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Weather Heritage, Scientific Networks and Weather Memory in Seventeenth Century Estonia, Livonia and Curonia

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Abstract. This article examines how the climate crises of the seventeenth century shaped forms of weather heritage and weather memory in Livonia and Courland, drawing on religious, economic and early scientific literature. It investigates weather-related social practices as expressions of local weather heritage. The study seeks to bridge the gap between literary studies and cultural climatology by asking how past weather events were recorded, transmitted and remembered. It argues that local weather heritage can be understood as a transcultural and trans-social set of practices shared among Estonians, Latvians and Germans, while also being connected to trans-regions and larger knowledge systems.

Keywords: Baltic history, climate history, weather memory, weather heritage, memory studies

INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century, known in Baltic history for its confessional conflicts between Sweden and Poland, as well as for the growth of cultural production, was also a century deeply shaped by weather and climate.¹ Owing to the fragility of social structures and the environmental pressures associated with the Little Ice Age, the Maunder Minimum, and growing volcanic activity,² the century was framed by two severe famines.³ It was further marked by harvest failures in the 1640s, culminating in a distinctive weather-related uprising among the local population.⁴ At the same time, this period witnessed a growing need to explain weather as a phenomenon, a rediscovery of weather heritage, and the emergence of new forms of weather memory.

This article examines forms of weather heritage and weather memory, focusing on how past weather-related events were remembered and to what ends. It contributes to the field of cultural climatology⁵ and

- 1 On the interaction between climate change and political conflicts in the seventeenth century, see M. Stoffel, C. Corona, F. Ludlow, M. Sigl, H. Huhtamaa, E. Garnier, S. Helama, S. Guillet, A. Crampsie, K. Kleemann, C. Camenisch, J. McConnell, C. Gao. Climatic, weather, and socio-economic conditions corresponding to the mid-17th-century eruption cluster. – *Climate of the Past*, 2022, 18, 1083–1108; C. Pfister, R. Brázdil, J. Luterbacher, A. E. J. Ogilvie, S. White. Early Modern Europe. – *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*. Ed. by S. White, C. Pfister, F. Mauelshagen. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, 265–295; D. Degroot. Climate Change and Conflict. – *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*. Ed. by S. White, C. Pfister, F. Mauelshagen. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, 367–385; Parker, G. *Global Crisis. War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2013; G. Parker. Crisis and catastrophe: The world crisis of the seventeenth century reconsidered. – *American Historical Review*, 2008, 113, 1053–1079, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.113.4.1053>; S. Ogilvie. Germany and the Seventeenth Century Crisis. – *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*. Ed. by G. Parker, L. Smith. Routledge, London, 1997, 57–87.
- 2 H. Wanner, C. Pfister, R. Neukom. The variable European Little Ice Age. – *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 2022, 287, 107531. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2022.107531>; H. Huhtamaa, M. Stoffel, C. Corona. Recession or resilience? Long-range socioeconomic consequences of the 17th century volcanic eruptions in northern Fennoscandia. – *Climate of the Past*, 2022, 18, 9, 2077–2092.
- 3 M. Seppel. Feeding the motherland: grain exports from the Swedish Baltic provinces during the Great Famine of 1696–1697. – *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 2015, 63, 3, 215–234; M. Seppel. Peatoidusehädad Liivimaal 1629–1700. – *Tuna*, 2004, 3, 25–36. M. Seppel. Näljaabi Liivi- ja Eestimaal 17. sajandist 19. sajandi alguseni. (Dissertationes Historiae Universitatis Tartuensis, 15.) Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2008; O. Liiv. Suur näljaaeg Eestis 1695–1697. – *Akadeemilise Ajalooseltsi toimetised*, 1938, 9; S. Vahtre. Ilmastikuoludest Eestis XVIII ja XIX sajandil (kuni 1870) ja nende mõjust põllumajandusele ning talurahva olukorrale. – *Eesti NSV ajaloo küsimusi*, 6 (TRÜ toimetised, 258). Tartu Riiklik Ülikool, Tartu, 1970, 43–159.
- 4 U. Plath, K. Vanamölder. Põrkuvad „ilmamaad” 17. sajandi Liivimaal. – *Methis*, 2022, 24, 30, 27–46.
- 5 W. A. Behringer. *History of Climate*. Polity Press, Malden, MA, 2010; C. Pfister. Climatic extremes, recurrent crises and witch hunts: Strategies of European societies in coping with exogenous shocks in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. – *Journal of Medieval History*, 2007, 10, 33–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097194580701000202>, 2007; M. Hulme. Climate and its changes: a cultural appraisal. – *Geo* 2015, 2, 1, 1–11, 3; S. Bergmann. *Weather, Religion and Climate change*. New York, London, Routledge, 2021; H. Huhtamaa, F. C. Ljungqvist. Climate in Nordic historical research – a research review and future perspectives. – *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, 665–695.

argues for a broader understanding of memory in climate history.⁶ To date, memory here has largely been approached through the lens of large-scale catastrophes – how such events were remembered or forgotten, and how societies responded to environmental risks. In contrast, this article does not centre on disaster memory; rather, it examines whether and how climatically challenging periods were reflected in cultural production and local practices, and the extent to which these practices and understandings of weather as a phenomenon were shaped through the remembrance of past weather events.

Weather memory is not identical to climate memory. Whereas the latter seeks traces of past climates within natural archives, weather memory is concerned with human archives and the ways in which weather events – or even perceived norms and averages – were recorded, interpreted and embedded in cultural practices. These two forms of memory are, however, closely interconnected. As Peter Adamson and David Rapson have argued, “weather and climate should be considered forms of both natural and intangible cultural heritage”, serving as umbrella terms for diverse forms of environmental, cultural and spatial memory and practice.⁷ The question of how weather and climate were perceived across different social strata is particularly significant in Baltic history, given the complex colonial entanglements between Estonian and Latvian peasants, the German-speaking middle and upper classes, and shifting political regimes (Sweden, Poland). It is therefore necessary to ask not only how different confessional groups, but also how distinct social and cultural communities, interpreted the weather events they experienced. Can Baltic weather memory be understood as an entangled phenomenon that transcends social hierarchies and power structures as supposed in memory studies?⁸ How far can we apply the

- 6 Historical oriented memory studies are often concentrating on disasters, see e.g. Ch. Rohr. Disaster memory and ‘banished memory’: General considerations and case studies from Europe and the United States (19th–21st centuries). – *Dealing with Disasters from Early Modern to Modern Times Cultural Responses to Catastrophes*. Ed. by H. van Asperen, L. Jensen. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2023, 315–337.
- 7 G. Adamson, J. Rapson. Weather, heritage, and memory. – *WIREs Climate Change*, 2024, 15, 6, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.913>, 2. L. Plate argues in the same way: “Memory Studies could upscale the concept for a posthumanist understanding of memory and reconceive it to be about the environment at large; a true memory environment of which humans are (but) a part.” (L. Plate. Climate change and the metamorphosis of memory: A response to Stef Craps. – *Parallax*, 2017, 23, 4, 493–497 (here 495). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1374519>)
- 8 R. Crownshaw. Cultural memory studies in the epoch of the Anthropocene. – *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*. Ed. by L. Bond, S. Craps, P. Vermeulen. Berghahn, New York, 2017, 242–257; *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. Ed. by C. De Cesari, A. Rigney. De Gruyter, Berlin, 2014; *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*. Ed. by A. Assmann, S. Conrad. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2010.

new environmental approaches of the fourth wave of memory studies to historical knowledge?⁹ While this article cannot provide exhaustive answers, it aims to shed light on a question that merits far broader discussion.

The primary sources for this study are locally printed German-language texts. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the number of printed publications increased significantly, accompanied by new forms of knowledge transmission across regions, and new interactions between authors, publishing houses and readers. Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in seventeenth-century cultural and literary studies has grown substantially.¹⁰ Recent research in Baltic literary history has demonstrated the extent to which international, regional and local forms of knowledge production were intertwined.¹¹ As shown in studies of early modern Latin literature, scholarly networks were as elsewhere a normal feature of academic life in Estonia, Livonia and Courland.¹² At the same time interest in systematic weather observation expanded following a late medieval boom centred in Nuremberg and spread particularly through Polish universities, where planetary astronomy and the production of astrological almanacs (ephemerides) flourished. What did local Baltic weather memory look like, and which concepts of weather generation were prevalent?

The sources examined in this article belong to several genres. Religious literature remained the dominant form of Baltic literary culture throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Particular attention is given here to the sermons of Samson Hermann (1579–1643), including his witch sermons of 1621¹³ and his comet sermon of 1619.¹⁴ Also central is Johannes Gutsclaff's *Short Report and Instruction about the Falsely Sacred*

- 9 E. Gülüm, P. Leworthy, J. Tabaszewska, H. Teichler. Memory and Environment. – *Memory Studies Review*, 2024, 1. 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1163/29498902-20240007>.
- 10 See the work of Martin Klöker, Aivar Pöldvee, Kristi Viiding, Stefan Donecker, Meelis Friedenthal, etc.
- 11 Entangled Cultures in the Baltic Region. Ed. by E. Laanes = Special Issue of *Journal of Baltic Studies* 2020, 51, 3; J. Undusk. Baltisaksa kirjakultuuri struktuurist. Ärgituseks erinumbri lugejale. – *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 2011, 8–9, 561–571; L. Lukas. Estonian folklore as a source of Baltic-German poetry. – *Journal of Baltic Studies* 2011, 42, 4, 491–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2011.621738>.
- 12 Briefe, Recht und Gericht im polnischen Livland am Beispiel von David Hilchen = Letters, Law and Court in Polish Livonia: The Case of David Hilchen. Hrsg. von K. Viiding, H. Siimets-Gross, T. Hoffmann, unter Mitarbeit von M. Klöker. (Baltische literarische Kultur, 4.) LIT, Münster, 2022.
- 13 S. Hermann. Neun Ausserlesen vnd Wolgegründete Hexen Predigt, Darinnen der Terminus Magiae oder Zauberey nach den Logicalischen terminis richtig vnd kürzlich auss Gottes Wort, vnd andern Schribenten vnd Historien erkläret vnd ausgeführt worden, und in der Thumb Kirchen zu Riga öffentlich gehalten, Riga, Gerhard Schröder, 1626.
- 14 S. Hermann. Cometen Prediegt [!], Das ist, Christliche Unterweisung, Wie man den Cometen, (welcher sich newlich am Himmel hat sehen lassen) soll betrachten (...). Nicolaus Mollin, Riga, 1619.

River Wöhhanda in Livonia (1644), which addresses the climatic unrest of 1642 from the perspective of a local pastor.¹⁵ In the second half of the century, we observe a rise in local economic literature. While German *Hausväterliteratur* drew on classical traditions and often produced extensive, richly illustrated works intended for rulers, the surviving Baltic examples of this genre were considerably shorter and more practical in content, as they were aimed not at kings and princes but at local manor owners and bailiffs.¹⁶ These texts describe ideal estate management and provide insight not only into social organisation but also into weather observation as an agricultural practice.¹⁷ This article focuses on Salomon Gubert's *Stratagema oeconomicum, oder Akker-Student*, published in four editions between 1645 and 1757,¹⁸ itself based on a now-lost late sixteenth-century work.¹⁹ Other texts in this genre, such as Johann Hermann von Neidenburg's *Lieffländischer Landmann* (Riga, 1662–1695)²⁰ and the anonymous *Faithful Bailiff*²¹, contain comparatively little material on weather and are therefore not included in this study. In addition to religious and economic writings, early scientific literature addressing meteorological questions must also be considered. Accordingly, the first work devoted to the history of Baltic weather – *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae sive Historiae Meteorologicae Teutonico-Curlandicae Astrologiae* by Georg Krüger (1700), hereafter referred to as the *Weather History*²² – will be analysed, as it retrospectively surveys weather observations

- 15 J. Gutsclaff. Kurtzer Bericht vnd Vnterricht Von der Falsch-heilig genandten Bäche in Lieffland Wöhhanda. Daraus die Vnchristliche Abbrennung der Sommerpahlischen Mühlen geschehen ist. Aus Christlichem Eyfer, wegen des Vnchristlichen vnd Heydnischen Aberglaubens gegeben Von Johanne Gutsclaff, Pomer. Pastorn zu Vrbs in Lieffland. J. Vogel, Dorpat, 1644.
- 16 See U. Plath. Stille im "Haus": Hausvater, Verwalter und transnationale Gesellung auf dem baltischen Gutshof zwischen 1750 und 1850. – Ehe. Haus. Familie: Strategien und Inszenierungen häuslichen Lebens 1750–1850. Hrsg. von I. Schmidt Voges. Böhlau, Köln, 2010, 179–207; U. Plath. Kommunikation als Drahtseilakt: Verwalter auf dem baltischen Gutshof in der Frühen Neuzeit. – Das Leben auf dem Lande im Baltikum. Hrsg. von J. Heyde. Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, Lüneburg, 2012, 273–315.
- 17 Anonym. Der getreue Amt-Mann, oder, Unterricht eines guten Hauss-Halters. Georg Matth. Nöller, Riga, 1696.
- 18 S. Gubert. Stratagema oeconomicum oder Ackerstudent, denen jungen ungeübten Ackerleuten in Lieffland zum nöthigem Unterricht (...). G. Schröder, Riga, 1645.
- 19 Zacharias Stopius's *Liefländische Oeconomia* was allegedly not printed for financial reasons, but contemporaries suspected that this had more to do with his role in the calendar riots and his dubious political activities, see U. Plath. Stille im "Haus".
- 20 J. Herman von Neidenburg. Lieffländischer Landman. Heinrich Bessemesser, Riga, 1662.
- 21 Anonym. Der getreue Amt-Mann, oder, Unterricht eines guten Hauss-Halters, Georg Matth. Nöller, Riga, 1696.
- 22 G. Krüger. Prodromus Aurorae Boreae Sive Historiae Meteorologicae Teutonico-Curlandicae Astrologiae Naturalis fundamendo exornatae & comprobatae Das ist Vortrab Teutsch= und Curländischen Gewitter=Historie Durch die wahre natürliche Astrologie bewehret und probiret, Nemlich Wie es in dem gantzen Seculo von Anno 1600 bis 1700. Jährlich von einem Quartal oder Jahrs=Viertel zum andern / Winter / Frülینگ / Sommer / Herbst / theils in Teutschland / theils in Curland nach dem Astrologischen Fundament gewittert / dem curieuses Liebhaber zur Nachricht / andern zum nützlichen Unterricht mit Fleiß zusammen getragen / und in dieser Forme Tafel. Nöller, Riga, 1700.

across the century. Rooted in the astrological traditions of Gdańsk, the work is linked to academic scholarship, astrology and calendar-making practices within the Polish sphere. It also represents an early example of organised weather memory and observation networks. Within Baltic climate history, it occupies a unique position, although it ultimately remained an incomplete endeavour. While the relationship between early modern calendars and climatic knowledge has been studied,²³ Krüger's *Prodromus* attracted scholarly attention in the field of communication studies and astrology mainly as a calendar maker,²⁴ but remained understudied within climate history and studies on weather memory.

This article compares weather-related knowledge across the three literary genres outlined above, analyses the cultural layers underpinning them and their interconnections, and evaluates the significance of weather memory and weather heritage for Baltic climate and cultural history. Its aim is to bridge the gap between climate, literary, communication, religious and memory studies.

RELIGION AND LOCAL WEATHER HERITAGE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Any analysis of weather-related knowledge in the early modern Baltic region cannot begin without considering the official doctrine of the Protestant Church in the first half of the seventeenth century. Samson Hermann (1579–1643),²⁵ superintendent of the Protestant Church in Riga, articulated a representative theological position in his widely circulated witch sermons. Within this framework, the making of weather was understood to lie exclusively in the hands of God. Any interpretation of weather conditions thus functioned as a kind of “moral

23 K. M. Smith. *The Science of Astrology: Schreibkalender, Natural Philosophy, and Everyday Life in the Seventeenth-century German Lands*. PhD thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2018. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=ucin1522057810431579&disposition=inline.

24 Y.-G. Mix, F. Köther, K. Kandler. *Die Kalender-, Almanach- und Taschenbuchliteratur Estlands, Livlands und Kurlands (1700–1830): Analytische Bibliographie*. Teil I, 2018; Teil II, 2019; http://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=krueger_georg;J.Kaminskis,J.Klētnieks.TheActivitiesofGeorgiusKrüger,SecretaryoftheAstronomerJohannesHevelius,inCourland.–JohannesHeveliusandHisWorld:Astronomer,Cartographer,PhilosopherandCorrespondent.Ed.byR.L.Kremer,J.Włodarczyk.InstytutHistoriiNaukiPAN,Warsaw,2013,231–235.

25 P. O. Schabert. *Mag. Hermann Samson, der erste livländische Superintendent: Ein Lebensbild für Jung und Alt*. Jonck & Poliewsky, Riga, 1906. <https://www.deutschebiographie.de/gnd124292712.html#adbcontent>.

barometer”,²⁶ reflecting an individual’s spiritual state; deviation from orthodox understanding could easily provoke suspicion and accusation.

According to Hermann, Satan, together with witches and sorcerers, sought to discern and anticipate God’s meteorological design in order to deceive humanity and assert false authority over the future. He explicitly criticised Catholic beliefs for attributing excessive power to demonic forces and condemned practices associated with weather-making, as well as belief in such powers, as forms of black magic that should be prohibited.²⁷ At the same time, Hermann distinguished between illicit practices and the interpretation of natural signs. The latter, which he classified as *magia naturalis* (natural magic),²⁸ constituted a permissible – if still morally ambiguous – form of knowledge. Drawing on biblical examples, he argued that even Jesus Christ and the prophet Elijah engaged in such practices by interpreting signs in nature to anticipate weather changes.

Christ the Lord speaks of such natural magic: In the evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red (Matthew 16); and in the morning, you say, Today there will be a storm, for the sky is red and overcast. The great wonder-prophet Elijah also observed such natural magic when he said that it would rain, upon seeing a small cloud, like a man’s hand, rising out of the sea.²⁹

In Hermann’s view, reading natural signs to understand imminent weather conditions was comparable to the use of medicinal plants: a minor and forgivable transgression. Nevertheless, he insisted that weather phenomena should primarily serve as occasions for praising God. Through religious contemplation, the observation of weather could and even should become a form of spiritual exercise.³⁰ In contrast, long-term forecasting or attempts to alter divinely ordained weather patterns were unequivocally condemned as black magic.³¹ Efforts to predict the future, whether through astrology, ritual practices or sacramental

26 S. Bergmann. *Weather, Religion and Climate Change*. New York, Routledge, London, 2021, 71–74.

27 U. Plath, K. Vanamölder. *Pörkuvad „ilmamaad”* 17. sajandi Liivimaaal.

28 “Vnd ist fürwar eine grosse Sünde vnnd Vermessenheit / gewisse Tage setzen / oder nennen / daran es kalt oder warm trüb oder helle / trucken oder feucht sein werde. Wie auch diejenigen sich sehr an GOtt versündigen / die im Gewitter nicht auff GOtt sehen / sondern lauffen zum Calender / vnd wollen daraus lehrnen / was für Gewitter seyn werde.” Those who believed in Satan causing bad weather were cursed by the officials of the churches: S. Hermann. *Neun Ausserlesen*, 63, 70.

29 “Von solcher natürlichen Magia redet der HErr Christus: Deß Abends/sprecht ihr, es wird ein schöner Tag werden / denn der Himmel ist rodt (Matt. 16): Vnd deß Morgens sprecht ihr es wird heut Vngewitter sein / denn der Himmel ist rodt vnd trübe. Auff solche natürliche magiam hat auch gesehen der grosse WunderProphet Elias / inDem er gesaget / es würde regnen / da er sahe /daß eine kleine Wolcke / wie eines Mannes Hand/auß dem Meer auffgieng.” S. Hermann. *Neun Ausserlesen*, Fünffte Predigt, s.p.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

interventions against storms and hail, were equated with superstition and likened to magical practices in warfare, such as attempts to render oneself invulnerable.³² Looking into the future was thus construed as sinful, whereas reflecting on past weather events, particularly through the lens of scripture, was considered a legitimate religious practice.

The question arises as to whether such theological interpretations can also be identified in other literary genres beyond explicitly religious texts. Evidence suggests that Hermann's doctrinal position often clashed with the lived experiences and beliefs of local populations, including Estonians, Latvians, Russians and Baltic Germans, whose livelihoods depended more directly on environmental conditions. A striking example is provided by events in 1642 in southern Estonia, where a watermill belonging to a German landowner was twice destroyed by local inhabitants. The attackers believed that the mill obstructed the sacred waters of the Võhandu River, which, according to local tradition, needed to flow freely and remain pure in order to ensure favourable weather.³³ Here, local weather-related beliefs and practices came into direct conflict with both ecclesiastical doctrine and the economic interests of the ruling elite. The resulting unrest escalated into broader uprisings that required intervention by local authorities. This event prompted the local pastor Johannes Gutsloff (d. 1657) to compose an extensive theological and scholarly treatise of over 300 pages, addressing the religious interpretation of local weather practices and memory. His account reveals that participation in the unrest was not limited to peasants; local Germans and even members of clergy were implicated. Gutsloff criticised not only popular practices but also the reliance of German elites on astrology and calendrical prognostication, which – like Hermann – he categorised as forms of illicit knowledge.³⁴ In this sense, all segments of society were, in one way or another, accused of improperly attempting to predict or influence the weather.

Gutsloff's writings also provide valuable insight into the role of memory in sustaining weather-related practices. He reports that earlier rituals involving the periodic cleaning of rivers and springs had been

32 S. Hermann. Neun Ausserlesen, Achtes Kapitel, s.p.

33 "Denn solch Geschrey hat gantz Lieflland erfüllet gehabt / also daß von Riga an biß Narva, Revall / Pernaw ec der Lettische Bawr über die Schwäti Ubbe / der Ehstnische Bawr aber über die Pöha Jöge gerufen hat. Vnd nicht alleine hat dies Aergernisse den Bawrsmann berühret / sondern hat auch viele der Teutschen bethöret / vnd zwar des gemeinen Mannes den mehrertheil / auch etzliche im hohen Stade vnnnd Ansehen: Schande ist es / daß ich bekennen muß / daß auch *Pastores*, die der Gemeine Christi mit heilsamer Lehre vorstehen sollen / sich nicht geschewet haben / diesen schändlichen *Paganismus* zu *defendieren*". (J. Gutsloff. Kurtzer Bericht vnd Vnterricht, 17–18)

34 Ibid., 285–286, 302–304.

regularly performed until the conquest of southern Estonia under Charles IX of Sweden.³⁵ Thereafter, such practices fell into decline but were partially revived during the crises of the early 1640s, when it was remembered that ancestors had been able to influence weather conditions. Testimonies from elderly peasants affirmed the perceived efficacy of these rituals.³⁶ Weather-related memory extended even further back in time and across cultural boundaries. Gutsloff recounts, for instance, that “during the Russian war”³⁷ Tatars serving in the Russian forces forced a local peasant to clean the stream in order to ensure favourable weather conditions.³⁸ Memory concerning weather manipulation dated therefore back more than 50 years and included transcultural features. However, the introduction of Protestantism under Swedish rule appears to have interrupted these traditions, which resurfaced primarily in times of environmental crises. This raises the question of whether periods of climatic stress reactivated older, nearly forgotten forms of weather heritage. If so, such cases would provide concrete evidence for the adaptive strategies described by Arno Borst, who argued that medieval and early modern societies developed recurring patterns for coping with environmental crises, while modern societies simply tend to forget them. In the Baltic context, these patterns of local weather memory appear as entangled phenomena, mobilised in response to severe weather conditions and capable of bridging divisions of culture, language and social hierarchy.

35 In 1602, the Swedish king Charles IX confirmed the privileges of the knightships of the districts of Võnnu, Tartu and Pärnu.

36 “Es ist unser alter Glaube also/denn es haben uns die Alten also gelehret. Und sagen weiter / es haben solchees ihre Vorfahren allewege gehalten / diesen Brunn und Bäche jährlich reine zu halten / biß zur Ankunfft König Caroli seligen Andenckens aus Schweden nacher Dörpat / zu der Zeit und hernach sey es verblieben und aus der acht gekommen / dass seythero weder der Brunn noch die Bäche sey gereinigt worden. Lettuiske Michel sagte mir / es hetten die Alten durch diesen Brunn das Gewitter stellen können wie sie gewolet hetten. Denn hetten sie Regen und Ungewitter begehret, Y so hätten sie etwas in den Brunne oder die Bäche geworfen / hetten sie aber klar Wetter begehret / so hätten sie den Brunn wieder gereinigt. Einen alten Bawren mit Namen Kiwwitte A. habe ich gefragt: ob er denn wüste / dass in alten Zeiten immer böses Wetter were erfolget auf die Verunreinigt dieser bäche. Der antwortete mir: es hetten die Alten also gesaget / were ihm abernichtet mehr bewusst als einmahl / da er noch ein Teoposiken / das ist ein Knabe gewesen / der in des Herren Arbiet hette gehen können / da sey er zu Odenpäh in der Arbeith gewesen zur Himmelfahrswuche.” (J. Gutsloff. Kurtzer Bericht vnd Vnterricht, 24–25)

37 During the second part of the sixteenth century.

38 Item / Im russischen Kriege / hetten die Tattern unterm Russischen Volcke / einsmahls einen Bawren Pulli genant / Im verbeziehen gepfändet an allem Eisenwercke / dass er solte die Bäche reine machen damit besser Wetter würde. J. Gutsloff. Kurtzer Bericht vnd Vnterricht, 28.

