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Social conditions in Estonia after the Second World War

Abstract

Estonia was forced to become an integral part of the USSR already in 1940. The aim of this paper to reconstruct the main stages of the Sovietization process in the field of economic, political and social life of Estonia. The examination covers the period from the 1940s to the 1980s which enables to explore the long-term consequences of the Sovietization.

Keywords: Estonia, World WAR II, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Sovietization, resistance

This article is an overview of the social conditions in Estonia after World War II. I focus on the introduction of the Soviet system in Estonia under Stalin's rule in the period from 1945 to 1953. The article covers the consolidation of the system in administration, politics, the economy, culture and everyday life, including who implemented the changes, how the new social system affected the lives of the Estonian people, and attitudes towards the reform. In the epilogue, I summarise the social developments in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) from the 1960s to the 1980s.

This article is based on information obtained from Finnish and Estonian academic research and articles. The information has been critically evaluated and cross-checked. The article summarises prior research and developments identified in prior studies and draws conclusions based on these. My most important source is Seppo Zetterberg's *Viron historia ('A history of Estonia')*, published in 2007. The book is based on the latest research on Estonia and held in high esteem by the Finnish and Estonian academic communities. My main sourcebook for comparison is Toivo U. Raun's *Viron historia* (1989; first published in English as *Estonia and the Estonians* in 1987, second edition published in English in 2001). The book provides a good overview of the era of Soviet rule in Estonia, particularly the introduction of the Soviet system, and is partly based on primary sources. Raun discusses the post-Second World War resistance movement known as the 'Forest Brothers', the deportations of Estonians, agricultural collectivisation and the emergence of active dissent. Raun did not adopt a judgemental or defensive approach. He focused on reconstructing an era about which no real basic research had yet been conducted.

The status of Estonia during and after the Second World War

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939) placed Estonia into the USSR's sphere of interest. The USSR established a puppet government in Estonia and eventually officially declared the country a Soviet Socialist Republic. Estonia was annexed to the

USSR on 6 August 1940. This marked the beginning of social Sovietisation and the elimination of the Estonian social elite. When Germany occupied Estonia in 1941, the locals were attributed nearly second class status in their own country. Germany received thanks for liberating Estonia from under the boot of Soviet oppression. Estonians expected and hoped that Germany would then restore their country's independence. This goal did not suit the Germans' plans, however. They meant to germanise Estonia and annex it to Greater Germany. However, the Soviet system was reintroduced in the Estonian SSR in 1944 after the Red Army regained the territory. The Western superpowers were resigned to the Soviet Union's uncompromising interpretation of the Baltic states as 'Soviet Empire' territory.¹

The USSR wanted to establish its position in Estonia as quickly as possible. To this end, it arranged a reliable workforce that served the communist party and the various bodies of administration. The source for this workforce were Russian Estonians who had returned to the Estonian SSR. Estonians who had fled the German occupation to the USSR and then returned to Estonia were also utilised as tools for Soviet administration. People loyal to the Soviet system were given key government offices and industrial and agricultural positions. This served to establish Soviet party nomenclature in Estonia: certain posts were defined as preferential and were filled according to rank in the communist party.²

State security agencies played a key role in the Sovietisation of Estonia. Internal security fell under the responsibility of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). Both agencies became ministries in 1946 and committed extreme actions. They resorted to all measures to secure the Soviet system, even oppression, and controlled all areas of life. Approximately 10,000 people were arrested for 'anti-Sovietism' in the period from 1944 to 1945. By 1953, 25,000 to 30,000 people had been taken into custody or to forced labour camps. A considerable number of the arrests and deportations were implemented in connection with the agricultural collectivisation process. The majority of the deported population were women and children. Harsh and primitive conditions contributed to considerable mortality rates. An estimated 11,000 people never returned to Estonia.³

¹ RAUN, Toivo U.: *Viron historia*. Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, Keuruu, 1989. 187-211. In detail ZETTERBERG, Seppo: *Viron historia*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 118, Hämeenlinna, 2007. 605-663. ROIKO-JOKELA, Heikki: *Unelma vapaudesta. Virolaisten pako Saksan sarron alta Suomeen. Elämää Suomessa. Salamatkustusta Ruotsiin. Luovutuksia Neuvostoliittoon noin 1942-1955*. Kopijyvä Oy, Jyväskylä, 2001. 269-270. ALENIUS, Kari: *Viron, Latvian ja Liettuan historia*. Atena Kustannus Oy, Jyväskylä, 2000. 236-250. LAURISTIM, Marju – VIHALEMM, Peeter – RUUTSOO, Rein: *Viron vapauden tuulet*. Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy, Jyväskylä, 1989. 39-63.

