SOVIET ESTONIA

Estonia and the Cold War

The end of World War II in 1945 completely changed the balance of power in the world. The impact the Soviet Union had, as one of the winning states, on the decision-making in world affairs grew considerably. Moscow gradually extended its supremacy in Eastern Europe and subjugated the local regimes almost completely to its control. The Western countries, at first, naively hoping to continue the cooperation of the war period, were not able to block the expansion of the Soviet Union. Instead of the previous cooperation, a new confrontation developed between the great powers, the Cold War, which largely influenced the developments in the world up to the second half of the 1980s. The Soviet Union and its allies withdrew behind an "iron curtain". Estonia and the other Baltic states also remained behind the curtain. Half a century in the Soviet Union meant Estonia's isolation from the Western world in economic and cultural terms, which, contrary to communist rhetoric, resulted in regress in society.

After huge human casualties, destruction and economic losses, the attempts by the Baltic countries to restore independent statehood in 1944 failed: Estonia was reoccupied by the Soviet Union. This included the extensive Sovietisation of social life, the suppression of resistance, the levelling of spiritual life, and the application of a Soviet-style command economy.

While there was initially some hope of restoring independence in annexed Estonia, by the early 1950s, it was clear that the Soviet power will remain in place for a long time. In turn, this realisation meant that the Estonians remained a divided people: those who had escaped to the West during the war had no chance of returning to their homeland, which is why an energetic Estonian community in exile formed to carry on the pre-war Estonian Republic.

After Estonia was occupied again, people hoped that the Soviet regime would not last long. People studying the map of the European military front in February 1945, at the Town Hall Square in Tallinn
National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-30679p

The continuation of the occupation in Estonia included changes to the regime that were the result of a de-Stalinisation policy that was started in the mid-1950s by Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union. After Stalin's death, the period known as "Krushchev's thaw" (mid-1950s to mid-1960s) saw the end of the state policy of violence in the Soviet Union; and economic progress was accompanied by a rise in the living standards of the population. At the same time, it became increasingly clearer that the Soviet Union was not ready to relax its control over its areas of influence in Eastern Europe, as evidenced by the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising (1956) and the Prague Spring (1968).

Adjustments to the regime, when they began during Krushchev's thaw, did not mean they were accepted without criticism. This could be seen in a mass

movement for liberation that started in the second half of the 1980s, and which peaked in the restoration of Estonian statehood in 1991.

During the Cold War, the regime constantly stressed the danger of the outbreak of war between the USSR and the Western states. This had a deep effect on Estonia, located on the western border of the USSR and covered with Soviet military bases. The army left in Estonia helped to perpetuate Soviet power; it was an important source of information for Moscow, and also an institution that helped to keep order in different locations and secure the regime. The

During the time of the "iron curtain", Finland became an important window to the West for the ESSR. In 1965, a regular ferry route was opened between Tallinn and Helsinki, with a trip by "Vanemuine". Pictured: the First CP Secretary of the Tallinn municipal committee, Vaino Väljas (in the centre), giving a speech at the newly finished passenger pavilion
Photograph: Salomon Rosenfeld / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-89725

army in Estonia was particularly numerous in the post-war years – more than 100,000 men.

The army was used to suppress the resistance movement and keep order within the country. Estonian territory belonged to the Baltic Military District. By 1991, the Soviet Army in Estonia had ownership of 1,665 different properties with a total area of 87,147 hectares. Military units were situated in nearly 800 locations, with about 160 smaller or larger military bases, as well as many campuses. The Soviet Army had full control of the town of Paldiski, including the Pakri Peninsula, the Pakri Islands and the island Naissaar. For ordinary people and foreigners, the restricted zones in Estonia included the border zones (the coastline and the islands), towns with military bases and weapons industry facilities (Paldiski, Sillamäe). There were other restrictions, as well. Foreigners were forbidden to spend the night in the university town of Tartu, as there was a military air base there.

Military presence was a heavy burden for the local residents. Local indigenous people had to leave the areas that were given over to military use; a considerable number of residential areas were also given to the military in cities. There were frequent conflicts between the military and civilians, particularly during the post-war period, when numerous acts of violence were carried out by the Red Army. Young Estonian men were conscripted into the Soviet Army. Altogether approximately 350,000 young men from Estonia were conscripted during the Soviet period.

The Soviet power structure and its leaders

The Red Army was used to restore Soviet power in Estonia in 1944. The power structure of the restored ESSR was similar to that of the Soviet Union, where the Communist Party had the dominant position. The Estonian Communist Party (ECP) was completely under Moscow's control, and only followed its orders. The First Secretary was the leader of the party apparatus, who convened

the weekly meetings of the ECP central committee bureau, which discussed issues related to the management of the Soviet republic. Indeed, in many respects, the central committee bureau was the real seat of power in the Soviet republic, where a large share of the local issues was discussed and decided upon.

According to the decree of the Communist Party and the central authorities, the Soviet Estonian government consisted until 1946 of people's commissariats and then of ministries and other central institutions. The highest legislative body, the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR and its Presidium, did not have any real power. The Supreme Soviet members were chosen through standard elections, from among candidates pre-approved by the authorities. Soviet-era elections were only a formality, as it was only possible to vote for a single candidate. Therefore, such elections were only a decoration of Soviet reality.

After the war, the party and government cadres of the ESSR mainly consisted of those who came to power in 1940, Estonians from the Estonian Rifle Corps, Estonians from Russia, and non-Estonians. The members of the ECP included party functionaries from various levels, as well as officials from local and state bodies. The membership figures of the ECP were small at first, but started to grow rapidly during the post-war years. In 1951, the ECP had over 18,000 members, while less than half of them were Estonians. Later, an increasing amount of local Estonians joined the party. The membership figures of the ECP continued to grow after that. In 1988, 112,925 people were in the ECP – nearly 10% of the adult population of the ESSR at the time.

In short, the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was one of the fifteen union republics of the USSR; it had some characteristics of a state (a territory, bodies of legislative and executive power, Soviet Symbols, etc), but it was not a sovereign state. All of the more important decisions were made by the central powers of the USSR in Moscow.

In the post-war years, Nikolai Karotamm was the leader of the ECP. He had been born in Estonia, but he was a Communist who had left for the Soviet Union in the 1920s. He came to Estonia in 1940 to construct a new power.

Nikolai Karotamm, promoter of the Sovietisation of the ESSR, 1944–1950, and leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Republic
National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-1319

Karotamm became one of the leading figures of the ECP. In 1944, he was appointed the First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party. Regarding the governance of the ESSR, he mostly relied on the "June Communists" and the Estonians from the Rifle Corps, while attempting to consider the Soviet republic's needs in his activities. On the other hand, Moscow primarily supported the cadres that they had sent. Karotamm and his colleagues were accused of bourgeois nationalism, incorrect collective farm policies, and other oversights.

After a power struggle, Karotamm was dismissed from office in 1950, and he was replaced by Johannes (Ivan) Käbin. Käbin had been born in Estonia at the beginning of the century, but had emigrated to Russia with his family already during the Tsarist period. He was also appointed to Estonia in 1940.

Käbin remained in office as the head of the ECP until 1978. Compared to Karotamm, Käbin was more obedient in following Moscow's instructions, but he was not in favour of the extreme Russification of the Soviet republic. During his rule, Käbin practiced a moderate balancing policy, attempting to be sufficiently Moscow-oriented, while considering the "special characteristics" of the ESSR. He adapted successfully to the political conditions of Stalinism, the Khruschev thaw, and the stagnation that began in the 1960s in the Soviet Union, and managed to keep his position.

The situation changed in the 1970s. In 1978, Käbin was replaced by Karl Vaino, who was Moscow-minded to the core and spoke almost no Estonian. A new period of Russification began in the ESSR when he took office. The propaganda for using the Russian language became particularly active, reaching its peak in the first half of the 1980s.