TOWARD TRANSCULTURAL WEATHER HERITAGE

This tendency toward a shared, transcultural local weather heritage becomes even more pronounced in economic literature from the second half of the seventeenth century. The most important source for this genre in Estonia, Latvia and Courland is the *Stratagema Oeconomicum* by Salomon Gubert (d. 1653), a pastor who served in Nītaure, Mālpils, and later Suntaži. First published in Riga in 1645, the work was reprinted multiple times (1649, 1676, 1688 and 1757), indicating its sustained relevance. Approximately one-third of the text is devoted to local weather heritage in the form of proverbs and weather lore, understood as “the knowledge of the people acquired through ordinary observation of plants and other natural phenomena, unaided by instruments”, and including elements of local astrology.³⁹ It is notable that Gubert, despite his clerical background, did not condemn this body of local (primarily Latvian) weather knowledge. On the contrary, he sought to transmit it to German newcomers – manor owners and stewards – who lacked familiarity with local environmental conditions and practices. As he writes: “A ploughman must needs be versed in the farmer’s signs and reckonings; therefore I set forth to offer the untried a modest service in what follows.”⁴⁰ His work thus functions as a medium of knowledge transfer across cultural and social boundaries.

At the same time, Gubert highlights differences between German and Baltic weather traditions. Whereas in German contexts the lunar cycle played a central role in agricultural practice,⁴¹ Baltic weather lore placed greater emphasis on winds, which were believed to exert a decisive influence and therefore required careful observation. Already at the end of the sixteenth century, Zacharias Stopius noted in his Livonian calendar the importance of observing the wind on St. Matthew’s Day and warned against sowing when the wind blew from the same direction.⁴² This focus

39 H. A. Hazen. The Origin and Value of Weather Lore. – The Journal of American Folklore, 1900, 13, 50, 191–198 (here 191, 192).

40 “Es ist gar nöthig einem Ackermann / dass ihm das Bawer prognosticon bekindt sey. Will demnach den Unerfahrenen hiermit nachfolgenden Dienst leisten.” (S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 69)

41 K. M. Smith. The Science of Astrology, 75ff.

42 Extract desz Sechsten Capittels Herrn Doctoris Stopii weilant Medic’der Stadt Riga. Ersten Buchesz Liefllandischer Oeconomi oder Hauszhaltung. Worin die Verrichtung einesz fleiszigen Hauszwirtesz Vnnd Hauszwirtinnenn auf alle Monats dasz Jahr durch Vorgescriebenn. Nebenst ein Auszug desz Stedtwehrenden Calenders vnndt abtheilung der Tage vnnd nacht lenge der Sonnen auff – vnnd Niedergang durchsz gantze Jahr auff den Polum desz Vberdunischen Furstenthumbs in Liefllandt nach dem Rigischen Seiger gestellet. Von obgedachten Herren Zachariam Stopium. National Library of Latvia, Reto Gramatu un Rokrakstu nodala R x/59 F.9.9, S. 33.

persisted into the seventeenth century, particularly in spring, when wind patterns were used to forecast the success of the harvest.⁴³ Northern and western winds received particular attention, and exceptionally strong winds were attributed a significance comparable to that of comets elsewhere in Europe, being associated with misfortune, war and disease.⁴⁴

In addition to winds, Gubert records interpretations of comets and eclipses,⁴⁵ as well as numerous methods for forecasting rain based on natural observation. Many of these are expressed in the form of proverbs derived from everyday experience: rain might be expected when salt becomes damp,⁴⁶ when lice and fleas become more active,⁴⁷ when frogs croak (“Wenn die Frösche knarren / So magstu auf Regen harren”⁴⁸), when chickens bathe in sand or chicks chirp loudly,⁴⁹ when cattle pant at noon, or when dogs dig and howl.⁵⁰ Particularly noteworthy is the distinction between “good” and “bad” rain, which is defined not by quantity but by quality. Good rain is described as warm and accompanied by thunder, whereas bad rain is cold, associated with hail, or occurs while the sun is shining – an ominous sign summarised in the proverb “Vom Sonnen-Regen werden Ungeziefer” (sun-rain breeds vermin).⁵¹

From the perspective of Samson Hermann, such practices would largely fall under *magia naturalis*, insofar as they aimed at short-term forecasting rather than direct manipulation of the weather. Unlike condemned forms of black magic, these practices did not seek to alter divine will but to interpret natural signs. For Gubert, they represented valuable empirical knowledge essential to agricultural practice. Since other contemporary works of *Hausväterliteratur* rarely address weather heritage in comparable depth, it would be unwise to generalise too broadly from the *Stratagema Oeconomicum*. Gubert’s openness toward such knowledge may reflect a personal inclination rather than a widespread trend. Nevertheless, his text demonstrates a broad interest in diverse forms of weather heritage, including those rooted in German

43 S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 161.

44 *Ibid.*, 88.

45 *Ibid.*, 87.

46 *Ibid.*, 75.

47 *Ibid.*, 74.

48 *Ibid.* These parts of the Peasant prognosticon is clearly rooted in European heritage.

So we can find the saying about the frogs already two hundred years earlier in Leonhard Reynmann’s *Vö[n]warer erkantnusz des weters*: “Wenn morgens fru/mit o/ schreyen die frösch / Bedeiit ain regen darnach gar resch.” (L. Reynmann. *Vö[n]warer erkantnusz des weters* Also das ain yeder er sey gelert oder vngelert durch alle natürliche anzygung die endrung des weters ... wissen vnd erkennen mag. Froschauer, Augspurg, 1510, s.p.)

49 S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 82.

50 *Ibid.*, 80.

51 *Ibid.*, 162.

elite culture. Alongside prayers and hymns against adverse weather⁵² – practices with deep roots in earlier Catholic traditions⁵³ – he also records beliefs associated clearly with the upper classes, such as the notion that carrying coral or hyacinth gemstones could provide protection against lightning.⁵⁴ Such ideas, deriving from ancient gemmological traditions, illustrate the coexistence of multiple layers of weather-related belief within the context of the manor.⁵⁵

Weather heritage at the level of the manor functioned as an entangled phenomenon, drawing primarily on local peasant knowledge while also incorporating religious practices and elements of German upper-class culture. Notably, within this body of weather lore one can also identify early forms of weather memory. Gubert, for instance, remarks: “After a winter most severe, a gentler one is wont to follow; yet in the year 1608, the very contrary came to pass.”⁵⁶ Such statements indicate an emerging practice of testing traditional weather lore against observed experience. This tendency toward empirical verification gained increasing importance toward the end of the seventeenth century, pointing to a gradual shift in the epistemological status of weather knowledge.

WEATHER AND SCIENTIFIC NETWORKS

The year 1700 marks not only the outbreak of the Great Northern War, which profoundly reshaped Baltic history, but also the beginning of climate historiography in the region. In that same year, Georg Krüger (1642/1643–1707) published his *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae sive Historiae Meteorologicae Teutonico-Curlandicae* (*Weather History*) in Nica, then part of the Polish Duchy of Courland. This work is unique in the Baltic

52 “Du grosser Himmels Herr / zner lieber Vater / ... Bewahre vnd segene znsere Ecker / Gärten / Utehe vnd Fahesel. Segene vnsere Arbeit / bescher frühe vnd spat-Regen. Behüte vns für Hagel / Milthaw / schädlichem Frost / und grawsahnen Ungewitter.” (S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 257–258) For other weather prayers, see *ibid.*, 260–261.

53 S. Hermann. *Neun Ausserlesen*, 29–31, 115; A. Bernd-Brinkmann. *Wetterlieder im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*. – *Lied und populäre Kultur = Song and Popular Culture*, 2000, 45, 89–108; C. Pfister, H. Wanner. *Klima und Gesellschaft in Europa: Die letzten tausend Jahre*. Paul Haupt Verlag, Bern, 2021, 141. P. Oderborn. *Tröstliche Betrachtung der Wolthaten Jesu Christi / der auff den Wolcken ein Richter der Lebendigen und der Todten kommen wird*. – P. Oderborn. *Vier Predigten von dem Bogen Gottes in den Wolken* (...). Niclas Mollyn, Riga, 1591, s.p.

54 S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 74–75.

55 G. Rapp. *Gems and man: a brief history*. – *EMU Notes in Mineralogy*, 2019, 20, 323–344.

56 “Nach einem sehr strengen Winter / pfleget ein weicher Winter zu folgen. / aber Anno 1608. ist das Gegenthiel erfolgt.” (S. Gubert. *Stratagema oeconomicum*, 76–77)

context as it compiles a unique overview of the use of weather memory within early scientific and astrological networks.

Krüger was born in Lieberose, in the Sorbian region of Lower Lusatia.⁵⁷ He entered the University of Frankfurt (Oder) at the remarkably young age of 12 or 13 and continued his studies from 1662 in Naumburg, where he acquired foundational knowledge in astronomy. Further studies at the University of Wittenberg culminated in his promotion to Master of Philosophy in 1675, with a dissertation devoted to Sorbian history.⁵⁸ On the recommendation of his former professor Michael Strauch, he moved in 1676 to Gdańsk, where he worked for three years as secretary and assistant to Johannes Hevelius (1611–1687), one of the leading astronomers of his time.⁵⁹

During his time in Gdańsk, Krüger developed a strong interest in astro-meteorology, seeking to understand the *influxus coelestis*, that is, the influence of celestial bodies on terrestrial weather. His central questions – whether and how the heavens shape weather patterns, and whether such knowledge could be systematised – reflect broader early modern concerns.⁶⁰ He wanted to understand “Why one year is wet / another dry / one fruitful / another barren / one too cold / another too warm”.⁶¹ In 1678 he published his first work, *Cometische Glücks- und Friedens-Fackel*, which, with an afterword by Hevelius, challenged the widespread interpretation of comets as harbingers of disaster.⁶² Such beliefs were also prevalent in the Baltic, as evidenced by Gebhard Himself’s *Cometologia*

57 K.-D. Herbst. Krüger, Georg. – Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=krueger_georg. About his life, see J. Kaminskis, J. Klėtnieks. The Activities of Georgius Krüger.

58 M. G. Krüger. Disputatio Historica De Serbis, Venedorum Natione vulgò dictis die Wenden qyam consensu Spectabilis Philosophicae Facultatis Praeses M. Georgius Krüger / Liberosensis Lusatus. & Laurentius Jetze / Rezens. NeoMarch. Respondens, publico Philosophorum examini submittent. horis consvetis. d. Junii 1675. In Auditorio Philosophorum. Wittenberg, 1675. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=krueger_georg.

59 Johannes Hevelius and His World: Astronomer, Cartographer, Philosopher and Correspondent. Ed. by R. L. Kremer, J. Włodarczyk, Instytut Historii Nauki PAN, Warsaw, 2013; G. Krüger. Prodomus Aurorae Boreae, Vorrede. s.p.; J. Kaminskis, J. Klėtnieks. The Activities of Georgius Krüger, 231–232.

60 “Waß von dem *influxu coelesti* oder Wirkung des Himmels / der von Vielen in Zweifel gezogen / oder wohl gar verneinet wird / zu halten: insonderheit: ob und wie der Himmel das Gewitter auf Erden würckete: item: ob und wie dieselbe Wissenschaft zu einer Regularität / worann viel desperieren, könnte gebracht werden.” (G. Krüger. Prodomus Aurorae Boreae, Vorrede, s.p.)

61 G. Krüger. Prodomus Aurorae Boreae.

62 G. Krüger. Cometische Glücks= und Friedens=Fackel / Welche Der Allerhöchste Gott im vergangenen 1677. Jahre den 26. (16.) Aprilis an dem hohen Himmels=Leuchter aufgesetzet / (...) Altenburg, [1678]; A. Bähr. Der grausame Komet: Himmelszeichen und Weltgeschehen im Dreißigjährigen Krieg. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 2017.

(1665).⁶³ In contrast, Krüger interpreted the comet of 1666 as a potential sign of peace and agricultural prosperity.⁶⁴

Krüger's career, however, was not without disruption. Following a fire in Hevelius's observatory in 1679, an event for which Krüger fell under suspicion, he left Gdańsk and relocated to Courland.⁶⁵ There, with the support of his brother, Christian Krüger, he secured positions as a teacher in Dobeles/Doblen and later as rector of the St. John's school in Liepāja/Libau.⁶⁶ In 1680, he produced the first calendar made for Courland, equipped with detailed weather forecasts.⁶⁷ In 1684 he donated a *tabula meteorologica* – most likely ephemerides for Courland – in a hand-coloured version highlighting the position of Saturn, to the Duke of Courland and Semgallia, together with a practical handbook explaining its use.⁶⁸ Two years later he was appointed court astronomer by Friedrich Casimir Kettler (1650–1698). During this period, he initiated new calendar series, including the *Rigischer Curiositäten-Calendar* 1699–1700 and the *Lieffländischer Curiositäten-Calendar* 1701–1708.

Krüger's ability to establish and maintain networks of correspondence was characteristic of early modern scientific practice.⁶⁹ Notably, he dedicated his *Weather History* not to a ruler but to regional publishers, recognising their role in disseminating knowledge and facilitating scholarly exchange.⁷⁰ His approach to communication

63 G. Himsel. *Cometologia oder Anmerckung und Natürliche Muthmassung von den Cometen In dreyen Fragen als I. Ob die Cometen unter oder über den Mond zusetzen? II. Ob die Aspecten der Planeten einige Würckung selbige hervor zubringen haben? III. Ob auß den Himmlischen Zeichen in welchen sie erscheinen etwas von derer Würckung könne vorher verkündiget werden?* Hamburg, 1665.

64 “Was aber unseren itzigen Cometen betrifft / kan ein ieglicher der nur den Titul obenhin ansiehet / ihm an den Fingern abzehlen / daß ich ihm keine böse Wirck- oder Bedeutung zuschreibe. Eben zu dem Ende habe ich ihn eine Glücks- und Friedens-Fackel genennet (...) Dörfte ich dieser Glücks-Fackel noch etwas zuwerffen / so wären dieses meine wenigen Gedancken / daß wie vor 100. Jahren geschehen /auch itztund der Comet und ein fruchtbares und gottgesegnetes Jahr anzeigen werde (...).” (G. Krüger. *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae*, s.p.)

65 For the whole story, see J. Kaminskis, J. Klētnieks. *The Activities of Georgius Krüger*, 231–232.

66 Ibid.

67 About the dating of the first calendar and the finances, see https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=krueger_georg.

68 Krüger's *Tabula* might have looked like similar ones from the 18th century as N. Cruquius. *Weather observations from Leyden, 1723*. – *Philosophical Transactions* 1724, 33, 4–7; P. van Musschenbroek. *Ephemerides Meteorological Ultrajectinae MDCCCCVIII*. – *Physicae experimentales*, 1729, 685.

69 *Die Korrespondenz des Astronomen und Kalendermachers Gottfried Kirch (1639–1710)*. Hrsg. von K.-D. Herbst (unter Mitwirkung von E. Knobloch und M. Simon sowie mit einer Graphik von E. C. Engelmann). IKS Garamond, Jena, 2006.

70 “Seyd Ihr / Herren Buchhändler / nicht diejenigen / welche von allen raresten und *Curieuses* Büchern Wissenschaft haben / und Nachricht geben? Seyd Ihr nicht die jengen / welche zu Wasser und Lande mit grossem Hazard die Wissenschaften in der gantzen Welt ausbreiten und befördern? Seyd Ihr nicht die jengen / welche mit denen Gelahrten in Liebe und Freundschaft so verbunden / das einer ohne den andern nicht leben kan? Seyd Ihr nicht die jengen / ohne welchen so zu reden ein Gelahrter kein Gelahrter ist / und seyn

perhaps reflects the influence of Hevelius, who maintained extensive European networks. On the level of intellectual reception he drew on the work of earlier scholars such as Lorenz Eichstädt,⁷¹ Johannes Kepler, Hermann IV landgrave of Hessen⁷², the writings of Johannes Stöfler, David Origanus, Sethus Calvisius,⁷³ William Cock,⁷⁴ Jean Baptiste Morin⁷⁵ and Peter Crüger, who worked between 1607 and 1639 in Gdańsk as a professor of mathematics and poetry and taught Johannes Hevelius.⁷⁶ In addition Krüger corresponded with many contemporary colleagues. The most prominent among them was his close friend Friedrich Büthner (1622–1701), who arrived in Gdańsk in 1653 and worked there as a school rector. Between 1655 and 1699, he compiled several calendars and began systematic weather observations. In October 1677 Büthner gained the Royal privilege for printing and selling calendars in German and Polish in Prussia.⁷⁷ With this position he outcompeted other calendar

kan? Demnach so bitte / HochgeEhrte Herren / Euch alle / und einen jeden insonderheit / sie nehmen Großgünstig dieses geringe *Praesentchen* vor lieb / bis was bessers erfolget / sie blieben diesen *Prodromum* an Liebhaber aller Orten zu befördren / und erkundigen sich überall / wo etwan curieuse Liebhaber dergleiche Gewitter=*Observationes* auf alle Tage oder Quartal *colligiret*." (G. Krüger. *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae*, s.p.)

- 71 Eichstädt worked since 1645 as a professor of mathematics and medicine at the academic gymnasium in Gdansk and took over also the duty as a town physician. In Gdansk he built up a close friendship with Johannes Hevelius, and he corresponded with many scientist all over Europe as Marine Mersenne, Joaching Jungius, Johann Amos Comenius, Stephan Fuhrmann and David Origanus. K.-D. Herbst. Eichstädt, Lorenz. – *Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750*. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=eichstaedt_lorenz.
- 72 Hermann published in 1651 under the pseudonym Cyriandrus Uranophilus the *Historia meteorologica*. Das ist: Vier vnd zwanzig Jährige eigentliche vnd trefwleißige Observation vnd tägliche verzeichnüsz des Gewitters / vom 1. Januarii 1623 an / bisz zum letzten Decembris 1646. in dreyen membris verfasst. ... Zu Rettung der biszher sehr beschimpfften Meteorologia, dem kunstliebenden Prognosticanten aber zu gefallen vnd mächtiger vorarbeit sich künftigt besser in der Natur umbzusehen / ... S. Schadewitz, Cassel, 1651; W. Lenke. Klimadaten von 1621–1650 nach Beobachtungen des Landgrafen Hermann IV. von Hessen (Uranophilus Cyriandrus). – *Berichte des Deutschen Wetterdienstes*, 1960, 63.
- 73 S. Calvisius. *Opus chronologicum ex autoritate s. scripturae ad motum luminarium coelestium contextum*. Thieme, Leipzig, 1605 (1st edition); Thieme, Frankfurt, 1685 (6th edition).
- 74 W. Cock. *Meteorologiae: or, the true way of fore-seeing and judging the inclination of the air, and alteration of the weather in several regions*, J. Conyers, London, 1671; German translation: W. Cock. *Meteorologia Oder Der rechte Weg Vorher zu wissen / zu beurtheilen Die Veränderung der Luft und Abwechslung des Wetters In verschiedenen Landern*. Darinnen auch entdecket worden / die Ursachen / warum die gemeine (sic!) Calender Schreiber so sehr fehlen; und die rechte Weise das Wetter zu erkennen klar und deutlich erwiesen wird. Liebezeit, Hamburg, 1691.
- 75 J. B. Morin. *Astrologia Gallica principiis & rationibus propriis stabilita, atque in XXVI. libros distributa*. Non solum astrologiae judicariae studiosis, sed etiam philosophia, medicis, & theologis omnibus per-necessaria, quippe multa complexens eximia ad scientias illas spectantia, Hagae-Comitis: Ex typographia Adriani Vlacq, 1661.
- 76 K.-D. Herbst. Crüger, Peter. – *Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750*. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=crueger_peter.
- 77 Büther was born in Bohemia, studied theology, astronomy and mathematics in Königsberg and arithmetics and geometry in Wittemberg, and worked from 1653 as the successor of the rector of St. John's School in Gdansk. Between 1655 and 1699 he compiled calendars in which he also included weather observations. K.-D. Herbst. Büther, Friedrich. – *Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750*. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=buethner_friedrich.

makers in Gdańsk, most notably Gottfried Kirch (1639–1710), who had earlier served as Hevelius’s assistant and can be regarded as Krüger’s predecessor.⁷⁸ Kirch moved on to Leipzig in 1676, became renowned for the discovery of new comets in the early 1680s, and was appointed Royal Astronomer by the newly founded Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1700. Between 1677 and 1685, Krüger participated in Kirch’s extensive scientific correspondence network, which comprised 139 correspondents. Within Kirch’s circle, Krüger was the only known participant from the territories of today’s Baltic region.⁷⁹ In comparison a review of Lorenz Eichstädt’s ephemerides suggests that Estonia, Livonia and even the Duchy of Courland are mentioned only rarely, with Riga being the sole consistently referenced locality.⁸⁰

Yet the distinctive strength of Krüger’s work lies less in its European connections than in its integration of local observation data. His network included meteorological records from Jelgava (the *Observatio Mytaviensis*) compiled by Johann Adolphi between 1643 and 1655.⁸¹ For the period from 1655 to 1680, he relied on observations by Johannes Liederitz, who served between 1665 and 1674 as priest for the Latvian congregation and from 1674 to 1682 for the German community in Liepāja.⁸² Liederitz was married to Christine Kettler, owner of the estate Jumpraviešu (Jumpraweeten), which further embedded his observations within local manorial networks. But it was not only priests who began to record weather observations in the seventeenth century. One of Krüger’s informants was Matthaeus Borra, the mayor of Kuldīga (Goldingen) in Courland, who compiled the *Observationes tempestatis*, covering the period between 1660 and 1690. This manuscript was used by Krüger and was still mentioned by Jakob Benjamin Fischer

78 K.-D. Herbst. Gottfried Kirch (1639–1710), Astronom, Kalendermacher, Pietist, Frühaufklärer. Verlag HKD, Jena, 2022.

79 K.-D. Herbst. Kirch, Gottfried. – Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750. https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=kirch_gottfried; actually only five letters have been found, https://gottfried-kirch-edition.de/?page_id=71. With that number he is among the top 30% of the 139 corresponding members

80 L. Eichstädt. Pars Prima Ephemeridum Novarvm Et Motuum Coelestium Quinquennalis, Ad Annos A Erae Christianae 1636. 1637. 1638. 1639. 1640. In Luminarium motibus & Eclipsibus ex Tabulis Danicis Christiani S. Longomontani, in reliquis Planetis ex Tabulis Rudolphinis Johannis Kepleri juxta exquisitas Nob. Tychohis Brahei observationes constructis, debitā diligentia elaborata & supputata. à Laurentio Eichstadio, Med. D. & Physico Ordinario in Veteri Sedino Pomeranorum. Cum Paedia De Utendi Methodo. David Reht, Stettin, 1634, 73.

81 J. F. von Recke, K. E. Napiersky. Allgemeines Schriftsteller- und Gelehrten Lexikon der Provinzen Livland, Esthland und Kurland. Erster Band A-F. Steffenhagen, Mitau, 1827, 14–15.

82 Jahrbuch für Genealogie, Heraldik und Sphragistik, 1903. Hrsg. von Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst, Steffenhagen, Mitau, 1905, 114; M. C. L. Tetsch. Curländischer Kirchen-Geschichte (...). Erster Theil. Hartknoch, Riga, Leipzig, 1767, 129.

(1731–1793) in 1782, but it appears to have been lost or destroyed in the early nineteenth century.⁸³ There are also no surviving traces of the weather observations made by the “good and erudite husbandman” (*ein guter und gelahrter Landmann*) named Fabritius, who lived near Bauska and whose records covered the period from 1682 to 1693. For the years 1693 to 1698, Krüger relied on observations made by his close friend, the pastor Nicolai Wittenberg (Nikolaus Wittenburg, 1653–1728) from the manor Muizciems (Muischazeem), who, after Krüger’s death, even published Krüger’s calendar manuscripts up to the year 1712.⁸⁴ One of Krüger’s correspondents was also his brother, Christian Krüger, who participated in the Couronian colonial enterprise on Tobago between 1686 and 1690, where he began his weather observations. After returning to Courland and becoming a pastor in Altraden in 1691, he continued his observations between 1691 and 1695.⁸⁵

As we can see, weather observations and forms of weather diary were common in seventeenth century Courland.⁸⁶ Krüger’s network of correspondents covered large parts of Courland, from Jelgava to Liepāja and from Kuldīga to Bauska. The individuals involved were mainly preachers and pastors, but also manor owners and mayors. They were clearly well-educated people who were familiar with the emerging practice of systematic weather observation and skilled in maintaining networks of communication. Interestingly, Krüger’s network remained largely confined to Courland and did not significantly engage with contemporaries in Livonia or Estonia. This is notable, given that Gebhard Himself (1603–1676) in Tallinn had likewise been producing calendars since 1632, corresponded with Hevelius between 1649 and 1674, and published works on comets.⁸⁷ In contrast to Krüger, Himself also relied on local networks, although these remained within Estonia and Livonia and did not extend to Courland or Poland. Krüger’s work, in contrast, was closely connected to Poland and to the strong astrological traditions present there at the time. It is unlikely that Krüger was unaware of Himself

83 J. B. Fischer. *Beyträge und Berichtigungen zu Hrn. F. K. Gadebusch livländischer Bibliothek. Nebst andern kürzern Aufsätzen ec.* (Nordische Mischellaneen, 4.) Hartknoch, Riga, 1782, 26; J. Friedrich von Recke, K. E. Napiersky. *Allgemeines Schriftsteller- und Gelehrten Lexikon der Provinzen Livland, Esthland und Kurland. Erster Band: A–F.* Steffenhagen, Mitau, 1827, 229.

84 L. K. Nachrichten über den Mitauschen Kalender. – *Das Inland* II, 46, 1. Oktober 1846, 931–940, 931.

85 G. Krüger. *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae, Vorrede*, s.p.

86 Here we can add information on early Baltic weather observations given in A. Tarand, J. Jaagus, A Kallas. *Eesti kliima. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu*, 2013.