² RAUN (1989): 212. ZETTERBERG (2007): 663-664. ALENIUS (2000): 251. PENNAR, Jaan: *Soviet Nationality Policy and the Estonian Communist Elite*. IN: PARMING, Tõnu – JÄRVESOO, Elmar (Eds.): *A Case Study of a Soviet Republic: The Estonian SSR*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1978. 114-115, 118, 121. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 65-66, 78.

³ RAUN (1989): 215, 223. ZETTERBERG (2007): 664. According to some sources up to 80,000 people were taken to the prison and forced labor camps. RAUN (1989): 223. ALENIUS (2000): 251-252. PURRE, Arnold: *Teine punane okupatsioon Eestis: Aastad 1944–1950*. IN: *Eesti saatusaastad 1945-1960*, I-VI.

National territory and regional administration

The territory of the Estonian SSR was slightly smaller than that of the former Republic of Estonia, because five percent of the former territory was ceded to other Soviet Republics. Such cessions were formally instigated by the regional administrative bodies of the areas in question and were implemented '*at the request of the residents*'. In reality, Moscow organised the transfers. For example, approximately 75% of the region of Petseri County, located in South-Eastern Estonia, was ceded to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1944. The area was annexed to the new Pskov *oblast*. Likewise, the eastern sections of the Narva region were annexed to the Leningrad *oblast*. As a result of the cessions of territory, approximately 75,000 Estonians '*changed*' nationality⁴.

Regional administration was also modified and harmonised in accordance with the Soviet model. In rural administration, the number of municipal village councils was first increased (1945). Villages, however, were subsequently abolished. The number of counties (administrative units from the republic era) was increased by three in the late 1940s. Towards the end of Stalin's rule, in 1950, the counties were divided into 39 administrative units, or *raions*, in accordance with the Soviet model. The biggest Estonian cities – Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, Kohtla-Järve and Pärnu – were placed under the direct control of the USSR Council of Ministers.⁵ The regional administration reform was problematic in terms of Estonian identity in the sense that the *raions* were established purely on the basis of the Soviet administration's plans, with no regard for the historical traditions or geographic starting points of the regions. The reform shattered local unity and identity.⁶

State system and politics

The communist party was the key exerciser of power in the Soviet Union and the Estonian SSR. The mother party in Moscow strictly controlled the Communist Party of Estonia, or *Eestimaa Kommunistlik (bolsevike) Partei*. It did not permit national or unprompted activities.⁷

The communist party reinforced its position in the Estonian SSR directly after World War II and saw a rapid increase in members. However, the percentage of native Estonian party members simultaneously radically decreased. The party had additionally lost members in the war, including executive members. Moscow began recruiting new members partly because it was suspicious of native Estonians. We can also reasonably presume that the Estonians felt no desire to

EMP, Stockholm, 1963-1972. II. 10-11. PURRE, Arnold: *Teine punane okupatsioon Eestis: Aastad 1952-1964*. IN: *Eesti saatusaastad 1945-1960*, I-VI. EMP, Stockholm, 1963-1972. III. 8-9.

⁴ ZETTERBERG (2007): 665.

⁵ Ibid, 666.

⁶ Ibid, 666.

⁷ Ibid, 666.

contribute to the entrenching of the Soviet system in their homeland. A considerable percentage of the new Estonian members in the Communist Party of Estonia were so-called Russian Estonians who had been born in Estonia but had lived practically their entire lives in the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s, the majority of the party members were already either Russian Estonian or Russian. This helped to reinforce Soviet thinking and administration in the Estonian SSR.⁸

Karl Säre, a leading member of the Communist Party of Estonia, had ended up in the hands of the Germans in the turmoil of war. The Estonian Nikolai Karotamm was appointed First Secretary of the Central Committee in his place in 1944. The Russian Sergei Sazonov was appointed Second Secretary. In the early 1950s, the party carried out extensive purges, the effects of which were substantially felt in the affairs of the state and society at large in the Estonian SSR. Karotamm was replaced by Ivan Käbin during the purges. The Communist Party of Estonia was simultaneously placed under the strict control of Moscow⁹ and remained in the command of non – Estonians for a long time. In practice, ‘non – Estonian’ also covered Russian Estonians who had no experience or knowledge of national opinions or culture. The party consequently remained distant from the general public. It implemented decisions and solutions on Moscow’s behalf and served as a tool for Sovietisation.¹⁰

