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Giving a lesson in history - Soviet attempts to manipulate Estonian émigré communities

This article aims at describing the framework in which the Soviet government tried to manipulate and affect Estonian émigrés to accept, or the very least, to cease challenging the official Soviet version of Estonian history. After long silence and disregard for émigrés from Soviet area, Soviet officials became anxious about émigré communities with the Cold War. Émigrés were seen as a threat, but also as a possible asset for Soviet enemies in the Cold War. In the sake of brevity, I will not focus here on what Estonian émigrés did, nor on the way they actually were or thought, but concentrate on what Soviet officials believed them to be.¹ Construction of such framework is important for understanding how the Soviet regime perceived its subordinates – for constructing the Soviet perspective on Estonians, their culture, history, but also the possible threat certain segments of Estonian nation purportedly posed to the Soviet rule.

In the Soviet Union, memory was a key political arena in which conflicting views were undesired and official version forcefully consolidated. As Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union, decisive fact in memory politics was to reinforce the conception about Estonians voluntarily entering the Soviet family of peoples. After the Second World War, interpretation of the Estonian position during the War became equally crucial. Third such issue in memory politics was in the more general Estonian history – how far national characteristics ought to be manifested along with the general Soviet historiography and culture. The hard task of Estonian historiography in the 20th Century was that Soviet and Nazi occupations, as well as radical national Estonians, had constantly severed the continuity of history writing. Thereby lack of stable and impartial history made it difficult to defend any line of Estonian history writing which significantly contributed to the controversy.² Thus, when after the Second World War Soviet officials confronted Estonian émigré communities they aimed at preventing rivaling interpretations of Estonian history from being consolidated. Indeed, Soviet officials paid enormous attention for promoting the Soviet versions of local histories and national identities. In the first place, objective was to disarm anti-Soviet individuals and separate them from other émigrés. Secondary objective was to make émigrés more Soviet-minded and prone

¹ Literature about Estonian émigrés in English mostly concentrates on the politics, and the diplomacy. Such examples include James T. McHugh & James S. Pacy *Diplomats Without a Country. Baltic Diplomacy, International Law, and the Cold War* (Westport Co: Greenwood Press, 2001); John Hiden & Vahur Made & David J. Smith (eds) *The Baltic Question during the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Majority of literature on Estonian émigrés is written in Estonian. Estonian political émigrés were also active in the US-sponsored Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN) until it was terminated in 1972, see e.g. Anna Mazurkiewicz, “‘The Voice of the Silenced Peoples’: The Assembly of Captive European Nations” in Ieva Zake (ed) *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

² This controversy and constant changes in the administration and their impact on history writing are perhaps best depicted by a famous Estonian novelist Jaan Kross, who in several of his novels touches upon the subject. Estonian émigrés naturally depicted the Soviet era as a dreadful occupation in stark comparison to “the golden age” of 1920s and 1930s. See e.g. Ants Oras, *Baltic Eclipse* (London: V. Gollancz, 1948) in which Oras describes independent Estonia with all the emotion a recent exile only can: practically as the happiest and the most developed place on Earth.

to accept the Soviet interpretation of their national history. Soviet authorities believed that this would reinforce the Soviet version of Estonian history within the Soviet Union as well.

Soviet authorities naturally hid the true motivations to engage émigrés for most of the Cold War. Émigré work was described as cultural work veiled behind such terms as friendship and mutual understanding. Consequently, means for reaching Estonian émigrés, as well as organizations that took care of this work were numerous. They also changed over time. In the immediate post-war years, the aim was merely to repatriate everyone that the Soviet Union regarded as its citizens, but who were outside its borders at the end of the war, the so-called displaced persons, *peremeshchennie litsy*.³ This work was much controlled by Moscow and KGB. The second phase started along the 1950s stretching to late 1960s.⁴ At this point, Estonian officials seem to have had much more autonomy over the methods and even organizations taking control of this work. By the 1970s, however, there was little trace of the former national emphasis. While some of the Soviet action concerning Estonian émigrés always originated from Soviet Estonia, much of it was Moscow-controlled, and Communist Party organs retained firm control. Even so, Soviet Estonian personnel were in crucial role when it came to contacting Estonian émigrés abroad. Initially, Soviet embassies kept Soviet Estonian officials updated about what was happening amongst émigrés, but quite early on, especially the Soviet Embassy in Sweden, had its own Estonian officials, reflecting how important the high echelons of the Soviet Communist Party considered this work to be.

Increased autonomy of Soviet Estonian officials in émigré work from the late 1950s onwards reflected the change in objectives for this work. When it turned out that major influx of émigrés back to the Soviet Union was wishful thinking, the initial target of repatriating émigrés was given up. Even so, throughout the Soviet era, Soviet officials remained convinced that émigrés constituted a potential threat that somehow needed to be dealt with.⁵ Primary threat was that émigré circles' memories could not be suppressed like in Soviet Estonia, where celebrations, monuments, publications and official discourse could be kept within the official limits. With help from the Western governments, émigrés could potentially spread their version of the Estonian past and culture even in Soviet Estonia, thus endangering the Soviet position in the international

³ Displaced persons and their fates have been described in: Salomon, Kim 1991. *Refugees in the Cold War. Toward a New International Refugee Regime in the Early Postwar Era* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991); Mark Wyman, *DPs. Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1989).

⁴ See e.g. Simo Mikkonen, "Mass Communications as a Vehicle to Lure Russian Émigrés Homeward" in *Journal of International and Global Studies* (Lindenwood UP) vol 2, issue 2: April 2011, pp. 45-61. This article discussed the changes in Soviet approach towards people it considered its citizens that were living abroad, meaning exiles, émigrés and so-called displaced persons.