87 K.-D. Herbst. Himself, Gebhard. – *Biobibliographisches Handbuch der Kalendermacher von 1550 bis 1750.* [https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=himselfius_gebhard;G.Himself.Cometologia oder Anmerckung und Natürliche Muthmassung von den Cometen.](https://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=himselfius_gebhard;G.Himself.Cometologia%20oder%20Anmerckung%20und%20NatürlicheMuthmassung%20von%20den%20Cometen)

and his work. The absence of communication between them can be explained in several ways: they may have simply operated within different intellectual circles, had little personal inclination to collaborate, or been separated by confessional divisions or methodological approaches.

WEATHER MEMORY AS A SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Methodologically, Krüger sought to correlate weather observations with celestial phenomena, particularly planetary positions and lunar cycles. However, he repeatedly encountered the limits of such approaches, as the available data did not produce consistent or predictive patterns. He framed these difficulties in both practical and theological terms, describing them as struggles not only against illness and isolation, but also against the interference of demonic forces ruled by Satan himself. Loneliness and the heavy workload were counterbalanced not only through his primary vocation as a pastor, deeply rooted in biblical learning, but also more concretely through the assistance of hired collaborators. One of them was Georg Wagner. Only with their help was Krüger able to undertake the analysis of earlier printed data and to construct what he described as “100 years of experience”.

The proper use of earlier data was a significant challenge for Krüger and his team, as it was often filled with false and superstitious information, which he interpreted as the direct influence of Satan himself.⁸⁸ He drew a clear distinction between “good” and “true” natural observations and superstitious beliefs, which he characterised as “bad” and “false”. His work demonstrates an emerging form of early source criticism, separating empirical data from inherited belief systems. In doing so, he subjected earlier material to critical scrutiny and even tested established authorities such as Ptolemy against historical evidence. Ptolemy had for example argued that an eclipse would exert influence for as many years as there were hours of darkness. Demonstrating the inaccuracy of such claims required extensive effort and often resulted in long periods of unproductive and painstaking work.⁸⁹ Krüger had to contend with the scarcity and uneven reliability of earlier sources. As

88 G. Krüger. *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae, Vorrede*, s.p. In English: “If, as a child of God, I want to proceed in the fear of the Lord, I must first learn to distinguish between the bad and the good. I had to know / what was superstitious and or false / void and what was true and based on nature.”

89 *Ibid.*, *Vorrede*, s.p.

he noted: “A true and earnest devotee must possess long experience, like the forefathers Noah and Abraham, and, in its absence, attend carefully to the observations of those who came before; these he should compare with the course of the heavens, and vice versa, and test them as upon a touchstone.”⁹⁰ This process – combining compilation, comparison and evaluation – represents an early step toward the historicisation of Baltic weather knowledge. As earlier research has shown, the influence of early Enlightenment thought on Körber, as on many other calendar makers of his time, is evident.⁹¹

Looking at the regional distribution of the data compiled in *Weather History*, a clear division between the two halves of the century becomes apparent. In the first part of the century, local information is largely absent, and Krüger instead relies on data from places with no direct connection to Courland, such as Prague, Rostock and Kassel. With the beginning of the Jelgava observations in 1643, he compares them over the following three years with data from Kassel. Interestingly, the information for both locations, derived from different sources, is often strikingly similar in wording. It is evident that Krüger emphasised similarities between different regions and showed little sensitivity to regional or climatic differences. His aim appears to have been to highlight correspondences between Courland and Germany, as already suggested by the title of his work. At the same time, it is notable that he does not include information from Estonia or Livonia, nor does he explicitly reflect on the broader spatial scope of his study.

Krüger was, in fact, working toward a three-volume work in Latin and German. The first planned volume was to address the seasons of each year according to astrological knowledge, presented in the form of short aphorisms based on observations. The second volume was intended to focus on the lunar cycle, again structured around brief aphoristic statements. Only the third volume was to deal with daily weather events across the century, primarily between 1617 and 1700, which he referred to as *Ephemerides astronomico-astrologicae seculares*. No manuscripts of these projected volumes have been found, if they ever existed. The

90 “Ein rechtschaffener Liebhaber muß eine sehr lange *Experience* haben / wie die Altväter Noah und Abraham / und in Ermangelung derselben / sich um die *Observationes* der Vorfahren bekümmern / welche er mit dem Lauf des Himmels / und vice versa conferire und als einen Probestein bewehre”. (Ibid., Vorrede, s.p.)

91 Y.-G. Mix, F. Köther, K. Kandler. Die Kalender-, Almanach- und Taschenbuchliteratur Estlands, Livlands und Kurlands (1700–1830): Analytische Bibliographie. Teil I, [S.l.] 2018, 30. http://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=krueger_georg; K.-D. Herbst. Schreibkalender der Frühen Neuzeit – eine noch wenig genutzte Quelle für die Astronomiegeschichte. – Sitzungsberichte der Leibniz-Sozietät der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 2009, 103, 31–48.

surviving *Prodromus* appears to represent a condensed version of the first volume.⁹² Krüger identified as potential readers for his planned volumes not only scholars but also merchants and economic actors in Courland, who would have required this kind of practical information in their daily activities. As noted above, he also approached publishing houses in search of sponsors for his project. This effort, however, appears to have been unsuccessful, most likely due to the outbreak of the Great Northern War, which disrupted large-scale scholarly publishing projects and curtailed international cooperation.

Although Krüger's *Prodromus* represents only a condensed version of a much longer lost manuscript, the scope of his undertaking to historicise weather observations and reconstruct a full century of climatic conditions through an extensive network of informants and sustained correspondence appears to be unique in the Baltic region. His statistical account of seventeenth-century weather begins with a description of the famine of 1601–1602, drawn from chronicles that report extreme cases of cannibalism, including within families, and the exhumation of corpses for food. It is evident that this framing of the century was shaped by the recent memory of the famine of 1695–1697. In this sense, the work marks an early attempt to historicise weather-related events and can be regarded as an early approach to the analysis of historical weather observations even though his compiled data is clearly unreliable and useless for the reconstruction of past climate.⁹³ It can certainly be seen as another cornerstone in the emergence of Baltic weather memory in the seventeenth century.⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated the significance and rise of weather heritage and weather memory in the seventeenth century, a period that was climatically one of the most challenging of the medieval and early modern eras. Weather heritage, understood as the collection of reactions to weather phenomena in the human archive, should be distinguished from climate heritage, which consists of memories of past

92 G. Krüger. *Prodromus Aurorae Boreae*, Vorrede, s.p.

93 About the use of premodern weather compilations, see W. T. Bell, A. E. J. Ogilvie. Weather compilations as a source of data for the reconstruction of European climate during the medieval period. – *Climate Change*, 1978, 1, 331–348. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00135154>.

94 About climate memory, see M. Hulme. *Climate change and culture. – Memory in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. by S. Groes. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, 159–162.

climatic conditions preserved in the natural archive. Within weather heritage religious interpretations of weather, practical activities and observations, different forms of memory and the methods used to analyse them converge. The article examined Baltic weather heritage and weather memory in German-language sermons, economic handbooks and early scientific compilations. According to the premises of cultural climatology, weather was not only experienced but also remembered, compared and reorganised over time. As the climate changed, so too did the meanings attributed to weather among different social groups; changes in nature directly influenced their interpretation within human cultures. At the same time, people did not limit themselves to observing and interpreting weather, but also sought to actively shape it through various religious practices.

The confessional and socially fragmented Baltic space comprising Estonia, Livonia and Courland does not appear as a passive periphery with regard to weather heritage, but rather as an active site of its application and of knowledge production, a space where different forms of weather memory were intertwined. Cultural entanglements between German and local Estonian and Latvian weather traditions are clearly visible (Gutslaff, Gubert), and a certain degree of restraint or limitation in networking between Estonia and Courland can be observed (Krüger). In Hermann's works, we encounter a particularly strict religious interpretation of weather and weather knowledge, which gradually evolved over the course of the century. While Gutslaff's mid-seventeenth-century work points to the difficulties of engaging with alternative local forms of weather memory, Gubert's work demonstrates the smooth integration of such knowledge into everyday manorial practice. Despite its methodological and source-related limitations, Krüger's work represents a culminating moment in seventeenth-century weather heritage and weather memory, directly reflecting on the possibilities of using historical data in the light of early enlightenment. We can thus observe a clear development of weather heritage in the seventeenth-century Baltic region, including its transregional scope and its connections to processes unfolding in nature. There are good grounds to consider the existence and development of seventeenth-century Baltic weather heritage as an important stage in the emergence of environmental thought and historical climatology in the region.

ILMAPÄRAND, TEADUSVÕRGUSTIKUD JA ILMAMÄLU 17. SAJANDIL EESTI-, LIIVI- JA KURAMAAL

Ulrike Plath

Käesolev artikkel uurib ilmapärandi ja ilmamälu tähendust ning esiletõusu 17. sajandi Baltikumis, keskendudes Eestimaale, Liivimaale ja Kuramaale. 17. sajand oli kliimaajalooliselt üks kesk- ja varauusaja keerulisemaid perioode: seda mõjutasid väikese jääaja keskkonnatingimused, Maunderi miinimum, suurenenud vulkaaniline aktiivsus, korduvad ikaldused ning sajandi algust ja lõppu raaminud rasked näljahädad. Sellises olukorras omandas ilm mitte üksnes praktilise, vaid ka religioosse, sotsiaalse ja kultuurilise tähenduse. Artikkel küsib, kuidas ilma kogeti, tõlgendati, mäletati ja oma mälestusi edasi anti ning millist rolli mängisid mineviku ilmaoludest kujunenud teadmised kohalikes praktikates ja varauusaegses teadmusloomes.

Artikli keskne lähtekoht on eristus ilmapärandi ja kliimapärandi vahel. Ilmapärandi all mõistetakse inimmälu säilinud reaktsioone, tõlgendusi ja praktikaid, mis seostuvad konkreetsete ilmanähtuste, -märkide ja -oludega. Kliimapärand seevastu viitab loodusmälu talletunud jälgedele varasematest kliimaoludest. Ilmapärandis põimuvad religioossed seletused, praktilised tegevused, vaatluspraktikad, erinevad mäluerežiimid ning ilmanähtuste analüüsimiseks kasutatud meetodid. Seetõttu ei käsitle artikkel kliimaajalugu üksnes ilmastiku- või keskkonnatingimuste ajaloo, vaid ka mäluajaloo. Ilma mitte ainult ei kogetud, vaid seda ka meenutati, võrreldi ja süstematiseeriti. Ühtlasi teisesen muutuvast kliimas ilma tähendus eri ühiskonnagruppide silmis ning looduses toimunud muutused mõjutasid otseselt nende kultuurilisi ja religioosseid tõlgendusi.

Artikkel analüüsib Balti ilmapärandit ja -mälu kolme liiki saksa-keelsetes allikates: jutlustes ja religiooses kirjanduses, mõisamajanduslikes käsiraamatutes ning varastes teaduslikes ja astro-meteoroloogilistes kogumikes. Religioosete tekstide seas on keskne Samson Hermanni käsitus ilmast kui Jumala tahte väljendusest. Hermanni teostes ilmneb rangelt teoloogiline arusaam, mille järgi ilmategemine ja pikaajaline ennustamine kuulusid Jumala meeleva ja katsed ilma mõjutada või tuleviku ilmaolusid ette teada saada võisid kergesti liigituda ebausu, nõiduse või musta maagia valda. Siiski eristas Hermann lubamatutest praktikatest loodusemärkide tõlgendamist, mida võis mõista kui *magia naturalis*'e vormi. Seega ei välistanud religioosne raamistik täielikult

ilmavaatlusi, kuid seadis nende tõlgendamisele ranged moraalsed ja teoloogilised piirid.

Johannes Gutsaffi 1644. aasta käsitus Võhandu jõega seotud rahutustest näitab, kui keeruline oli kohaliku ilmapärimuse ja ametliku protestantliku õpetuse vahekord. Võhandu jõe puhastamise ja vabalt voolamisega seotud uskumused osutavad kohaliku ilmamälu pikaajalisele kestusele ning selle seotusele kriisiolukordadega. Gutsaffi kirjeldatud juhtumid näitavad, et ilmaga seotud praktikad ei kuulunud ainult talurahva uskumusmaailma, vaid puudutasid ka kohalikke sakslasi ja vaimulikke. Keskkonnakriis võis taasaktiveerida vanemaid, osaliselt unustatud ilmapärimuse vorme, mis olid säilinud mälus, rituaalides ja suulises traditsioonis. Nii ilmneb Balti ilmamälu kui sotsiaalselt ja kultuuriliselt põimunud nähtus, mis ületas keelelisi ja seisuslikke piire.

17. sajandi teisel poolel muutus ilmapärimuse praktiline ja transkultuuriline mõõde eriti nähtavaks Salomon Guberti mõisamajanduslikus käsiraamatus „Stratagema oeconomicum“. Gubert ei käsitlenud kohalikke, eeskätt lätlaste ilmateadmisi ebaususe või eksitusena, vaid kasuliku empiirilise teadmisenähtuse, mida ka saksa mõisnikud ja valitsejad pidid kohalikes oludes edukaks majandamiseks tundma. Tema teos vahendab tuule, vihma, loomade käitumise, taimede, putukate, kuu faaside ja muude loodusemärkidega seotud tähelepanekuid. Eriti oluline on see, et Guberti tekstis põimuvad talurahva ilmateadmised, mõisamajanduslikud vajadused, religioossed praktikad ja saksa eliidikultuuri elemendid. Ilmapärimus ei ole siin enam üksnes konfliktne või kahtlane teadmiste kogum, vaid osa argisest majanduslikust ratsionaalsusest. Samas võib Guberti tekstis märgata ka ilmamälu varast kriitilist mõõdet: traditsioonilisi ilmaseoseid võrreldakse konkreetse aasta kogemusega ning vajadusel korrigeeritakse varasemate tähelepanekute paikapidavust.

Georg Krügeri 1700. aastal ilmunud „Prodromus Aurorae Boreae sive Historiae Meteorologicae Teutonico-Curlandicae“ märgib Balti ilmapärimuse ja ilmamälu kulminatsiooni. Krüger püüdis koondada varasemaid ilmavaatlusi, siduda neid astroloogiliste ja astronoomiliste arusaamadega ning luua sajandit hõlmav ilmastikuajalugu. Tema töö põhines ulatuslikul, kuigi piirkondlikult piiratud võrgustikul, kuhu kuulusid peamiselt Kuramaa pastorid, õpetatud mõisnikud ja linnaametnikud. Krügeri ettevõtmine näitab, kuidas ilmamälu võis muuttuda teadusliku meetodi osaks: mineviku ilmaandmeid koguti, võrreldi, hinnati kriitiliselt ja püüti asetada laiemasse seletusraamistikku. Kuigi tema andmestik oli tänapäevase kliimarekonstruktsiooni seisukohalt

ebaühtlane ja metoodiliselt problemaatiline, on see oluline tunnistus varauusaegsest katsest ilma ajalooliselt süstematiseerida.

Konfessionaalselt, poliitiliselt ja sotsiaalselt killustunud Balti ruumi ei käsitleta artiklis ilmapärandi suhtes passiivse perifeeriana. Vastupidi, Eesti-, Liivi- ja Kuramaast kujunes aktiivne teadmusloome ja ilmapärandi rakendamise piirkond, kus põimusid saksa, eesti ja läti pärimus, religioossed tõlgendused, mõisamajanduslik praktika ning varased teadusvõrgustikud. Samal ajal ilmnevad ka piirangud: Krügeri võrgustik jäi valdavalt Kuramaa-keskseks ega haakunud kuigivõrd Eesti- ja Liivimaa kalendritegijate ja ilmavaatlejatega. See osutab Balti ruumi sisemisele killustatusele, kuid ka teadmiste lokaalsele trajektoorile.

Kokkuvõttes näitab artikkel, kuidas Baltikumi ilmapärand arenes religioosest ja kriisiolukordades aktiveeruvast mälust praktilise mõisamajandusliku teadmise ning lõpuks varase ajaloolis-meteoroloogilise refleksiooni suunas. Ilmaga seotud teadmised olid ühtaegu kohalikud ja rahvusülesed, sotsiaalselt põimunud ja hierarhiliselt vahendatud, praktilised ja teoloogiliselt laetud. Seetõttu on põhjust käsitleda Balti ilmapärandi ja -mälu kujunemist 17. sajandil kui olulist etappi regiooni keskkonnamõtlemise ning kultuurilise ja ajaloolise klimatoloogia arengus.

Petitioning from an Island: Negotiated Sovereignty and Ruhnu's Incorporation into the Estonian State, 1919–1921

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Abstract. This article examines how the Swedish-speaking island community of Ruhnu in the Gulf of Riga navigated the island's incorporation into the Estonian nation-state through a sustained strategy of petitioning. From 1919 to 1921, Ruhnu's inhabitants pursued parallel petitions submitted to Estonian authorities and to the King of Sweden with the aim of gaining confirmation of what they understood as historical local rights. At the same time, the island's incorporation to the Republic of Estonia was contested by Latvia, which gave the islanders strategic leverage. Rather than treating the islanders' petitions as peripheral expressions of a local grievance, the analysis frames them as an independent political strategy by which the community actively, and in part successfully, shaped the terms under which Estonian sovereignty came to be exercised over the island. It identifies in these texts a distinct privilege-based idiom of claim-making ('privilege grammar') focused on exemptions and confirmations, which stood in tension with the idea of modern uniform citizenship.

Keywords: Ruhnu, Estonian Swedes, Estonian politics, petitioning, post-imperial borderlands, minority politics

INTRODUCTION

In the final stage and aftermath of the First World War, as new nation-states emerged from the collapse of the Romanov Empire, small minority communities faced difficult choices in trying to assert their rights and articulate preferences for political allegiance. The inhabitants of Ruhnu,¹ a tiny island in the Gulf of Riga inhabited by a few hundred Swedish-speaking fishermen and seal hunters, became entangled in competing sovereignty claims advanced by Estonia and Latvia. This article focuses on how, between 1919 and 1921, the islanders navigated this fraught period by using petitioning as a political instrument to shape the terms under which sovereignty would be exercised over the island.

Ruhnu's case is notable in that the island's population, though numbering only around 275 inhabitants,² acted with striking political agency. While Estonia and Latvia were engaged in a dispute over the island's fate and Sweden was wary of any formal commitment, the Ruhnu Swedes intervened directly by petitioning for the confirmation of the exemptions and privileges that they believed had long defined their relationship with distant rulers. Written in a deferential but firm tone, these petitions only marginally adopted the language of modern democratic rights or ethnic self-determination, instead framing their demands in terms of confirmation of old rights and exemptions from new obligations, which they justified either by precedent under earlier sovereigns or promises allegedly made by representatives of the new rulers. This echoed a mode of political negotiation familiar from the history of the Baltic region, where local elites – the Baltic German nobility – had traditionally secured written guarantees of their corporate privileges when sovereignty changed hands.³ The Ruhnu community pursued a comparable mode of negotiation, seeking reaffirmation of inherited community rights amid the post-imperial transition.

Recent scholarship on post-imperial Europe has increasingly shifted attention from border-making as something decided by diplomats and technical commissions to the ways in which local inhabitants intervened in this process for their own reasons. Most broadly, Tara

1 The island's name is here standardised as Ruhnu (in Estonian sources also Ruhno; in Swedish and German, Runö; in Latvian, Roņu sala).

2 Early 1922 press reports gave a population of 274 and 272 respectively: "Par Roņu salu". – *Latvis*, 28.01.1922 (274 inhabitants); "Valitsuse esitusest Ruhno saarel". – *Vaba Maa*, 03.02.1922 (272 inhabitants).

3 On the negotiation and confirmation of elite privileges in the so-called capitulations of 1710, see *Die baltischen Kapitulationen von 1710. Kontext–Wirkungen–Interpretationen*. Hrsg. von K. Brüggemann, M. Laur, P. Piirimäe. Böhlau, Köln u.a. 2014.

Zahra has urged historians of East Central Europe to pay close attention to the limits of nationalisation and to forms of political belonging that did not map neatly onto the categories claimed by national movements, arguing that local actors often responded to modern mass politics through loyalties and calculations that were situational, mixed, and not exclusively national in character.⁴

Particularly relevant for the Ruhnu case is Peter Haslinger's demonstration that in the Czechoslovak–Hungarian borderlands, local interventions in post-imperial border-making often centred less on abstract national principle than on livelihood, mobility and the practical terms of rule.⁵ Even more relevantly, Catherine Gibson has shown that the making of new frontiers after the First World War unfolded “from below” in other Estonian–Latvian borderlands, too, as villagers, landowners and other border dwellers used petitions and other forms of claim-making to try to influence the outcome. Her analysis is primarily concerned with ethnographic mapping and counter-mapping rather than insular minority politics, yet it is highly applicable to nearby Ruhnu,⁶ where post-imperial sovereignty was likewise negotiated at the local level.⁷

Along similar lines, this article argues that Ruhnu petitions were not a mere sideshow to high-level diplomatic manoeuvres between states, but a strategy through which the islanders exercised their political agency. Precisely because Ruhnu's Swedish-speaking community did not fit unproblematically into either the Latvian or the Estonian nation-state, it could exploit the uncertainties of post-imperial border-making to press for more favourable terms. By addressing appeals to both Sweden and Estonia, it hedged its bets and maximised its leverage. Sweden was entreated as the cultural ‘motherland’ that might, if not bring the island back under its rule, at least advocate on its behalf. Estonia, as the most plausible effective sovereign, was petitioned to confirm and preserve special arrangements if the island were to remain under Estonian

4 T. Zahra. *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*. – *Slavic Review*, 2010, 69, 1, 93–119.

5 P. Haslinger. *Dilemmas of Security: The State, Local Agency, and the Czechoslovak–Hungarian Boundary Commission, 1921–25*. – *Austrian History Yearbook*, 2018, 49, 187–206.

6 For other examples of negotiations of authority and identity among Estonian–Swedish communities in the late imperial and post-imperial Baltic, see also J. M. White. *Changing Tides of Nation and Confession: Building Orthodoxy and Empire on the Island of Vormsi, 1873–1905*. – *Ab Imperio*, 2022, 2, 147–177; and G. E. Kranking. *Island People: Transnational Identification, Minority Politics, and Estonia's Swedish Population*. Ohio State University, Columbus, 2009.

7 C. Gibson. *Geographies of Nationhood: Cartography, Science, and Society in the Russian Imperial Baltic*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, 177–216.

jurisdiction – not entirely a given, at a time when Latvia was also asserting its territorial claim.

I use ‘privilege grammar’ as a shorthand for the historically specific repertoire of claims through which the Ruhnu community articulated what it believed it was owed by any would-be sovereign. Three partially overlapping registers recur across the petitions. Most consistently, they speak in a corporate privilege idiom: rights appear as inherited, communal exemptions and customary entitlements that a new ruler should confirm, rather than as universal claims grounded in citizenship or equality. At the same time, appeals directed to Sweden activate a national-cultural patronage register, casting the ‘motherland’ as a legitimate patron with authority derived from language, Lutheran confession and an imagined continuity of ‘Swedish law’. Finally, the texts intersect with a state-sovereignty register of post-imperial border-making, in which Estonia and Latvia pursued administrative control, maritime security and diplomatic advantage. Reading the petitions through these registers makes it possible to follow how specific demands were justified by shifting combinations of idioms, and why this rhetorical flexibility could translate into concrete concessions at a moment when sovereignty over the island was still being stabilised.

This grammar should not be conflated with ethnic nationalism, modern minority rights discourse, or simple resistance to state authority. Nor did it presuppose legal codification in the strict sense. Rather, it operated in a register shaped by older imperial traditions of negotiated incorporation, in which local communities expected incoming sovereigns to recognise and reaffirm inherited arrangements as a condition of loyalty. The Ruhnu petitioners framed their demands (1) as requests for confirmation rather than innovation; (2) grounded entitlements in precedent, usage or earlier assurances rather than abstract rights; (3) articulated exemptions as inherited conditions of incorporation (from taxation, conscription, forestry regulation or arms control); and (4) addressed sovereign authority vertically, presuming asymmetry but also moral obligation. These elements recur across petitions to Swedish, Estonian, and intermediary authorities, allowing the islanders to recalibrate addressees without abandoning the underlying logic of their claims.

As strategic texts composed for specific authorities and designed to elicit action, the petitions involved selective self-presentation, use of deferential and morally charged language, and the framing of grievances probably calculated to have political effects. They therefore need to

be understood on two levels at once: first, for the explicit claims they make about rights, burdens and political belonging; and second, for the rhetorical work they perform in presenting Ruhnu as a deserving community whose exceptional treatment was justified.

Significantly, there are also other indications that the petitions were overwhelmingly collective rather than individual in character. The first surviving 1919 appeal was signed by a committee headed by village elder Johan Mogs/Mooks; the 1920 address to the Swedish king circulated as a mass petition signed by a large number of inhabitants; and the 1921 petitions were likewise rooted in community (*landskap*) meetings rather than private initiative.

Methodologically, the article is based on a close reading of primary sources, which include the petitions authored by the Ruhnu islanders, internal Estonian government correspondence, Swedish diplomatic memos and contemporary newspaper accounts from Estonia, Latvia and Sweden. An analysis of the petitions illuminates their rhetorical strategies from the humble, loyalist tone taken in an address to the Swedish King to the urgent pleas directed at Estonian officials. These texts are then triangulated with state records. The Estonian official correspondence reveals how officials responded to the community's requests. Swedish Foreign Ministry archives show how the petitions to the King of Sweden were handled behind the scenes, and what sort of dynamics consequently developed between Estonia and Sweden. The Latvian position, which is worthy of a separate study, is reconstructed here primarily through published Latvian press and through Estonian and Swedish archival representations of Latvian claims, rather than through systematic use of Latvian archival holdings.