The activities implemented by Moscow in Estonia were extremely propagandistic. They were intended to quickly Sovietise the new Estonian SSR, including commensurate agitation. The fight against bourgeois nationalism began in autumn 1944. The state saw unwanted nationalist activity everywhere. Sovietisation peaked towards the end of the decade, starting in spring 1949 when numerous Estonians holding key positions were replaced with people who were more loyal to the USSR. The people who were dismissed included Karotamm, Nigol Andresen (Deputy of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet), Boris Kumm (Minister for Security), Johannes Semper (President of the Estonian Writers’ Union) and Hans Kruus (President of the Academy of Sciences).¹¹

The class struggle grew more intense. Some 400 people were dismissed from their posts and offices. Many ‘enemies of the state’ were also arrested and imprisoned, but they were released after a few years. By the 1951 Congress of the Communist Party, the Bureau of the Central Committee had been all but completely reformed.¹²

Legislative power and execution of party decisions

The Council of People’s Commissars was founded in 1940 to execute the decisions of the communist party. The People’s Commissariat for External Affairs

⁸ RAUN (1989): 212-213. PENNAR (1978): 114-115, 118, 121.

⁹ RAUN (1989): 213-214. MISIUNAS, Romuald J. –TAAGEPERA, Rein: *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1980*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983. 74, 79-80. PURRE (1963–1972): II. 53-54, 59-60. PURRE (1963-1972): III. 8-9.

¹⁰ ZETTERBERG (2007): 666-667.

¹¹ Ibid, 667–669.

¹² Ibid, 670.

and the People's Commissariat of Defence were founded in 1946, but remained of secondary practical importance. The party, and above all Moscow, kept everything under tight control. For example, the completely Estonian Arnold Veimer had served as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars since 1944, but became the victim of 'systematic persecution' by party leader Ivan Käbin and was dismissed from office in 1951. The Russian Estonian Aleksei Müürisepp was appointed Chairman in his place. Veimer was not alone in being cast aside: by 1952, the Council of Ministers did not have a single completely Estonian member while the majority of the members had still been fully Estonian in autumn 1944.¹³

The Supreme Soviet was ostensibly in charge of legislation and of approving the annual budgets in the Estonian SSR. The reality was different, however. The Supreme Soviet was entirely subordinate to Moscow and only had the right to validate decisions made by the party. A prime example of the significance of the Supreme Soviet were the first Supreme Soviet elections held in 1947. The Central Committee of the Communist Party had published candidate lists comprising a single candidate. According to Zetterberg, people grimly concluded that they had only the choice between communists and Siberia.¹⁴

The Forest Brothers

Soviet action against nationalist Estonians provoked a strong reaction. Not everyone was content to stand aside and watch. Some took the path of active resistance, the guerrilla movement. Some of the Estonians who had served in the German army stayed in Estonia and hid in the forests in fear of Soviet troops. They were later joined by people escaping mobilisations and deportation. The group became jointly known as the 'Forest Brothers' and comprised an estimated 5,000 to 30,000 people. The Forest Brothers continued the fight for Estonia. They obtained their arms from the Germans or by stealing them from USSR troops. Local farmers provisioned them with food and maintenance. However, they were organised only on a local scale and did not unify their forces sufficiently.¹⁵

The Forest Brothers were most active in the counties of Virumaa, Pärnumaa and Võrumaa. They attacked garrisons, security authorities, prisoner and soldier convoys and the communists. They aimed to maintain and promote the Estonian national and fighting spirit against the Russians. The guerrilla fighters nevertheless knew they did not stand a chance at liberating Estonia. They were hoping for an intervention by the Western Allies to restore independence in Estonia.¹⁶

Casualties and exhaustion, combined with agricultural collectivisation, gradually reduced guerrilla numbers and the movement was discontinued in the

¹³ZETTERBERG, (2007): 670.

¹⁴Ibid, 670-671.