⁵ Letter of Stepan Chervonenko from Ukrainian Communist Party to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, no later than 6.9.1958, RGANI (Russian State Archives of Recent History) f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 102-109. Central Committee had been receiving several letters which presented worries about threat posed by anti-Soviet émigrés.

scene, but also within Soviet Estonia.⁶ Thus, Soviet officials needed to sell their version of Soviet Estonian culture and past to émigré communities: it was battle for the legitimacy of Soviet rule in Estonia.

With this framework, I aim at giving a glimpse of how Soviet officials perceived Estonian émigrés along the Soviet era and how they aimed at confronting them. Instead of concentrating on émigré publications, the main emphasis is on the Russian language materials collected mostly in archives of Tallinn and Moscow explaining the dynamics between Moscow and Tallinn in regards to émigré affairs. I will deal very little with KGB, which, unarguably was active throughout the period, but central archives of which cannot be reached. This article is more interested in the triangle of Kremlin, Soviet Estonia and Estonian émigrés – their mutual relationship and especially the Soviet use of soft power towards émigrés.

Repatriating the displaced Soviet citizens

Immediately after the war, primary objective of the Soviet government was to repatriate all the displaced people from Soviet-occupied areas.⁷ There was no other Soviet nation to be repatriated in as large a scale as Estonians in proportion to absolute amount of the nation in its entirety. By the end of the war there were camp inmates who had fought in the Red Army and were captured by Germans, those who had fought in the German army, forced and voluntary laborers in the German area, and those who had escaped from Estonia to Sweden either in 1940 or 1944. Although repatriations were indisputably extensive, in this paper, evacuations and forced migration primarily create the context for the postwar operations of Soviet officials.

In the postwar situation, with Europe in ruins, Soviet nationalities were repatriated to the Soviet Union even from western territories, sometimes by force. Baltic Nations, however, were considered a special case by the West.⁸ Thus, while there were well over one hundred thousand Estonians displaced, Soviet officials managed to get only 20% of them returned by 1953. In the case of other Soviet nationalities, amount was close to 95%. Majority of those 20.000 that were repatriated were most likely found in the Soviet occupied areas, and Finland, which was forced to sign an agreement about turning over Soviet citizens. But just like in

⁶ Operation “Rollback” during the Truman administration (1945-1952) and the following American attempts to use anti-Soviet émigrés in large scale operations against the Soviet Union alerted Soviet officials for counter actions. About American work among Soviet émigrés, see Simo Mikkonen, “Exploiting the Exiles. The Soviet Emigration in US Cold War Strategy.” In *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol 14, issue 2 (Spring 2012), 98-127. These American operations gave birth for example to Radio Free Europe, as well as contributed to the formation of the Assembly of Captive European Nations.

⁷ There is not much literature on Soviet objectives towards émigrés, but among them, the best is perhaps: V. A. Iontsev, (eds.), N. M. Lebedeva, M. V. Nazarov, A. V. Okorokov (eds.), *Emigratsiya, i Repatriatsiya v Rossii* (Moscow: Popechitelstvo o nuzhdakh Rossiiskikh repatriantov, 2001); on the Baltic case, some enlightening remarks about émigrés and the Soviet power are made in: Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1990* (London: Hurst and co, 1993), in which they touch upon the role that émigrés had on the development of their native countries under Soviet rule.

⁸ See e.g. Eero Medijainen, “The USA, Soviet Russia and the Baltic States: from recognition to the Cold War” and Vahur Made, “The Estonian Government-in-Exile: a controversial project of state continuation” in John Hiden & Vahur Made & David J. Smith (eds) *The Baltic Question during the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

the case of other Soviet citizens, stream of displaced citizens back to their native land turned into a trickle by the end of 1947. In 1952 there were just 25 Estonians repatriated to Soviet Estonia from outside the Soviet Union through repatriation efforts.⁹

According to official reports about repatriation work in 1953, some 45% of repatriated Estonians came from camps of displaced persons, and these were typically civilians. These camps were nominally controlled by the United Nations, but political control was with the occupation powers, yet Soviets seemed to count these as special cases. Remaining repatriates were listed by the countries they returned from, thus almost 40% came from Germany (most likely primarily from the Soviet-occupied zones), one tenth from Finland and the rest from a number of other countries (for instance one Estonian from Canada, 6 from the US, Australia 4, Great Britain 27, China 4...).¹⁰ At this point, Soviet officials were using mostly diplomatic channels and foreign policy efforts to get foreign governments to turn over Estonians. But they were also using a number of propaganda measures in order to get Estonians abroad to turn themselves in. Naturally, there was a lot of printed propaganda, but radio, too, played an important part in reaching émigrés. Although most of the repatriation work was carried out by Soviet officials, this work required a lot of Estonians, too. Before 1953, already some 73 Soviet Estonians had participated in making radio programs abroad. Also, 282 of those who had returned from abroad contributed to programs. Furthermore, 24 collective letters and 2726 individual letters from Soviet Estonians appealing to Estonians abroad were broadcasted. Twice a week there was a program of an hour in Estonian broadcasted abroad.¹¹