The article proceeds chronologically. It opens with a brief contextual section on Ruhnu's historical status and the political repertoire available to the islanders before 1919, including the upheavals of 1917–1918. The core of the analysis then focuses on the years 1919–1921, when the islanders formulated and recalibrated a sustained petitioning strategy directed towards the young Estonian state and, in parallel, towards Sweden as a perceived historical patron. Particular attention is paid to the moment of heightened uncertainty in 1920–1921, when competing sovereignty claims and the circulation of international minority precedents (the Åland dispute between Sweden and Finland) gave this strategy its greatest leverage. Later developments, including the 1923 border settlement with Latvia and the longer-term administrative accommodation of the island,

are addressed only insofar as they illuminate the durability and afterlife of the earlier petitioning campaign.

A SWEDISH ISLAND IN THE GULF OF RIGA: ISOLATION AS PRIVILEGE

Ruhnu is a small oval-shaped island (approximately 11.9 km²) situated in the Gulf of Riga, far off Estonia's southwestern coast. Physically, it is closer to the Latvian shore. It lies approximately 37 km from Cape Kolka in Courland (Latvia), whereas the nearest major Estonian port, Kuressaare, is nearly double that distance at roughly 70 km, and the mainland city of Pärnu is roughly 96 km away. Lacking deep natural harbours and surrounded by shoals, the island was difficult to approach for large vessels. In winter, isolation could become near-absolute: as the shallow waters froze, Ruhnu was often ringed by pack ice that was too thick for boats but too unstable for sledge travel. These material constraints made regular outside supervision of life on island expensive and intermittent.

For centuries, Ruhnu was populated almost entirely by ethnic Swedes, a community dating back to at least the Middle Ages. Under Swedish rule, which in Estonia and Livonia lasted until the early 18th century, the Ruhnu peasants were understood (as they later reminded the Swedish king) to enjoy certain customary rights, including local self-governance through their church congregation and elders, and the freedom to continue their Lutheran religion and Swedish language unabated.⁸ Even after the island, along with the rest of Livonia, was formally ceded to the Russian Empire in 1721, Ruhnu's Swedes tenaciously preserved their distinct culture and normative order. In local lore and practice, they still lived by their 'Swedish law' (*svensk rätt*), meaning the traditional village laws and privileges believed to have been granted by Swedish kings and recognised by subsequent rulers. Indeed, their 1920 petition to the King of Sweden explicitly noted that Ruhnu's population "had lived under Swedish law for centuries" and in spirit "never wanted to be called anything but Swedes" despite being subjects of the Russian Tsar.⁹

8 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. Riksarkivet (SRA), Marieberg, Utrikesdepartementet (UD), 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079. On the role of the village assembly and the specific ecclesiastical privileges that had survived since the Swedish era, see also J. Steffensson. *Elu Ruhnul. Olion*, Tallinn, 1994.

9 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

Ruhnu's later petitioning campaign fits into a longer local tradition of collective bargaining with outside authorities. As Trond O. Tøllefsen and James M. White have shown in their study of the Ruhnu Orthodox conversion crisis of 1866–1867, the islanders used the threat of conversion as leverage against the Lutheran consistory to procure the removal of an unpopular pastor and the reconsideration of local obligations. Tøllefsen and White also emphasise the importance of the *loindskap* (*landskap*): the Ruhnu assembly of adult men, and of a collective historical memory in which the islanders had defended their freedom against external encroachment and secured recognition of themselves as a community of free farmers. Conversion, just like sovereignty, was treated on Ruhnu as a communal matter to be resolved collectively, with the corresponding expectation that outside church and state authorities would deal with the island as a single community.¹⁰

By the early 20th century, the islanders' sense of special status as a privileged Swedish enclave was thus deeply ingrained. However, the Ruhnu understanding of "Swedish law" is best treated as shorthand for inherited custom, parish-based social order and a remembered way of life, not as evidence that codified Swedish statute law continued to operate under the Russian Empire. Estonian observers in the early 1920s also described Ruhnu's everyday normative order as grounded less in "written law" than in customary practice (*kombeõigus*) and local regulation, with disputes handled through community mechanisms rather than formal courts.¹¹

What did Ruhnu's claimed privileges entail? Even without a written charter granting them, imperial administrative practice appears to have tolerated substantial local leeway on the island. In the early 1920s, the islanders recalled that "during the Russian time the inhabitants of Ruhnu had, as is known, special privileges", which had included free use of the island's forests, *de facto* exemption from military service, and special tax advantages such as reduced or fixed payments.¹² In concrete terms, Ruhnu's peasants believed they could cut timber for their needs without paying fees; were used to conscription being irregular and usually not enforced; and under the impression that the community had been spared some of the heavier provincial taxes that burdened other villages.

10 T. O. Tøllefsen, J. M. White. Navigating an Orthodox Conversion: Community, Environment, and Religion on the Island of Ruhnu, 1866–7. – *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, 46, 5, 642–664. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2021.1921840>.

11 Ruhno saarel. VIII. Kirjutatud seadus ja kombeõigus; XI. Külakondline maapidamine. – Kaja, 29.08.1923.

12 Memorandum of the Swedish government concerning the situation of the inhabitants of Runö, 12.09.1921. RA (Eesti Rahvusarhiiv), ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

Whether these facts ever amounted to anything formally recognised and legally codified is more than doubtful. A corrective view on taxation came from the Estonian Ministry of Finance in 1921, which insisted that Ruhnu had not possessed special Russian-era tax exemptions beyond the general arrangements applicable to Saaremaa county. Rather than treating it as a case of historical fiscal exceptionalism, the ministry instead framed Ruhnu's problem as one of poverty and structural disadvantage (poor land, limited income sources), implying that any relief should be justified on contemporary socioeconomic grounds rather than as the continuation of old rights.¹³ The Estonian Ministry of Agriculture submitted a similar corrective on forest material, stating that the former Russian government had not provided the islanders with free forest material, and explained the subsequent concessions in this area again as a new policy choice rather than confirmation of an old entitlement.¹⁴ Regarding freedom from conscription under the tsar, the Swedish *chargé d'affaires* Einar af Wirsén reported in 1921 that the islanders had had no legally codified exemption from military service during the Russian period, and that the relative absence of conscription was instead a contingent outcome of insularity and state practice. More generally as well, the island's remoteness had according to af Wirsén, left it to itself in many administrative matters, while the imperial system in any case only called up a limited proportion of those formally registered for service.¹⁵ Read against Ruhnu's own memory-language, these sources are reminders of how quickly the 'privilege' idiom could become contested: what the islanders experienced as inherited entitlement could be reframed by the state or outsiders as a by-product of the tsarist state's limited administrative reach and uneven enforcement.

By the early 20th century, the social and institutional pattern that the island's insularity had preserved was increasingly represented as anachronistic, though the seclusion was interpreted differently depending on the observer. For Swedish nationalists across the Baltic, the island served as a romanticised time capsule. One 1906 account describes the islanders in exoticising terms as "simple fishermen" who held fast to their nationality with an "obstinacy that must gladden every Swedish heart".¹⁶ Similarly, a 1919 article in *Stockholms-Tidningen* depicts

13 Report of the Direct Taxes Head Administration of the Ministry of Finance on the tax burden of the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 26.08.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 24–26.

14 Memorandum of the Ministry of Agriculture to the Government of the Republic concerning timber use on Ruhnu, 29.05.1922. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 61.

15 E. af Wirsén to the Swedish Foreign Minister (H. Wrangel), report on the Runö islanders' petition, 02.10.1921. SRA, Marieberg, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

16 Svenskarne ihågkomma sina stamförvanter på Runö i Ryssland. – Åland, 01.09.1906.

the island as a surviving fragment of an older Swedish world, portraying it as remote, culturally intact and morally appealing precisely because it seemed to stand outside modern political time. In this genre, Ruhnu is described as a national-cultural relic, inviting emotional identification and philanthropic concern.¹⁷ The islanders themselves went along with this narrative of exceptionalism. In their later appeals to Sweden, they framed their history not as one of backwardness, but of heroic preservation, claiming to have “kept the Swedish language and customs sacred” and remained “Swedes in heart and soul” through centuries of foreign rule.¹⁸

From an Estonian administrative perspective, however, Ruhnu’s isolation was seen as precarious and culturally backward. The Estonian press characterised the community’s situation as a Robinson Crusoe-like seclusion, emphasising how the lack of regular steamship connections or telegraph lines severed the island from the modern world. This also posed severe physical risks. During the winter months, the island was frequently cut off by ice for weeks at a time, and the lack of a telegraph line meant the community could not signal for help or effectively warn passing ships of navigation hazards. Occasionally, they lacked information about even major political events. *Postimees* reported that when Tsar Alexander III died in 1894, the news failed to reach Ruhnu for many months, leading the church to pray for the late emperor well into the following spring.¹⁹ Similarly, according to contemporary press accounts of the first Estonian visit to the island in the first half of May 1919, the inhabitants were then still unaware of the existence of the Republic of Estonia.²⁰

The above highlights how severely Ruhnu appeared to be cut off from outside world, at least in the winter. Yet even in its isolation, the ties of loyalty and identity connecting Ruhnu to Sweden were kept alive: Sweden had not forgotten “its children on the lonely island”, as the islanders themselves later wrote.²¹ Already in 1906, spurred by the Kuressaare-based Swedish engineer Hans Fraenkel, the Swedish press launched a public campaign to establish a parish library on the island, collecting books to ensure the population would not lose their Swedish language.²² Even during the hardships of the First World War, Swedish

17 G. Danell. Ett par Runö-bilder. – Stockholms-Tidningen, 24.04.1919.

18 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

19 Nagu Robinsoni saarel. – Postimees, 14.02.1920.

20 Eesti Vabariigi maa-ala, kus kuni 8. maini Eesti Vabariigist veel midagi ei teatud. – Vaba Maa, 17.05.1919.

21 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

22 Svenskarne ihågkomma sina stamförvanter på Runö. – Åland, 01.09.1906.

well-wishers had managed to send emergency provisions to the island, a fact the islanders gratefully cited in their later appeals.²³

Most importantly: over the years, Sweden dispatched Lutheran pastors to serve Ruhnu parish, supporting local education and ensuring worship in Swedish.²⁴ In 1906, the Swedish ecclesiastical ministry even sought to make sure that service on this remote island would count towards official seniority in Sweden, effectively treating Ruhnu as a Swedish ecclesiastical outpost.²⁵ A new church on the island was constructed and opened in 1912 largely with funds collected in Sweden.²⁶ This reinforced the islanders' identity as Swedes abroad, whose motherland acted as a remote but benevolent patron.

However, this relationship with Sweden did not go unnoticed and in the increasingly paranoid atmosphere of the late empire, it could indeed be interpreted as a geopolitical threat. In autumn 1912, the Estonian daily *Päevaleht* reported on an article by the Tallinn Russian newspaper *Okraina* that claimed to have discovered a case of "treason" (*isamaa äraandmine*) on Ruhnu. The paper had pointed to the recent church opening as a diplomatic slight, noting that while a Swedish representative had been present, not a single Russian official attended. Furthermore, *Okraina* catalogued the island's administrative anomalies, specifically the lack of a compulsory municipal school and the total absence of border guards as evidence that Ruhnu was drifting dangerously into the Swedish orbit.²⁷

Suspicious of this type had intensified after the 1909 founding of the Friends of Swedish Education (Svenska Odlingens Vänner, SOV), an organisation dedicated to strengthening the national consciousness of Swedes across the Baltic provinces. The founding of SOV marked a critical turning point where the disparate Swedish communities, scattered across islands and coastal villages, began to forge a unified national movement. Initiated and led by schoolteachers Hans Pöhl and Johan Nymann, this movement sought to overcome the communities' geographical fragmentation and social marginalisation by promoting Swedish education and cultural cohesion. Shortly before Christmas 1913, SOV's headquarters were raided and documents confiscated by the

23 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

24 J. Steffansson. *Elu Ruhnul*. Olion, Tallinn, 1994.

25 *Svenskarne ihågkomma sina stamförvanter på Runö*. – Åland, 01.09.1906.

26 Estonian observers noted the symbolism of this construction: the new church stood immediately beside the ancient wooden church from 1644, creating a visual testament to the continuity of Swedish patronage across centuries: Nagu Robinsoni saarel. – *Postimees*, 14.02.1920.

27 *Okraina kahtlustused*. – *Päevaleht*, 23.10.1912.

authorities. SOV itself was not banned, but the beginning of the war soon afterwards made serious work impossible.²⁸

For Ruhnu, the most isolated of all Estonian Swedish communities, the emergence of the Estonian Swedish movement signalled something quite new. The islanders were now being linked to a broader ethnic network with organisational resources and a political agenda. From 1919 onward, this broader Swedish movement would also provide crucial support both to the islanders' fight for local privileges and for the Estonian state in its efforts to integrate Ruhnu administratively.

By the beginning of the First World War, Ruhnu thus had quasi-autonomous status in practice, existing under a distant Russian imperial framework. However, this specific combination of isolation, perceived privilege and budding national consciousness relied on the relative stability of the Russian Empire. In the last years of the War, Ruhnu's Robinson Crusoe existence abruptly ended, as the island's strategic location in the Gulf of Riga made it a military asset for the enemy. When the German occupation on Ruhnu began in October 1917, the islanders found that their way of life was no longer guaranteed by inertia. Indeed, by that point the Russian administrative presence had already evaporated, reportedly leaving the community in a form of autarkic self-governance in which a local bellringer doubled as pastor and teacher.²⁹

NAVIGATING THE IMPERIAL COLLAPSE, 1917–1918

The year 1917 proved to be a turning point for the peoples of the former Romanov Empire, including the Swedish community on Ruhnu. In the wake of the February Revolution, 23–27 February,³⁰ the collapse of tsarist authority created new political possibilities in the Baltic provinces. In early March the Provisional Government replaced the tsarist governor in Estonia with a gubernatorial commissar, appointing Tallinn's mayor Jaan Poska to the position. On 30 March 1917, it issued the decree that granted Estonia a measure of territorial-administrative autonomy by uniting the Governorate of Estonia with the Estonian-inhabited

28 M. Kuldkepp. The political choices and outlooks of the Estonian Swedish national minority, 1917–1920. – *National Identities*, 2021, 23, 4, 409–431, here 414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2021.1873930>.

29 Kudas Ruhno saar ära võeti. – *Uus Päevaleht*, 14.11.1917.

30 Unless otherwise noted, dates until the beginning of 1918 are given in Old Style.

northern districts of the Governorate of Livonia under the commissar's authority. This brought the main ethnically Estonian areas together in a single administrative unit for the first time.

Sensing an opportunity, Estonian Swedish leaders mobilised to ensure their minority rights would be recognised in this new order. After petitioning the Provisional Government in Petrograd (a text not known to have been preserved), a delegation headed by Hans Pöhl submitted to Poska a petition dated 20 March 1917 and registered by the chancery on 19 April.³¹ It demanded cultural and linguistic rights for Swedes who had been “inhabiting the ... islands and coasts of Estonia since the 2nd century, or even before that”, including the right to use Swedish in local schools, courts and churches, and the creation of a Swedish secretary post within the governor's administration. Based on the fact that the Russian Provisional Government had just granted autonomy to Estonians, the Swedish delegation argued that the Swedish minority was entitled to the same ‘equal rights’ now enjoyed by the Estonian majority.³²

The organisational steps that made these claims sustainable followed almost immediately. On 15 April 1917, representatives from Swedish communities across Estonia met in the Swedish church hall in Tallinn and unanimously resolved to found the League of the Swedish People in the Baltic Sea Provinces (*Svenska Folkförbundet i Östersjöprovinserna*), a permanent Swedish political organisation. Pöhl's formulation of the League's purpose was strategic: he argued that the Swedes were not merely a cultural minority but the “indigenous population of Estonia and Ruhnu”, and so were entitled to equal participation in the emerging Estonian autonomy. By framing the community's rights as deep-rooted and territorial, Pöhl positioned the League to demand political rights, including Swedish-language schools, local administrative rights and a guaranteed seat in the new Estonian Temporary Diet (*Ajutine Maanõukogu* or *Maapäev*), the first Estonian parliamentary self-governance institution. These aims were formally adopted as the League's platform at its constitutive meeting on 2 May 1917.³³

Notably, these 1917–1918 initiatives framed Swedish claims in the idiom of equality, representation and cultural-linguistic guarantees within an autonomous Estonia, while Ruhnu's petitioning would later

31 Statement of the Swedish population of Estonia to the Commissar of the Estland Governorate, 20.03.1917. RA, ERA-R f. 1290, n. 1, s. 100, l. 49.

32 Statement of the Swedish population of Estonia to the Commissar of the Estland Governorate, 20.03.1917. RA, ERA-R f. 1290, n. 1, s. 100, l. 49.

33 M. Kuldkepp. The political choices and outlooks, 415–416.

lean much more heavily on a confirmation-and-privilege logic. This broader Estonian Swedish framework nevertheless mattered because it created recognised minority intermediaries in the Estonian administrative system. In summer 1917, Pöhl became a member of the Temporary Diet, and, in December 1918, he was appointed the Swedish National Minister in the Estonian government. A few months later, this ministerial post was abolished and replaced by that of the Swedish National Secretary attached to the Ministry of Education, taken up by Nikolaus Blees. This positioned Pöhl and Blees as the first intermediaries through whom the Ruhnu islanders went on to channel their grievances and requests.³⁴

Meanwhile, Ruhnu entered the German operational horizon: following some earlier seaplane actions against the island, German forces moved to secure the area during Operation Albion.³⁵ On 13 October, a German unit landed on Ruhnu by seaplane to take control of the lighthouse and remove the remaining Russian personnel.³⁶ The German pilot Rudolf Pechel, who participated in the operation and later became a prominent journalist and editor, described in his memoir the takeover as peaceful and the reception as warm,³⁷ even though the community was forced to surrender its entire arsenal of approximately 300 seal-hunting rifles.³⁸ In a symbolic act of aligning with the new power, an “old, grey-bearded Swede” requested that his rifle be sent to Field Marshal Hindenburg as a token of loyalty. According to Pechel, the islander hoped this personal tribute would secure a direct response or protection from the Field Marshal, much like a feudal subject petitioning a king. Of course, the reply never came. As Pechel wrote with regret, the German High Command was too busy to notice such “psychological imponderables”, leaving the islanders’ attempt to establish a personal bond with their new sovereign unanswered.³⁹

Following the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd in October 1917, authority on the Estonian mainland became sharply contested. While the Estonian Temporary Diet had declared itself the supreme authority, Bolshevik institutions and pro-Bolshevik armed formations

34 M. Kuldkepp. The political choices and outlooks, 416, 420–421.

35 About Operation Albion, see M. B. Barrett. Operation Albion: The German Conquest of the Baltic Islands. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008.

36 Kudas Ruhno saar ära võeti. – Uus Päevaleht, 14.11.1917. Later, Pechel celebrated this operation as the first instance in military history of an island being captured solely by air forces: R. Pechel. Die Besetzung von Runö. – Deutsche Rundschau, October 1937, 41–48, here 48.

37 R. Pechel. Die Besetzung von Runö, 46.

38 Kudas Ruhno saar ära võeti. – Uus Päevaleht, 14.11.1917.

39 R. Pechel. Die Besetzung von Runö, 47. The story of a gift of rifle to Hindenburg is also corroborated by another description of the German takeover of the island: Kudas Ruhno saar ära võeti, Uus Päevaleht, 14.11.1917.

asserted control in Tallinn and other urban centres and initiated a campaign of repression against political opponents while disrupting administrative continuity. The countryside was further destabilised by the looting of demoralised soldiers retreating from the front, creating an atmosphere of pervasive insecurity and lawlessness. This volatile situation persisted until the second half of February 1918, when the rapid advance of Imperial German forces (Operation *Faustschlag*) and the retreat of the Bolshevik armed detachments allowed the three-man Estonian Salvation Committee appointed by the Council of Elders of the Temporary Diet to declare Estonia an independent republic on 24 February, just before the arrival of the German forces and the beginning of German occupation on the Estonian mainland.⁴⁰

In the run-up to the German occupation, the circle around Hans Pöhl in Tallinn attempted to internationalise the Estonian Swedish question. On 2 February 1918, the Swedish People's League dispatched a petition to the Swedish envoy in Petrograd, Edvard Brändström. Fearing the unpredictable consequences of the German advance and the Russian retreat, the League implored the Swedish government to intervene diplomatically to "safeguard the rights of the Swedish population" in any coming peace settlement. It also floated attachment to Sweden, Finland or an Åland-type autonomy as the preferred solution; failing that, it asked for Sweden to support Swedish cultural autonomy. Notably, this shows that 'Åland' already functioned as a political template in Swedish activist language already in early 1918.⁴¹ Simultaneously, the newspaper *Åland* began championing the cause, publishing an article that highlighted the "loyalty and conservative nature" of the Estonian Swedes and urging Sweden not to forget its "tribal kin" across the Baltic.⁴² Clearly, Ruhnu and its sister communities were part of a trans-Baltic network that was already then actively soliciting Swedish state protection.

However, as the German occupation consolidated in the spring of 1918, the community's leadership demonstrated its adaptability and turned their attention instead to the new masters in Berlin. On 12 April 1918, the League of the Swedish People submitted a deferential

40 On the chaotic conditions of the "dual power" period, the retreat of Russian forces, and the emergence of the Salvation Committee, see T. U. Raun. *Estonia and the Estonians*. 2nd ed. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2001, 101–105; and K. Brüggemann. *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des "Einen und unteilbaren Russland": die Petrograder Front des russischen Bürgerkriegs, 1918–1920*. Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2002, 58–64.

41 Swedish Embassy in Petrograd to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, forwarding a memorandum of the League of the Swedish People in the Baltic Provinces, 02.02.1918. SRA, Arninge, St. Petersburg, vol. 33.

42 J. Pöhl. *Revolutionen och svenskarna i Estland*. – Åland, 06.02.1918.

memorandum to the head of the German occupation administration in Estonia, Lieutenant General Adolf Freiherr von Seckendorff. This text mobilised a rhetoric of “Germanic” solidarity, thanking the Kaiser for liberating them from Russian terror and framing the inhabitants of Ruhnu and the other islands not merely as Swedes, but as a “Germanic stock” (*germanisk folkstam*) who had battled for its existence for 900 years and who had now secured their national survival thanks to the “mighty German Empire”.⁴³ This policy of accommodation extended to the very end of the occupation. In November 1918, as plans for a German-dominated United Baltic Duchy client state reached their zenith, Hans Pöhl allowed himself to be elected as the Swedish representative to the Duchy’s *Landesausschuss* (Land Committee) in Riga; an indication that the community was preparing to secure its rights within a German state order should the Estonian Republic fail to materialise.⁴⁴ Rather than being exclusively aligned with the project of independent Estonian statehood, the Swedish activists were pragmatic brokers who could speak multiple “languages of power” (democratisation of Russia, Germanic solidarity, etc.) to protect their community interests.

At the same time, Ruhnu’s administrative isolation was deepened by German occupation policy, which dismantled the 1917 autonomy arrangements and reinstated older provincial jurisdictions. As a result, Ruhnu was returned to the jurisdiction of the province of Livland once more as the sole Swedish settlement.⁴⁵ This latest step in Ruhnu’s administrative exceptionalism added to its ambiguity of political belonging and probably made it easier to depict the island as a disputed border space rather than an unproblematic part of the Estonian state.

The autumn of the same year brought another sudden change. Germany’s revolution in November 1918, followed by the armistice, allowed the Estonian Temporary Government, which had been forced to operate underground during the occupation, to take the reins of power. The German troops started pulling out of Estonia, coinciding with the beginning of the Estonian War of Independence against the Red Army, which immediately invaded from the east. For months, Ruhnu would be effectively adrift as a “no man’s land” with no police, no mail and no clear sovereign, as the islanders would later describe it.⁴⁶

43 Memorandum of the League of the Swedish People of Estonia to General von Seckendorff, 12.04.1918. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA), RZ 201 21769, 177–180. This memorandum specifically lists Ruhnu (Runö) as a constituent part of this “Germanic stock”.

44 M. Kuldkepp. The political choices and outlooks, 419–420.

45 M. Kuldkepp. The political choices and outlooks, 419.

46 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Memorandum concerning petitions from

The years 1917–1918 laid important groundwork for the Ruhnu community’s later political strategy. The collapse of imperial rule, rapid administrative reconfigurations, and the experience of German occupation made the islanders’ position precarious, although they also pulled Ruhnu into wider political circles. At the same time, the broader Estonian Swedish movement acquired practical experience in petitioning new centres of authority created by revolution and autonomy, translating local concerns into a language of rights, representation and institutional guarantees.

Ruhnu was peripheral to this activity, but the island was repeatedly evoked within it, and, crucially, the organisational infrastructure and intermediaries that emerged began to create channels through which Ruhnu’s local claims could later be routed. Ruhnu thus entered 1919 primed to treat sovereignty not as a settled territorial fact but as a negotiable relationship.

TRADING SEAL FAT FOR SOVEREIGNTY IN 1919

In the middle of January 1919, Estonia’s emerging state apparatus still had not clarified in formal administrative terms where Ruhnu belonged. This caused some confusion. On a proposal from the Maritime Affairs Department, the Ministry of Trade and Industry asked the Temporary Government on 16 January 1919 to clarify “under whose jurisdiction Ruhnu island falls, whether it is part of Estonia or of Latvia”.⁴⁷ The question was answered the next day at cabinet level: among the resolutions dated 17 January 1919, the government explicitly ruled “to recognise Ruhnu island as part of the Estonian Republic”.⁴⁸ In other words, Estonia asserted sovereignty over Ruhnu as a matter of formal state decision well before that claim could be made fully effective on the island itself, which, as in most winters, lay isolated behind pack ice.

Therefore, by the first months of 1919, neither Estonia nor Latvia had established a sustained administrative presence on Ruhnu. The first link to Estonian authorities was created through the arrival on the island on 8 May 1919 of an Estonian naval officer, Rudolf Schiller

the inhabitants of Runö, 02.07.1921. SRA, Marieberg, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

47 Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Estonian Temporary Government, 16.01.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 42, l. 1.