Territory and administrative division

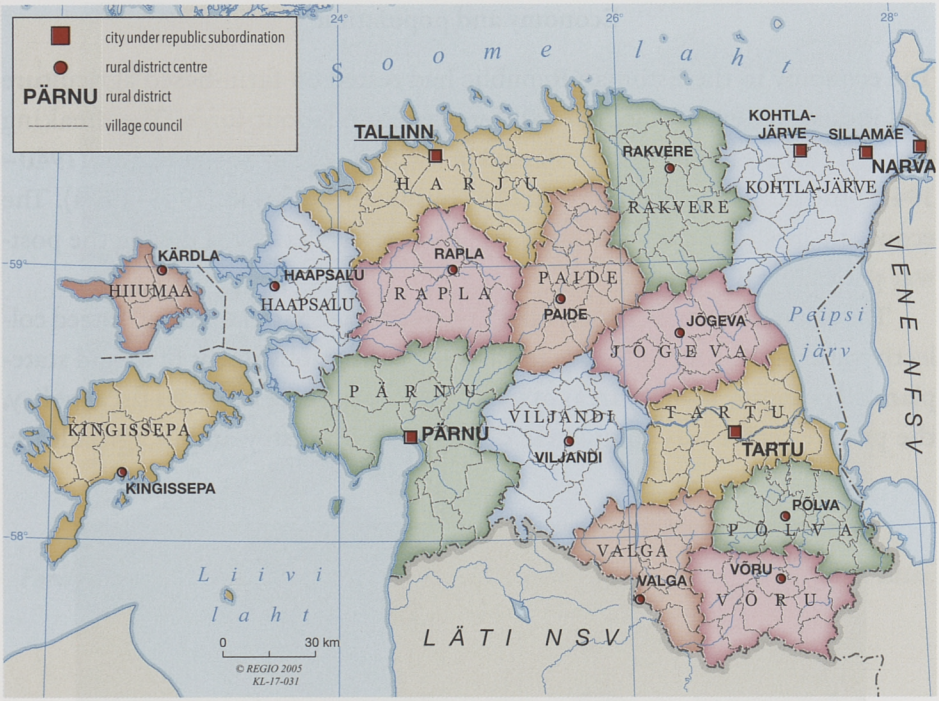
During the process of Sovietisation, the borders and administrative divisions of the Republic of Estonia did not survive. In 1944–1945, the Estonian territory was reduced: three rural municipalities beyond the Narva River were added to the Leningrad oblast, and the newly established Pskov oblast now contained most of Petseri county, including the town of Petseri. The existing Petseri county was abolished and the remaining area was added to Võru county. The territories joined to the Leningrad and Pskov oblasts (2,330 km^2, about 5% of the Estonian territory) had been assigned to Estonia on the basis of the Tartu Peace Treaty (1920); most of the population (over 80%) in these territories was Russian. At the same time that the Estonian territory was reduced, the Latvian borders were also "adjusted" – as a result, both formerly independent countries were left without significant military-strategic border areas. Smaller alterations to the Russia-Estonia border occurred as late as 1957.

ESSR administrative division 1952–1953

Eesti ajalugu VI, p 263

When the Estonian SSR was restored, the existing administrative division was initially left unchanged. In 1945, Soviet Estonia had 10 counties and 236 rural municipalities. Later, Hiiumaa (1946), Jõhvi and Jõgevamaa (1949) were established as separate counties. Village councils were also established in rural municipalities as first-level authoritative bodies.

In 1950, rural municipalities were abolished, and village councils became the only local authoritative bodies of the Soviet regime. In autumn of the same year, there was an administrative reform, during which the counties (13) were replaced with 39 rural districts. The Estonian SSR was briefly (1952–1953)



ESSR administrative division in 1978

Eesti ajalugu VI, p. 318

divided into three oblasts. After the oblasts were abolished, there were no other major changes in the Soviet administrative structure. However, this structure was constantly reorganised. This mainly meant that the number of districts was reduced, making the Soviet administrative division resemble the old division more closely. This process went on until the mid-1960s, when 15 districts remained out of 39. In 1986, Estonia had 15 rural districts, 33 towns, 24 townships, 189 village councils, 167 small towns and 3,274 villages.

Economy and population

The economy in the Estonian Republic had rested on farm-based agriculture and industry, depending on local resources and labour force. The breaking down of this economic system started in the first year of Soviet regime (1940–1941), and also continued during the German occupation (1941–1944). The economic model of the small state was completely destroyed during the post-war period.

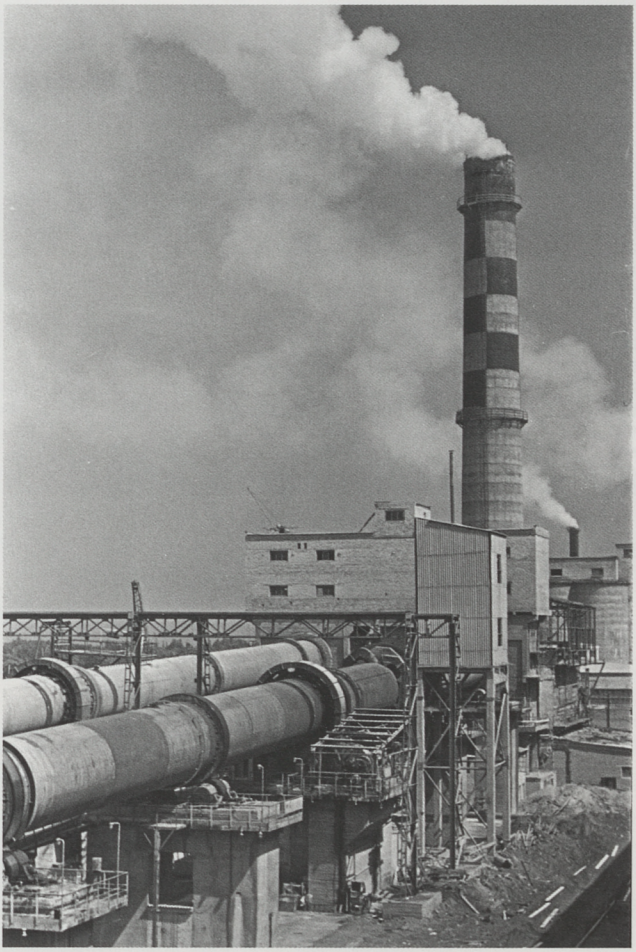
The essence of Soviet fiscal policy lay in forced industrialisation, forced collectivisation (creating collective farms), and the establishment of a rigid state-planned economy in most areas of life. As a consequence of Soviet fiscal policy, the private sector was completely destroyed in industry and in agriculture.

Viktor Karrus' painting "Vilja riigile" ("Grain for the state"), 1953
Art Museum of Estonia, EKM j 6198 M 3095

Foreign workers who migrated to Estonia during the Soviet era mainly settled in cities. A view of the Lasnamäe district in Tallinn (1986)
Photograph: Endel Tarkpea / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-145623

Large companies became dominant in the industrial sector, and in agriculture, the expropriation of land led to the prevalence of collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhozy*).

In northeastern Estonia, where oil shale mining and oil production had been established already in the 1930s, a huge oil shale and energy complex was built on Soviet orders, with the main task of supplying energy to what was then known as Leningrad (present-day St. Petersburg). In addition to electricity production and oil shale mining, the following were also promoted in the ESSR: the production of construction materials, mechanical engineering, textiles, furniture, pulp and paper industry, and some branches of the food industry. One of the main fields of specialisation in Soviet Estonian agriculture was the



One of the most important industrial companies of the ESSR was the cement factory "Punane Kunda" ("Red Kunda"), which was established in Kunda already during the Russian Empire, and greatly expanded in the early 1960s (1961)

National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-43554

production of agricultural produce and supplying large cities with dairy and meat products.

The command economy, based on a planned economy, took root in the ESSR. The command economy resulted in a massive influx of migrant workers from other Soviet republics. Over time, this immigration reduced the relative importance of Estonians in the population. In 1945, there were 854,000 people in Estonia, only a few of whom were non-Estonians. In 1959, there were already nearly 1.2 million inhabitants in the ESSR, with non-Estonians amounting to one-quarter of the population. In 1979, there were nearly 1.5 million people in the Soviet republic, while the relative importance of Estonians had decreased to less than 65% of the population.

Industrialisation and the transition to collective farming increased the pace of urbanisation. In 1953, more than half of the Soviet republic's population lived in cities. However, in the 1980s, already more than 70% of the population lived in cities. Some regions of Estonia, particularly the large industrial towns in the eastern part of Virumaa, became primarily Russian-speaking towns.

Culture, education and church

The aim of the Soviet power was to introduce the kind of culture where "socialist content" was combined within "national form". This occurred during constant ideological pressure from the authorities. The ESSR remained largely separated from the spiritual developments and tendencies of the Western world. In turn, this lack of information meant forced orientation towards Russian culture. One part of the Soviet cultural politics was the selective destruction of the cultural heritage created by preceding generations. During the post-war years, libraries were emptied of the "heritage of bourgeois society".

