders. But the Provisional Government in its March 30 act declared the Committee of the Estland Knighthood null and void, explaining that it was in conflict with the Uusikaupunki (Nystad) Peace Treaty of 1721. Since the Baltic nobility was deprived of the privileges given by Peter the Great, the former had no obligations to the Russian state. They looked forward to a continuation of the German military offensive.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ago Pajur, "Iseseisvusmanifesti sünd [The Birth of the Independence Manifesto]," *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* 2/19 (2003), pp. 27-43, 157-158 (Summary).

⁵¹ There were some individuals among the Baltic Germans, including the Estland Knighthood members, who sought compromise with the Estonians to liberate Estonia from Russia's dominance. Some of them tried to conclude an agreement between the Estonian and Baltic German leaders, according to which, in the case of Germany's victory, the Bal-

In Estonia one of the most prominent leaders of the majority of Baltic Germans who supported the annexation of the Baltic countries to Germany was Eduard v. Stackelberg from Sutlema. He had been a secretary of the Estland Knighthood for a long time, strove to create a Baltic German common front without any class distinctions, initiated the German Society of Estonia in 1905 and became its chairman, a land counselor and deputy headman of the knighthood in 1911-1914. The tsarist authorities sent him to Siberia in 1915-17, and at the beginning of 1918, the Bolsheviks deported him together with German landlords. Another group of Baltic Germans, a cosmopolitan and considerably smaller one, was represented by Count Hermann Keyserling from Raikküla, a nobleman and philosopher.⁵²

Understandably, at the end of 1917, when the majority of Baltic Germans were impatiently waiting for the arrival of the rescuing German troops, Stackelberg, bustling with Germany, had a serious argument with Keyserling, who in turn disseminated a memorandum recommending that the Baltic Germans keep their distance from the German-Russian conflict. As Stackelberg saw it, Keyserling belonged to those few Baltic Germans who disregarded both Baltic German patriotism and nationality.⁵³ The cosmopolitan-minded Keyserling distanced himself from the German cause as early as the spring of 1915, since he thought Germany was the main initiator of World War I, and confronted German-minded members of the knighthoods.⁵⁴ On December 25, 1917, headman of the

tic Germans would support Estonia's independence. On the other hand, Estonians were to promise not to use their power to oppress Baltic Germans even if Germany lost. See: Andreas von Antropoff, "Erlebnisse in Petersburg und Estland in den Jahren 1917/18 nach Tagebüchern," *Baltische Hefte*, 17 (1971), pp. 135-176; in Estonian with comments: Andreas von Antropoff, "Elamusi Peterburis ja Eestis aastatel 1917/1918 päevikute põhjal [Impressions of St. Petersburg and Estonia from 1917/1918: After a diary]," *Akadeemia* 8/161 (2002), pp. 1606-1656, 1761 (Summary).

⁵² Laaman, *Eesti iseseisvuse süünd*, pp. 197-198 ; Jaan Undusk, "Eesti kui Belgia. Viimne baltlane Hermann Keyserling [Estonia as Belgium. 'The Last of the Balts' Count Hermann Keyserling]," *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* 2/19 (2003), pp. 48-78.

⁵³ Undusk, "Eesti kui Belgia," p. 159. Keyserling developed – even before World War I – a peculiar "Baltic philosophy," according to which Baltic Germans (or the Balts) developed from an origin different from the Germans in Germany. This group's mentality had more similarity with Estonians and Latvians than with Germans living in Germany.

⁵⁴ Under the German occupation, the controversy between Stackelberg and Keyserling was taken to the court of honor in Tartu in the summer 1918 and the personal issue of

Estland Knighthood, Eduard v. Dellingshausen, representing the so-called cautious center trying to be loyal to the Russian Empire to the last moment, received a defiant letter from Keyserling in which the latter warned, "Germans will only have any chance in Estonia if they forget their Germanness and earn the Estonians' trust, because in the future the most we can expect is to be a minority with parliamentary representation."⁵⁵

After Estonia's *Maapäev* had declared itself the bearer of the supreme power in Estonia on November 15 (28), the knightships also declared their secession from Russia, referring to the right of self-determination of peoples, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks.⁵⁶ On November 30 (December 13), 1917, the Committee of the Estland Knighthood declared itself independent of Russia and appealed to Germany for protection (i.e. occupation of Estonia). On December 18 (31), the Diet of the Livland Knighthood adopted a similar resolution in Riga. The representatives of the Baltic landlords compiled these documents and submitted them to the governments of Russia and Germany at the beginning of 1918. Although they had no popular mandate, the functionaries of the knightships deliberately staged these statements as declarations of independence, representing the will of the majority of the population. This did not please Berlin, which asked for clearer evidence of Estonians and Latvians' support for the Baltic-Germans' undertakings. Although many Estonians resented the violence and disorder caused by the Bolshevik rule, these declarations promised the indigenous people guarantees of a certain rights, mainly those promoting cultural autonomy, inviolability of private property, use of the mother tongue at elementary and secondary school; very few Estonians supported the Baltic Germans' attempt to collect signatures confirming the declarations. With the approval of Berlin, the head of the