48 Eesti Ajustise Valitsuse otsused (17. jaanuar 1919). – Riigi Teataja, 23.01.1919.

(captain 2nd rank). The exact circumstances of Schiller's visit are unclear (the sources do not specify who dispatched him there and why), but after his departure, Schiller reported to Prime Minister Konstantin Päts that the islanders had been without contact with the mainland since November and "knew nothing" of the Estonian state. Schiller had temporarily confirmed the village elder Johan Mooks/Mogs in office, told the islanders that Ruhnu continued to fall under the Saaremaa county administration based in Kuressaare, declared former crown property to be property of the Estonian state, forbade trade with "foreign lands" and heard their grievances. Crucially, he also told the islanders that they had "their own Swedish national minister" in Tallinn, and the islanders immediately turned towards this figure.⁴⁹ Ruhnu's very first encounter with Estonian sovereignty was thus framed not as popular participation but as mediated access to a patron-like representative at the centre.

The resulting letter from the Ruhnu community to Pöhl (dated 8 May 1919 but preserved in a file registered later in May) is revealing because it is so concrete. Written in Swedish, it opens with a deferential request for help "in our missions", and moves immediately to a list of necessities. The "forest question" comes first, justified by scarcity and invoking the right of the congregation to take what it needed "from the crown's forest", thereby treating this resource as claimable by precedent and necessity rather than purchasable on a market. The next request is for salt, described as an essential commodity for survival. Finally, the letter states that Germans had removed the community's landholding deeds and taken them to Kuressaare. The islanders asked Pöhl to enquire for them in writing, and likewise to ask for the return of the maps of fields, meadows and forest. The letter was signed by a committee headed by Johan Mogs/Mooks as chairman, underscoring that Ruhnu's petitioning activity was organised and hierarchical from the outset. It also led to immediate follow-up: the administrative notes on the same document show the beginning of its bureaucratic life, including a prompt to consult the Trade and Industry Ministry about petroleum and salt.⁵⁰

This May 1919 petition is significant for at least two reasons. First, it shows that even before a stable Estonian administrative presence had been established on Ruhnu, the islanders were already trying to negotiate the practical terms of incorporation by addressing it through a usable intermediary. Secondly, the letter's agenda is materially specific, but

49 Schiller's report on Ruhnu, 10.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 158, l. 50;

Eesti Vabariigi maa-ala... – Vaba Maa, 17.05.1919.

50 Petition of the inhabitants of Ruhnu to Hans Pöhl, 08.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 38–39.

its phrasing already presupposes a relationship in which the incoming state can be politely but insistently asked to provide necessities on a preferential basis. The request that the congregation should obtain what it needed “from the crown’s forest” and the appeal for salt “according to our need” are not framed as market transactions or optional acts of charity, but as matters of entitlement and government duty.⁵¹

In his report to Päts, Schiller had also stated that a boat had been detained near the island carrying three Latvians, one of them a former junior lieutenant Jan Kolme from Mērsrags (Markgrafen) in Courland. The Latvians had told Schiller that the government of Kārlis Ulmanis had declared that Ruhnu belonged to Latvia and placed it under Talsen district (*kreis*); the corresponding proclamations had reportedly been posted in Courland.⁵² Soon afterwards, these allegations also appeared in the Estonian press⁵³ and were taken up by Swedish newspapers, which reported that the Latvian government had proclaimed the island’s union with Latvia.⁵⁴ Later, Ruhnu’s pastor Nils Linderstam told Blees that he had heard Latvians had announced Ruhnu as Latvian “in their newspapers”, even if the islanders themselves had not been formally notified.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the Ruhnu question entered documented ministerial workflow in Tallinn. Schiller’s report had included a description of Ruhnu’s desired exchanges, including seal fat for salt and cartridges.⁵⁶ It is unclear where the idea of organising a trade expedition to Ruhnu first appeared, but on 24 May, the Ministry of Trade and Industry asked the State Audit Office to delegate a representative (preferably “someone with prior experience purchasing seal fat”) to participate in the ministry’s planning meeting to be held that day. Two days later, the ministry forwarded the meeting minutes and plan to the State Audit Office for approval and announced a scheduled departure for 27 May (later postponed). The State Audit Office, in turn, issued a written authorisation empowering its officer Jaan Kuusik to join the mission as the audit representative for the inspection and acquisition of seal fat and other material.⁵⁷

51 Petition of the Ruhnu islanders to Pöhl, 08.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 38–39.

52 Schiller’s report on Ruhnu, 10.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 158, l. 50.

53 Eesti Vabariigi maa-ala, kus kuni 8. maini Eesti Vabariigist veel midagi ei teatud. – Vaba Maa, 17.05.1919.

54 Från det isolerade Runö. – Svenska Dagbladet, 22.06.1919; Hvem tillhör Runö? Lettland eller Estland. – *Nya* Dagligt Allehanda, 23.06.1919.

55 Linderstam to Blees, 21.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 48–50.

56 Schiller’s report on Ruhnu, 10.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 158, l. 50.

57 Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Head of the Economic Department of the State Audit Office, Tallinn, 24.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 32; Minutes of the meeting on the Ruhnu expedition, 24.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 34; State Audit Office’s

As evident from this paperwork trail, the expedition was explicitly conceived as a combined procurement and incorporation operation. Audit memoranda preserving the ministry's meeting minutes record that the "exchange goods" approved for the expedition included not only commercial staples but also tools of hard and soft power: 20 rifles, roughly 20,000 Arisaka cartridges for Japanese-made rifles, leather and Swedish-language calendars (a gift from Minister Pöhl to the islanders). The same audit material also preserves the protocol's price discipline for seal fat purchases (a ceiling price, with higher rates only under defined conditions), underscoring that the expedition's inducements were intended to be connected to a controlled, auditable procurement regime.⁵⁸

The expedition's own reporting confirms how these commercial and political elements fused on the ground in early June. The delegates departed Tallinn on 30 May, reached Kuressaare on 1 June, and then sailed for Ruhnu in the early hours of 3 June, arriving that afternoon. Because the Food Ministry had supplied only a small quantity of salt, the delegation purchased additional salt in Kuressaare. Once at Ruhnu, the delegates (Blees, Kuusik and others) first negotiated with the island's elders and then held a community meeting at the pastorate. There, Blees addressed the population in Swedish, read out the act of independence, declared the island part of the Estonian Republic, and supervised the raising of the Estonian flag, which was followed by the singing of the Estonian national anthem.⁵⁹

On the procurement side, the same expedition documentation gives precise quantities and a price structure. The delegates bought a large lot of seal fat (recorded as 644 poods), with different price rates applied to different portions of the lot. The transaction was embedded in a credit-backed operation: the ministry issued a substantial advance, most of it was spent on seal fat (with additional costs booked for "representation", shipping and supplies), and the balance was returned to the ministry cashier. In other words, Estonia's first effective move towards Ruhnu

authorization for Jaan Kuusik to participate in the Ruhnu expedition, 26.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 35.

58 V. Reiman-Augi. Audit report to the State Auditor on the Ruhnu expedition and related financial irregularities, 28.07.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 30–31; Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Civil Department of the State Audit Office, Tallinn, 28.10.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 4; Minutes on the Ruhnu expedition, 24.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 34.

59 N. Blees, E. Paldrock, O. Truumees, J. Kuusik. Report of the meeting of the Ruhnu expedition members, 14.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 22.

was not only a political act but also an auditable transaction producing obligations, receipts, and, later, disputes over accounting.⁶⁰

The political incorporation component is equally explicit and connects directly to the islanders' confirmation-and-privilege expectations. The expedition report states that since Ruhnu lacked organised self-defence, the delegates created a local *Kaitseliit* (militia) unit appointing village elder Johan Mogs as commander and issuing rifles and cartridges for local defence. According to the report, the islanders immediately turned this into a bargaining position: since the island lacked any external protection and the population was only a few hundred, they asked for the Ruhnu men to be left as the island's defenders and, on that basis, to be freed from general military service. They also made communications demands that read more like sovereignty terms than requests for charity: a monthly ship to bring post (and a doctor), and repair of a damaged telephone cable to Saaremaa, explicitly described as having both economic and political significance.⁶¹

From the perspective of the Ruhnu community, these arrangements were understood as a confirmation-in-practice of the exemptions that sustained their customary way of life. No written document was signed on the island during the expedition and the state's own subsequent paperwork framed anything the delegates had done as discretionary relief. Yet later Swedish advocacy distilled the islanders' interpretation of this event into a basic claim: that when Estonia "took over administration of the island", expedition representatives allegedly promised that earlier privileges would remain in force, only for these understandings to be challenged when the state later demanded payment for timber and pursued conscription.⁶²

A further shift in 1919 came when Swedish aid for Ruhnu began to be negotiated through Estonian administrative gatekeeping. A telegram from the Estonian Stockholm consulate dated 28 May reported that Swedish donors had assembled a substantial gift consignment for distribution on Ruhnu (including 3,000 kg of sugar, tobacco worth 400 kronor, sacks of wheat flour, a barrel of kerosene, and grain feed) and wished to send it on a Swedish Red Cross vessel bound for Riga that would stop at Ruhnu. Consul Arnold Posti asked for a prompt reply

60 Bleses et al. report of the Ruhnu expedition members' meeting, 14.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 22; Reiman-Augis audit report on the Ruhnu expedition, 28.07.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 30–31; J. Adams. Audit report to the head of the Trade Section concerning the Ruhnu expedition accounts, 12.09.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 37–39.

61 Bleses et al. report of the Ruhnu expedition members' meeting, 14.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 22.

62 Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

on whether permission could be granted and how customs would be handled, while guaranteeing that the cargo was meant to remain on the island.⁶³ The Foreign Ministry forwarded the request “in urgent order” to the Ministry of Food, which requested the necessary import licence from the licensing commission and simultaneously asked the Finance Ministry to exempt the shipment from customs duties.⁶⁴ By positioning itself as the permitting state through which Swedish patronage would pass Estonia helped demonstrate both to the islanders and to their Swedish supporters that incorporation into Estonia need not immediately sever Ruhnu’s channels of support from Sweden.

At the same time, Estonian responsiveness to Ruhnu’s needs in 1919 cannot be separated from the fact that Latvia was actively contesting the island’s legal status. Although the government had already in January decided explicitly to make Ruhnu a part of the Estonian state,⁶⁵ Latvia’s counterclaim was neither abstract nor merely rhetorical. What is more certain than the rumours that circulated in spring 1919, is that the Latvian delegation placed the claim in documentary form in its submission to the Paris Peace Conference, arguing that Ruhnu “must” be included in Latvia on the grounds that the island lay in Latvia’s territorial waters and that its wireless station and lighthouse were indispensable to Riga’s navigation during winter and spring.⁶⁶ Latvian press commentary likewise framed the island as an object of peace diplomacy, expressing the hope that the peace conference would recognise Latvia’s claim to Ruhnu.⁶⁷

The idea of the islanders’ possible orientation towards Latvia was also not entirely far-fetched, but, as they themselves stressed, a practical consequence of seasonal connectivity in the Gulf of Riga. On 28 August 1919, the islanders sent a follow-up letter to Bles in Tallinn in which they listed their grievances once more, but also argued that Ruhnu had “from time immemorial” stood in connection with Courland and could not “get by” without it: the island lay closer to the Courland mainland than to Estonia, and at certain times of year it was possible for them to maintain contact only with Courland. They particularly pointed to the winter period, when they had customarily used Kolkasrags (Domesnäs)

63 Estonian Consulate in Stockholm to the Ministry of the Interior, 28.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 8, s. 90, l. 77.

64 Ministry of Food Supply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 31.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 8, s. 90, l. 78; Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Estonian Consulate in Stockholm, 03.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 8, s. 90, l. 79.

65 “Eesti Ajutise Valitsuse otsused”, *Riigi Teataja*, 23.01.1919.

66 *Mémoire sur la Latvia*, presented by the Latvian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (Utenriksdepartementets arkiv), UD, P 10, A 7, 1918, p. 5.

67 *Roņu sala*. – *Brīvā Zeme*, 14.08.1919.

as their post station, linking it to basic subsistence: mail, purchasing and bartering for necessities. On that basis, they requested permission to continue, as they had “from of old”, to sell, buy and exchange goods with Courlanders.⁶⁸ Beyond any political posturing, this was the material basis that made Latvia a credible reference point in their later bargaining.

On balance, the islanders’ preference for Estonia was quite clear; not only because all other Swedish settlements were in Estonia, but also (as repeatedly emphasised in both Estonia and Sweden) because the community’s seal hunting grounds lay by the Estonian coast and islands.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, by late summer, Latvian officers had reportedly again visited Ruhnu and recommended Latvian rule, prompting the Ruhnu village elder to reiterate in Kuressaare that the community preferred to be attached to Estonia and to remain there.⁷⁰ But some ambiguity of allegiance remained. In that setting, local dissatisfaction over supplies, military service, forests, or taxes carried an amplified cost for Estonia: it risked turning grievances over local “privileges” into evidence that Estonia’s sovereignty was merely declaratory or, what’s worse, rejected by the Ruhnu community.

In summary, 1919 was the year in which Ruhnu’s incorporation into Estonia was initiated as an informal, conditional settlement: less a one-time act of allegiance than a sequence of negotiated exchanges. Already the initial assertion of Estonian authority by Rudolf Schiller on 8 May was coupled with the acknowledgement that governance would run through local intermediaries.⁷¹ This started the pattern of petitions, beginning with the islanders’ first approach to Hans Pöhl, where timber and salt appeared as necessities the community expected to obtain through precedent and official help.⁷² When the seal fat expedition followed in early June, incorporation was again made a workable arrangement through a blend of material provision and administrative recognition. The expedition’s internal reporting foregrounds the deliberate respect shown to “old customs and traditions”, the necessity of obtaining the full community’s consent, the provision of salt and the purchase of seal fat.

68 Petition of the Ruhnu islanders to Nikolaus Blees, 28.08.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 77–78.

69 T. Undén (Swedish Legation in Riga) to Nothin (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 05.04.1922. SRA, Marieberg, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079; A. Schiller. Ruhno saar. – Päevaleht, 15.08.1923; Confidential report by the Information Bureau (Laaman) on Ruhnu, 29.08.1923. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 12, s. 360.

70 Lätlased soovivad Ruhno saarele oma valitsust. – Vaba Maa, 01.09.1919.

71 Schiller’s report on Ruhnu, 10.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 158, l. 50.

72 Petition of the Ruhnu islanders to Pöhl, 08.05.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 38–39.

It also records the islanders' own wish to remain the island's defenders and, on that basis, to be exempted from ordinary military service.⁷³

By the end of 1919, Estonia's de facto position on Ruhnu was stronger, yet it remained politically sensitive, and the islanders continued to treat their incorporation into Estonia as negotiable. The Latvian rival claim did not disappear, and the Ruhnu community was certainly conscious of the leverage this fact gave them, alongside Sweden's somewhat romanticised interest in its trans-Baltic diaspora. This environment magnified the cost of leaving Ruhnu unadministered and helps to explain why sovereignty over the island was asserted by Estonia not simply by declaring it "Estonian" but by addressing its immediate needs.

RUHNU'S ÅLAND MOMENT: THE PETITION TO THE KING OF SWEDEN IN 1920

The Tartu Peace Treaty (2 February 1920) ended the Estonian War of Independence and removed Soviet Russia from Estonia's sovereignty equation, but it did not settle Estonia's border with Latvia. Ruhnu therefore remained a live variable in an ongoing interstate dispute. In early 1920, the Latvian official gazette framed Ruhnu as lying under "Estonian occupation".⁷⁴ The claim also entered the mechanics of border-making: Latvian representatives repeatedly attempted to place Ruhnu on the agenda of the border commission,⁷⁵ which led to mutual suspicions and finger-pointing. In May, the Tallinn daily *Tallinna Teataja* went so far as to claim that the Latvian government planned to transform the idyllic island into a penal colony, a "Baltic Sakhalin" for forced labourers, thereby framing the choice of sovereign as one between traditional liberty under Estonia and existential destruction under Latvia.⁷⁶ Conversely, a survey of Latvian press in *Postimees* reported a mirror-image allegation

73 Blees's report to the Minister of the Interior on the Ruhnu expedition, 09.07.1919. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 158, l. 56; Blees et al. report of the Ruhnu expedition members' meeting, 14.06.1919. RA, ERA f. 66, n. 1, s. 99, l. 22.

74 Roņu bagāta. – Valdības Vēstnesis, 01.02.1920; Ajakirjanduse ülevaade. Ruhnu saare küsimus. – Postimees (Homniku-väljaanne), 04.05.1920.

75 Valga saatuse otsustamine. – Tallinna Teataja, 27.04.1920; Eesti-Läti piiriküsimus. – Sakala, 01.09.1920.

76 Lätlased ja Ruhnu saar. – Tallinna Teataja, 15.05.1920; K. Täht. Ruhnu saare küsimus Läti ja Eesti omavahelistes suhetes ning selle kajastamine perioodikas (1917–1927). BA thesis, University of Tartu, 2017, 24.

from the Latvian side: that it was in fact Estonia that had intended to make Ruhnu a prison.⁷⁷

Others sought to appropriate the islanders' grievances for their own anti-reform agendas. In May 1920, the former Livonian Land Marshal Heinrich von Stryk⁷⁸ attempted to draw Ruhnu into a broader Baltic German campaign against the Estonian land reform by presenting the island's church income and pastoral salary arrangements to Swedish interlocutors as evidence that the republic was despoiling a Swedish ecclesiastical foundation. The Estonian Consul Eduard Klaas, however, framed the episode as a baronial "manor intrigue" rather than a genuine defence of the islanders: any historical revenues connected to the manor had been appropriated under the old estate order, not confiscated from the Swedish church by the new Estonian state. In the ensuing press discussion, the new Ruhnu pastor Ernst Gordon publicly distanced himself from von Stryk's claims, denying knowledge of the alleged endowment. The result was therefore not an alliance between Ruhnu and the Baltic Germans over alleged Estonian violation of their rights, but a rapid public clarification that helped keep the island's negotiations with Estonia on a separate track from the simultaneous Estonian–Baltic German controversy.⁷⁹

In the continuing Estonian–Latvian border discussions, Ruhnu turned up as a possible bargaining chip. In June, Estonian press reported on rumours of plans under which Latvia would receive Ruhnu as compensation in a Valga/Valka arrangement.⁸⁰ The reports detailed a supposed compromise proposal attributed to Colonel Robinson, an aide to Commissioner Tallents, wherein Estonia would retain the contested town of Valga/Valka, while Latvia would be compensated with other territories and/or money. In the most striking version, Latvia would be allotted Heinaste harbour, Ruhnu, and a large monetary payment of 20 million marks, half of which was to be paid in gold, if the whole of Valga/Valka went to Estonia.⁸¹

77 Ajakirjanduse ülevaade. Ruhnu saare küsimus. – Postimees (Homniku-väljaanne), 04.05.1920.

78 Erroneously named "Kurt von Stryk" in the newspaper articles.

79 E. Klaas (Estonian vice-consul in Stockholm) to the Head of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ed. Virgo), 18.05.1920. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 11, s. 275, l. 15; Baltisk politik i Runöprästens löneförhållanden. – Dagens Nyheter, 16.05.1920; Eesti maaseadus ja Rootsi usuasjade ministeerium. – Kaja, 21.05.1920; Mitte Eesti valitsus, vaid Balti parunid on maakoha ära võtnud. – Tallinna Teataja, 21.05.1920; Ruhnu saarelt. – Postimees (Homniku-väljaanne), 27.05.1920.

80 Nagu Valgast kuuleme, – Postimees (Homniku-väljaanne), 08.06.1920.

81 This discussion is summarised in K. Täht. Ruhnu saare küsimus Läti ja Eesti omavahelistes suhetes, 25–26.

A compensation scheme involving Ruhnu did not materialise, but the uncomfortable realities of border settlement became very apparent when British Commissioner Stephen Tallents announced on 1 July 1920 his decision which physically divided the railway hub of Valga/Valka between the two states. This drastic solution was widely lampooned in the regional press for its perceived absurdity. In 1921, when the conflict over Ruhnu still continued, Latvian satirical periodical *Svari* suggested that, if Tallents were left in charge, he would apply to Ruhnu the same partition logic and “cut the island, the church, the parsonage, the 37 1/2 inhabitants, 3 houses and the old woodshed in half.”⁸²

In late August, when Estonian–Latvian negotiators met in Riga for border talks, the Latvian side again proposed placing both Ruhnu and the Laura colony⁸³ on the agenda, which the Estonian side explicitly rejected,⁸⁴ it nevertheless fed uncertainty. By early September, Swedish newspapers were treating “the Ruhnu question” as an open matter: reporting that Estonia and Latvia were negotiating over an island “currently without sovereignty”, and presenting a possible plebiscite as the mechanism through which the inhabitants’ preference might decide the outcome.⁸⁵

This external attention intersected with the logic of Ruhnu’s earlier conditional incorporation. In Estonian and Swedish narratives alike, the island’s “choice” was framed as a function of governance and privileged treatment rather than abstract constitutional belonging. A widely circulated pro-Estonian account attributed to Ruhnu’s previous Swedish pastor Nils Linderstam shortly after leaving the island asserted that Estonia, unlike Latvia, had repeatedly sent ships, repaired the lighthouse and rescue station, appointed a forest guard, supported schooling, delivered food without charging freight and – crucially – exempted Ruhnu men from military service while allowing extensive access to timber without payment.⁸⁶ The argument for Estonia’s claim was thus made by Linderstam in the same privilege-and-confirmation

82 C. Gibson. Attuning to Emotions in the History of Border-Making: The Estonian-Latvian Boundary Commission in 1920. – *Journal of Modern European History*, 2024, 22, 1, 40–54, here 40–41, 52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16118944231221031>.

83 The “Laura colony” (Estonian: Laura asundus or Laura koloonia) was an ethnically mixed settlement belt around Laura alev in Põlva maakond and the second main contested territory in the Estonian-Latvian border disputes in 1920–1923. See e.g. Eesti-Läti piiriküsimus. Sennise piiri tegelik tõmbamine. Laura asundus. Ruhnu saar. – *Vaba Maa*, 19.08.1921; Veel Laura küsimusest. – *Tallinna Teataja*, 21.12.1921.

84 Eesti-Läti piiriküsimus. – *Sakala*, 01.09.1920.

85 Ruhnu küsimus Rootsi lehtedes. – (Information Department report), 03.09.1920. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 1, s. 51, l. 10.

86 Ruhnu küsimus. – *Meie Maa*, 11.09.1920.

terms that structured Ruhnu's petitions: through exemptions, supplies and guarantees.

The Estonian response to this publicity shows how quickly petitioning, diplomacy and administrative proof became entangled. In October, the Foreign Ministry forwarded to the Interior Ministry a recommendation from Karl Menning, Estonia's envoy in Stockholm: send a government representative to Ruhnu to secure a written, signed statement of the inhabitants' political preference. This material could then be "spread in the press" in Sweden and strengthen Estonia's position against continued Latvian pressure. The same communication explicitly linked Swedish interest in the matter to the contemporaneous Åland question, noting that the Swedish government had become "somewhat cooler" towards Estonia because it sought French support over Åland and therefore hesitated over moves (such as *de jure* recognition of Estonia) that France might dislike.⁸⁷ This shows that Ruhnu was seen by Estonia as a potential reputational problem in a Swedish public sphere shaped by other, very current sovereignty disputes.

Indeed, in the Nordic political discourse in 1920, the Åland question was the most visible contemporary test of how post-imperial border-making might be reconciled with the wishes of a small, linguistically distinct island population. A strategically placed archipelago at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia, the Åland islands were inhabited overwhelmingly by Swedish-speakers. Historically, they had belonged to the Swedish realm until 1809, when Sweden ceded Finland (and Åland with it) to the Romanov Empire. In 1917–1918, the issue re-emerged in acute form because Finland's declaration of independence in December 1917 and subsequent civil war created a moment in which Ålanders claimed that sovereignty had become unsettled enough to reopen the question of allegiance.⁸⁸

Åland activists framed their demand as a matter of popular will and national self-determination, petitioning for reunion with Sweden and presenting the islands as a Swedish community that should not be stranded inside a new state against its wishes. Finland, in contrast, treated Åland as non-negotiable territory essential to the integrity and security of the new republic, and sought to contain the dispute by insisting on sovereignty while exploring concessions in the direction of autonomy. By 1920 the conflict had moved beyond bilateral argument into a wider

87 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, forwarding a letter from the Estonian envoy in Stockholm, 27.10.1920. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 11, s. 494, l. 69–70.

88 J. Barros. *The Åland Islands Question: Its Settlement by the League of Nations*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1968.

international arena: it was being discussed in terms of plebiscites, minority guarantees, and the problems of small communities whose linguistic identity did not align neatly with the borders being drawn after the First World War.⁸⁹

For precisely this reason, Åland provided an immediately intelligible template (both rhetorically and procedurally) for how a Swedish-speaking island could be argued about in public opinion and diplomacy. This ‘Åland moment’ also sparked debate in the Estonian Swedish community.

In spring 1920, the organ of the League of the Swedish People and the only Estonian Swedish newspaper *Kustbon* (edited by Nikolaus Bles), became a key arena in which some Estonian Swedish activists tested how far they could push from Swedish cultural autonomy claims towards a more territorial language of autonomy. Writing under the signature “M. K.”, one of them argued that the postwar moment had elevated “the nations’ right of self-determination” into a practical political lever, explicitly invoking the Ålanders’ struggle for reunion with Sweden. M. K. insisted that Aiboland – a collective term for all Estonian Swedish settlements – also needed its own *landsting*, i.e. a representative assembly, and even suggested that, if Estonian authorities resisted the idea, “the council in Paris” (i.e. the Paris Peace Conference) could function as a kind of ultimate court of appeal.⁹⁰ In this key, Åland served as a moral analogy and an imagined procedural pathway: self-determination could be operationalised through institutional claims framed as both locally necessary and internationally intelligible.