¹⁵Ibid, 671. LAAR, Mart: *Metsavennad*. AS Helmet Raja & Co, Tallinn, 1993. passim. LAURISTIN – VIHALEM – RUUTSOO (1989): 64, 66.

¹⁶ZETTERBERG (2007): 672. LAAR (1993): passim. LAURISTIN – VIHALEM – RUUTSOO (1989): 66.

mid – 1950s. The general amnesty granted in 1955 contributed to the discontinuation.¹⁷

Industry and agriculture

The battles fought in Estonian territory, including bombings, led to the collapse of national production. The production capacity of the national industry fell nearly by half, and considerably more in some branches. Reconstruction and the revival of production were key priorities after the war. The Soviet authorities focused on developing heavy industry in particular.¹⁸

Moscow saw the Estonian SSR as part of the community of Soviet nations and required the close connection of the country to the USSR system. Union – wide plans failed to account for local needs and implemented planned economy purely on the basis of Moscow’s specific interests. Production in the Estonian SSR was integrated into the planned economy of the USSR. Moscow instructed and controlled all aspects of production. Failing to meet set production goals was unacceptable. Not meeting specified standards constituted sabotage at the worst and was severely punished.¹⁹

Estonia had suffered considerable damage in World War II. Countless arrests and deportations took place under Stalin’s rule, causing an actual labour shortage. The labour problem grew more pronounced particularly during the gradual revival of heavy industry. Soviet authorities solved the problem by importing workforce from the other republics. For instance, in the period from 1945 to 1947, an overall 180,000 non – Estonians entered the Estonian SSR. This significantly changed the local demographic structure. To further ease the labour problem, the Soviet authorities also sent German war prisoners to the Estonian SSR to help with the reconstruction.²⁰

The Soviet authorities had particularly high expectations concerning the relaunch of the oil shale industry. Large amounts of capital were allocated to the industry and it was rendered operational in 1946. Subsequently, oil shale production nearly doubled. The revival also helped to launch other production in the Estonian SSR.²¹

Agriculture was collectivised after the war. However, operations were slow to start and primarily launched through taxation methods. The sluggishness of the collectivisation was a result of the Soviet authorities’ failure to complete the

¹⁷ ZETTERBERG (2007): 671-672. LAAR (1993): passim. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 66.

¹⁸ RAUN (1989): 218. ZETTERBERG (2007): 675. JÄRVESOO, Elmar: *The Postwar Economic Transformation*. In PARMING, Tõnu –JÄRVESOO, Elmar: *Case Study of a Soviet Republic: The Estonian SSR*. Westview Press, Boulder Colo, 1978, 133-134.

¹⁹ ZETTERBERG (2007): 675. ALENIUS (2000): 257-258.

²⁰ RAUN (1989): 219. ZETTERBERG (2007): 675.

²¹ RAUN (1989): 218-219. ZETTERBERG (2007): 675. PURRE (1963-1972): II. 41-43. PURRE, Arnold: *Tööstus okupeeritud Eestis*. IN: *Eesti saatusaastad III*. 114. JÄRVESOO (1978): 71-72.

Sovietisation process in the period between 1940 and 1941. Then again, the Soviet administration had somewhat less of a foothold in rural areas than it did in the cities.²²

An extensive land reform was implemented in Estonia between 1944 and 1947. Soviet authorities had decided on the reform during the first period of occupation in 1940, but had been unable to implement their plans at that time. The Soviet administration claimed numerous land areas, often by expropriation. The size of the state territory gradually increased and land was distributed to the part of the population that owned none. Land sections were primarily allocated to soldiers who had served in the Red Army and to extremely small farms. Sovkhozos (state-owned farms), machine and tractor stations and horse and machine rentals also received land areas. Some land was retained as state land reserves.²³

The land reform increased the number of small farms. Once the reform had been completed, the number of small farms in the Estonian SSR totalled 136,000. In practice, the new farms were too small to be viable and the former large estates forced to surrender land were left weakened, sometimes to the point of non-profitability. The state increased farm productivity with strict tax obligations. Farmers were also supposed to sell their products exclusively to the state, which set the prices extremely low. The Soviet authorities did not want to support the farmers' livelihood or social position, but rather they aimed to weaken small farm profitability as much as possible in order to create a foundation for the impending collectivisation of agriculture.²⁴