World War II and the re-establishment of the Soviet regime in 1944 split the thus far integral Estonian culture into two parts: cultural lives in exile and at home. In 1944, a large number of writers, artists, scientists, and others

became refugees, who continued their activities in their new home countries. Their activities and achievements are an organic part of Estonian cultural history. However, participating in the cultural heritage they had created was unattainable for most Estonians in the ESSR until the late 1980s. That is why the survival of Estonian culture was nevertheless decided in the homeland, where the majority of Estonians had remained. It was their resistance and vitality that ensured the continuity of Estonian culture even during the Soviet era.

The intellectuals who had remained in Estonia became victims of ideological terror, as a result of which their active creative work either decreased or stopped completely. Many intellectuals were forced to "reassess" their works to date, and endure repressions. During the second half of the 1950s, the psychological repression in society eased, enabling older-generation intellectuals to return to their creative work. This was the beginning of the partial self-restoration of Estonian culture, wherein a new generation of intellectuals played an increasingly important role. The final breakthrough of the new generation occurred in the 1960s, at a time when the political circumstances in society had also become more liberated. Updates to the cultural life of the time were evidenced by a more liberal creative environment, as well as unique and novel experiments in form. The new generation of intellectuals attempted to find a positive programme for survival within Soviet conditions.

The war and the following years of intellectual repression dealt a heavy blow particularly to high culture. The people's cultural activity, however, remained high and was expressed mainly through amateur clubs. In the countryside, different music, dance and theatre clubs and choirs continued operating. The tradition of song festivals was also restored, and the song festival of 1947 became a major event. Despite the waving of red flags, the Soviet-era song festivals became unique mass events with a national tint. During the second half of the 1950s, widespread amateur clubs started to give way to professional high culture. A new generation of high intellectuals came of age. Wider cultural consumption was also furthered by urbanisation, increased education

Aleksander Peek's painting "Laulupeoliste rongkäik" ("The parade of the participants in the Song Festival"), 1950s
Art Museum of Estonia, EKM j 51146 M 7237

levels and better material opportunities. The relative importance of mass media (printed press, radio, television) in cultural consumption continued to increase. The national TV broadcasting company, Eesti Televisioon, started airing shows in 1955. The switch to colour television was made in the early 1970s. The number of programmes on the national radio, Eesti Raadio, also increased. However, all media was subject to censorship and used to disseminate the official propaganda. Nevertheless, the media of the time had a significant role, as it broadened the audience's horizons and promoted cultural exchange. The cultural consumption of northern Estonia was heavily influenced by Finnish TV, promoting the adoption of a Western lifestyle mainly in Tallinn.

The Soviet authorities got rid of the independence-era education system. The new organisation of studies was based on the system of comprehensive schools, which had already been implemented in other Soviet republics. During the post-war years, many teachers and university teaching staff were declared enemies of the state, and were fired. The curricula of general education schools and higher education institutions were also thoroughly changed, particularly in the field of humanities. In addition to world history and Estonian history, there were now in-depth courses on the history of the Soviet Union. In the ESSR, education was initially compulsory for a period of 7 years, and this was extended to eight years in 1959. In the 1970s, secondary education became compulsory. Pupils had to obtain secondary education either in a comprehensive school or a vocational school.

In 1950, the higher art school "Pallas" was closed town in Tartu, and the State Art Institute of Estonia was opened in Tallinn. In addition, there were the following higher education institutions in Tallinn: Tallinn Polytechnic Institute, State Conservatory, and from 1952, Tallinn Pedagogical Institute. In Tartu, the university continued its work (Tartu State University), as did the Estonian Agricultural Academy, from 1951. The existing subject system in higher education institutions was replaced by a course system. This decreased the students' independence and freedom of choice. To graduate from university, students had to complete compulsory courses, and only had minimal choice in subjects. The University in Tartu (Tartu State University, as it was known at the time) remained the most important higher education institution even during the Soviet era. At that university, an academic way of thinking and an academic lifestyle remained partially intact. One of the characteristic features was a growth in student numbers: in 1945, there were more than 3,700 students in the higher education institutions in the ESSR, but by 1985, there were more than 23,500.

Soviet Estonia formally recognised freedom of religion, but all possible direct and indirect hurdles were put in place for religious people and their

On his visit to the ESSR, Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, the President of Finland, giving a speech in the hall of the Tartu State University in 1964
Photograph: V. Mastyukov / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-58257

congregations in their everyday lives. Buildings and lands used by the church were nationalised. The faculty of theology was dissolved at the University of Tartu. That is why the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, supplementing the Tallinn Consistory, started educating pastors. The authorities tried to diminish the role of church in society through atheist propaganda to evoke a hostile or at least indifferent attitude towards church and religion, and also by promoting secular customs as a substitute for ecclesiastical customs. Ecclesiastical memorial days of the dead were replaced with secular days. Summer Days for the youth replaced Christian confirmation. Church funeral services were still quite regular throughout the Soviet period. Under Soviet conditions, the church had lost its traditional moral and

balancing role in the daily lives of Estonians. However, the church essentially remained the only public organisation in Soviet Estonia, which managed to resist being fully dominated by the ruling regime. The church thus fulfilled a role of intellectual opposition in Soviet society.

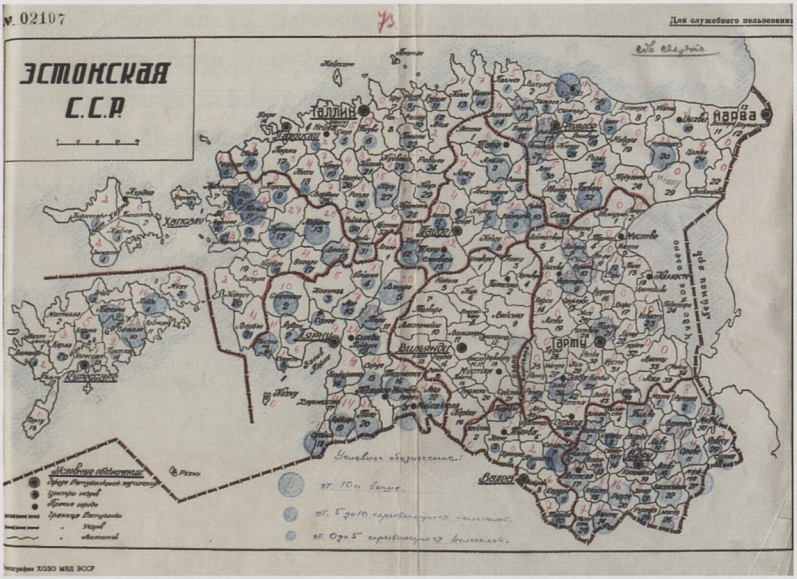
Opposition to the regime

The majority of Estonians opposed the re-establishment of the Soviet power, and this is expressed in both passive and active resistance to the regime. At the same time, people were groundlessly waiting and hoping that Western countries would want to restore Estonia's independence and to prevent the supremacy of the Soviet Union from becoming stronger in Eastern Europe.

Between 1944 and 1953, the main form of resistance in Estonia was direct armed combat by the Forest Brothers, which covered the entire territory of Estonia. To fight the Forest Brothers, the Soviet power used regular army units, the militia, and local law enforcement authorities. This "war after war" claimed numerous victims on both sides. The guerrilla resistance was considerably weakened by the mass deportations in 1949: the operation that started on the night of 26 March saw more than 20,700 people deported from Estonia to Siberia. Nearly 2.5% of Estonians living in Estonia were deported.

The Soviet authorities attempted to suppress any kind of resistance with violence. The politics of violence exercised by the Soviet regime was various and directed against different classes of the population with the aim of the total submission of society to its control. These policies were initiated by the Communist Party apparatus, and executed primarily by the state security organs.

With the restoration of Soviet power in the autumn of 1944, extensive and varied repressions started in Estonia, which primarily meant mass arrests. During 1944–1945, an estimated 10,000 people were arrested in Estonia, half of whom died during the first two years. Up to 1953, altogether 25,000–30,000



Forest brothers known to and recorded by the ESSR Ministry of Internal Affairs on 1 June 1946. Forest brother groups marked in blue, the amount of forest brothers in the municipality marked in red

private collection

people from Estonia were sent to labour and prison camps, of whom up to 11,000 did not return home according to approximate calculations.

By the early 1950s, the occupying power was able to suppress the armed resistance movement. In addition to direct physical violence, the authorities started using psychological violence in the post-war years. This was manifest in the subjugation of the intellectual life of society to the regulations of the regime, and in the levelling of the pre-war sphere of culture (education, science, art). This also included the proliferation of "red propaganda".