Bles’s published response did not reject the autonomy idea so much as discipline it. He stressed strategic sequencing and institutional feasibility: rather than leaping directly to a territorial legislature, the Swedish movement should prioritise attainable organisational forms and representative mechanisms that could function within Estonia’s administrative and political framework. In effect, Bles reformulated the autonomy question as a problem of building capacity (structures, procedures and legitimacy) before escalating demands to maximal institutional endpoints. Hans Pöhl’s contributions to the debate similarly emphasised consolidation, but from the angle of political

89 See League of Nations. The Aaland Islands question: Report of the International Committee of Jurists entrusted by the Council of the League of Nations with the task of giving an advisory opinion upon the legal aspects of the Aaland Islands question. Harrison & Sons, London, 1920.

90 [M. K.]. Vi fordra. – *Kustbon*, 03.03.1920; [M. K.]. Aibolands landsting. – *Kustbon*, 14.04.1920.

architecture: he stressed the need for durable national organisation, rules of representation and internal funding mechanisms, and treated “self-government” not as a slogan to be imported wholesale from the Finnish-Åland dispute but as something that would have to be designed to fit Estonia’s constitutional and administrative realities.⁹¹

This discussion did not go unnoticed abroad. In June 1920, Estonia’s envoy in Finland, Oskar Kallas, wrote to Prime Minister Jaan Tõnisson, noting that the dispute over Åland was “running high” in Finland and urged the Estonian government to inspire newspaper editors to back Finland morally in the matter. Kallas argued that even Finland’s Swedish-speakers largely opposed Åland’s separation and that critical voices could be heard in Sweden as well. Kallas then immediately turned to a domestic analogy and proposed that such press positioning could simultaneously serve as a stance “regarding our coastal Swedes”, whom their own newspaper *Kustbon* wanted to make “independent” via Paris, explicitly glossing this as *mutatis mutandis*, “Åland in Estonia”.⁹²

It was in this intellectual climate that Ruhnu’s own petitioning strategy acquired its sharpest international edge. On 18 October 1920, a *landskap* (village assembly) meeting took place on the island, and after a speech by the new Swedish pastor Ernst Gordon explicitly invoking the community’s former connection with “old Sweden”, the meeting resolved to petition the Swedish king and to approach Swedish authorities about placing Ruhnu under Swedish protection or otherwise arranging its attachment to Sweden.⁹³

The petition’s opening adopts the deferential royal-supplique genre while simultaneously presenting the islanders as a coherent corporate community. It begins with language of loyalty, emphasising an “old longing” to be reunited with the Swedish fatherland, before anchoring it in demographic and historical claims. Ruhnu is described as an island inhabited “for centuries” by an exclusively Swedish population who have remained Swedish “in heart and soul” even as subjects of foreign rulers. The petition thereby positions Sweden as the proper moral addressee for a community that insists it never consented to becoming anything else.⁹⁴

91 [H. P.]. Vår nationella organisation. – *Kustbon*, 10.03.1920; [N. B.]. Vårt närmaste mål. – *Kustbon*, 17.03.1920; [N. B.]. Åbolands självstyrelse. – *Kustbon*, 21.04.1920; [H. P.]. Om Estlandssvenskarnas självstyrelse. – *Kustbon*, 28.04.1920.

92 O. Kallas (Estonian Legation in Helsinki) to Prime Minister Jaan Tõnisson, 18.06.1920. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 1578, l. 239.

93 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079; B. Johansson (Swedish Consulate in Mariehamn) to the Cabinet Secretary of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 03.11.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

94 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

To make this moral claim credible, the petition foregrounds a history of Swedish patronage in explicitly institutional terms. It points to the long-standing provision of Swedish clergy and support for local education, and treats the 1912 church, financed largely through Swedish contributions, as a material monument to Sweden's continuing engagement with Ruhnu. It also invokes Swedish wartime aid as a lived experience of protection, suggesting that the relationship between Ruhnu and Sweden was understood as reciprocal: Sweden had acted as a distant patron, and the islanders had interpreted those acts of patronage as confirmation that they remain within Sweden's sphere of concern.⁹⁵

Only after establishing this patron–client relationship does the petition turn to the post-imperial settlement, where it deploys a notably flexible understanding of sovereignty. The collapse of the Romanov Empire is presented as having opened a moment in which the island's status is unsettled, allowing the petitioners to claim that Ruhnu was effectively “no man's land” (*ingen mans land*).⁹⁶ Rhetorically, this kept the island's future available to potential Swedish intervention by casting current governance as provisional and the international settlement as incomplete.

The petition is particularly notable for how explicitly it then steps onto the terrain of plebiscitary self-determination. Rather than arguing through the more common Ruhnu repertoire of negotiated exemptions, it goes on to frame the central issue as the community's right to decide its state allegiance in accordance with national identification and historic connection, asserting that “each people itself should be allowed to decide where, politically, it wishes to belong”. It reports rumours that the Estonian–Latvian dispute might be resolved through a vote (*omröstning*) and within that framing, the petition's core request is direct: the islanders ask to be reunited with Sweden and to become Swedish citizens (*rikssvenskar*), insisting that they do not wish to become subjects of either of the new Baltic republics.⁹⁷ Timed to exploit the perceived fluidity of the post-imperial period and adopting the rhetoric of self-determination, it places the Swedish king in the position of the potential protector and the political solution to the “Ruhnu question”.

95 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

96 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

97 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

In Estonia, the islanders' appeal remained unknown or at least did not generate press debate. In Åland, it surfaced briefly when on 3 November 1920 the newspaper *Åland* carried a brief notice, explicitly based on a private letter from Ruhnu, which stated that the islanders had addressed the Swedish king in a "mass petition", seeking to have the island placed under Sweden's protection and thereby obtain security for "language and culture".⁹⁸ The Swedish consulate in Mariehamn immediately forwarded this item to Stockholm, adding that the report rested on a letter sent to a student (Dreier) from his father, a farmer on Ruhnu.⁹⁹

On the Swedish state side, the petition did land in the administrative machinery even if it did not produce immediate action. A later internal Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum records that on 5 November 1920 a petition addressed to the King, signed by a large number of Ruhnu inhabitants, arrived "with the ordinary post" at the Foreign Ministry; it then outlines the petition's core elements (centuries-old Swedish population; Swedish aid in pastors, church funding and wartime provisions; the claim that circumstances had changed after World War; and the request to be reunited with Sweden). The memo goes on to note that the petition had "hitherto" not led to any measure, but it was prepared for presentation within the Foreign Affairs Council (*Utrikesnämnden*). This fact shows that Stockholm still treated the matter as something that had to be recorded, summarised and managed by Swedish diplomacy.¹⁰⁰

In 1920, the Ruhnu question entered public view through the Åland-inflected communicative space in which "small Swedish islands in new states" were being discussed as a recognisable category. This made their petition to the Swedish King both intelligible and, in strategic terms, well-timed. That timing mattered because the islanders were trying to preserve, for as long as possible, the framing of Ruhnu as an open question rather than a settled fact of interstate border-making. The petition's own rhetoric stressing that only now could the island's inhabitants give political voice to their long-standing Swedish identification, helped to keep sovereignty supposedly unresolved and therefore negotiable.¹⁰¹ Unlike the previous petitions, this one engaged

98 Hava runöborna vädjat till Sverige? – Åland, 03.11.1920.

99 B. Johansson (Swedish Consulate in Mariehamn) to the Cabinet Secretary of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 03.11.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

100 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum on Runö petitions, 02.07.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

101 Petition from the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 18.10.1920. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

with the idea of self-determination, but expressed it through sentiments of communal continuity, patronage and the moral authority of the Swedish motherland, rather than through a universalist theory of citizenship. In the end, this form of self-determination was fully consistent with the broader Ruhnu political approach since 1919: the islanders treated incorporation as conditional and revisable and saw external patrons as instruments for enforcing (or restoring) the practical confirmations on which their customary life depended.

Notably, possibly the same “M. K.” who had argued for Aiboland’s territorial autonomy in *Kustbon* in spring 1920, wrote in 1922 an article about Ruhnu for the newspaper *Åland*, where he reworked the island’s significance in an archipelago idiom. Addressing “Åland sailors” (*Åländska sjömän*), he pointed to Ruhnu’s similar reputation for dangerous banks and repeated a supposed tradition that the island’s first settlers were storm-driven Åland seal-hunters. He thus symbolically folded Ruhnu into the same Swedish-island world that had made Åland a *cause célèbre*.¹⁰²

THE DUAL-ADDRESS PETITIONS OF 1921 AND ESTONIA’S DE FACTO CONFIRMATION OF RUHNU’S PRIVILEGES

By 1921, Ruhnu’s brief “Åland moment” – the attempt to convert postwar diplomatic fluidity into a sovereignty claim by appealing over Estonia’s head to the Swedish crown – was already over. In Sweden, the petition received in November 1920 was later explicitly noted as not having to any measure¹⁰³ and on 5 February 1921, Sweden, alongside Norway and Denmark, formally recognised Estonia as an independent state.¹⁰⁴ This meant that any official Swedish intervention was now difficult precisely because the island lay under Estonian sovereignty.¹⁰⁵ The practical consequence for Ruhnu was that the “no man’s land”

102 Runö. Svenskön i Riga-viken. – Åland, 26.08.1922.

103 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum on Runö petitions, 02.07.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

104 See M. Kuldkepp. Põhjamaine Eesti: rahvusriigi süünd. Varrak, Tallinn, 2024, 281.

105 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum on Runö petitions, 02.07.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

rhetoric collapsed back into administrative bargaining over the questions that had surfaced in 1919: forest use, conscription, and taxation.

On 6 May 1921, the community held another meeting and decided to compose a renewed address to the King of Sweden. This petition was once again to emphasise their wish to be reunited with Sweden, but its argumentative weight was to lie in the well-known repertoire of grievances and what was framed as broken Estonian promises to solve them.¹⁰⁶

The text of this petition stressed that the island's economy and survival were "by nature" dependent on access to the crown forest (for fuel, building timber, boat timber), and presented earlier arrangements under Russian rule in terms of tolerated or lightly charged use rather than market-priced extraction. The petition then framed the 1919 Estonian takeover as a moment of promised continuity: when the Estonian flag was first raised by representatives of the new republic, the islanders claimed they had been assured that their earlier "benefits" would not be removed. Yet they were now being asked to pay compensation for timber already cut, faced the calling-up of all men of conscription age, and were threatened with heavier taxes. The new request to the Swedish king therefore combined aspiration and fallback: reunion with Sweden remained the ideal, but the immediate plea was for Swedish help in securing, "as long as" Ruhnu was administered from Estonia, continued free access to necessary timber, exemption from military service and relief from onerous taxes.¹⁰⁷ This was, in effect, a recalibration of the strategy of the previous year: Sweden was still invoked as the proper moral patron of the island, but the petition's operative goal was to mobilise Swedish authority as protector of exemptions under Estonian sovereignty, not to ask it to step up as an alternative sovereign.

That this strategy worked better is demonstrated by Swedish files showing that the new petition entered formal diplomatic processing. A Foreign Ministry memorandum notes that on 1 June 1921 Pastor Gordon had personally delivered a new petition dated 6 May 1921. The memo then summarised the same triad of issues (forest, military service, taxes) and highlighted the islanders' claim that Estonian representatives had promised continuity when the Estonian flag was raised. Crucially, it then drew a policy conclusion in terms of sovereignty constraints: an official Swedish intervention could not be contemplated

¹⁰⁶ Excerpt from the minutes of the Ruhnu village assembly, 06.05.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

¹⁰⁷ Petition of the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 06.05.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

but an informal approach through Sweden's diplomatic representative in Tallinn in support of the islanders' wishes might be possible.¹⁰⁸

On the Estonian side, the same months show attempts to regularise Ruhnu's requests into administratively manageable decisions, especially regarding forest use. A cabinet decision of 20 May 1921 instructed the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that islanders could obtain firewood "for the cleaning of the forests", while any allocation of usable timber was to proceed only through regulated felling permits. In other words, forest access was cast as a work-linked concession rather than confirmation of an inherited right.¹⁰⁹

At the same time, the continued salience of "the Ruhnu question" also worried Estonian Swedish activists who had rejected M. K.'s programme of territorial autonomy for Aiboland. A letter in April from the chairman of the board of the Swedish Teachers' Association Joel Nyman to Hans Pöhl noted, on the basis of newspaper reports, that Latvia again appeared to be asserting a claim to Ruhnu. Framing the island as "in so many respects" closely bound to Swedish Estonia – indeed as constituting an "organic whole" with it – Nyman warned that its "detachment" from the other Swedish settlements would harm not only Ruhnu but Swedish Estonia as a collective, and urged Pöhl to issue a public protest (either as parliamentary representative or in the name of the Swedish People's League) against Latvian propaganda, arguing that organised opinion might matter not only in Estonia and Latvia but also "abroad".¹¹⁰ This minority-solidarity logic closely resembles the stance visible in the contemporaneous Åland dispute, where (as reported by Oskar Kallas) even most Finland-Swedes opposed Åland's separation from Finland.¹¹¹

By summer 1921, the interstate frame that had helped keep the Ruhnu question rhetorically open was narrowing but not gone. Press reports on border-commission proceedings state that Tallents again removed Ruhnu from the Estonian–Latvian agenda at Estonia's insistence.¹¹² Yet, while Estonian officials insisted that Ruhnu's state affiliation was already decided and not open to renewed bargaining,

108 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum on Runö petitions, 02.07.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

109 Decision of the Government of the Republic concerning timber use on Ruhnu, 20.05.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 3, s. 6266, l. 1.

110 J. Nyman to Hans Pöhl, 10.04.1921. SRA, Marieberg, Hans Pöhl, vol. 11.

111 O. Kallas (Estonian Legation in Helsinki) to Prime Minister Jaan Tõnisson, 18.06.1920. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 1, s. 1578, l. 239.

112 *Latvijast. Jälle Ruhno saare küsimus.* – *Päevaleht*, 04.04.1921.

Latvia continued to treat the island as part of a wider bundle of unsettled border questions.¹¹³

In this conjuncture, Estonia performed its sovereignty visibly by bringing the head of government to the island. In early July 1921, State Elder Konstantin Päts travelled from Kuressaare to Ruhnu by motorboat, accompanied by several senior officials. In newspapers, the visit was reported as both inspection and reassurance: Päts was said to have spent the day on the island, hearing the inhabitants and noting their concerns.¹¹⁴ The islanders reportedly asked Päts directly whether the island's political belonging was now definitively settled, and his answer – reported as unequivocal – was presented as calming local uncertainty and reducing the space for Latvian-oriented rumours. At the same time, Estonian press coverage cast Ruhnu's "choice" in strongly practical terms: although the islanders were described as Swedish-speakers, they were also represented as communicating readily in Estonian and as accepting Estonian rule because it best secured their livelihood: above all access to seal-hunting grounds in Estonian territorial waters.¹¹⁵

Beyond informal conversations during Päts's visit, the Ruhnu community decided to compose yet another petition. Received on 23 July 1921 and rooted in a *landskap* decision of 13 July, it was addressed "most humbly" to the "President of the Estonian Republic". It explicitly invoked the border dispute and the possibility of a plebiscite, and it framed the islanders' political position as preference-based ("with whom we want to belong"). After this introduction, however, it immediately turned to Ruhnu's usual programme of exceptions. The petition asked for continued free access to necessary timber from the state forest (especially for fuel and boats), for tax relief and reshaping of burdens (including explicit mention of inheritance taxation), for exemption from general conscription for a fixed period (framed as a long-term guarantee), and for permission to retain the community's firearms – thirteen rifles previously supplied by the 1919 seal fat expedition – rather than being required to hand them back.¹¹⁶

Estonian records suggest a readiness to address at least some of Ruhnu's concerns, but the matter was certainly helped by the fact

113 J. Seljamaa. Ruhnlaste arvamine Ruhno saare allumisest. – Vaba Maa, 14.07.1921.

114 Riigivanem Ruhno saarel. – Meie Maa, 09.07.1921; Riigivanem Ruhno saarel. – Vaba Maa, 13.07.1921.

115 Ruhnosaarlased tahavad Eesti vabariigi alla jääda. – Vaba Maa, 11.07.1921; Riigivanem Ruhno saarel. – Vaba Maa, 13.07.1921; J. Seljamaa. Ruhnlaste arvamine Ruhno saare allumisest. – Vaba Maa, 14.07.1921.

116 Petition of the inhabitants of Ruhnu to the Estonian State Elder. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 15–17, 42.

that the islanders' dual-address strategy soon also produced help from Sweden. Its role as Ruhnu's external patron became concrete again in September, when Sweden's representative in Tallinn delivered to the Estonian State Elder Päts an informal, unsigned memorandum. Dated 12 September, this document was carefully framed so as not to challenge Estonia's sovereignty: it explicitly acknowledges that Ruhnu is practically and economically bound to Estonia, while relaying the islanders' anxiety that conditions had worsened under the new administration and that their future looked insecure. The memorandum foregrounds the same domains that were central to Ruhnu's own petitions (forest use, conscription and fiscal burdens) and does so in a language of continuity: the islanders are presented as insisting that under the previous regime they had enjoyed special arrangements in these fields, and that when the transfer occurred they were promised that those arrangements would not be withdrawn. The aim of this Swedish intervention was thus not a challenge to Estonia's sovereignty, but it certainly amounted to pressure for a style of rule compatible with Ruhnu's inherited "specialness".¹¹⁷

This support for Ruhnu exceptionalism apparent in the Swedish documents reflects the broader Swedish tendency to frame the island as a culturally valuable Swedish enclave: a "paradise for ethnographers", as Dr Ernst Klein described it¹¹⁸ or a "living museum" (as put by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself),¹¹⁹ whose integrity could be endangered by coercive state use. In April 1921, Swedish newspapers (drawing on the Estonian Baltic German paper *Revaler Bote*) had reported with evident alarm that the Estonian government had designated Ruhnu a place of expulsion (*utvisningsort*) for persons deemed undesirable on the mainland. This, it was feared, would transform "old, wonderful Runö" into a dumping ground for unwanted outsiders. The Estonian consulate in Stockholm immediately sought to neutralise the story by issuing a correction to the Swedish press: the island in question was not Ruhnu at all but Kihnu in Pärnu Bay, explicitly described as having no Swedish population.¹²⁰ Regarding Latvia, similar anxieties were more persistent: in August 1923 Torsten Undén warned Stockholm that, if Latvia became master of the island, measures might be taken "without regard to the population" that would be experienced as hateful, noting circulating

117 Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

118 E. K—n [Ernst Klein]. Runö – ett paradis för etnografer. Intressanta fynd. – Svenska Dagbladet, 26.10.1922.

119 Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

120 Runö icke förvisningsort. En förklaring från estniska konsulatet. – Svenska Dagbladet, 10.04.1921; Rootsii eksiärevus. – Sotsialdemokraat, 15.04.1921.

rumours that Latvia wished to establish a penal-prisoner colony on Runö and would probably station troops there.¹²¹

The September 1921 memorandum also shows the limits of what Stockholm was prepared to do for Ruhnu. The operative policy line had been formulated in the Foreign Ministry handling of the islanders' May 1921 petition: an official intervention could not be contemplated given Estonia's rights as sovereign, but it might be "possible and appropriate" to make an informal approach through Sweden's diplomatic representative in Tallinn in support of the islanders' wishes.¹²² The September memorandum was the practical implementation of that line: an attempt to keep Sweden present as a patron without reviving the "Ruhnu as an open sovereignty question" framing of the previous year.

Under pressure from two directions – the islanders themselves and their Swedish allies – Päts signalled a clear willingness to make concessions to the islanders' demands.¹²³ Yet the following months and years reveal how difficult it was to translate Ruhnu's "privilege grammar" into administratively acceptable forms. The outcome, accordingly, was not a clean transition into a codified territorial autonomy, but a piecemeal politics of confirmation: discrete concessions and administrative accommodations that kept the island's core demands subject to case-by-case bargaining and, crucially, reversible as administrative policy rather than entrenched right.

Where clear concessions can be documented, they appear as *ad hoc* decisions that satisfy a particular demand without necessarily endorsing the wider claim behind it. A good example is the firearms question. Ruhnu's petition to the State Elder in July 1921 explicitly included the request to retain the thirteen rifles (of the original twenty supplied in 1919) rather than being required to return them. Their claim rested on the assertion that expedition representatives had made oral promises to this effect in 1919.¹²⁴ In September 1921, the issue was processed inside the Estonian state as a matter of political prudence: an internal report and ministerial proposal warned that demanding payment or reclamation would probably produce needless resentment on an already sensitive

121 T. Undén (Swedish Legation in Riga) to the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, private letter, 26.08.1923. SRA, Marieberg, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

122 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum on Runö petitions, 02.07.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079; Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

123 See Päts's handwritten resolutions (to consult the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Interior) attached to the Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52.

124 Petition of the inhabitants of Ruhnu to the Estonian State Elder. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 15–17, 42

island. Consequently, the state retrospectively regularised the arming of 1919 by formal recognition that the rifles would be treated as community property, free of charge. This is precisely the kind of ‘confirmation’ outcome the petitions presupposed: exceptional local arrangements of unclear legal standing converted into administratively recognised exceptions.¹²⁵

Forestry is the clearest case where ‘confirmation’ turned into regulation rather than recognition, and this through protracted administrative handling rather than a single sovereign act. In the islanders’ own narrative, access to fuel, building timber and boat timber belonged to the core of their customary order, and they traced its renewed legitimacy to assurances given at the moment of transfer in 1919. Already in late August 1919, they reminded Blees that, when Estonian representatives visited the island, they had asked for the free use of the forest for repairs and fuel and had been told this would be allowed, with a written permit to follow.¹²⁶ By 1921, that remembered assurance was being experienced as fragile and reversible. In May, the second petition to the Swedish King framed the island’s survival as “by nature” dependent on the crown forest and treated the new demands for compensation and controls as a breach of the continuity promised when the Estonian flag was raised.¹²⁷

The Estonian state, however, processed the same issue through the administrative logic of state forestry. As already noted, a cabinet decision in May 1921 allowed household firewood without payment but tied the concession to an obligation “to clean the forests”, while other timber was to be handled through ministerial regulation and standard permits. Wood was therefore understood as a supervised state resource rather than an inherited communal entitlement.¹²⁸ That gap in framing persisted into the following years and repeatedly pulled the “Ruhnu question” back into ministerial paperwork even after other issues cooled. In May 1922, the agricultural administration explicitly reconstructed the chain of earlier decisions and reiterated a key state premise: that, under the Russian regime, the islanders had not possessed any general right to free extraction from the state forest, implying that “old privileges” were at best partial, at worst exaggerated, and therefore could only be

125 Report to the Minister of Trade and Industry on rifles issued to the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 01.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 3; Proposal of the Minister of Trade and Industry concerning rifles issued to the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 13.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 33.

126 Ruhnu inhabitants’ petition to Blees, 28.08.1919. RA, ERA f. 1108, n. 8, s. 4, l. 77–78.

127 Petition of the inhabitants of Runö to the King of Sweden, 06.05.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

128 Decision of the Government of the Republic on timber provision for the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 20.05.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 3, s. 6266, l. 1.

continued as a policy justified by need, not as the legal confirmation of an ancient right.¹²⁹

By 1923 the same anxieties over forest were still being reported as politically combustible, intersecting with rumours of Latvian agitation and the islanders' continuing sensitivity to anything that looked like administrative "normalisation" (i.e. treating Ruhnu like any other rural district).¹³⁰ A compromise came in July of the same year in the form the state found administratively tolerable: renewed provision of timber as an exceptional measure to stabilise the community, reported publicly as a discretionary concession rather than as the restoration of a right.¹³¹

Fiscal officials from the Finance Ministry's direct tax administration responded coolly to Ruhnu's attempt to turn past fiscal practice into a permanent privilege. In the July 1921 address to the Estonian head of state, the islanders had grounded their complaint in the history of land redemption: once they had gained the right to buy their holdings from the crown and the purchase sum had been partly paid and partly remitted, they claimed that their income taxes had been "very small", and they now demanded that these "old rights" be left in place despite rising assessments.¹³² The Finance Ministry's response of 26 August 1921 dismantled this narrative, insisting that the cancellation of redemption arrears after the 1905 revolution could not be treated as an island-specific tax entitlement, and argued that under the Russian government Ruhnu had not enjoyed "any special privileges or reliefs" beyond what it described as general Saaremaa-wide tax abatements. On that basis, the ministry found "no need" to introduce any Ruhnu-specific concessions in land or income taxation.¹³³

Beyond the tax issue, which yielded no positive results for the islanders, conscription was the hardest domain to convert into an explicit, formal exception, since it cut so clearly against the republican state's core principle of uniform obligation. Swedish diplomatic reporting from Tallinn relayed that Ruhnu's requests in this area were discussed sympathetically in administrative circles, but also that the War

129 Ministry of Agriculture to the Government of the Republic, 29.05.1922. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725.

130 Confidential report by the Information Bureau (Laaman) on Ruhnu, 29.08.1923. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 12, s. 360.

131 Ministry of Agriculture (Forestry Department) to the Government of the Republic, proposal on Ruhnu forest use policy, 05.07.1923. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 3, s. 6342, l. 1; Ruhnu saare elanikkudele antakse tasuta metsamaterjaale. – Vaba Maa, 08.07.1923.

132 Petition of the inhabitants of Ruhnu to the Estonian State Elder. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 15–17, 42.

133 Report of the Direct Taxes Head Administration of the Ministry of Finance on the tax burden of the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 26.08.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 24–26.