Change was on the way. In May 1947, the political bureau in Moscow instructed the party organisations in the Baltic countries to initiate collectivisation. Measures were very quickly taken and the first collective farm or *kolkhoz* was established in the Estonian SSR in September 1947. The overall collectivisation process nevertheless progressed reasonably slowly. Propaganda against the large estate owners (known as *kulaks*) and their registration, together with stricter taxation, individual deportations and voluntary collectivisation, proved futile. The slow progress of the collectivisation process was partially thanks to the efforts of Karotamm, the leader of the Communist Party of Estonia, to avoid violent collectivisation. His efforts can be seen in how in 1948, only two percent of Estonian SSR farms were *kolkhozos*. In early 1949, the corresponding figure was eight percent.²⁵

Collectivisation clearly gained momentum starting in March 1949. In one month's time, over half of the farms in the Estonian SSR had been collectivised. By the end of Stalin's rule, the process had been completed. The quickened progress

²² RAUN (1989): 220. ZETTERBERG (2007): 672. ALENIUS (2000): 260. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: The Taxation Phase*. Journal of Baltic Studies X, 1979. 266.

²³ RAUN (1989): 220. ZETTERBERG (2007): 673. ALENIUS 2(000): 260. RUUSMAN, Ants: *Nõukogude maareformi taastamine pärast Eesti NSV vabastamist Saksa fasistlikest okupanditest*. SPANE, 47-48, 52, 57, 59-61. TÖNURIST, Edgar: *Sotsialistliku põllumajanduse arengust Nõukokude Eestis*. SPANE, 12-13.

²⁴ ZETTERBERG (2007): 673-674.

²⁵ Ibid, 674.

was a result of the extensive mass deportations preceding the collectivisation process: the Estonians thought it best to join the kolkhozes so as to not risk deportation. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of people were deported to Novosibirsk, Omsk, Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk in Siberia.²⁶

The kolkhoz became the basic agricultural unit in the Estonian SSR. The kolkhozes were additionally amalgamated in 1950 when the Soviet authorities decided that large kolkhozes would be more productive. However, the kolkhoz system proved fatal to Estonian agriculture, and overall production collapsed. The collapse was partially caused by the production costs of agricultural products (grain, potatoes, vegetables, milk, meat and eggs) exceeding the selling prices. Production difficulties also contributed to the crash, including machinery and equipment shortage and low motivation among poorly paid farm workers. Agricultural production was unable to satisfy even local needs. Another factor aggravating the situation was the considerable loss of agricultural expertise the country had suffered.²⁷

Demographic development

The years following World War II were a difficult time in terms of demographic development in Estonia. The population had decreased by an estimated 200,000 during the war alone. After the war, the country had additionally lost the population living in ceded territory and the population who had been taken into custody and deported. However, Soviet statistics paint a different picture, showing an increase in population. This development can be explained by active immigration. Tens of thousands of Russian Estonians moved to the Estonian SSR after the war. The Soviet government additionally helped up to approximately 180,000 non-Estonians enter the ESSR in the late 1940s. Most of the immigrants came from the Pskov and Leningrad regions and from Belarus. The immigration peak abated in the 1950s.²⁸

²⁶ RAUN (1989): 222-223. ZETTERBERG (2007): 672. ALENIUS (2000): 260-261. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: The Taxation Phase*. Journal of Baltic Studies X, 1979. 265. PARMING, Tõnu: *Population Changes and Processes*. IN: PARMING, Tõnu – JÄRVESOO, Elmar: *Case Study of a Soviet Republic: The Estonian SSR*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colo, 1978. 26-27. JÄRVESOO (1978): 134. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: The Deportation Phase*. Soviet Studies 32, 1980. 390-393. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 76-77.

²⁷ RAUN (1989): 224-225. ZETTERBERG (2007): 675. ALENIUS (2000): 260-261. JÄRVESOO (1978): 135-136. JÄRVESOO, Elmar: *Progress Despite Collectivization*. IN: ZIEDONIS Jr., Arvids – TAAGEPERA, Rein – VALGEMÄE, Mardi (Eds.): *Problems of Mininations: Baltic Perspectives*. Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, San Jose California, 1973. 142, 147.