In the 1950s, the armed resistance movement of the Forest Brothers was replaced by more modestly spread underground youth organisations. The secret youth organisations mainly emerged in protest to the increasing compromises and adaptations to the Soviet system. From the second half of the 1960s, the existing underground youth movement was replaced by rather different democratic movements, which had better-defined ideas and political foundations. These democratic movements were no longer narrowly restricted to Estonians, but many participants were also non-Estonians, whose aim was to democratise the Soviet Union. The founding principle was that no subjugated nation could achieve independence fighting on its own, and Estonian independence was now seen as an international issue. This claim was also enhanced by the activities of the exile organisations who tirelessly raised the Baltic issue in the international arena.

The 1968 events in Czechoslovakia soon put an end to an era of relative liberality in the entire Soviet Union. Regressive tendencies were clearly evident also in political life within the ESSR at the time, and in intellectual circles. During the next decade, the optimistic atmosphere in the intellectual life of society in the 1960s was replaced with social pessimism, laissez-faire attitudes and adaptation to the regime. The regressions and stagnations in society were manifest in the increased violent management of cultural life, the propaganda of a "single Soviet nation" and bilingualism (i.e. forcing the Russian language on people in all social circles), and censorship becoming stricter.

As a consequence of these processes, resistance moved into the public sphere, using open letters and addresses to authorities, international organisations and foreign governments as its main tools. The strengthening of the ideological repression created sparks of protest in various intellectual circles. This is evidenced by a public letter ("Letter of the Forty") sent to the press (*Pravda, Rahva Hääl, Sovetskaya Estoniya*), highlighting many unresolved problems in society and the intensifying Russification, written in October 1980.

Members of Ülo Aeltermann's group of forest brothers in Paide district in 1953
National Archives of Estonia, ERAF.131SM.1.290

Some of the underground activities included establishing and documenting facts about violations of human rights, collecting truthful material about the situation in Soviet Estonia and smuggling this information out of the country to various exile organisations in the West, who sent them for publication. At that time, contacts were also made with Latvian and Lithuanian freedom fighters as well as with refugee organisations.

However, the authorities continued to implement repressive policies against the liberation movement. The more active freedom fighters were arrested, tried during political proceedings, and then sent to prison camps. Jüri Kukk, an associate professor at the University of Tartu, died in 1981 in a prison camp in Russia, convicted for his anti-Soviet way of thinking. In 1984, Enn Tarto was the last freedom fighter to be sent to a special-regime prison camp. With that, public resistance was essentially suppressed by repressions from the authorities.

Expatriate Estonia and relations with the homeland

A large community of expatriate Estonians emerged for political reasons during World War II, as thousands of people left their homeland to escape the Soviet occupation; many were kept by the Allies as prisoners of war, or were forced to go to labour camps in Germany during the war. The majority of the refugees had assembled in Sweden and other Western European countries, where they were put in displaced persons camps.

The Soviet Union demanded that the refugees should voluntarily return to their homeland. Nevertheless, the majority of the refugees did not bow to that pressure. Only 20,000 people returned to Estonia in the post-war years, either voluntarily or involuntarily; nearly half of them were prisoners of war. However, the majority of the refugees remained in Western countries – approximately 75,000 Estonians, who initially found refuge mainly in Sweden and Germany, and to a smaller extent also in Austria, Denmark, Belgium and France. Between 1947 and 1952, in fear of extradition to the Soviet Union, more than 27,000 Estonians migrated to the United States of America, Australia, Canada and England, with the help of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). By the early 1950s, most of the Estonian refugees were living in Sweden (20,000), Canada (19,000), the United States of America (16,000), the Federal Republic of Germany (4,000) and Australia (6,500). Toronto, New York, Stockholm and Sydney had become the most important centres for expatriate Estonians.

The majority of the people who left Estonia during World War II were political refugees. They had left their homeland not in search of better living conditions, but because they were forced to. This status of being political refugees largely determined the activities and attitudes of the refugees.

Because there was a shortage of labour force in most countries after the war, the refugees were able to find employment relatively quickly and painlessly. They started out with easier jobs, but were soon also employed in public offices in their new home country, became involved in enterprise, and were successful in many fields of life. They were also able to maintain their Estonian identity, which was passed over from one generation to the next, primarily through upbringing, but also supported by Estonian-language schooling, circles of friends and social activities. Most of the refugees were convinced that they were abroad only temporarily, and would return to their homeland after a while.

One of the most important outputs of the expatriate Estonian society was political activity, which was based on various refugee organisations. A part of this activity included what was called the expatriate struggle, the main goal of which was to inform the general public and the politicians of the host countries about the situation in occupied Estonia, and influence public opinion in Western countries. Memoranda were drafted to achieve these goals, sent to influential politicians and shapers of foreign policy in powerful countries, as well as to international organisations. The legal continuity of the Republic of Estonia was maintained by the Estonian government-in-exile, the Main Consulate of the Republic of Estonia, located in New York, and several other organisations. Despite the differences of opinion between refugee organisations and top executives, the main result of their activities was that the majority of the Western countries did not acknowledge *de jure* the annexation of the Republic of Estonia by the Soviet Union.

Political dissensions were not a hindrance to the numerous cultural activities of the expatriate Estonian community, which had already started when they were in the refugee camps. Together with Latvians and Lithuanians, the

Members of the Republic of Estonia's government-in-exile in 1953.
Front centre: August Rei, Prime Minister in capacity of the President
private collection

Baltic University was established in Hamburg, Germany (active 1945–1949), and the Baltic Institute in Bonn. There was also a multitude of lively literature, theatre and art activities that also started in the refugee camps. Active cultural activities continued after resettling in the new host countries. This could be seen in the scout movement, amateur clubs, student unions and fraternities and sororities. Since 1967, there have been annual Forest Universities, with university-level lecturers. In 1972, the first Global Estonian Cultural Days (ESTO) were held in Toronto. Estonian Houses function as significant cultural centres in several countries. Expatriate Estonian literature has been a cultural phenomenon of its own, with literature from the ESSR becoming its equal partner

only in the 1960s. The refugee community of Estonians abroad ensured that the national culture would survive and develop abroad.

During the first few years of the Cold War, contacts between the refugees and Estonians in the homeland were minimal and accidental. As with the rest of the Soviet empire, the ESSR was behind an "iron curtain", which started to lift slowly only after Stalin's death in 1953. Around that time, contacts with the Estonian homeland started to be restored, extremely carefully. The majority of these were personal contacts (at the time, there was no official contact), which then meant correspondence and a few visits to the homeland.

Starting from 1959, refugees were able to visit Estonia as tourists, but it was necessary to apply for a visa from an embassy of the Soviet Union. There were opposing opinions in the refugee circles regarding private contacts with Estonia. Those who considered communication with Estonia to be inadvisable were rather influential, seeing this as an indirect acknowledgement of the Soviet occupation. However, the number of expatriates visiting Estonia continued to increase.

In the 1960s, alongside personal relationships, cultural contacts became increasingly more important, expanding further during the next decade as well. The leadership of the Soviet Union aimed to take advantage of these connections in turn: they hoped to show the "liberal" nature of the regime to the world. Official propaganda in the ESSR increased, trying to lure expatriate Estonians into returning to their homeland. Propaganda literature on that topic was sent abroad, and a separate newspaper, *Kodumaa* (Homeland), was published aimed at refugees. This propaganda was directed by the Committee for Developing Contacts with Estonians Abroad (*Väliseestlastega Kultuurisidemete Arendamise Komitee*, *VEKSA*), established in 1960. Although this organisation was officially a "social" organisation, its activities were controlled by the KGB.

From Estonia's perspective, scientific contacts were also important, although these were initially limited to correspondence between academics,

sending books, and so on. Since the 1970s, Estonians from the Soviet Republic were invited to give presentations at scientific conferences. From the ESSR, these contacts mainly occurred through VEKSA, which was supposed to guarantee the loyalty of the scientists going abroad, and provide certain feedback. Upon return, everyone had to write a report about their trip abroad.

With the renewed onslaught of Russification in the 1980s, the relatively modest relations between expatriate Estonians and Estonia became random again. Official propaganda also became increasingly more aggressive towards expatriate Estonians. One of the consequences of the increasing ideological pressure was the departure of several artists and writers from their homeland. Relations between expatriate Estonians and Estonia then started to recover in the second half of the 1980s, and reached a state of complete freedom when the independence of the Republic of Estonia was restored in 1991.