Keyserling was raised on July 2-6, 1918 in Toompea, where a regular Diet of the Estland Knighthood was held. See: Henning von Wistinghausen, "Krahv Hermann Keyserlingi konflikt eestimaalastest rahvuskaslastega 1917-1918 [The conflict between Count Hermann Keyserling and his local compatriots 1917/1918]," *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* 3/24 (2004), pp. 52-64; 4/25 (2004), pp. 66-81; Summary: "Hermann Graf Keyserling im Konflikt mit seinen estländischen Landsleuten 1917/18," *Ibid.*, 3/24, (2004), pp. 158-159.

⁵⁵ Undusk, "Eesti kui Belgia," pp. 53-55; Arved von Taube, "Die baltisch-deutsche Führungssicht und die Loslösung Livlands und Estlands von Russland 1916-1918," *Von baltischen Provinzen*, p. 163.

⁵⁶ Taube, "Die baltisch-deutsche Führungssicht," p. 157 ff.; Laaman, *Eesti iseseisvuse süünd*, pp. 191-194.

Estland Knighthood, Dellingshausen, contacted Estonia's Land Council concerning the matter, but the political and economic elite of Estonia, with a few exceptions, was dead against summoning German troops.⁵⁷

Indeed, once the statehood of Estonia was proclaimed, the Baltic Germans were not ready to accept it, particularly when the German troops were marching into Estonia. They continued to appeal to Germany, trying to establish "their own" Baltic German state in union with Prussia. The wish of the Estland Knighthood was to continue belonging to the German sphere of influence and protection, as had been the case with the Teutonic Order in Livonia in the distant past. Only in the summer of 1918 did they begin to understand that the fate of war was unpredictable and that if Germany lost it, the British would be a decisive factor in the independence of the Baltic countries.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter identified three stages of development of Estonians' nationhood. The first stage was the 1860-70s, when definite strata of the Estonian peasant landowners and national intellectuals had emerged and Estonian cooperatives and cultural associations began to develop. It was not by chance that during this period the Estonian leaders began to request from the tsarist government to transform the traditional three divisions of the Baltic region into the two, Estonian and Latvian provinces. The tsarist government adjusted its traditional policy of unconditional alliance with the Baltic German nobility and began to use the indigenous population's potential to weaken the German influence. The agrarian reforms, the township reform in 1866, the urban municipal reform in 1877, and the Russification of the police and judicial institutions in 1888-1889 were examples of this attempt. But the tsarist government's main ally in this region continued to be the Baltic Germans.

The development of Estonian public activities after the 1905 revolution, in particular during World War I, gave the Estonians unprecedented

⁵⁷ Eduard von Dellingshausen, *Im Dienste der Heimat! Erinnerungen des Freiherrn Eduard von Dellingshausen ehem. Ritterschaftshauptmanns von Estland* (Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 234-241; Laaman, *Eesti iseseisvuse süünd*, pp. 193-199.

opportunities for self-organization. They built a dense network of cooperatives and associations and seized the headquarters of municipalities. The Provisional Government, once it attempted to continue the total war effort, had no alternative but to rely upon this cooperative-municipal network by granting the Estonians their long awaited national autonomous territory composed of Estland and the northern part of Livland. The new Estonia was expected to be a constituent of a federalized Russia. On the other hand, the Provisional Government canceled the privileges the Baltic Germans enjoyed since the Nystad Treaty.

The Bolshevik revolution violently severed this evolutionary development of the national public activities into an embryonic statehood. This forced the Estonian leaders to abandon their traditional quest for autonomy within Russia and demand independence. Rejecting both the traditional imperial alliance with the Baltic Germans and a new wager on the developing Estonian and Latvian public, the Bolsheviks found no other allies but revolutionary soldiers, marines, and de-nationalized laborers to integrate the Baltic region into their newly emerging empire.

World War I considerably accelerated the modernization of Baltic society; the Baltic-German elite declined, while the Estonian-Latvian elite rose to replace the Baltic Germans as the partner of the Russian authorities in the region. On the one hand, the simple fact that Russia was warring with Germany caused this, but on the other, the war itself, once begun, made it necessary for the government to broaden its popular support by gaining the loyalty of indigenous populations in the borderlands. At the same time, this reorientation became possible only because of the development of the organizational infrastructure of Estonian-Latvian society. These nations had already assumed characteristics of modern nations, and needed no tutelage of the Baltic German nobility. The German nobility forsook neither their privileged position nor inherited ideology of guardianship over "politically underdeveloped nations."

The Estonian leaders' actions during World War I and, in particular, the Russian Revolution showed that they were politically mature, creative, and tactful enough to exploit the changing domestic and international situation, which led to national autonomy and eventually an independent statehood for Estonians, one of the first successful examples among the borderland peoples of the Russian Empire.