Ministry resisted the creation of an overtly privileged legal category: such exemptions would violate the “equal basis” principle and invite copycat demands. Even when Estonian officials signalled willingness to “take account” of the islanders’ wishes, the workable horizon was typically framed as an informal or narrowly delimited accommodation rather than a statutory exemption.¹³⁴

Over the following year, however, a pragmatic compromise nevertheless emerged that redefined what this exemption could mean in administrative practice. Instead of abolishing military service in principle, the solution was to displace it into locally bounded duty compatible with the island’s labour needs and strategic functions. According to a government decision of 16 June 1922, Ruhnu conscripts could serve their term on the island (explicitly linked to duty at the Ruhnu lighthouse), while any wartime mobilisation of Ruhnu reservists was left to the discretion of the commander-in-chief.¹³⁵ This was far from a timeless privilege, but it was duly implemented as shown in later communications.¹³⁶ It also produced the kind of outcome the islanders could treat as functional confirmation of their claimed exceptional status.

Taken together, the resolutions of these domains (firearms, forestry, taxation and conscription) reveal the underlying logic of the 1921–1923 settlement. It was not a simple capitulation to the islanders, but a partial translation of their privilege grammar into the language of the modern state. Where the islanders sought exemptions, the state successfully recoded them as specific duties: the freedom from conscription became the duty of local defence, just as the right to timber was reframed as a labour obligation in the state forest. Crucially, where such translation proved unacceptable, as with the retrospective tax claims, the state held firm, proving that the “privilege” logic had hard limits. The ultimate result was a functional hybrid: a set of administrative arrangements that allowed the community to live as if under their idea of the ancient Swedish Law, while allowing the state to govern as if it were maintaining a uniform legal order.

¹³⁴ Swedish memorandum concerning Runö, 12.09.1921. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 5, s. 725, l. 52; Wirsén report on the Runö petition, 02.10.1921. SRA, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

¹³⁵ State Secretary to Minister of War, notice of the Government decision of 16.06.1922 permitting Ruhnu conscripts to remain in service on the island at the lighthouse, 19.06.1922. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 4, s. 1326, l. 10.

¹³⁶ Ministry of War to the Government of the Republic, report on the fulfilment of compulsory military service by the inhabitants of Ruhnu, 04.09.1923. RA, ERA f. 31, n. 4, s. 1326, l. 4.

CONCLUSION

Later reporting and memoranda underscore how consciously the islanders treated sovereignty as leverage for extracting (or restoring) their claimed exceptions. A September 1923 Swedish memorandum (based on information from Dr. Ernst Klein of the Nordic Museum, who had done fieldwork on Ruhnu) stated that Ruhnu people had no serious wish to exchange Estonian nationality for Latvian but had “simulated” indifference to that possibility in order to produce “healthy anxiety” in the Estonian government and thereby make it more accommodating on their “special wishes”.¹³⁷ Estonian internal communications corroborated this assessment. A report by journalist Eduard Laaman from August of the same year, which detailed conversations with the Swedish envoy Torsten Undén, characterised the islanders as “very cunning” (*väga kavalad*) – while also remarking on their outwardly naive presentation – and explicitly framed their demands regarding forest management and limited conscription as an attempt to “extort” (*välja pressida*) privileges. The report concluded that the state nonetheless had to meet these demands “to the last possibility” to prevent the islanders from drifting towards Latvia, even if their economic dependence on seal hunting in Estonian waters made a genuine exit unlikely.¹³⁸

This conclusion on part of Laaman is evidence of how well their sustained and successful petitioning campaign had served the needs of the Ruhnu community. It had also set Ruhnu apart from other Swedish settlements in Estonia, which, as far as is known, engaged in petitioning only under the umbrella of SOV/League of the Swedish People, and did not demand special local privileges during this period. Under the leadership of figures like Hans Pöhl, other Swedes pursued their rights through Estonia’s domestic political process, lobbying for cultural autonomy, Swedish-language schools and equitable land reform.¹³⁹ Unlike the Ruhnu case, these efforts were collaborative with the Estonian state rather than explicitly conditional and focused on minority rights rather than historic exemptions from general law.

Ruhnu’s exceptionalism stemmed from a convergence of geography and memory. Unlike the other Swedes, who lived mostly

137 Memorandum by Eric Gyllenstierna based on Dr. Ernst Klein’s observations, 25.09.1923. SRA, Marieberg, UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP, vol. 1079.

138 Confidential report by the Information Bureau (Laaman) on Ruhnu, 29.08.1923. RA, ERA f. 957, n. 12, s. 360.

139 See M. Kuldkepp. The Estonian Swedish National Minority and the Estonian Cultural Autonomy Law of 1925. – Nationalities Papers, 2022, 50, 5, 923–941. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.86>.

interspersed with Estonians and had been subject to Baltic German landlords, the Ruhnu islanders inhabited a homogeneous, geographically isolated “crown domain” with a strong tradition of self-governance. Their distinct collective memory of local rights made the universal obligations of the new Estonian state feel like a degradation of status rather than a democratic gain. Furthermore, their isolation and status as a contested territory between Estonia and Latvia allowed them effectively to frame themselves as a “no man’s land” in the eyes of foreign observers, a rhetorical luxury unavailable to other Swedish villages. Thus, while Pöhl and the mainland leadership worked from late 1918 onwards to integrate Swedes into the republic, facing only occasional criticism from activists keen to bring up the Åland example, Ruhnu mobilised its peripheral status to keep the republic at arm’s length.

The diplomatic window that made this strategy finally closed in 1923, when Estonia and Latvia signed, then ratified a supplementary border agreement that definitively assigned Ruhnu to Estonia.¹⁴⁰ This formally ended the “floating” status of the island and removed the Latvian threat that had given the islanders political leverage. Yet, by the time the geopolitical door closed, the Ruhnu anomaly had already been successfully embedded into the administrative fabric of the Estonian state.

Importantly, the case of Ruhnu offers a counter-narrative to the standard history of post-imperial state-building, where small minority communities are typically portrayed as passive objects of diplomatic bargaining, swept up in the “unmixing of peoples” or subjected to the nationalising policies of new states.¹⁴¹ The Swedish fishermen of Ruhnu demonstrated a remarkable capacity to reverse this dynamic. By exploiting the geopolitical fluidity of 1919–1921, they leveraged their peripheral status into political power to negotiate the terms of their loyalty to Estonia. In this sense, their petitions were not simply reactions to state-level decisions, but drivers that helped condition them. The fact that Estonia hurried to solidify control with material incentives in 1919, and that Sweden engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy in 1921, would be difficult to explain without the influence of the islanders’ expressed will. The success of this strategy lay in the community’s ability to translate their privilege-based idiom of political claim-making into a language that the modern Estonian state could, however reluctantly,

140 Weenofchanās panākta. – Latvīš, 02.11.1923; Eesti–Lāti lepingud ratifitseeritud. – Vaba Maa, 22.12.1923; Lāti valitsus tunnistas Ruhno saare Eesti omaks. – Vaba Maa, 25.11.1923.

141 See R. Brubaker. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

accept and regulate. By couching their requests as continuations of what they had ‘historically enjoyed’ rather than as separatist demands, the islanders made it politically feasible for Estonian officials to acquiesce without losing face; honouring local custom could be framed as good governance rather than capitulation.

In the end, the islanders did not achieve their maximalist goal of unification with Sweden, nor did they secure a formal constitutional autonomy on the Åland model. A genuine union with Latvia was probably never a serious option for them. But instead, they secured something in the Estonian state, a functional hybridity of status. Through a piecemeal process of bureaucratic bargaining, most of their desired corporate exemptions were recoded as modern administrative duties. Ultimately, in an era defined by the Wilsonian rhetoric of national self-determination, they succeeded by deploying a much older political logic: the negotiation of conditional loyalty in exchange for the confirmation of inherited rights. For two decades, until the violent ruptures of the Second World War finally ended their centuries-long habitation, the Ruhnu community managed to live within a modern republic while maintaining the sense that they were still governed by their own Swedish Law.

PALVEKIRJAD ÜKSIKULT SAARELT.
LÄBIRÄÄGITAV SUVERÄÄNSUS
JA RUHNU LIITMINE EESTI RIIGI
KOOSSEISU 1919–1921

Mart Kuldkepp

Artikkel käsitleb Ruhnu saare rannarootslastest kogukonna palvekirja-aktisioone aastatel 1919–1921, mil saare kuuluvus Eesti riigi koosseisu ei olnud veel täielikult põlistunud ning saart soovis endaga liita ka Läti Vabariik. Artikli keskne väide on, et Ruhnu elanikud ei jäänud selles olukorras pelgalt riikidevahelise poliitika ja diplomaatia passiivseks sihtmärgiks, vaid sekkusid aktiivselt ka ise, püüdes petitsioonide abil mõjutada eelkõige tingimusi, mille alusel Eesti riiklikku suveräänsust saarel teostama hakatakse. Lisaks Eesti ametivõimudele pöördus Ruhnu kogukond 1920. ja 1921. aastal ka Rootsi kuninga poole, kasutades enda

huvides ära seega mitte ainult Eesti-Läti territoriaalset vaidlust, vaid ka Rootsi riigi põhimõttelist huvi oma rahvuskaaslaste saatuse vastu.

Ühtlasi asetub Ruhnu juhtum laiemasse, I maailmasõja järgsete postimperiaalsete ümberkorralduse konteksti Kesk- ja Ida-Euroopas. Vene impeeriumi kokkuvarisemine, Saksa okupatsioon ning I maailmasõja jätkusõjad ja piirivaidlused muutsid väikeste kogukondade staatuse ebamääraseks ja vaieldavaks mujalgi. Ruhnu ja võib-olla ka mõne teise sarnase juhtumi puhul on aga märkimisväärne, et kohalikud elanikud ei lähtunud omapoolseid nõudmisi esitades mitte peamiselt moodsast vähemuste õiguste või rahvusliku enesemääramise diskursusest, vaid toetusid ajaloolise eriseisundi, põliste õiguste ja varasemate lubaduste kinnitamise loogikale. Artiklis kasutatakse selle retoorilise repertuaari kohta terminit „privileegigrammatika“.

Konkreetselt Ruhnu eripärade taustaks võib pidada saare suhtelist isoleeritust ning sellest tulenevat ja pikalt kestnud vähest administratiivset sekkumist kohaliku kogukonna ellu. Nii oli Ruhnul tekkinud tugev omavalitsustraditsioon, mis soodustas kohalikku arusaama, et ruhnlased peavad saama elada oma tavade järgi üldistele koormistele allumata, sh õigusega langetada riigimetsast tasuta puid, olla vabastatud sõjaväeteenistusest ja mujal kehtivatest maksudest. Samavõrra tähtis oli Ruhnu jaoks ka Rootsi kui emamaa roll. Rootsikeelne kirikuelu, haridus, Rootsis tehtud korjanduse toel rajatud uus kirik ning perioodiline Rootsi humanitaarabi kinnistasid ettekujutust, et Rootsi kuningas asub Ruhnu suhtes vähemalt moraalse kaitsja positsioonil, kui mitte enam.

Ruhnu palvekirjapoliitika eeldused loodi 1917.–1918. aasta murranguliste sündmuste ajal. Vene veebruarirevolutsiooni järel hoogustus eestirootslaste rahvuslik liikumine, mis püüdis kindlustada rootsi vähemusele keelelisi ja kultuurilisi õigusi autonoomses või iseseisvas Eestis. Ruhnu puhul kujunes postimperiaalne trajektoor siiski teistsuguseks, kuna ruhnlased ei nõudnud mitte poliitilist esindatust ja vähemusõigusi, vaid kohaliku kogukonna ajalooliste privileegide tunnustamist. Seejuures lähtus kohalik kogukond algusest peale arusaamast, et Eesti suveräänsus saare üle ei ole mitte paratamatult lõplik ja vaieldamatu fakt, vaid selle aluseks peavad olema läbirääkimised ruhnlaste ja Eesti ametivõimude vahel ning kogukonna varasemate privileegide kinnitamine.

Kuigi Eesti ajutine valitsus otsustas juba 1919. aasta jaanuaris, et Ruhnu kuulub Eesti Vabariigile, sai esimeseks tegelikuks kontaktiks saarega mereväeohvitser Rudolf Schilleri visiit mai alguses. Schilleri vahendusel sai ruhnlastele teatavaks, et neil on Hans Pöhli näol Tallinnas oma rootsi rahvusminister, kellele nad läkitasid esimese artiklis käsitletud

petitsiooni riigimetsa kasutamise, soola saamise ja muudes küsimustes. Leevendamaks saarel valitsevat ainelist puudust ja kinnistamiseks seal Eesti riigivõimu toimus sama aasta juunis nn hülgerasva-ekspeditsioon, mille raames tõid Eesti riigi ja rootsi vähemusrahvuse esindajad saarele tarbekaupu, ostsid ära ruhnlaste aasta jooksul kogutud hülgerasva, kuulutasid Ruhnu Eesti osaks ning rajasid kohaliku kaitseliidu.

Omalt poolt esitasid ruhnlased kohe Eesti riigiga liitumise tingimused, mille sekka kuulusid õigus tasuta puudele riigimetsast ja pääsemise üldisest sõjaväeteenistusest. Seega oli hülgerasva-ekspeditsioon korraka nii kaubanduslik tehing kui ka poliitiline kokkulepe: Eesti riik soovis näidata, et suudab saart tegelikult valitseda, ruhnlased aga seadsid tingimuseks oma eristaatuse tunnustamise. Viimase tõsiseltvõetavust mõjutas tugevalt Läti Vabariigi poliitika, mis oli samuti suunatud Ruhnu endaga liitumisele ning andis ruhnlastele täiendavat läbirääkimisruumi.

1920. aastal, kui aktuaalne oli Rootsi-Soome vaidlus Ahvenamaa üle, saavutas Ruhnu küsimus oma kõige rahvusvahelisema mõõtme. Kuna Ahvenamaa juhtum pakkus selget eeskujuga teiste rootsikeelsete saarekogukondade enesemääramiseks, otsustasid ruhnlased ahvenamaalaste eeskujul pöörduda 1920. aasta oktoobris Rootsi kuninga poole. Palvekirjas rõhutati saare sajanditepikkust rootslust ning väideti, et kogukonnal, mille lõplikku kuuluvust pole veel otsustatud, peab olema õigus ise valida, millisesse riiki ta soovib kuuluda.

See „Ahvenamaa moment“, mille kestel esitati seniste praktiliste nõuete kõrval ka enesemääramisargumente, jäi siiski lühiajaliseks. Rootsi riik ruhnlaste palvekirjale ei reageerinud ning 1921. aasta alguses, kui Rootsi Eesti iseseisvust ametlikult tunnustas, muutus igasugune otsene sekkumine Ruhnu suveräänsusküsimusse üldse poliitiliselt võimatuks. Ka ruhnlaste strateegia keskendus taas praktilisematele küsimustele: 1921. aasta mais saadeti Rootsi kuningale uus pöördumine, milles küll taasesitati soov Rootsi ühineda, kuid tegelik rõhuasetus oli metsa kasutamisel, maksukoormusel ja sõjaväeteenistuse küsimusel. Samal ajal pöörduti ka Eesti riigivanema poole, kellele esitati sisuliselt sama nõudmispakett.

See kahesuunaline strateegia andis tulemusi: Rootsi diplomaatiline esindus Tallinnas sekkus mitteametlikult ruhnlaste soovide toetuseks ning need võeti põhimõttelise heasoovlikkusega vastu ka Eesti poolel. Eesti riik Ruhnu väidetavalt ajaloolisi privileege siiski ei kinnitanud, kuid tegi rea praktilisi mööndusi, sh rakendati riigimetsa kasutuses erikorda ning sõjaväekohustust kohandati nii, et Ruhnu mehed said teenistuse läbida oma saarel. Ainult maksuküsimuses jäi riik jäigemale seisukohale.

Nii ei kujunenud tulemuseks mitte Ruhnu otsene autonoomia, vaid kompromiss, milles ruhnlaste soovitud eriseisund sõnastati ümber Eesti riigile vastuvõetavateks administratiivseteks eranditeks.

Artikli lõppjärelendus on, et Ruhnu juhtum aitab nüansseerida tavapärasest postimperiaalsete piiride tõmbamise käsitust, mille järgi olid väikesed vähemuskogukonnad eeskätt sõjajärgse riigiloomes passiivsed objektid. Ruhnu rootslased oskasid oma perifeerset asendit, ajaloolisi traditsioone ja riikidevahelisi territoriaalseid vaidlusi kasutada selleks, et võrdlemisi edukalt läbi rääkida oma Eesti riiki kuulumise tingimuste üle. Seejuures ei saavutanud nad küll liitumist Rootsi ega Ahvenamaa tüüpi autonoomiat, kuid teataval määral säilis nende ajaloolise eriseisundi tuum siiski ka Eesti riigis erandliku halduskorraldusena.

Depriving Small Ethnic Minorities of Legal Existence? The Supreme Court on Ethnicity in 1920s Estonia

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Abstract. This article discusses the issue of legal existence of ethnic minorities by asking whether and how legal recognition of ethnic groups as collective entities has affected individual freedom of ethnic self-identification. To this end, the article analyses court cases concerning the ethnicity record in identity documents in 1920s Estonia. It appears that the court decisions, all of which covered the right of individuals to select the ethnicity record “German”, as a side effect of relying on the Cultural Autonomy Law, explicitly declared small and marginal ethnic groups that did not meet the requirements of the law to be legally non-existent and prohibited the individual freedom to self-identify with these ethnic groups. However, these decisions appeared to have no significant impact on the individual freedom of choice. The results of the article thus show that the link between legal recognition of ethnic minorities as collective entities and individual freedom of ethnic self-identification is not unambiguous. Whether and to what extent restrictions on the freedom of choice were implemented in practice may have been dependent on such social conditions that are not immediately apparent from legal norms.

Keywords: Ethnic minorities, cultural autonomy, legal existence, Supreme Court, interwar Estonia, Germanisation

At least since the rise of nationalism in the late 19th century, increasing legal significance has been attributed to ethnicity, a social category, on the nature of which even academic circles have not reached a consensus.¹ Despite the vagueness of this social category, states of different times and geographical areas, including both empires and nation states, have developed systems of sometimes extreme sophistication that draw legal boundaries between ethnic groups and determine which social groups can be formally considered ethnicities and which cannot. Such legal categorisation tends to be arbitrary and confusing, often does not take into account the informal grouping of society, and at times does not have much practical value.²

Legal recognition of the existence of particular ethnic groups or ethnic minorities as such is one of the crucial aspects of ethnic categorisation. Thus, several studies have addressed this issue, particularly the tendency of states to limit such recognition arbitrarily.³ Studies imply that such restrictions can particularly endanger small or weak ethnic

- 1 In this article, *ethnicity* is used as a generic term for communities that are defined and delimited by a variety of characteristics but primarily exist due to the cognitive perception of rigid boundaries between them. For the background of this terminological choice, see F. Barth. Introduction. – *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Ed. by F. Barth. Waveland Press, Long Grove, 1998, 9–38; C. Lorenz. Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History. – *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*. Ed. by S. Berger, C. Lorenz. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008, 24–59; S. Malešević. *The Sociology of Ethnicity*. Sage, London, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446215029>.
- 2 For the variety of formal categorisation practices at different times and in different geographical areas, see e.g. A. Bonnett, B. Carrington. Fitting Into Categories or Falling Between Them? Rethinking Ethnic Classification. – *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 2000, 21, 4, 487–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713655374>; J. Cadot. Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917). – *The Russian Review*, 2005, 64, 3, 440–455. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2005.00369.x>; D. I. Kertzer, D. Arel. Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power. – *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*. Ed. by D. I. Kertzer, D. Arel. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, 1–42; B. Kuzmany. Objectivising National Identity: The Introduction of National Registers in the Late Habsburg Empire. – *Nations and Nationalism*, 2023, 29, 3, 975–991. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12950>; P. Mateos. A Review of Name-Based Ethnicity Classification Methods and Their Potential in Population Studies. – *Population, Space and Place*, 2007, 13, 4, 243–263. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.457>; V. Messing, A. L. Pap. Cacophony in Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Ethnicity: The Case of Roma in Hungary. – *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2024, 47, 9, 1920–1940. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2328327>; A. Morning. Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective: A Cross-National Survey of the 2000 Census Round. – *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics*. Ed. by P. Simon, V. Piché, A. A. Gagnon. Springer, Cham, 2015, 17–37. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20095-8_2; A. L. Pap. Is There a Legal Right to Free Choice of Ethno-Racial Identity: Legal and Political Difficulties in Defining Minority Communities and Membership Boundaries. – *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 2015, 46, 2, 153–232.
- 3 See e.g. G. Baranowska. Legal Regulations on National and Ethnic Minorities in Poland. – *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2014, 2, 35–48; T. Magazzini. When Ethnicity is “National”: Mapping Ethnic Minorities in Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. – *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2024, 47, 9, 1812–1833. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2328338>.

minorities,⁴ probably because such minorities often lack vocal and accomplished advocates and are thus easy to silence into nonexistence. Usually, this means that culturally and socially existent but marginalised ethnic groups are not recognised as collective legal entities by relevant legislation or court decisions.⁵ Depending on social conditions, this legal existence of collective entities may also affect individuals to the extent to which they are allowed to self-identify with a particular ethnic group or to the extent to which the legal existence of ethnic groups entails benefits, such as the right to native language education or the right to vote and be elected to ethnically based representative bodies. The relationship between collective recognition and individual freedom of self-identification is, however, complex and can manifest in various ways. In censuses, for example, collective recognition often determines which ethnic groups individuals can self-identify with.⁶ Scarce historical research has shown that there have also been administrative restrictions on the existence of ethnic groups and individual freedom of choice in vague connection with census data, whereas larger and socially influential ethnic groups have been in a favoured position.⁷

While in historical research, there are thus some hints at the complex relationship between the legal existence of ethnic minorities and individual freedom of self-identification, this topic is generally neglected by historians. Discussing this connection, however, would help better understand the minority issues that societies faced in the past. Thus, this article focuses on a distinctive example from interwar Estonia, the minority policy of which has attracted much and generally positive attention at the time and since. Particularly the cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities established in 1925 as a unique solution to the minority problem has been consistently discussed by several researchers who, over decades, have published numerous studies on its establishment, implementation, international reactions and perspectives for wider

4 In this article, the term *ethnic minority* is used in a quantitative sense, referring to any collective entity composed of individuals who self-identify in various life situations (for example, for a census) with a group that is numerically in a clear minority in a particular country without regard to migration background, autochthony, inner cohesion of community or other abstract factors sometimes considered important in terms of minorisation.

5 See e.g. B. Dobos. The Question of Recognising New Minorities in Hungary. – Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies, 2025, 65, 4, 432–453. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2052.2024.00557>; F. Palermo, J. Woelk. No Representation Without Recognition: The Right to Political Participation of (National) Minorities. – Journal of European Integration, 2003, 25, 3, 225–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0703633032000133574>; A. Petričušić. The Rights of Minorities in International Law. – Croatian International Relations Review, 2005, 11, 38/39, 47–57.

6 See e.g. A. Morning. Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective.

7 For late imperial Austria, see e.g. B. Kuzmany. Objectivising National Identity.

use.⁸ Interwar cultural autonomy has also been compared with the one currently in force in Estonia to point out the advantages of the former model over the present one.⁹ This extensive research could easily give the impression that interwar Estonia had an exemplary minority policy without major complications.

Interwar Estonian minority policy was, of course, actually much more complicated. As has been shown recently, already in the first years of independence the attitudes of politicians gradually turned from being highly minority-friendly to protecting the interests of Estonians at the expense of minorities.¹⁰ However, most research addressing minority issues in relation to and beyond cultural autonomy largely revolves around the larger minority groups (Germans, Russians, Swedes and Jews),¹¹ while the smaller ones have been discussed only briefly and rather

- 8 A selection of relevant studies: T. Aava. *Minorities and the State: Non-Territorial Autonomy in Estonia in the Late Tsarist and Interwar Periods*. PhD dissertation, University of Vienna, 2023; K. Alenius. *The Birth of Cultural Autonomy in Estonia: How, Why, and for Whom?* – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2007, 38, 4, 445–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770701682723>; K. Aun. *The Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities in Estonia*. – *Yearbook of the Estonian Learned Society in America, 1951/1953*, 1, 26–41; M. Housden. *Ambiguous Activists. Estonia's Model of Cultural Autonomy as Interpreted by Two of Its Founders: Werner Hasselblatt and Ewald Ammende*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2004, 35, 3, 231–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770400000091>; M. Housden. *Cultural Autonomy in Estonia: One of History's 'Curiosities'?* – *The Baltic States and Their Region: New Europe or Old*. Ed. by D. J. Smith. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2005, 227–249. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401201438_012; K. Laurits. *Saksa kultuurumavalitsus Eesti Vabariigis 1925–1940: Monograafia ja allikad*. Rahvusarhiiv, Tallinn, 2008; D. J. Smith, J. Hiden. *Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State: National Cultural Autonomy Revisited*. Routledge, London, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118320>; D. J. Smith. *Estonia: A Model for Inter-War Europe?* – *Ethnopolitics*, 2016, 15, 1, 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2015.1101841>; V. Vasara. *Das estnische Parlament und die Deutschbalten: Zu den Debatten bis zur Verabschiedung der Kulturautonomie 1925*. – *Nordost-Archiv*, 1995, 4, 2, 479–500.
- 9 See e.g. K. Kössler, K. Zabielska. *Cultural Autonomy in Estonia Before and After the Soviet Interregnum*. – *Solving Ethnic Conflict through Self-Government: A Short Guide to Autonomy in South Asia and Europe*. Ed. by T. Benedikter. EURAC, Bolzano, 2009, 56–60; M. Lagerspetz. *Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities in Estonia: The Erosion of a Promise*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2014, 45, 4, 457–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2014.942676>; D. J. Smith. *The "Quadratic Nexus" Revisited: Nation-Building in Estonia Through the Prism of National Cultural Autonomy*. – *Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 48, 2, 235–250. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.38>.
- 10 M. Kuldkepp. *Vähemusrahvuste küsimus Eesti riikluse tekke-ja algusperioodil*. – *Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi aastaraamat 2020*. Opetatud Eesti Selts, Tartu, 2022, 167–190.
- 11 See e.g. T. Aava. *Jewish Autonomy in Interwar Estonia and the Life Trajectories of Its Leaders*. – *S: IMON Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*, 2023, 10, 1, 37–56. https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0123/art_taavo1; K. Alenius. *Dealing with the Russian Population in Estonia, 1919–1921*. – *Ajalooline Ajakiri = The Estonian Historical Journal*, 2012, 1/2, 167–182; M. Kuldkepp. *The Political Choices and Outlooks of the Estonian Swedish National Minority, 1917–1920*. – *National Identities*, 2021, 23, 4, 409–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2021.1873930>; M. Kuldkepp. *"A Union of Friendship Between Two Entire Nationalities": The Estonian Swedes and the German-Swedish Bloc in the 1929 Estonian Parliamentary Elections*. – *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2024, 30, 1, 50–82. <https://doi.org/10.3176/hist.2024.1.02>; *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-estnischen Verhältnisses*. Ed. by B. Meissner, D. A. Loeber, C. Hasselblatt. Bibliotheca Baltica, Hamburg, 1997; D. J. Smith. *Retracing Estonia's Russians: Mikhail Kurchinskii and Interwar Cultural Autonomy*. – *Nationalities Papers*, 1999, 27, 3, 455–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/009059999108966>.

in passing.¹² As a result, little is known about the social and legal position of such smaller ethnic groups and about the situation of individuals who self-identified with them. While marginal minorities might seem insignificant at first glance, research in recent years has highlighted topics which could call this insignificance into question. This research indicates that analysis of the membership registration of cultural self-governments, the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification and the connection between them would benefit from taking the role of small minorities into account.