Repatriation of Soviet émigrés remained as the primary objective throughout the 1950s, even if Soviet officials were facing difficulties with western governments soon after the War ended. Secret correspondence between Soviet embassy and foreign ministries in Moscow and Latvia in 1946 points out that Soviets were frustrated with Swedish officials, who had subsequently not only declined to hand out any Baltic nationals back to the Soviet Union, but also denied any information about their existence and composition. Soviet security organs, therefore, tried to draw up lists of those presumably in Sweden in order to make it easier to reach them.¹² Thus, Soviet officials spent a lot of time in searching émigrés' whereabouts in the West, then locating their relatives back in Soviet Estonia and getting these people to write appealing letters to their

⁹ Report about the work of the department of repatriation of CM ESSR for 1945-1953, ERA.R-1970.2.112, 65-82. This document gives yearly details for repatriation of citizens from Estonian area. Of 20671 that were repatriated from 1945 to 1953, 11170 were civilians and 9451 soldiers from the German army. Interestingly, Estonian POW's from the Red Army were not mentioned in these lists, or they were categorized as civilians. Overall Soviet figures can be found in GARF (Russian State Archives) f. 9526, op. 3, d. 175 and op. 4, d. 1, l. 62, 70, 223; also quoted in V.N.Zemskov, "Vtoraia emigratsiia" i otnoshenie k nei rukovodstva SSSR, 1947-1955. In *Istoriia rossiiskogo zarubeznaia emigratsiia iz SSSR-Rossii 1941-2001 gg* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2007), pp. 63-91.

¹⁰ Report about the work of the department of repatriation of CM ESSR for 1945-1953, ERA.R-1970.2.112, 109.

¹¹ Report about the work of the department of repatriation of CM ESSR for 1945-1953, ERA.R-1970.2.112, 83-104.

¹² Letter from the advisor of the Soviet embassy in Sweden S. Vazarov to Deputy Foreign Minister of Latvia, J. Avotins, September 1946." In Andrejs Plakans, *Experiencing Totalitarianism: The Invasion and Occupation of Latvia by the USSR and Nazi Germany 1939-1991* (Bloomington IN: Authorhouse, 2007), 302-3.

émigrés relatives, or in other ways contacting them.¹³ Naturally, as the register grew, whenever Soviet citizens were sent abroad, it was checked if they had relatives or friends whom they could approach when visiting abroad. Emotions played a big part in Soviet strategy concerning the émigrés in general. Homesickness, worries over relatives or friends in the Soviet Union as well as pride over everything Estonian was blatantly exploited in Soviet propaganda.

From Repatriation towards Cultural Work

In January 1953, shortly before Stalin's death, first phase of the repatriation work was coming to an end. Estonian foreign ministry was ceding authority over future repatriation work to the Soviet foreign ministry and sending its remaining registers to KGB. Administration for hunting economy (sic) was taking premises from Estonian office for repatriation.¹⁴ But, Soviet operations in regards to émigrés were already activating in a new way to counter the threat they felt émigrés were posing, even if repatriation still remained as the main objective. In 1955 Soviet Committee on Return to Homeland (Komitet za vozvrashchenie na rodinu) was established in Berlin. It was the last, and mostly failed, effort at massive repatriation of Soviet citizens. It was responsible for the émigré work in the Soviet scale. This Committee controlled a sizable propaganda machine distributing magazines, printed materials, but also boasting an own radio station designed purely for Soviet émigrés. Methods of this committee were softer than its predecessors and it is partly related to the increasing presence of the Soviet Union in the international arena after Stalin's death. Committee also commissioned aforementioned publishing and broadcasting of appealing letters to individual émigrés. Magazine and radio channel were first named *Za vozvrashchenie na rodinu* (On return to Homeland), but were soon changed to more neutral *Golos Rodinu* (Voice of the Homeland). The Committee itself became known as Rodina association. All this work aimed at émigrés' voluntary repatriation, which I have previously studied in the general Soviet context.¹⁵ But intensification of the work with Estonian émigrés was not far behind. In 1955, an Estonian representative was placed to the Soviet Embassy in Sweden. He was eventually Enno Mikkelsaar, lecturer of political economy in the University of Tartu.¹⁶

Reports of the Soviet foreign ministry also point out that the work with émigrés was generally changing towards the late 1950s. Along with describing the composition and actions of Estonian émigrés new lines of action were suggested in order to better reach émigré communities. Cultural approach was preferred: attempts to raise émigrés' interest towards current Soviet Estonian culture through magazines, movies, artistic tours, and even émigrés' tourist trips to Soviet Estonia. Further marginalizing of anti-Soviet émigré organizations was to be combined with this new approach. Anti-Soviet émigrés were to be presented as

¹³ Estonian department of repatriation, N. Filatov's letter to Heinsaar, December 30, 1952, ERA.R-1970.2.113, 1.

¹⁴ About terminating Estonian department of repatriation, February, 1, 1953, ERA.R-1970.2.113, 62- 64.

¹⁵ Simo Mikkonen (2011), "Mass Communications as a Vehicle to Lure Russian Émigrés Homeward" *Journal of International and Global Studies* Volume 2, Number 2: April 2011, 45-61.

