



## INTRODUCTION

The armistice signed on 11 November 1918 in a forest near Compiègne in Picardy in France ended more than four years of the fiercest fighting that mankind had ever seen. But it did not mean the end of the violence and the destruction for all of Europe. A political struggle for domination, inspired by national movements and socialist ideas, commenced in the collapsed empires of the Romanovs, Ottomans, Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns. Across a vast area, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, the new political elites that had emerged either during or before the war, quoting slogans about democracy, national self-determination and social equality, tried to realise their ideas to (re)establish new political entities, and these attempts met the challenge from Bolshevik Russia almost from the very beginning.

In Western Europe, the agreement signed in Compiègne not only put an end to the fighting, but also established a rather clear new order: Germany was recognised as the loser of the war, and the powers of the Entente, with France at the head, came out as the winners. However, the situation in Eastern Europe at that time was not so unambiguous. In the huge German-occupied area, from Reval (Revel, Tallinn) to Kiev, rebellious German soldiers formed councils (Soldatenräte) on 10–13 November. They took power without causing bloodshed in Dorpat (Yur'yev, Tartu), Riga, Mitau (Mitava, Jelgava), Dünaburg (Dvinsk, Daugavpils), Kowno (Kovna, Kaunas), Wilna (Vil'na, Wilno, Vilnius), Grodno (Hrodna), Minsk and other cities. The rebellious mood also spread among sailors in Reval, Riga and Libau (Libava, Liepāja).<sup>1</sup> The Lietuvos Taryba (Council of Lithuania) declared Lithuania's independence on 11 December 1917, and again on 16 February 1918. On 24 February 1918, the Salvation Committee of the Ajutine Maanõukogu (Estonian Provincial Assembly) also published the Estonian Independence Manifesto. But the Estonians and the Latvians were also represented in the Vereinigter Landesrat (Provincial Assembly), albeit disproportionately, which in April 1918 was composed of representatives from the former Russian governorates of Liflandiia, Estlandiia, the city of Riga, and the island of Ösel (Saaremaa). Just a few days before the signing of the armistice at Compiègne, on 5–8 November, the Landesrat met in Riga for its last session. Together with representatives of the Duchy of Courland (Herzogtum Kurland), which was reestablished in March 1918, and authorising the joining of the areas of Latgale and Pechory (Petseri), the session decided to establish one Baltic State (Baltischer Staat), and constituted the Regentschaftsrat (Regent Council) for this purpose. In March 1918, the German Kai-

<sup>1</sup> For more, see KLUGE, Ulrich. *Soldatenräte und Revolution. Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19*. Göttingen, 1975, S. 94–105.