THE RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE

A new period of national awakening

The Soviet perestroika that started when Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985 did not initially have any extensive impact in Estonia. The domestic situation in the ESSR started to change only in late 1986, when it was revealed that Moscow was planning to establish a new phosphorite mine in Estonia. The people sensed the strength in togetherness, and their protests (the "phosphorite campaign") forced the authorities to abandon their plans of establishing a mine. The people awakened, "history started moving again" after decades of stillness. In August 1987, the first political association was founded: The Estonian Group on the Publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, MRP-AEG. Its goal was to have the true contents of the 1939 deal between Hitler and Stalin made public, as well as its consequences for the Baltic states. To achieve that goal, the group organised a political demonstration on 23 August in Hirve park, Tallinn.

The Hirve park meeting played an important role in the society becoming more organised and politically opinionated. In late 1987, the Estonian Heritage Society (*Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts, EMS*) was established, the first mass organisation founded on the basis of democratic principles. The following year, the first political party was founded: the Estonian National Independence Party (*Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei, ERSP*). Both of these organisations put a lot of emphasis on increasing awareness about historically important dates for Estonians, organising the celebrations of the anniversary of the Treaty of Tartu and Estonian Independence Day. In 1988, the celebration of both anniversaries attracted large crowds, which the authorities could no longer stop. In early April 1988, there was a joint plenum of the creative unions, which linked the intelligentsia to the social renewal process. The plenum paid a great deal

A mass demonstration at the Song Festival Grounds, during a meeting of the Popular Front of Estonia in June 1988
National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-138718

of attention to the situation regarding national culture, and the participants expressed their discontent with regard to the actions of the leaders of the ESSR. These demands were supported by the wider public. In mid-April, there was a call to establish the Estonian Popular Front in Support of Perestroika (Popular Front – Rahvarinne). Within a short time, the Popular Front became the largest people's movement. The blue-black-white national flag was presented to the public for the first time during the Heritage Days in April 1988.

In the spring of 1988, public dissatisfaction with the leadership of the ESSR became widespread. There was antagonism towards the head of the Estonian Communist Party, Karl Vaino, and his cronies, even within the party itself. This resulted in a power crisis in Estonia, which was solved in June 1988, when Vaino Väljas was appointed as the new head of the party. The people celebrated this victory at a mass demonstration (150,000 people) held on 17 June at the Song Festival Grounds, effectively pressuring the new leadership into defending Estonia's interests in Moscow. A week later, the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR gave the blue-black-white flag the status of the national flag. In September, the Popular Front organised yet another mass meeting, *Eestimaa Laul* (Estonian Song), with nearly 300,000 participants. This event also included a public call for the restoration of the Republic of Estonia. People were becoming more aware of history, greatly helped by the media, which was becoming free of the fetters of censorship.

At the same time, imperially-minded forces were also becoming organised, with the goal of maintaining the Soviet Union at any price. In the summer of 1988, the heads of the huge Soviet factories in Estonia formed the International Movement of Soviet Estonian Workers (*Eesti NSV Töötajate Internatsionaalne Liikumine, Interliikumine/IL*), and later in autumn that year, the Council of Working Collectives (*Töökollektiivide Ühendnõukogu, TKÜN*). The supporters of these organisations considered Estonia to be an integral part of the Soviet empire. There was harsh criticism about the Language Act and Citizenship Act that were being drafted at the time. These forces had the support of the more conservative elements of the Kremlin.

Declaration of Sovereignty

By the end of 1988, three significant movements had developed on the Estonian political landscape. The main idea of the more radical element of the national movement (ERSP, EMS) was the restoration of the Republic of Estonia, which was however completely barred by empirically-minded powers. In their opinion, everything should have remained unchanged. The Popular Front (and the national-communist part of the Estonian Communist Party) constituted the reformist direction of the national movement, who were then in favour of a union agreement and Estonia having a confederate status within the Soviet Union.

On 16 November 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR adopts the sovereignty declaration. Arnold Rüütel, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR, giving a speech
Photograph: E. Norman / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-151188

On 23 August 1989, on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Baltic Way was organised to put pressure on Moscow
Photograph: Harald Leppikson / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-139849

It was hoped that a union agreement would give Estonia the right to increased self-determination. However, Moscow was not interested in a union agreement at the time. The preservation of the empire was considered to be of utmost importance, which is also why there were attempts to change the existing pan-Soviet constitution. On 16 November 1988, the Estonian Supreme Soviet passed the Declaration of Sovereignty, which confirmed the supremacy of laws passed by the Supreme Soviet in the Estonian SSR over pan-Soviet laws and regulations. The relationship between the central authority of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Republic was supposed to be based on a union agreement. That was the first time that the issue of a self-governing Estonia was partially addressed in front of Moscow under Soviet rule.

With regard to the central government, the issue of apportioning legality to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact became increasingly important. To put pressure on Moscow, the popular fronts of the Baltic countries organised a never-before-seen act of protest on 23 August 1989: a continuous human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius. The Baltic Way (660 km, 2 million people) helped the international audience become aware of problems facing the Baltic countries. At the end of 1989, Moscow finally admitted the existence of the 1939 secret protocols, and these were declared to be null and void.

The transition period

The Language Act was passed in January 1989, giving the Estonian language the status of the official language. After some time, 24 February was declared Independence Day. The blue-black-white national flag was hoisted and flown from the tower of Tall Hermann. However, 1989 also saw the gap between various political powers widening. One of its characteristic features was the strengthening of the radical section of the national movement. On the restored Independence Day – 24 February 1989 – the movement of Estonian citizens' committees was started, with the main aim of restoring Estonian independence on the basis of legal continuity. To achieve this goal, all citizens of the Republic of Estonia were invited to become registered, and select a representative body – the Estonian Congress (*Eesti Kongress*). The elections were held in February 1990, and they also included 34,000 foreign representatives and Estonian expatriates. Although they were initially negative about the movement of Estonian citizens' committees, the Popular Front and the Estonian Communist Party also took part in the elections. The first session of the Estonian Congress was held in March 1990, and the adopted action plan included commencing negotiations with Western countries and the Soviet Union to achieve the end of the occupation and the restoration of the Republic of Estonia. The Estonian Committee was selected from among the members of the Congress, chaired

by Tunne Kelam. By that time, the society's support for the restoration of the republic had become dominant. Some of the key factors for this were the 1989 events in Eastern Europe, through which Moscow lost control over its former satellite states, and which showed that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was possible.

In the spring of 1990, the Estonian Communist Party split into two groups (the national communists and the imperially-minded), thereby finally losing its position of power in society. In March 1990, there were semi-democratic elections for the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR. All of the more important political powers took part in the elections. Arnold Rüütel was selected as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, having already been chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Estonia since 1983. The existing government, headed by Indrek Toome (in office 1988–90), stepped down. The Supreme Soviet appointed Edgar Savisaar as the new head of government. Basically, an institutionalised fight for the restoration of independence had begun at the start of 1990.

On 30 March 1990, the Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution on the national status of Estonia, declaring a transition period. This period was meant to lead to the restoration of the Republic of Estonia, with an Estonian constitutional government taking office. In May of the same year, the name of the Republic of Estonia was restored, and the symbols of the ESSR (the anthem, the flag, the coat of arms) were no longer used. Only the state's own laws were meant to be valid in the Republic of Estonia. However, contrary to people's hopes, there was no fruitful collaboration between the Estonian Committee, the Supreme Soviet and the government. At the same time, pressure from imperially-minded forces also increased. Moscow was threatening Estonia with an economic blockade, and the local Intermovement was organising political meetings and strikes.

The central government tried to force the three Baltic countries into a union agreement, at any cost. In January 1991, the army was deployed in Vilnius and Riga, and several civilian objects were attacked, resulting in casualties. Bloodshed was avoided in Estonia. Moscow did not give up its goals, and attempted

to keep the empire together by organising a referendum. A pre-emptive referendum was organised in March 1991 in the three Baltic states, with the majority of the population in favour of the restoration of independence. Approximately one-third of the foreigners in Estonia were also in favour of independence. The results of the referendum made it impossible to enter into a union agreement. The primary goal of the negotiations with the central authorities could only be the restoration of independence.

The concept of a Self-Managing Estonia

Gorbachev's accession to power also meant changes in the existing fiscal policy. However, there was no comprehensive breakthrough in the centrally planned economy. Economic reforms in Estonia were made within the framework of Soviet-wide restructuring. Nevertheless, Estonia was unique in that the economic programme of a Self-Managing Estonia (*Isemajandav Eesti, IME*) was developed independently of the official economic policy.

IME was based on a proposal published by four men in the press in September 1987, titled *Ettepanek: kogu Eesti NSV täielikule isemajandamisele* (Proposal: Self-Management for the whole of the Estonian Soviet Republic). One of the further goals of IME was to separate the Estonian economy from the Soviet economic complex, by creating a market economy environment with an independent budget and monetary system. IME also found wider acceptance in society, and laid the foundation for an extensive plan of economic reforms. Gradually, the principles of self-management were also acknowledged by the heads of the Estonian SSR of the time, and partially also by Moscow. In 1989, the Supreme Soviet passed the Principles of Economic Autonomy in the Estonian SSR. Several IME principles were implemented.