¹⁶ MID's Baranenkova's letter to Müürisepp, September 22, 1955, ERA.R-1970.2.117, 93-95.

troublemakers and good intentions of Soviet Estonia towards émigrés were to be emphasized, thus making anti-Soviet émigrés' proclamations look like empty propaganda.¹⁷

Attempts to elevate the official Soviet version of Estonian history reserved an important position in the cultural work with émigrés in general. Magazines and radio programs to Estonian audiences abroad carefully followed the official line. Naturally, films and documentaries produced in Soviet Estonia that were also brought to émigré audiences via Soviet embassies had gone through Soviet censorship. This new kind of cultural work naturally drained a lot of resources, but it was considered highly important in countering émigrés' anti-Soviet operations. Thus, selling of the official Soviet version of Estonian history became an important part of the Soviet Cold War strategy, something, that was believed to sow discord among Estonian émigré communities.¹⁸

Similarly through the increase of emotional ties between Estonian émigrés and their former native land, all chances to isolate and marginalize political émigré organizations from the majority of émigrés were exploited. For this purpose, select notable émigré artists and scholars were approached and invited to visit their homeland. Such contacts were hoped to serve as bridgeheads through which larger quantities of émigrés would admit the benevolence of the Soviet Union and downplay anti-Soviet attitudes.¹⁹ An early Estonian example was acknowledged Estonian composer Eduard Tubin from Sweden. Tubin surely had his own motives to be in touch with Soviet Estonia, but Soviet officials aimed at using him to their own ends. He was given a chance to distribute his music in Soviet Estonia and was for instance commissioned to write an opera, "Barbara von Tisenhusen" to Estonia Theater.²⁰ He was also used at spreading Soviet Estonian music abroad. These kind of friendly connections were believed by Soviet officials to be poison to anti-Soviet émigrés who were against any kind of connections with the Soviets.

Increased émigré-related activities in the Soviet Union along the 1950s reflected also to Estonian governmental structures. In 1960 was established VEKSA, Väliseestlastega Kultuurisidemete Arendamise Ühing (Association for Cultural Ties with Estonians émigrés). Its purpose was rather similar to other Soviet

¹⁷ For example ERA.R-1970.2.122 contains lots of correspondence between Soviet Foreign Ministry, Embassy in Sweden and Soviet Estonian officials about émigré work in the late 1950s. Cultural approach, and use of soft power are in the center of these talks. Moscow had urged all the republics to enhance anti-émigré work in spring 1958 especially through special radio broadcasts and printed media. Käbin reported to Moscow about how the work was proceeding in Estonia In October 1958, see About strengthening counter-propaganda, not before 23 October 1958, RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 74, ll. 92-95.

¹⁸ Käbin's letter to Central Committee CP, April 10, 1959, RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 74, ll. 96-99. Käbin was discussing possibilities of increasing radio propaganda to supplement effectiveness of printed media in Northern America, where Estonian broadcasts could still not be heard.

¹⁹ Käbin's letter to Central Committee CP, January 18, 1966, ERAF 1.302.38, 3-4. Käbin presents a request for inviting émigrés to visit Soviet Estonia via Inturist for propaganda purposes. Émigrés would come from Sweden, England, France and Canada. Control was to be given for the Estonian Friendship Society.

²⁰ Käbin's memorandum to Central Committee CP about about friendly ties between Estonia and foreign countries, March 10, 1969, ERAF 1.302.98, 16.

organs designed to approach Soviet émigrés during the time.²¹ Soviet level model organ for VEKSA was likely GKKS, the State Committee for Cultural Ties with foreign countries. Despite the links to KGB, GKKS was much softer in its approach than many of its predecessors and successors were.²² GKKS took its authority from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, VOKS that was terminated in 1957, Radio Committee and other central organs. GKKS practically created Soviet Cultural Diplomacy during the Khrushchev era. In this sense, VEKSA's establishment seems to have drawn from the same source of reform within the Soviet administration that gave birth to GKKS. I have not personally studied VEKSA well enough to judge its methods, but it apparently is connected to developments in the Soviet level. Naturally, VEKSA, too, harbored close ties to KGB, which had the best register of Estonian émigrés. Thus, as Sweden was the most important target area, the first KGB representative in VEKSA, Randar Hiir, would often travel to Sweden to meet and arrange work with Estonian émigrés there.²³

But perhaps the most apparent manifestation of the new courage of Soviet officials was to invite Estonian émigrés to Soviet Estonia. What would have been a better way to point out Soviet achievements than have émigrés to testify this by their own eyes. They could, then, spread out the greatness of Soviet Estonia, also emphasized by Khrushchev according to whom Estonia was better off with the Soviet Union than it would have independently.²⁴ In order to publicize chances to travel to Soviet Estonia, officials tried to find representatives of cultural intelligentsia abroad, such as Tubin, who were curious, or benevolent enough to make the trip. Thus, along the 1960s, numerous émigré intellectuals were invited and welcomed to Soviet Estonia, especially in connection with Song Festivals.²⁵ Émigré visits in the 1960s typically took place in groups ranging from ten to fifty émigrés at time. Typical duration of visits seems to have been around ten days. Especially at first, Estonian Communist Party drafted lists of those to be invited. In addition to Sweden, émigrés arrived from Canada, United States and Britain. Apart from visits by cultural luminaries, Estonian officials even wished to organize visits by émigré children to summer camps, like the one in Valkla.²⁶

State of Estonian emigration according to Soviet officials

²¹ According to Mitrokhin's KGB lexicon, similar organizations to VEKSA were established in Ukraine and Byelorussia. See: Vasiliy Mitrokhin (2002) *KGB lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass), 267.

²² The only English language article to date that discusses GKKS in more detail is: Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy." In *Diplomatic History* vol 27, nro 2 (April 2003), 193-214. More in detail in Finnish, see: Simo Mikkonen, "Neuvostoliiton kulttuurivaihto-ohjelmat – kulttuurista kylmää sotaa vai diplomatiaa?" in *Historiallinen aikakauskirja (Finnish Historical Journal)* 4/2011.

²³ Decision of Central Committee ECP about Hiir Randar's trip to Sweden, November 15, 1963, ERAF 1.5.88, 1-2. Randar was given 220 rubles for the expenses.