²⁸ RAUN (1989): 225-226. PURRE, Arnold: *Eesti rahvastik okupeeritud Eestis*. In *Eesti saatusaastad V. 22*. PULLAT, Raimo – SIILIVASK, Karl: *Nõukokude Eesti sotsiaalne struktuur*, ENSVTA, Toimetised 26, 1977. 20. PARMING, Tõnu: *Population Changes in Estonia 1937-1970*. Population Studies 26, 1972. 56, 58, 60. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Baltic Population Changes 1950-1980*. Journal of Baltic Studies 12, 1981. 47. ALENIUS, Kari: *Baltia toisen neuvostomiehityksen aikana. Väestölliset ja kulttuuriset muutokset*. IN: HAVIA Jari P.: *Viro vuosikirja 2001*. Tallinn Kustannus Oy, Helsinki, 2001. 83-84.

High birth rates also contributed to the increase in population, especially among the immigrants. In the period from 1945 to 1949, for example, the Estonian SSR had some of the highest national birth rates in the 19th century.²⁹

Immigrants quickly compensated for the labour shortage of the newly relaunched industry in the Estonian SSR. Industrial development accelerated urbanisation. While approximately 33.6% of the population lived in cities in 1940, the corresponding figure in 1953 was 52.5%. The dramatic urbanisation subsequently slowed down in the 1950s. It had been speeded up by substantial immigration within and into the country, but also by recently built cities and the expansion of existing urban areas.³⁰

Culture

The Sovietisation of Estonian culture began with the creation of a new Soviet school system. The initial phase proved challenging as school buildings had been destroyed in the war, competent teachers were in short supply and student numbers increased constantly. However, basic education was free of charge under Stalin's rule. Secondary school and higher education were fee-based.³¹ A key change in the higher education sector was the weakened status of the University of Tartu, including the transfer of teaching to other educational institutions. Some of the receiving institutions had been recently founded by the Soviet authorities (the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR in 1946, the Estonian Agricultural Academy in 1951 and the Tallinn Pedagogical Institute in 1952), but some were traditional and established (Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn State Conservatory.)³²

Especially the latter half of Stalin's rule marked a cultural recession in Estonia. All culture had to abide by the rules of socialist realism. Ideological purity was a constant objective and no bourgeois or national characteristics were permitted. The Soviet authorities had the most obvious impact on literature, which became stagnant in quantity and quality. This was due to ideological requirements and the immigration of many Estonian writers (e.g., Johannes Semper, Friedebert Tuglas and Mait Metsanurk) along with other key cultural figures. Some of the remaining writers were expelled from the Writers' Union. Expulsion meant they were unable to publish any of their work. Additionally, only members of the communist party were allowed to publish their writing. Some writers were also arrested, including Heiti Talvik and Hugo Raudsepp, who both later died in prison.³³

²⁹ RAUN (1989): 226. PARMING (1972): 58, 60.

³⁰ RAUN (1989): 227-228. TAAGEPERA (1981): 40. PARMING (1972): 66-67. ALENIUS (2001): 84.

³¹ RAUN (1989): 229-230. PURRE, Arnold: *Haridosolud N. Eestis*. IN: Eesti saatusaastad VI. 32, 44. Eesti NSV Ajalugu III. 617-620. KAREDA, Endel: *Estonia in the Soviet Grip: Life and Conditions Under Soviet Occupation 1947-1949*. East and West VI. Boreas, London, 1947. 48. *Nõukokude Eesti Saavutusi 20 aasta jooksul: Statistiline kogumik*. Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, Tallinn, 1960. 93.

³² RAUN (1989): 230. SURVEL, Jaak: *Estonia today*. East and West I. Boreas, London, 1947. 38-39. Eesti NSV Ajalugu III. 622-625. KAREDA (1947): 51-54. REINOP, H.: *Education in Soviet Estonia*. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn, 1967. 34. *Nõukokude Eesti Saavutusi*: 94. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 74-75.