In short, these economic reforms were aimed at demolishing the existing command economy, and creating more favourable operating conditions for the private sector. However, ties to the Soviet economic system were a hindrance

Signatories of the idea of a Self-Governed Estonia (Isemajandav Eesti, IME) in 1987: Siim Kallas, Tiit Made, Mikk Titma, Edgar Savisaar.
Photograph: Harald Leppikson / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-235045

for the implementation of more comprehensive reforms. The partial disintegration of the previous economic model resulted in imbalance and economic recession, which also included price increases and inflation. Social tensions grew in society, as illustrated by food coupons, store checks, long queues and unpaid wages and pensions.

The restoration of independence

By 1991, the perestroika policy had exhausted itself. This policy did not meet its goal of updating the socialist form of society in the Soviet Union with moderate rearrangements, but instead, led to the collapse of an empire. The failed coup d'état that took place in Moscow in August 1991 provided a historical

opportunity for the small nations of the empire to restore their national independence. On 20 August 1991, based on the agreement of various political powers, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia adopted the "Resolution on the Independence of the Estonian State". The Constitutional Assembly (*Põhiseaduse Assamblee*) was convened by the same resolution, with the task of developing the basis of a new constitutional order for the Republic of Estonia, compatible with the European legal system, and setting it up for a referendum.

On the following day – 21 August – the independence of the Republic of Latvia was restored, and in August 1991, Lithuania again declared the restoration of its national independence. By then, the attempted coup had failed in

Ülo Nugis, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia, chairing the Supreme Council session on 20 August 1991, where the independence of the Republic of Estonia was restored. Photograph: Harald Leppikson
National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-285964

Moscow, and the situation became normal again in Estonia and the other Baltic states. The coup d'état had completely transformed the power relationships in Moscow. The failure of the putsch considerably accelerated the dissolution process of the Soviet Union, which was finalised in December 1991.

The restoration of the independence of the Baltic states was internationally acknowledged shortly thereafter. Iceland was the first state to acknowledge Estonia's independence. On 6 September 1991, the State Council of the Soviet Union also acknowledged the independence of the three Baltic states. In mid-September, Estonia and the other Baltic states were accepted into the United Nations (UN). Together with the other Baltic states, Estonia was again present on the world map as an independent and sovereign state. For the Baltic states who had restored their independence, a new stage had begun – further integration with the economic, political and military structures of Europe.

THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA TODAY

Building a constitutional public order

After Estonia's independence had been restored, the work of building a constitutional state authority began – establishing a democratic public order. The draft for the new constitution was finished by the Constitutional Assembly by the end of 1991, and was then followed by a public discussion. At the referendum held on 28 June 1992, the new constitution was widely approved. The constitution stipulated that the state must "guarantee the preservation of the Estonian people, the Estonian language, and the Estonian culture through the ages".

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in September 1992. In the first round of the presidential elections, no candidate received more than half of the people's votes. That is why the *Riigikogu* had to choose the next head of state from among the two candidates who received the most votes. On 5 October 1992, Lennar Meri was elected as the first President of the newly independent Republic of Estonia in the *Riigikogu*. The parliamentary election results meant that the representatives of 9 electoral alliances won seats in the *Riigikogu*, with the largest – Pro Patria – establishing a coalition government with the Estonian National Independence Party (*Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei*, *ERSP*) and the electoral alliance Moderates (*Mõõdukad*). Mart Laar, the leader of Pro Patria, became the head of the government, implementing radical reforms and adopting a highly liberal fiscal policy (shock therapy).

The 1992 elections laid the foundation for a new political landscape, with non-citizens or the Communist Party no longer having a say in its development. Having experienced a one-party system for so long, it was quite complicated to build a Western-style multi-party system. The connection between the parties and society was weak because often a new political power was established not based on a common interest, but rather, around a strong leader. Hence, the party

Heinrich Mark, the last Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia's government-in-exile giving a speech at the parliament of the Republic of Estonia on 8 October 1992, announcing the end of his government

National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-015

landscape of the new society was rather unsettled, but in the end, it nevertheless functioned and supported the necessary rearrangements. After the *Riigikogu* elections, the Congress of Estonia and the government-in-exile were dissolved. The Supreme Court of Estonia started working in the spring of 1993. Great emphasis was placed on the foundation of the defence forces, border guard and police.

To conclusively secure the country's independence, it was essential that the occupying army leave and that the military bases in Estonia (including the naval bases in Tallinn and Paldiski) be liquidated. In September 1992, there were roughly 40,000 soldiers of the Russian Army on Estonian territory, who were in possession of approximately 2% of the country's territory. The deportation of foreign military forces was supported by international organisations and the wider public. Deporting the army was one of the core topics of the negotiations between Estonia and Russia, which were initially unproductive. A breakthrough in the negotiations was achieved only in July 1994, during the summit between presidents Boris Yeltsin and Lennart Meri, organised with the support of Western countries. At this meeting, the heads of state signed an agreement according to which foreign military forces left Estonia on 31 August 1994. The Estonian government offered the military pensioners who stayed the opportunity to apply for a residence permit. These agreements were unequivocally approved on the international arena, strengthening Estonia's international position, although they entailed incisive political discussion at the national level. As far as the development of a self-governing Estonia was concerned, the departure of foreign military forces was kind of a final marker in the process of restoring independence.

The transition from a command to a market economy

The restoration of independence created the political and economic prerequisites for a transition from the former Soviet command economy to a contemporary market economy. After the restoration of independence, the economic

situation in Estonia was extremely complicated (rapid increases in the cost of living, food stamp system, etc), but against all odds, Estonia survived the crisis successfully. The economic reform was mainly based on the monetary reform carried out in June 1992, adopting kroons as the currency of Estonia. The value of the Eesti kroon (EEK) was pegged to the German mark (1 mark = 8 kroons). In 1999, the euro was used for the exchange rate (1 Euro = 15.6466 kroons), and the European Union's common currency, the euro, was adopted on 1 January 2011.

The monetary reform separated Estonia from the rouble zone, enabling the implementation of fiscal policies focused on Estonia. The Estonian economy opened up towards the West, and its economic connection with Europe became an inevitable process. The free trade agreement with the European Union entered into force in 1995. Privatisation and the development of banking played an important role in the transition to a market economy. Generally speaking, privatisation was successful, and by 1999, the majority of the large companies had been privatised. The privatisation of land was slower and more painful. The completion of the ownership reform and the restructuring of the former Soviet-style large-scale agriculture into a farm-based system thoroughly changed Estonia's economic environment. In economy, the relative importance of small enterprises and the private sector increased, and foreign investments also grew. The structure of the economy changed: the service sector became the most important, while the relative importance of industry and agriculture decreased. Integration with the European economy resulted in the rapid development of banking, IT and several other fields. The Tiigrihüpe (Tiger's Leap) programme began in 1996, which laid the foundation for the widespread use of computers and the internet. Computers and the internet were soon widely available and spreading quickly in administration, banking, all kinds of public services, and the media. Already by the late 1990s, the IT development level of Estonia was high. The standard of living improved. Between 1995 and 2008, the gross domestic product (GDP) of Estonia grew 3.6 times – reaching 16.1

billion euros – and amounting to 17,000 euros per inhabitant (i.e. 68% of the EU average).

The processes involved in the transition to the market economy, particularly the restructuring of agriculture, were painful and sometimes resulted in serious setbacks. In relation to economic success, there is now greater financial disparity in society, with the underdevelopment of rural areas and the emigration of working age population being particularly problematic.

Estonia's rapid economic growth, which was mainly based on foreign investments, halted due to the global financial crisis in 2009. As a consequence of the crisis, the country's GDP decreased rapidly, the standard of living became lower, and the unemployment rate increased. Various European Structural Funds, the small government debt, and a balanced budget and savings policy all played an important role in stabilising the economic situation, preventing larger economic upheavals and making it possible to meet the criteria for joining the European Economic and Monetary Union. The adoption of the European single currency also had a favourable effect on the economy. In 2015, the GDP of Estonia was 20.2 billion euros, the majority of which comprised of the service sector (trade, transport, accommodation, catering, financial exchange etc) – 70%, followed by industry and construction – 27%, and agriculture (farming, forestry, fishing) – 3%. Since the crisis, the economy has been at a standstill rather than recovering completely, and the negligible economic growth has not met society's expectations.