²⁴ In connection with a state-visit to Sweden, Khrushchev had addressed Baltic exiles in an official dinner (apparently aggravated by their anti-Soviet protests during his visit) by giving a lecture about the state of Baltic nations and how they were thriving because of the Soviet Union. See: Wiskari, Werner, "Khrushchev Says Baltic Exiles Err" in *New York Times* 24.6.1964, p. 2.

²⁵ Käbin's memorandum to Central Committee CP about about friendly ties between Estonia and foreign countries, March 10, 1969, ERAF 1.302.98, 16.

²⁶ Käbin's memorandum about inviting foreign Estonians to ESSR, June 16, 1966, ERAF 1.302.38, 31-33.

Like it has already been suggested, Estonian emigration was considered to be a threat due its uncontrolled collective memory of the Estonian past, and resulting interpretation of the present. At least, in part the threat was upheld and even fueled by Estonian Communists. Party secretary Johannes Käbin outlined the significance of Estonian émigré community in a letter to Soviet Foreign minister Andrei Gromyko in November 1966 and attested the need to expand Soviet countermeasures. Thus, he used émigré question to expand the authority of Soviet Estonian organs. He was primarily discussing the emigration in Sweden, which in his words was “organized into a number of societies, committees, corporations and such. Some of these were political and professed anti-Soviet actions, and some had strong influence on Swedish government.” Émigrés in Sweden were also said to distribute propaganda in Estonian, Swedish, English and German languages in some 20 different newspapers and journals. Käbin regarded that while Estonian émigrés were countered through many measures, Soviet Estonia did not have resources to reach Swedish people, who were influenced by the émigré propaganda. Käbin called for concerted efforts with a number of central organizations in Moscow.²⁷ But actions taken also illustrate that since Estonian foreign ministry and VEKSA were rather small, they aimed at using all Estonian organs with foreign connections, like Estonian section of the Soviet-Sweden friendship association to reach émigrés. This was illustrated in cases that in the West were normal cultural exchange, and even for Soviet professionals were part of their normal duty. Indeed, Leida Loone, an Estonian historian, was sent to organize a book exhibition of Estonian books to the Royal Library in Stockholm in early spring 1967 as part of the Soviet-Swedish cultural exchanges. From the point of view of the ECP exhibition, however, was an answer to an émigré effort a year earlier displaying 297 émigré publications in the same library.²⁸

While Soviet officials feared that Estonian émigrés would manage to worsen Soviet relations to Sweden, it was also believed that émigrés might affect neighboring Finns. According to Estonian Communist Party, Estonian émigrés had repeatedly approached Finnish tourists to Sweden. For Soviet officials, good relations to Finland and benevolent attitude of Finns towards the Soviet Union were important. Thus, according to Soviet officials, émigrés’ work with Finns, attempts to present their perception about history and life in Soviet Estonia severely distorted facts about Soviet Estonia and its history.²⁹

But in order to have an effect on émigrés Soviets needed accurate information about them. Information was continuously collected, updated and outlined in a number of reports. All together, Soviets put the rough amount of Estonian emigration to 80000, quarter of which lived in Sweden. Estonians were among the most numerous Soviet émigré groupings, which is valid if Estonia is considered to be part of the Soviet Union continuously from 1940 onwards. Interestingly, two thirds of émigrés in Sweden were mentioned to be Swedish subordinates (word “citizen” was not used). Some were mentioned refusing to give up their

²⁷ Letter of J. Käbin to MID Gromyko, November 15, 1966, ERAF 1.302.38, 92-93.

²⁸ A. Vader’s report to CC, December 2, 1966, ERAF 1.302.38, 124.

²⁹ Section of foreign ties of Central Committee ECP, January 6, 1972, ERAF.1.46.471, 1.

Estonian citizenship, like composer Eduard Tubin.³⁰ Soviet embassy in Sweden counted 32000 Soviet citizens in the country in 1961. This included 20000 Estonians and 6000 ethnic Swedes from Estonia. Latvians numbered in 5000 while the remaining 1000 were Lithuanians, Russians and others. Majority of émigrés were factory workers, very few lived in countryside. Half of émigrés lived either in Stockholm or Göteborg. One ball bearing factory in Göteborg employed over 1000 Soviet émigrés.³¹ These numbers created the framework for intensive work in Sweden. Unlike in many other cases, émigrés were not spread all around, but concentrated in few major urban areas. This made it easier for Soviets to reach émigré communities.

An annual report for 1958 from the Soviet Embassy in Sweden about Estonian émigrés is telling in many respects. It points out that Soviets estimated that the wealthier part of the emigration was hostile to the USSR and it was influencing Swedish rightists, increasing anti-Soviet attitudes. Émigré intelligentsia, in turn, was considered to include people who were interested in Soviet science and arts. The report also mentioned that anti-Soviet émigrés managed to spread fear and negative attitude towards conditions in Soviet Estonia. It was also mentioned that the magazine for émigrés had changed its name from Return to Homeland to plain Homeland, *Kodumaa*, as the former name had caused furious criticism among some of the émigrés.³² Furthermore, according to Soviet officials, even if the amount of anti-Soviet émigrés was small, they managed to sabotage many features of the work with émigrés. For instance, movie club that showed Soviet films received an audience of ten people. In order to lessen fears towards the Soviet Estonia, embassy's Estonian staff also toured local émigré homes and told them about embassy's work and different events. More visits to Soviet Estonia were also recommended as émigrés were told to have asked a lot about this.³³

In Europe, Germany was also harboring a number of Estonian émigrés. Annual report from Soviet Embassy in West Germany in 1959 estimated that majority of Estonians in German were anti-Soviet by nature, putting the figure to 3000, with important centers in Munich, Augsburg, Hamburg and Stuttgart.³⁴ Total amount of Estonian émigrés in Germany was around 4-5000. Notable amount of them had served in SS or other such organizations. Some societies of Estonian émigrés were mentioned to receive US funding. Few were mentioned to have ties to American military, and it was worriedly remarked that Americans had an

³⁰ Report on Estonian emigration in Sweden, June 6, 1959, ERA.R-1970.2. 122, 102-116. MID's head B.Podtserov writes to Müürisepp on September 22, 1959.