³³ RAUN (1989): 230-232. MÄGI, Arvo: *Kodumaine kirjanduselu*. IN: Eesti Saatusaastad 1945-1960. I-VI. EMP, Stockholm, 1963-1972. VI. 87.89. SLONIM, Marc: *Soviet Russian Literature*. University Press,

Estonian theatre experienced a similar fate. Unreliable staff members were dismissed and theatre production was subordinated to ideological purposes. All theatre buildings had been destroyed in the war and actors had gone into exile. By the 1940s, the country had three functional theatres, the state-owned Estonian Drama Theatre, the Estonia Theatre in Tallinn, and the Vanemuine in Tartu. The 1950s presented a small chance to break loose from the iron grip of socialist ideology and incorporate older Estonian theatre pieces into programmes.³⁴

Soviet officials made no exceptions in the fields of visual art and music. Both were subjected to equally strict surveillance and control. The leaders in the fields were native Estonians who had lived in the USSR during World War II, had adapted the communist ideology and were willing to conform and produce art that served socialism.³⁵

Music was nevertheless beyond the total control of the party and the Soviet authorities. Estonia had a strong tradition of song festivals. The Soviet administration presumed it would be able to harness such a tradition to serve the objectives of the communist party. Different mass events complied with the Soviet ideology and the party expected song festivals to be a good method of implementing socialist ideology in a nationally appropriate manner. But the song festival tradition proved too strong and too closely tied to Estonian national identity for the party to harness it for its purposes. A prime example of this failure was the performance of the melody composed by Gustav Ernesaks to the lyrics of Lyldia Koidula's poem *Mu isamaa on minu arm* at a song festival in 1947. The song became the unofficial national anthem of Estonia. Song festivals remained a link to the past days of Estonian independence.³⁶

Everyday life

The Estonian SSR was fully Sovietised under Stalin's rule. In 1953, Moscow announced that the ESSR had converted to socialism. The new social elite comprised the members of the communist party, supported by a loyal workforce, scientists and artists.³⁷

Oxford, 1967: 278-284. NIRK, Endel: *Estonian Literature*. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn, 1970. 287. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *A Portrait of the „Historical ap” in Estonian Literature*. Lituanius 26, III. 1980. 73-74. 81. *Eesti kirjanduse biraafine leksikon*. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn, 1975. 305. 387. KURMAN, George: *Literary Censorship in General and in Soviet Estonia*. Journal of Baltic Studies VIII, 1977. 8. ALENIUS (2001): 85-86. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 72-74.

³⁴ RAUN (1989): 232-233. *Eesti NSV ajalugu* III. 649-655. KAREDA (1947): 55. *Nõukokude Eesti: Entsüklopeediline teatmeteos*. Valgus, Tallinn, 1978. 296-298.

³⁵ RAUN (1989): 233. *Eesti NSV ajalugu* III. 655, 657, 659-660. KAREDA (1947): 57. *Nõukokude Eesti: Entsüklopeediline teatmeteos*, 1978. 267-271. 279-281.

³⁶ RAUN (1989): 233. Eesti NSV, 1975. a. Üldlaulu- ja tantsupeo teatmik. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn, 1975. 34. MESIKÄPP, Aarne et al. (Ed.): *Laulusajand 1869-1969*. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn, 1969. passim. *Nõukokude Eesti: Entsüklopeediline teatmeteos*. 1978. 280. ALENIUS (2001): 87.

³⁷ RAUN (1989): 228. *Eesti NSV ajalugu* III: 450; *Nõukokude Eesti: Entsüklopeediline teatmeteos*, 1978. 105.

The Stalinist endeavour to favour heavy industry and state-controlled agriculture soon began to affect the everyday life of ordinary citizens. Heavy industry workers enjoyed 'government protection' and made a decent living. In rural areas, the agricultural worker elite comprised the workers of the state-owned farms known as sovkhoses. The state-controlled, investment-based production policy gradually grew unbearable for the ordinary citizen.³⁸

Securing a livelihood in Estonia grew more difficult by the year. The state did not permit private entrepreneurship, investment activities were non-existent, and salaries remained on an extremely low level, merely sufficing to secure basic survival. Citizens' livelihood and life quality were further eroded by a lack of consumer goods and the unreasonable prices of those goods that were available. Additionally, many products were rationed for a long time.³⁹

The newly immigrated workforce had launched a vigorous urbanisation process in the Estonian SSR. This was reflected in an increasingly extensive housing shortage among the general public. Housing production simply failed to meet the population growth rate. Living expenses were relatively low, since the Soviet administration considered basic housing to be a general right. However, the housing was extremely basic: living density and the level of commodities had clearly deteriorated compared with the era of independence.⁴⁰

Epilogue

Stalin's death in 1953 was a turning point in the history of the USSR, and particularly in the history of the Estonian SSR. The Khrushchev Thaw, named after Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev, and initiatives by the Lavrenti Berija, the Minister for Internal Affairs, to improve the status of national languages and to strengthen the position of Soviet republics, combined with the release of prisoners, inspired hope of a more independent Estonian SSR. Such hope shortly proved futile. The Soviet troops' violent suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and Khrushchev's dismissal from office in 1964 were a painful reality check. Estonia was a part of the USSR, and Moscow would strictly dictate any activities therein. The USSR was headed towards the 'Era of Stagnation' under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, the newly appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party (General Secretary starting in 1966).⁴¹

³⁸ RAUN (1989): 229.