The development of a civic society

One of the important factors in securing a self-governing state is the construction of a civic society. That has not been an easy task because in Soviet society, the initiative of individuals and their sense of responsibility were pushed to the background. The quick implementation of a market economy highlighted entrepreneurship, valuing personal gain, and partially overshadowing social

responsibility. Where previously society was relatively egalitarian, it now became quickly stratified, valuing consumerism. It only took a few years for the earlier deficit of consumer goods to be replaced by a consumer society, as evidenced by large shopping centres. Cheaper prices and lower taxes attracted foreigners to enjoy life in Tallinn. Meanwhile, the world opened up for Estonians, enabling them to travel and to study abroad. There were also more personal and regional contacts with the rest of the world, particularly with Finland and other Nordic countries involving communication through churches, schools, cultural clubs and similar institutions. This laid the foundation for a number of contact networks, whose role in the creation of a civil society cannot be underestimated.

The laws of the Republic of Estonia do not permit discrimination against people due to their ethnicity, race, gender, profession, financial or social status, religion or cultural background. All people have the right to maintain their ethnic or religious characteristics. The National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act, which was passed in 1993, entitles national minorities (with more than 3,000 representatives) to form and support national organisations in order to maintain their culture, religious or linguistic identity. A similar law was also valid in Estonia during the period 1924–1940. The Republic of Estonia has also joined international treaties on human rights and humanitarian law. However, there are many people living in Estonia who immigrated here during the Soviet era, and who do not have the citizenship of the Republic of Estonia.

With the Aliens Act, which was passed in the summer of 1993, a legal and administrative mechanism was established whereby the people who had immigrated to Estonia during the Soviet era were temporarily given the status of an alien. This was a radical legal step, which strengthened the sense for Estonians of having their own state, and their desire to continue with reforms. In addition, the relationship between non-citizens and the Republic of Estonia is regulated by the Citizenship Act, passed in 1995 and partially amended in December 1998.

In collaboration with the UN Development Programme and the Nordic countries, a national integration programme for non-Estonians was developed for the period 1997–2006. By the second half of the 1990s, the stabilisation of the economic situation combined with a more persevering integration policy resulted in a calmer situation regarding the relationship between the different ethnic nationalities. However, there have been large upheavals even in this matter. In April 2007, some groups in the Russian community in Estonia organised extensive riots in Tallinn, due to the removal of a monument for Soviet soldiers (the "Bronze Soldier") that was relocated from Tõnismägi. To this day the issue of stateless people remains unresolved at the national level. By the beginning of 2012, the population of Estonia included 1,102,618 citizens of the Republic of Estonia and 105,605 foreign citizens (incl. 90,510 citizens of the Russian Federation), and also 85,961 people with unspecified citizenship.

Developments in domestic policy

The government of Mart Laar appointed in 1992 remained in power until November 1994, when it was replaced by an interim government headed by Andres Tarand, until regular elections could be held. During the parliamentary elections of March 1995, the most votes were won by a five-party electoral alliance – the Coalition Party & Rural People's Union (*Koonderakonna ja Maarahva Ühendus, KMÜ*) – who formed a coalition government with the Centre Party. Tiit Vähi became the Prime Minister. This coalition government collapsed in the autumn of 1995. In November 1995, Vähi's new government took office, formed by KMÜ and the Reform Party. Discord in the coalition led to the Reform Party leaving government, and its composition being restructured in December 1996. The Development Party (*Arengupartei*) was included in the government as a new political force, and the coalition majority government became a coalition minority government.

The PM of the Republic of Estonia, Mart Laar (on the right), and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at the opening of the embassy of the United Kingdom in Tallinn on 29 June 1999
National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-173503

In March 1997, Vähi resigned from his position as Prime Minister, and the new minority government was formed by Mart Siimann, on the basis of the previous government coalition. During the regular elections of 1999, an electoral alliance was formed by Pro Patria, the Reform Party and the Moderates. Laar again became the Prime Minister of a majority government. In late 2002, Laar stepped down due to conflicts within the coalition. After that, the government was formed by Siim Kallas, who included the Estonian Reform Party and the Estonian Centre Party. The new coalition remained in power until regular elections in spring 2003. These elections were successful for the Estonian Centre Party, and a new political power, Res Publica, whose leader – Juhan

The President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, 2016
Photograph: Rene Riisalu / The Office of the President of Estonia

Parts – became Prime Minister. In addition to Res Publica, the coalition also included the People's Union of Estonia (*Rahvaliit*) and the Reform Party.

This government stayed in office until April 2005, when a joint government of the Reform Party and the Centre Party was established, with Andrus Ansip becoming the Prime Minister. After the 2007 elections, Ansip kept his office as Prime Minister, and the government was formed by the Reform Party, Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (*Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit, IRL*) and the Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, SDE*). The latter left the government in 2009, and a minority government remained in power. After the 2011 parliamentary elections, the government was formed by the Reform Party and IRL. From the spring of 2014, the Reform Party's coalition partner became the SDE, with Taavi Rõivas rising to the position of Prime Minister. He continued as the head of the government with the same partners after the 2015 parliamentary elections, until November 2016 when the coalition collapsed. The leader of the Centre Party, Jüri Ratas, became the new head of the government, also including SDE and IRL in the coalition. Although a long-standing leader in government, the Reform Party was left in opposition.

In the 1996 presidential elections, Lennart Meri was again selected as the President of the Republic of Estonia, despite the acrimonious atmosphere in Estonia's political sphere. Arnold Rüütel became President after the subsequent presidential elections in 2001; he was followed by Toomas Hendrik Ilves in 2006, who enjoyed a second term starting in 2011. After Ilves' final term in office came to an end, Kersti Kaljulaid became the new President of the Republic of Estonia in autumn 2016.

Foreign and defence policy

The foreign policy of the newly independent Republic of Estonia was orientated towards the West from the very beginning, with the goal of becoming as closely connected with Europe as possible. Due to Estonia's geopolitical position, a more

The Vice President of the USA, Al Gore (on the right) being received by the President of the Republic of Estonia, Lennart Meri, on 13 March 1995
Photograph: Toomas Volmer / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-174775

secure guarantee of a self-governing state was possible through accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union. The accession process towards that goal developed successfully, thanks to the stability of Estonia's domestic policy and the country's successful fiscal policy. In 1994, Estonia became a full member of the Council of Europe, and 1998 saw the start of accession negotiations with the European Union. The negotiations were successful, and the Republic of Estonia has been a full member of the European Union since 1 May 2004. Since 1999, Estonian citizens no longer required visas to travel to Schengen countries; Estonia joined the system in 2007.

Defence cooperation with NATO and also with neutral countries strengthened Estonia's defence forces, thereby also gradually creating the practical

The departing of the Russian troops from Estonia in 1994 was important in securing the independence of the Republic of Estonia
Photograph: Albert Truuväärt / National Archives of Estonia, EFA.0-267259

prerequisites for joining the Western European defence structures. One of the more important goals was joining NATO, and to that end the *Riigikogu* adopted several legislative acts. In 2000, the new Military Service Act was adopted. Integration into European military structures was also successful – as of March 2004, Estonia became a member of NATO. Membership in NATO is a guarantee of military deterrence and collective defence. Since 1995, the Republic of Estonia has participated in numerous UN, NATO and EU operations in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Israel and Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Mali, thus fulfilling its duty for the security of Europe, and the world.

The foreign policy of the Republic of Estonia places great importance on its relationships with the Nordic countries and the other Baltic countries – Latvia and Lithuania. There has been closer collaboration between the defence forces, the police and the border guard from these countries. In September 1994, the countries signed an agreement for the creation of a joint Baltic peacekeeping battalion (BALTBAT), and in autumn 1999, the Baltic Defence College was opened in Tartu, with its first graduates completing their studies in summer 2000. Estonia is interested in the stability of the political and economic

The building of Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia), 2016
Photograph: Kaupo Kalda / Chancellery of the Riigikogu

development of the Baltic Sea region. Issues related to the sea border have been regulated with Finland and Latvia.

Relations with Russia continue to be one of the key elements of Estonian foreign policy. The relationship between Estonia and Russia is complicated mainly due to a lack of agreements between the two countries, with the comprehensively unresolved border issue being a particularly problematic topic. Even now, Russia has not recognised the Treaty of Tartu, or the occupation of 1940. Russia claims that it should have a special status regarding relations with former Soviet republics; there are also constant accusations of breaches of the human rights of local Russians, and other similar demands. Moscow's aggression in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea resulted in the United States of America, the European Union, and several additional countries imposing economic sanctions against Russia. The relationship between Estonia and Russia has also been strained due to conflicting interpretations of history, particularly the events of World War II. Russia has not admitted to the crimes committed under Communism, and tries to present Estonia and the other Baltic countries as societies that support "the rebirth of fascism" in order to tilt international opinion in Russia's favour.