³¹ Excerpts from the report from the Soviet Embassy in Sweden about the work of the Consular department in 1961, ERA.R-1970.2.134, 2-11.

³² Excerpts from the report from the Soviet Embassy in Sweden about the work of the Consular department in 1958, ERA.R-1970.2.122, 37-42. This report mentioned that many émigrés returned to consulates and embassy publications they received, and that famous émigré writer Valev Uibopuu had threatened to start a vicious anti-Soviet campaign in Swedish press if embassy would not stop sending materials to him.

³³ Excerpts from the report from the Soviet Embassy in Sweden about the work of the Consular department in 1958, ERA.R-1970.2.122, 37-42.

³⁴ Excerpts from the report about anti-Soviet actions in West Germany, November 23, 1959, ERA.R-1970.2.122, 65-67.

Estonian military section to be used against the Soviet Union in the case of war.³⁵ It seems that compared to Sweden, or later North America, Estonian émigrés in Germany received little attention, at least in the cultural form. It is likely that KGB kept a close eye on émigré organizations, but this was primarily not a concern to Soviet Estonia, but rather that of Moscow. It seems that Soviet officials believed that émigrés in Sweden were more impressionable to cultural work. Also, emigration in Germany was spread, making it harder to reach them via direct contacting.³⁶

While Europe (and Sweden in particular) remained in the center of the work well into the 1960s, Canada had slowly been turning into an area of important Estonian emigration, and one that grew in importance during the Brezhnev era. Already in 1962 Soviet Estonian officials demanded resources to reach émigrés in Canada that was estimated at 17000 (of which 10000 in Toronto) and growing quickly. This group was also considered to be very active, and yet, Embassy in Canada was lamented to be working without an Estonian representative. Soviet Estonian officials likely activated due to Canadian Prime Minister Diefenbaker paying attention to Estonian affairs. Diefenbaker had received émigré's petition about taking Estonian case to the United Nations in 1962. UN was indeed a problem for the Soviet Union and the measure in which Baltic émigrés managed to bring forth their version of their native lands. In order to counter the émigré version of Estonian situation, Soviet officials enhanced circulation of *Kodumaa* and *Tõe häääl*, "the sound of truth". Controlling of images about Soviet Estonia was the primary objective of Soviet Estonian officials. Soviet officials also noted that close to 100 Soviet Estonians (sic) had joined their relatives in Canada in 1960-1962, and these people were considered to be loyal to their native land and strong antidote to anti-Soviet émigré propaganda. Yet, Soviet officials felt threatened about the way in which Estonian émigrés in Canada were celebrating Estonian cultural heritage and commemorating Estonian history. Although this was seemingly innocent and apolitical for many of the participants, it contradicted with the official Soviet line about Estonia and was therefore considered a serious threat.³⁷

New rise of the émigrés

Canada would become even bigger headache for Soviet officials in years to come. Along the 1950s and 1960s émigrés had activated in cultural work and emphasized the Estonian national heritage in their work. Käbin seems to have seized this threat and actively approached Central Committee in Moscow about sending Soviet Estonians to counter the supposed threat the North American groups posed. For example, in 1967 there was to be a high-profile World Expo in Montreal. Käbin requested sending of 15 Estonians to this event and wanted to include Toronto, center of Estonian emigration in Canada to their route. Expo itself

³⁵ Report of the activities of Estonian emigration in West Germany, April 3, 1961, ERA.R-1970.2.129, 4-10.

³⁶ N. Lunkov's (Head of MIDs Scandinavian section) letter to F.T.Gusev at the embassy of Stockholm, November 25, 1959, ERA.R-1970.2.122, 68-69.

³⁷ Report about Estonian emigration in Canada, July 7, 1962, ERA.R-1970.2.134, 29-37.

already employed some Soviet Estonians, as Soviets had heavily invested on their pavilion, making it the most visited pavilion of the whole expo. Yet, Käbin aimed at using the occasion for promoting Soviet Estonia and countering the efforts of the Estonian emigration in North America.

By the early 1970s, activities of the Estonian emigration rose to a new level. It seems that new generation of émigrés had activated in anti-Soviet activities, and once again Estonian communist party felt threatened. Especially émigrés' work in relation with O.S.C.E. the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe raised concerns, but Soviets were also increasingly concerned about cultural festivals in North America. Indeed, the first Estonian World Festival in Toronto in 1972 was a major show of émigré unity and as such, highly alerting to Soviets. Furthermore, émigrés had been able to get their articles published in the Finnish media.³⁸ However, the primary attention now turned from Sweden to North America which had become the largest concentration of Estonian émigrés.