³⁹ RAUN (1989): 228-229. ALENIOUS (2000): 261. KAREDA (1947): 60-66. SURVEL (1947): 27-30. PURRE, Arnold: *Ehitustegevus ja korteriolud*. IN: Eesti saatusaastad 1945-1960, I-VI. EMP, Stockholm, 1963-1972. VI. 43.

⁴⁰ RAUN (1989): 227-229. ALENIOUS (2000): 261. TAAGEPERA (1981): 40. KAREDA (1947): 60-66. SURVEL (1947): 27-30. PURRE (1963-1972): V. 43. MISIUNAS – TAAGEPERA (1983): 290.

⁴¹ ZETTERBERG (2007): 678-680. See also RAUN (1989): 235, 239-240. Rahva Hääl, 25 September.1956. 3. *Nõukokude Eesti: Entsüklopeediline teatmeteos*. 1978. 165-166. KLESMENT, Johannes: *The Forms of Baltic Resistance to the Communists*, The Baltic Review VIII, 1956. 25. VARDYS, V. Stanley: *The Role of the Baltic Peoples in Soviet Society*. IN: SZPORK (Ed.): *The Influence of East*

The citizens began to adjust to the prevailing social system and life in the Estonian SSR. Hopes and visions of Estonian independence nevertheless survived, sometimes surfacing more vigorously than at other times. The academic youth, in particular, kept the Estonian dream of freedom alive in the 1960s and 1970s. The first signs of dissent surfaced in the late 1960s and grew more systematic in the 1970s. The personal lust for power of Johannes Käbin, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Estonia, improved the position of the Estonians to a certain extent. Käbin wanted to hold on to his leading position in the ESSR and succeeded in doing so until 1978 through the skilful balancing of Moscow's and local interests. Käbin undeniably served Moscow's interest, but he also understood that he needed to pay heed to local wishes in order to stay in power. The Estonians wanted to reinforce Estonian identity, even if within the strict framework dictated by the Soviet Union. Käbin was able to fend off the sharpest edge of Moscow's demands.⁴²

After a fierce political fight for power, Käbin was succeeded as the leader of the Estonian SSR by the Russian Estonian Karl Vaino in 1978. Vaino's election marked the beginning of a period of rigorous Sovietisation in Estonia. The general interest of the Soviet Union preceded all national interests without exception. A practical manifestation of this renewed focus on Sovietisation was the highlighted status of the Russian language. The new wave of Russification provoked protests among Estonians. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, began the economic reform known as *perestroika*. The reform presented the Estonian SSR with better chances for social dialogue. Such dialogue gradually expanded to demands for the democratisation of the entire society. Estonia was on the path toward regaining independence.⁴³

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⁴² ZETTERBERG (2007): 679, 681, 713. About dissidents see also: RAUN (1989): 242-244. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Nationalism, Collaborationism and New Leftism*. IN: PARMING Tõnu – JÄRVESOO, Elmar (Ed.): *A Case Study of a Soviet Republic: The Estonian SSR*. Westview Press, Boulder Colo. 1978. 78, 83. Baltic Events 46, 1974. 7. *Teataja*, 17 September 1977. 3. *Teataja*, 2 October 1982. 6-8. VARDYS, Stanley V.: *Human Right Issues in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Journal of Baltic Studies XII, 1981. 280-281, 283-284, 292-296. TAAGEPERA, Rein: *Softening Without Liberalization in the Soviet Union: The Case of Jüri Kukk*. University Press of America, Lanham Md. 1984. 115-116, 185-193. Baltic Forum 1, 1, 1984. 91-93. LAURISTIN – VIHALEMM – RUUTSOO (1989): 79-113.

⁴³ ZETTERBERG (2007): 683-684, 714. In detail ZETTERBERG (2007): 718-739.

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