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In 2017, Estonia will confront a great international challenge: it will hold the presidency of the Council of the EU at a time when Europe and the entire world is facing a migrant crisis, terrorism, Brexit, the consequences of the Syrian civil war and many other external issues and security problems. The world is changing, but in the words of Lennart Meri, the first President of the Republic of Estonia since the restoration of independence: "Being small, Estonia is simultaneously an old country and a young state. The history of the Estonian people goes back over fifty centuries, while the Republic of Estonia goes back

to 1918. We can look back at repeated attempts to break or deny the continuity of the Republic of Estonia, but not a single one of these attempts has been successful. From this, we can and must conclude that we can move toward the future with confidence".

The Republic of Estonia, 2016

Regio 2017

CHRONOLOGY

02.03.1917	February Revolution reaches Estonia, civil unrest in Tallinn
30.03.1917	Provisional Government issues a regulation on the governance of Estonia ("Autonomy Act")
01.07.1917	Provincial Assembly convenes
25.10.1917	Bolsheviks seize power in Tallinn
15.11.1917	Provincial Assembly declares itself to be the highest power in Estonia
19.02.1918	Estonian Salvation Committee is formed in Tallinn
23.02.1918	Declaration of Independence is read to the public for the first time in Pärnu
24.02.1918	Estonian Provisional Government is formed in Tallinn
04.03.1918	Narva is seized, and German occupation is established in the entire country of Estonia
21.11.1918	Germans hand over the power to the Estonian Provisional Government
28.11.1918	Battle for Narva marks the beginning of the Estonian War of Independence
23.04.1919	Estonian Constituent Assembly assembles
23.06.1919	Estonian troops occupy Cēsis, Victory Day celebrates the victory over the Landeswehr

10.10.1919	Constituent Assembly passes Land Act, which becomes the basis of a radical land reform
02.02.1920	Peace Treaty between Estonia and Russia is signed in Tartu
15.06.1920	Constituent Assembly approves the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia
26.01.1921	High Council of the Triple Entente decides to acknowledge the Republic of Estonia *de jure*
22.09.1921	Estonia is accepted into the League of Nations
01.12.1924	attempted Communist coup in Tallinn
12.02.1925	*Riigikogu* passes the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act
16.10.1933	new constitution, drafted by the Vaps' movement, is approved by a referendum
12.03.1934	Konstantin Päts and Johan Laidoner carry out a coup d'état
01.01.1938	new authoritarian constitution enters into force, having been drafted in the National Assembly
24.04.1938	parliament elects Konstantin Päts as the President of the Republic of Estonia
23.08.1939	the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocol is signed in Moscow
28.09.1939	Estonia is forced by the Soviet Union to sign an agreement to allow Soviet military bases in Estonia

17.06.1940	Red Army occupies Estonia
14.06.1941	first mass deportation in the Baltic countries
22.06.1941	war breaks out between the Soviet Union and Germany
28.08.1941	German forces occupy Tallinn
02.02.1944	Red Army crosses the Narva River, the battles for Narva commence
18.09.1944	Jüri Uluots appoints the Government of the Republic of Estonia, to restore self-governance
22.09.1944	Red Army captures Tallinn
30.10.1944	Kremlin passes the decision for the Sovietisation of Estonia
06.12.1944	International Estonian Writers Union is founded in Stockholm
21.05.1947	Kremlin passes a decision for establishing *kolkhozy* on a massive scale
27.–29.06.1947	first Soviet-era song festival held in Tallinn
25.03.1949	joint mass deportation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
21.–26.03.1950	Central Committee of the Estonian Communist (Bolshevist) Party 8th plenum is held in Tallinn, resulting in the replacement of the previous administration of the ESSR, and widespread repressions
26.09.1950	rural districts are established to replace counties in the ESSR, rural municipalities are abolished

08.06.1951	first Estonian-language radio programme is broadcast on the Voice of America
12.01.1953	first members of the Republic of Estonia's government-in-exile take office in Oslo
29.04.1954	US Senate passes a resolution affirming that it does not acknowledge the occupation of the Baltic countries
15.01.1959	first Soviet-era census in Estonia
11.–14.03.1964	Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, President of Finland, visits Estonia
09.06.1965	Tallinn-Helsinki ferry route, disrupted in 1940, is restored
28.–29.06.1969	jubilee song festival held in Tallinn
18.10.1970	joint address of Baltic refugees to the UN
20.06.1975	Free Europe and Liberty radio stations start broadcasting Estonian-language programmes
23.08.1979	Baltic Appeal, a joint memorandum of the Baltic freedom fighters to the UN
20.–30.07.1980	sailing regatta of the Moscow Olympic Games is held in Tallinn
01.10.1980	student unrest in Tallinn targets Russification policy
28.10.1980	open letter by 40 intellectuals against the Russification policy
15.–19.09.1982	celebrating the 350th anniversary of the University of Tartu

19.–21.02.1987	Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, visits Estonia
23.08.1987	Hirvepark meeting – the first public political demonstration in Estonia, which demanded the disclosure of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and its secret protocols
16.11.1988	Supreme Soviet of the ESSR adopts the Declaration of Sovereignty
24.02.1989	blue-black-white flag hoisted at the Tall Hermann tower
23.08.1989	Baltic Way – on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Popular Fronts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania organise a protest to apply pressure on Moscow
24.12.1989	Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union declares the secret protocols of the MRP to be null and void
24.02.1990	elections of the Congress of Estonia
30.03.1990	Supreme Soviet of the ESSR passes the decision "On the Independence of the Estonian State", declaring a transition period
08.05.1990	the name "Republic of Estonia" is adopted to replace the "ESSR"
20.08.1991	the independence of the Republic of Estonia is restored
17.09.1991	Republic of Estonia becomes a member of the UN

20.06.1992	monetary reform, adopting Estonia's own currency – the Estonian kroon
28.06.1992	Constitution of the Republic of Estonia approved by a referendum
20.09.1992	first presidential and parliamentary elections
05.10.1992	Lennart Meri, the first President of the restored Republic of Estonia takes office, the Estonian government-in-exile ceases to operate
31.08.1994	Soviet military forces depart Estonia
20.09.1996	Lennart Meri is elected President of the Republic of Estonia for a second term
16.08.1999	Baltic Defence College opens in Tartu
13.11.1999	Estonia becomes a member of the World Trade Organisation
12.05.2001	Estonia wins the 46th Eurovision Song Contest in Copenhagen
21.09.2001	Arnold Rüütel is elected as President of the Republic of Estonia
14.09.2003	at a referendum, 67% of the voters are in favour of Estonia's accession to the EU
29.03.2004	Republic of Estonia becomes a member of NATO
01.05.2004	Republic of Estonia becomes a member of the European Union

17.02.2006	KUMU, the new building of the Art Museum of Estonia is opened in Kadriorg, Tallinn
23.09.2006	Toomas Hendrik Ilves is elected as President of the Republic of Estonia
26.–27.04.2007	street riots by Russian youths in Tallinn
01.01.2011	the euro is adopted in Estonia
29.08.2011	Toomas Hendrik Ilves is re-elected as President of the Republic of Estonia
29.09.2016	the new building of the Estonian National Museum is opened in Tartu
10.10.2016	Kersti Kaljulaid is elected as President of the Republic of Estonia

ESTONIA: POPULATION AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION 1897–1941

Year	1897	1922	1934	1941
Population	958,351	1,107,059	1,126,413	999,884
Estonians	90.6%	87.7%	88.2%	90.8%
Russians	4.0%	8.2%	8.2%	7.3%
Germans	3.5%	1.7%	1.5%	...
Swedes	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Jews	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Other	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%	0.8%

ESTONIA: POPULATION AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION 1959–1989

Year	1959	1970	1979	1989
Population	1,196,791	1,356,079	1,464,476	1,565,662
Estonians	74.6%	68.2%	64.7%	61.5%
Russians	20.1%	24.7%	27.9%	30.3%
Germans	0.1%	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%
Jews	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Latvians	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Finns	1.4%	1.4%	1.2%	1.1%
Ukrainians	1.3%	2.1%	2.5%	3.1%
Belarusians	0.9%	1.4%	1.6%	1.7%
Other	0.9%	1.0%	1.2%	1.6%

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HISTORY OF ESTONIA
1918–2017

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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