Estonian Communist Party was following worriedly the preparations for the First Estonian World Festival in Toronto in 1972, but it could do little about it. Soviet-Estonian officials were estimating that some 15000 to 20000 Estonians from all continents would participate in the Festival. For convenors, the purpose of the festival was to unite Estonian émigrés, make them known to world and possibly step up anti-Soviet actions. Therefore, Soviet Estonian officials were preparing for countermeasures already a year in advance. Yet, measures were rather familiar and mild, arranging from displays of benevolent émigré artists in Soviet Estonia to distribution of propaganda materials among émigrés. Book called the "Estonian state and people in the Second World War" was among those mentioned to be distributed. Furthermore, Kodumaa magazine presenting the life in the Soviet Estonia was to have new issues to be distributed heavily. Some Estonian émigrés were also invited to visit Soviet Estonia in an attempt to further separate anti-Soviet émigrés from the supposedly apolitical majority.³⁹ There was hardly anything new in these measures. But this was not all. Direct action was planned to Toronto in particular.

Toronto that had become major center for Estonian emigration and thus would host the 1972 festivities was to be bombarded by photograph collections, literature and music recordings introducing present-day Soviet Estonia. Soviet Embassy in Canada also appealed to Toronto mayor, Minister of Immigration, and General Secretary of Ontario for abstaining to participate in the Estonian festival. But Soviet officials did not forget Sweden, from which numerous Estonian émigrés were expected to participate in Toronto festival. Therefore, Estonian Chamber Choir and ballet group of Estonia Theater were scheduled for a tour in Sweden. Friendly ties were also to be improved with the visit of a basketball team consisting of Estonian émigrés' children from Stockholm to Tallinn for a game with a team of local school children.⁴⁰ Although some of the action

³⁸ Department of foreign relations of the Central Committee ECP, January 6, 1972, ERAF.1.46.471, 1-3.

³⁹ Report on actions prepared by VEKSA against "Estonian World Festival", not before June 16, 1971, ERAF.1.46.471, 4-7.

⁴⁰ Report on actions prepared by VEKSA against "Estonian World Festival", not before June 16, 1971, ERAF.1.46.471, 4-7.

might seem irrelevant or even banal, they underline how important it was for Soviet officials to get Estonian émigrés to recognize the Soviet rule over Estonia. Estonian Festival in Toronto was considered to aim at underlining the Soviet occupation of Estonia as well as émigré interpretation of the Estonian history and heritage. This was taken as a direct challenge for the legitimacy of the Soviet Estonia.

Inviting people to Soviet Estonia seems to have been one of the primary means for creating friendly ties with émigrés who in turn were hoped to become more benevolent towards the Soviet rule this way. Indeed, towards the 1970s, it seems that all those émigrés, who seemed interested in Soviet Estonia, and especially if they were considered to be benevolent towards it, were potential invitees to Soviet Estonia.⁴¹ Yet, while Estonian officials hailed émigré visits as important, KGB had a key role in letting émigrés to the country. While KGB wrote in 1961, during the Thaw period, that émigrés could enter the country, there were still strict limits about where they could travel inside the country.⁴² It was practically very hard to go beyond Tallinn and other urban areas. This undermined the propaganda value of such trips.

Still, visits by émigré intelligentsia were considered as important events to be propagated abroad. Thus, when Eduard Tubin visited Soviet Estonia, Communist Party rejoiced that back in Sweden, he was interviewed by the Swedish TV where Tubin praised the musical life of Soviet Estonia. Furthermore, visits by other Estonian émigrés were mentioned in connection with actions against anti-Soviet émigrés. In general, Estonian officials estimated that about one third of émigrés were loyal or benevolent towards the existence of Soviet Estonia. These people were considered most likely to be affected by cultural connections. Even anti-Soviet émigrés were now divided into two categories, aggressive, and those with whom negotiation was possible.⁴³

Decline of the Soviet Estonian émigré connections

Unlikely benefactors of the Soviet émigré-related operations were Soviet-Estonian and émigré intellectuals. While Soviet officials aimed at exploiting Soviet Estonian intellectuals for influencing émigré communities, for many participants this gave a highly desired chance to go abroad and be in touch with émigré communities, something that was otherwise considered to be highly undesirable by Soviet authorities. Yet, during the heyday of cultural operations, in the 1960s, such connections seem to have been surprisingly commonplace. Soon after, however, Estonian phase in the work with émigrés turned to decline, most likely because of the Central Committee's concerns. Possibly, increasing connections were too much for KGB which was quickly strengthening its grip under Brezhnev. At the very least, the national orientation in the

⁴¹ Letter of Soviet ambassador to Sweden M. Yakovlev writes to A. Green, February 18, 1974, ERAF 1.46.473, 1.

⁴² Letter from vice-chair of Soviet Estonian KGB F. Lätte to Müürisepp, May 5, 1961, ERA.R-1970.2.129, 11.

⁴³ Excerpts from the report from the Soviet Embassy in Sweden about the work of the Consular department in 1961, ERA.R-1970.2.134, 2-11.

émigré work was obviously in trouble: émigré-related reports of the Estonian Communist Party ceased to underline Estonians by 1970s. Instead, reports started to use “the Soviet Union” where Soviet Estonia was mentioned earlier. Thus, Estonian national features vanished and the center was vacated by the Soviet semblances by the 1970s. While Soviet Estonia and its achievements had previously been at the core, now it was the Soviet Communist Party, Soviet nationalities, Soviet foreign policy and Brezhnev’s peace program.⁴⁴ Previous flexibility was just a memory in this new language. The work itself, however, remained in familiar tracks. According to a report of the work in 1974, *Kodumaa* magazine had been sent to 3751 émigrés, record amount of Estonian émigrés had visited Soviet Estonia, and Song festivals were used to raise patriotism and affection towards Soviet Estonia.⁴⁵ Yet, new generation of politically active émigrés had activated, conditions in Soviet Estonia were not getting better and politically Moscow was clamping down on Estonian communists. This made non-official contacts between Estonian émigrés and Soviet Estonians even more important, especially towards the 1980s. Paradoxically, many of these contacts were made possible due to VEKSA’s and other organs’ cultural operations.

Interestingly, historian Vahur Made has pointed out, that 1960s were a quiet period in the Baltic question in the international scene.⁴⁶ This seems to follow the period when Soviets used mostly soft power towards émigrés, when links between Soviet Estonia and émigré communities were nurtured; émigrés were invited to visit their native land; and émigré-related measures generally originated primarily from Soviet Estonia, not Moscow. Whether or not this is a sign of the success of the Soviet officials’ work, during this period émigré-related work was most active, but also fresh. Furthermore, during this period Soviet Estonian officials were also given most space to maneuver and organize the work. In the 1970s, when Estonia and the Baltic question returned to international politics, Soviet émigré-related work was once again tightly controlled by Moscow and national characteristics suppressed from the way of Soviet-centered agenda. In the 1980s, as it is known, the Baltic question became once again topical and it received a lot of international attention.

Yet, it is important to remember, that throughout the Cold War, émigrés were considered a threat by the Soviet Union. Ever since the Second World War, Soviet relationship with them was at best unease. Soviet officials were certain about their potentially destructive influence on Soviet international propaganda efforts. What was even more threatening was that émigrés actively challenged the Soviet version of Estonian history and questioned legitimacy of Soviet rule in Estonia. Therefore, even if émigrés were engaged in cultural work and all kinds of soft measures were directed to them, in Soviet propaganda émigrés were constantly

⁴⁴ Ties between Finland and Soviet Estonia, for example, which had been coming ever more active throughout the 1960s faced some new restrictions. While official connections had been encouraged by the Communist Party in the 1960s, in 1970 there was a sudden announcement that connections had been ballooning too quickly and that there ought to be tighter control over delegations to Finland. See e.g. About plans for friendly ties with foreign countries for 1970, March 12, 1970, ERAF 1.9.210, 3.

⁴⁵ Report about VEKSA’s activities in 1974, ERAF 1.46.473, 7-17.

⁴⁶ Vahur Made (2002) “The Baltic Issue during the Cold War” in *Estonian Foreign Policy at the Cross-Roads*, Helsinki: Kikimora Publications, 113-129.

attacked and their credibility questioned. Émigrés were demonized, often in terms of the Soviet version of the history of the Second World War. Although there were collaborators, fascists, former SS-men, and even some actual war criminals among émigrés, they were always a small minority. Yet, Soviet propaganda depicted politically active émigrés practically as Nazis, heinous war criminals that received their paychecks from American imperialists and warmongers; who in the Soviet Union could trust such scoundrels, proclaimed the propaganda both to foreign and domestic audiences. Thus, Soviet approach towards émigrés was always paradoxical: calling them for co-operation while simultaneously pushing them away. Partly this was due to the fact that Soviets never aimed at understanding émigrés, but rather at disarming them.⁴⁷

Émigré memories of golden 1920s or 1930s had to be suppressed. Any unfavorable comparisons between Soviet Estonia and independent Estonia were poison to Soviet officials. Years of independence were officially times of bourgeois repression of average Estonians, of economic hardship, from which the Soviet Union finally freed Estonia. While deviations from the official line could be suppressed in public within the Soviet Union, this was not the case with emigration. Emigration was confronted with hard measures mostly through KGB, but after mid-1950s increasingly with soft measures described in this article, consisting mostly of propaganda and cultural operations.

As far as individual émigrés (or Soviet Estonians) are considered, getting in touch with Soviet Estonia was for many of them hardly a political act. They had reasons ranging from curiosity to family ties to professional agenda that encouraged them to find connections in the other side of the Iron Curtain. Although it goes beyond the scope and limits of this article, it seems highly likely, that transnational, people-to-people side in relations with émigrés grew in importance from the 1970s onwards. In 1950s and 1960s Soviets selected mostly highly reliable people to be in touch with émigrés and actions were controlled in many respects. By the 1970s, however, even if the autonomy of Soviet Estonian communists was being questioned, foreign connections of Estonian citizens had been growing. Increasing amount of people were having personal or professional contacts abroad. Similarly, younger generation of Estonian émigrés was not as interested in politics as it was in the culture of their motherland. This is not to say that culture did not play a highly important role in the national movement of Soviet Estonia during the 1980s, but only that traditional émigré politics were waning in the face of other issues. This, needless to say, calls for the attention of future studies.

⁴⁷ E.g. fates of those accused of Nazi-related crimes were highly interesting in the eyes of Soviet officials, as they were useful for sowing discord among émigré communities, see e.g. the case of Aleksandr Laak: About the suicide of criminal Aleksandr Laak in Canada, ERA.R-1970.2.129, 1-2. Soviet Estonian officials ask and receive information from Canadian embassy and Moscow concerning Laak's suicide after his crimes in Estonia during the Nazi rule were exposed. Similarly, in the case of former Rector of Tartu University, Edgar Kant, who in 1962 was a famed professor in the University of Lund was in a secret memorandum linked in the first place to collaboration with Nazi occupation and to crimes committed in Tartu during that time. See: Letter of A. Green to Soviet Foreign Minister A. Gromyko, April 28, 1962, ERA.R-1970.2.134, 18-23.

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