While national registers, as lists of members of cultural self-governments, were merely intended to keep records of membership, recent research implies that their impact was not limited to this. Several studies show that the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities,¹³ the frame law of cultural autonomy, had an influence on the 1920s legal practice of ethnicity determination, particularly on the issue of whether and under what conditions individuals should have had the right to select the ethnicity record in their identity documents.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that while in all disputed cases the Supreme Court granted the freedom of the complainants to change the previous ethnicity record to “German” according to section 20 of the constitution, it also emphasised that this freedom only applied to those individuals who wished to self-identify with ethnic groups that met the conditions set out in the Autonomy Law (i.e. Germans, Russians, Swedes and minorities with at least 3,000 members) since only these were recognised as ethnic minorities. What, if anything, these decisions actually meant for the small minority groups and their members has, however, remained unclear.

- 12 See e.g. K. Alenius. “Away with German and Russian Influence!” Ethno-Political Considerations in the Reorganisation of the Estonian School System in the Early 1920s. – *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 2007, 56, 3, 347–363. <https://doi.org/10.25627/20075638726>; K. Katus, A. Puur, L. Sakkeus. Development of National Minorities: Republic of Estonia up to 1944. – *Trames*, 1997, 1, 3, 221–246. <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.1997.3.01>.
- 13 Hereinafter the Autonomy Law or Cultural Autonomy Law. For the original Estonian version, see *Vähemusrahvuste kultuur-omavalitsuse seadus*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1925, 31–32, 153–156. Further references to and quotes from the law are from the English translation published in the official journal of the League of Nations: *Law on the Cultural Autonomy of Racial Minorities in Esthonia*. – *League of Nations, Official Journal*, 1925, 6, 6, 788–791.
- 14 See e.g. K. Rebane. *Vähemusrahvuste õiguste kohtulik kaitse riigikohtu administratiiv-osakonna praktikas 1920–1940*. Magistritöö, Tartu Ülikool, 2019; K. Rebane. *Rahvuse vaba määramine – kas põhiseadusega tagatud kodanikuõigus II maailmasõja eelses Eesti Vabariigis?* – *Juridica*, 2019, 10, 723–730; T. Tark. *Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung und die Änderung der Volkszugehörigkeit in Estland in den 1920er Jahren*. – *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 2022, 70, 1/2, 131–158. <https://doi.org/10.25162/jgo-2022-0005>; T. Tark. *Does Non-Territorial Autonomy Essentialise Ethnicity? Cultural Autonomy Legislation in Interwar Estonia*. – *Nations and Nationalism*, 2025, 31, 2, 509–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13088>; T. Tark. *Rahvuse määramisest Eesti Vabariigis: 1928. aasta rahvuse muutmise seaduse eelnõu*. – *Akadeemia*, 2025, 9, 1588–1622.

Equally unclear is what prompted the Supreme Court to make decisions that restricted the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification and why these restrictions were based on the Autonomy Law. The latter deserves particular attention, since the impact of this law has hitherto been rather underestimated or taken for granted.¹⁵

Thus, this article takes a closer look at the court cases dealing with the ethnicity record in identity documents. It focuses on the question of whether and to what extent the court's reliance on the Cultural Autonomy Law affected the legal existence of small ethnic minorities as collective entities and the individual freedom to self-identify with these ethnic groups. The analysis demonstrates that while the court decisions indeed deprived small ethnic minorities of legal existence and, accordingly, restricted the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification, their impact on small minorities and individuals remained low. The article thus finally explains the reasons for this curious situation.

MINORITY ISSUES IN EARLY 1920s ESTONIA

The newly independent Estonia had a rather small proportion of ethnic minorities. According to the 1922 and 1934 censuses, Estonians as the largest ethnic group made up almost 90% of the population, whereby the total number and proportion of minority individuals gradually fell between the two censuses. The census data show that five larger minority groups (Russians, Germans, Swedes, Latvians and Jews) together constituted almost the entire minority population in Estonia, two largest among them being Russians with 8.2% of the country's entire population and Germans with 1.7% and 1.6% in 1922 and 1934, respectively. The total number of smaller minorities, however, remained below 1.5% throughout the two decades of Estonian independence.¹⁶ As a result, while the Declaration of Independence from 1918 was addressed to

15 For one recent example, see e.g. J. Schnur, M. Leppik. Kaassõna. – Riigiõiguse aastaraamat 2021. Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia riigiõiguse sihtkapital, Tallinn, 2021, 325–331 (328). For contemporary overviews, see e.g. S. v. Csekey. Strafrechtlicher Schutz des freien Nationalitätsbekenntnisses. – *Glusul Minorităților*, 1927, 5, 4, 149–154; S. v. Csekey. Estland. Staatsgericht (Verwaltungsabteilung) Tartu (Dorpat). Jeder Staatsbürger ist frei in der Bestimmung seiner Nationalität. – *Zeitschrift für Ostrecht*, 1927, 1, 3, 391–393; E. Maddison, O. Angelus. Das Grundgesetz des Freistaats Estland vom 15. Juni 1920. Carl Heymanns, Berlin, 1928, 34–35.

16 Rahva demograafiline koosseis ja korteriolud Eestis: 1922 a. üldrahvalugemise andmed. Vihk I. Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, Tallinn, 1924, 31; Rahvastiku koostis ja korteriolud. I. III 1934 rahvaloenduse andmed. Vihk II. Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, Tallinn, 1935, 47–53.

“all the peoples of Estonia” and formulated extensive rights to minorities, only a few larger minority groups were able realistically claim these rights.

Indeed, most of the small minorities did not play a significant role in society due to their small size as well as lack of internal cohesion and organisational capacity. They thus had minimal or no opportunities to exercise some minority rights provided for by the constitution, such as the right to communicate with the state and local authorities in their own language (sections 22–23) or to receive native language education (section 12).¹⁷ This was a practical issue since officials could not be expected to be proficient in any languages spoken by every Estonian citizen, and it was also not realistic to offer education in every minority language, especially if the number of pupils with the respective native language was extremely small in a particular settlement.¹⁸ The lack of skilled elites who would have fought for the collective interests of the small minorities also contributed to their weak position. At the same time, individuals may not even have been particularly interested in such primarily linguistic minority rights, even if they self-identified with one of those small minorities.¹⁹

The situation was different with the largest minority groups, Germans and Russians, whose elites held political power in the Estonian area during the pre-independence centuries, and who the state authorities thus perceived as problematic and a potential security threat.²⁰ Estonian minority policy particularly revolved around the German minority. There were historical reasons for this, but not necessarily the perception of Germans as historical enemies and oppressors, although Estonian nationalist historiography intensely disseminated such views back then.²¹ The problem, as reflected by the press, tended to be rather the opposite, i.e. the excessive attraction of Germans, primarily manifested in the

17 Eesti wabariigi põhiseadus. – Riigi Teataja, 1920, 113–114, 897–901 (here 898).

For the English translation, see *The Constitution of the Estonian Republic* (passed by the Constituent Assembly on the 15th of June 1920). Ühiselu, Tallinn, 1924.

18 The limited applicability of native language education was already acknowledged during the discussions on the Law on Public Primary Schools in the Constituent Assembly.

See T. Tark. Valikuline kohustus: emakeelne kooliharidus sõdadevahelises Eestis. –

Ajalooline Ajakiri, 2021, 175, 1/2, 53–78 (here 57). <https://doi.org/10.12697/AA.2021.1-2.03>.

19 For an analysis of such trends using the example of the Ingrian Finns, see K. Alenius, “Away with German and Russian Influence!”, 359–362.

20 For more detail about state authorities’ attitudes towards Germans and Russians, see e.g. K. Alenius. Under the Conflicting Pressures of the Ideals of the Era and the Burdens of History: Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918–1925. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2004, 35, 1, 32–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770300000211>; K. Alenius. Dealing with the Russian Population in Estonia; H. Rohtmets. Vergeltung am Erzfeind? Die Staatsbürgerschaftsfrage der Deutschbalten in der neugegründeten Republik Estland. – *Forschungen zur Baltischen Geschichte*, 2011, 6, 141–162.

21 For a historiographical overview, see T. U. Raun. The Image of the Baltic German Elites in Twentieth-Century Estonian Historiography: The 1930s vs. the 1970s. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1999, 30, 4, 338–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629779900000161>.

popularity of German-language schools that provided – as was widely believed – high-quality education. Thus, the issue of Germanisation became the subject of sharp social discussions throughout the first two decades of Estonia's independence.²² The tension of the situation was increased by the fact that the German minority elite was sufficiently consolidated, active and skilled in defending their interests. Consequently, the state authorities were forced to respond to their demands, which ultimately affected the country's minority policy, including relevant legislation and legal practice.

At the end of 1918, during the beginning of state-building, the state authorities started the systematic fight against Germanisation, which was mainly carried out through education policy. By the end of 1918, native language primary schools were made compulsory for pupils with the principle of obligatorily native language education settled with the 1920 Law on Public Primary Schools. However, the school system was in fact not based on pupils' native language. As the law provided, native language in the sense of the law had to be determined according to pupils' ethnic belonging. In practical terms, when distributing pupils between schools, education officials were not required to know what the child's first acquired or best-spoken language was, which could usually be the main determinants of native language, but rather the child's ethnicity, which in turn was determined by the ethnicity of the parents.²³

Decision-making inside the school system was, however, largely case-based and vague until October of 1919, when a government regulation introduced new identity documents, which, apparently on the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior, contained an ethnicity record.²⁴ From now on, education officials could rely on this document without the need to apply intuition or require evidence that actually proved nothing. Yet in the long term, this seemingly unambiguous system of ethnicity determination appeared to be problematic, not least because personal self-identification was often not taken into account when issuing identity documents. Instead, officials could indicate the ethnicity of the applicants as "Estonian" if the latter did not actively express the wish to have another ethnicity recorded. Furthermore, both applicants for

22. For more detail, see e.g. T. Tark. *Rahvuskuuluvuse tähendus riigi ja üksikisiku perspektiivist Eestist Saksamaale 1941. aastal ümberasunute elulooliste andmete põhjal*. PhD dissertation. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2021.

23. *Awalikkude algkoolide seadus*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1920, 75–76, 593–599. For the implementation of such school system see T. Tark. *Valikuline kohustus*.

24. *Määrus isikutunnistuste kohta*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1919, 91–92, 722. According to the regulation, the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for developing the design of the identity documents.

identity documents (especially if they did not have school-age children at the time of issuing the document) and the officials who issued these documents might sometimes not have understood what was meant by ethnicity (it was, for example, often confused with citizenship or place of origin) or what the practical effect was on the applicants' future lives. Thus, identity documents issued from the autumn of 1919 onwards could contain ethnicity records that the document owners might not have been satisfied with later.²⁵

Dissatisfied people found the opportunity to overcome their unfortunate situation in 1920, when the first constitution of the Republic of Estonia was adopted in the summer and entered into force in December. Section 20 of the constitution provided for every adult Estonian citizen's freedom to determine his or her ethnic belonging²⁶ and thus raised public awareness of the possibility of formally self-identifying with the desired ethnic group either on emotional or instrumental grounds. Apparently, there were quite a few people from the beginning who wanted to exercise this constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification and, accordingly, change the ethnicity record in their identity document. This fact was referred to in a regulation from the Minister of the Interior issued in the spring of 1921, several months after the constitution came into force. This was the first legal act directly showing that the ethnicity record in an identity document was assumed to be a form of expression of the exercise of the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification. Based on this assumption, the regulation restricted the individual freedom of choice on the grounds that it could only be used once when issuing the identity document. Changes to this document had to be possible only in cases where the document was issued before the constitution came into force and the applicant was able to prove that the previous ethnicity record was incorrect.²⁷ Later practice showed, however, that the ministry's officials did not fully adhere to this regulation, but made decisions at their own discretion.

Documentation from the first half of the 1920s concerning the ethnicity record in identity documents reveals that people generally wanted to change their previous ethnicity to German. However, this was not a widespread phenomenon, the total number of applications per year was on average around one hundred and this number included any combination of initial and desired ethnicity.²⁸ Accordingly, social tension

25 T. Tark. *Rahvuskuuluvuse tähendus*, 70–77.

26 *Eesti wabariigi põhiseadus*, 898.

27 *Siseministri määrus isikutunnistuste paranduste kohta*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1921, 22, 137.

28 For relevant documentation from 1921 to 1924, see *Rahvusarhiiv* (National Archives)

around this issue was relatively modest and without legal consequences. Yet, the situation escalated in 1925, when the Cultural Autonomy Law was passed and the German minority elite began preparation to establish their cultural self-government.

CULTURAL AUTONOMY AS A DECISIVE FACTOR

The establishment of cultural autonomy in Estonia was a slow and tense process, although it had already been declaratively granted to ethnic minorities in the Declaration of Independence (point 2) and in the constitution (section 21).²⁹ The first draft law for cultural autonomy was developed in the *Riigikogu*, the Estonian parliament, in 1921 after the German minority elite, expressing the wish to exercise the promised autonomy, discovered that this was not possible without a special law. Yet, the adoption of such a special law proved to be difficult, the drafts mainly initiated by representatives of the Baltic German Party in parliament were repeatedly rewritten and the related discussions in the parliamentary committees and plenary were heated. The law was finally adopted on 12 February 1925.³⁰

One of the central points of contention was the question of which individuals could or should benefit from autonomy. The two related fundamental questions were whether members of an ethnic group should have been compelled to become members of the respective cultural self-government and whether anyone who would self-identify with an ethnic group could become a member of its cultural self-government. Both issues caused considerable confusion among politicians, which ultimately made the Autonomy Law a legal tangle.³¹ As stipulated in the adopted law and relevant implementing regulations, joining the national register was voluntary, but those who wished to join had to prove their ethnicity. The wording of the relevant legislative pieces shows that these two ideas were not as unambiguous and compatible with each other as they perhaps might seem at first glance.

of Estonia, RA), Tallinn, ERA.14.1.665; RA, ERA.14.1.709; RA, ERA.14.1.910; RA, ERA.14.1.1013. See also Valitsusasutiste tegevus 1918–1934. Riigikantsleli, Tallinn, 1934, 215.

29 Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele. – Riigi Teataja, 1918, 1, 1–2 (here 1); Eesti Wabariigi põhiseadus, 898.

30 For the adoption of cultural autonomy in Estonia, see e.g. K. Alenius. The Birth of Cultural Autonomy; D. J. Smith, J. Hiden. Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State; V. Vasara. Das estnische Parlament und die Deutschbalten.

31 See more T. Tark. Does Non-Territorial Autonomy Essentialise Ethnicity.

In terms of the court cases analysed in this article, the most relevant provisions regarding complex membership issues are sections 8 and 9. According to the English translation published in the Official Journal of the League of Nations, section 8 reads as follows: “The term ‘minorities’ within the meaning of this law shall apply to the German, Russian and Swedish peoples and also to minorities living in Estonian³² territory whose total number is not less than 3,000.”³³ This section makes explicit that – in terms of the same law, which is a very important nuance – only the aforementioned ethnic groups were to be recognised as ethnic minorities. The section did not stipulate that no other ethnic group could be an ethnic minority in Estonia outside the autonomy legislation, in other areas of life. This is also evident from section 15, according to which the cultural self-government was to cease its activities if the number of adults in the national register fell below half of the total number of members of the relevant ethnic minority according to the last census. Therefore, at least in the organisation of censuses, the concept of ethnic minority had to have a broader meaning than that provided for by the Autonomy Law, otherwise the content of section 15 would become nonsense.

The possible different meanings of “ethnic minority” are particularly important in the light of section 9 which, following the logic of the previous section, explained the inclusion criteria by formulating a specific provision for individual membership:

The fact that a member of a minority belongs to an autonomous organisation shall be established by the national register, in which Estonian citizens of the nationalities mentioned in paragraph 8, who are at least 18 years old, may have their names entered.

Children of the registered members of a minority shall be considered, up to the age of 18 years, as belonging to the same minority as their parents. If the parents are of different nationalities, the nationality of the children shall be fixed according to the joint wish of the parents. If an agreement is not arrived at, the child shall belong to the father’s nationality. Minors who have reached their eighteenth year and are children of members of a racial³⁴ minority shall

32 In the 1920s, “Estonia” was the standard English form of the name “Estonia” in international communication and English-language legal texts.

33 Law on the Cultural Autonomy of Racial Minorities in Estonia, 789. At that time and later, in addition to those explicitly mentioned, only Jews and Latvians crossed the 3,000 mark.

34 In this translation of the law, the words *racial* and *national* were used interchangeably as synonyms. Thus, the former should not be interpreted as a reference to phenotype. For this conceptual ambiguity, see more e.g. D. I. Kertzer, D. Arel. *Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power*, 12; C. Lorenz. *Representations of Identity*, 35–41.

not be considered as belonging to that minority unless they have registered within the year.³⁵

This section and even more clearly the explanatory memorandum to the law make explicit that belonging to a certain ethnic minority was the same as belonging to the national register of the cultural self-government of that minority.³⁶ It was a controversial provision for at least two reasons. First, national registers of cultural self-governments were meant to be a practical tool for keeping track of individuals who were entitled to benefit from cultural autonomy and there was no practical need for and benefit of such an equation since it was not possible to fully restrict the exercise of all minority rights and freedoms to only those on the national register. Second, while section 8 was clear in limiting its validity only to the context of autonomy, this limitation is not so obvious in this section. Therefore, this section alone could have made those ethnic minorities that did not have a cultural self-government with a national register or the right to create one legally non-existent in the eventuality that an institution (for example, the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of Education, which were most involved in the issue of ethnicity determination) had interpreted it as generally applicable. In fact, this provision was not applied in practice, not least because it would have caused massive confusion.³⁷ Nevertheless, as analysed in more detail below, sections 8 and 9 together with the government regulations, issued in the following months after the adoption of the Autonomy Law to regulate the maintenance of national registers, had a wider impact beyond cultural autonomy, as they later became highly relevant for the Supreme Court.

The two government regulations on membership issues were the Regulation on Compiling the Electoral Rolls for the First Cultural Council Elections of the German Minority of the Republic of Estonia, issued in April 1925, and the Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers, issued in June.³⁸ Both regulations appear to be at odds with section 9 of the Autonomy Law. According to this section, individuals would have belonged to an ethnic minority if they were included in the respective national register. The section did not specify what would have been the applicants' ethnic belonging before including their names

35 Law on the Cultural Autonomy of Racial Minorities in Esthonia, 789.

36 For the explanatory memorandum, see Lisa nr. 87. – II Riigikogu protokollide lisad. VII istungjärg. Riigikogu, Tallinn, 1925, columns 209–219.

37 T. Tark. Does Non-Territorial Autonomy Essentialise Ethnicity, 515.

38 Määrus Eesti Wabariigi Saksa wähemusrahwuse esimese kultuurnõukogu walimiste walijate nimekirja kokkuseadmise kohta. – Riigi Teataja, 1925, 65–66, 346–347; Rahwusnimekirjade pidamise määrus. – Riigi Teataja, 1925, 101–102, 469–470.

in the register, which means that, in legal terms, this might have been undefined. Thus, the section implies that the determination of ethnicity should have taken place at the moment a person was included in the national register. According to the regulations, however, it was necessary to prove belonging to the respective ethnic minority for inclusion. A “document of legitimation” was supposed to be used as proof, that is, the identity document with ethnicity record as made explicit in the April regulation. The regulations also established the condition that if a person who wished to be included in the electoral roll or national register had some other ethnicity recorded in their identity document, they were obliged to apply first to the Ministry of the Interior for a change.

The regulations relied on identity documents because these documents were already the basis for ethnicity determination in any situations where this proved necessary. In other words, ethnic belonging and, accordingly, individual freedom to decide on one’s belonging were implicitly associated with what was stated about it in one’s identity document. Thus, this connection between ethnic belonging and an ethnicity record in identity documents developed early on into a universally recognised social agreement. While not being explicitly stipulated in any legislation, even the Supreme Court took this social agreement into account in its later practice. Perhaps this connection, perceived as self-evident, was the reason why it was easy to adopt the established practice in maintaining national registers. Consequently, a new reality emerged. All those who wanted to join a national register, but whose ethnicity record in the identity document did not match their wish, were forced to go through an extensive bureaucratic process to prove their ethnicity.

This complicated process would perhaps not have been a problem if the Ministry of the Interior had followed the constitution to the letter and granted the applications of everyone who desired to change the ethnicity record in their identity document. Instead, the ministry had already rejected such applications in the first half of the 1920s, though relatively rarely. Given the rarity of rejections, the officials apparently did not see such ethnicity changes as too great a risk from the perspective of the country’s main ethnic group at that time. Yet in spring 1925, when the above-mentioned April regulation was established and thus formal confirmation was given for the possibility of such changes, the German-language press began actively to promote this possibility in its calls to register for the election. As a result, hundreds of applications were submitted during 1925 to change the ethnicity to German, and the

Ministry of the Interior, seeing an increasing problem in the situation, began to reject applications much more often than before.³⁹

In 1925, the changes of ethnicity records in identity documents were, however, no longer just a matter of particular individuals, but also in the interest of the German minority elite and their soon to be established cultural self-government. The committee preparing the cultural self-government was in contact with numerous applicants, often helping them submit applications and making suggestions for efficient communication with the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁰ The committee members also quickly became aware of the rejection of applications. Thus, in autumn 1925, the first people filed complaints in court, apparently with the encouragement and support of the committee. In the following years, dozens more people took legal action with the support of the active German Cultural Self-Government the contribution of which was, for example, help finding lawyers. Altogether 38 cases, mainly represented by the lawyers Woldemar Hartmann and Walter von Stackelberg, finally obtained Supreme Court decisions.⁴¹

COURT CASES ABOUT ETHNICITY IN IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

Court cases about ethnicity records in identity documents were spread over several years, reaching decisions from 1926 to 1930. Of the 38 complaints, 32 concerned the Ministry of the Interior's refusal to change the document; six cases from 1928 were, however, related to the ministry's unjustified suspension of the processing of applications.⁴² The administrative department of the Supreme Court, which processed the complaints, satisfied almost all of them, with two exceptions. The reasons for rejections were procedural rather than substantive, yet

39 T. Tark. *Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung*.

40 D. J. Smith, J. Hiden. *Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State*, 48.

41 In an earlier study, 35 cases were discussed, yet this study does not include all relevant court files, while cases that did not directly concern the ethnicity record in identity documents were included. See K. Rebane. *Vähemusrahvuste õiguste kohtulik kaitse*, 20–27.

42 These six cases are not relevant to this article, but it is worth briefly mentioning that in all cases the court upheld the complaints and ordered the ministry to fulfill its legal obligations. See Bernhard Jürgens against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.597; Alma Pajo against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.617; Senta Treffner against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.647; Balduin Eskenson against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.587; Ida Eichen against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.585; Eduard Eichen against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.584.

one of these rejections helps contextualise the other cases and therefore, regardless of its procedural nature, will be briefly discussed below.⁴³

From the complaints submitted to the Supreme Court starting in autumn 1925, the first 10 reached a decision on 26 February 1926 with nine approved and one rejected. In this rejected case, the complainant, Elfriede Treumann, requested the ethnicity record in the identity document of her minor (15 years old) daughter to be made according to the ethnicity of the daughter's deceased father. When rejecting the complaint, the court pointed out that the complainant had not submitted evidence to the Ministry of the Interior about the ethnicity of the child's father.⁴⁴ Of broader significance in this case is, however, the fact that the daughter of the complainant was a minor and thus not yet able to exercise the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification. Therefore, some kind of special law was necessary to resolve the difficult situation, and thus, the Supreme Court decided to apply section 9 of the Autonomy Law, since it provided a guideline for determining the ethnicity of minors. Although this guideline was in fact intended to be applied only to include minors in the national registers, it may have been reasonable to rely on it in this case in the absence of more appropriate legislation.

However, the court could have approached the cases of adults who wanted to change the ethnicity record in their own identity document in a different way. Since none of the parties disputed that the moment of ethnicity determination and thus the exercise of the respective constitutional freedom occurs when filling in or changing the ethnicity record in the identity document, then, from such a starting point, neither the Ministry of the Interior nor any legal act should have restricted legally capable adults in the selection and change of an ethnicity record as long as there were no circumstances that would have made the personal ethnicity determination impossible.⁴⁵ Any such restrictions

43 In another case, the complaint of a married woman was rejected on the grounds that, according to the Baltic Private Law, she had no right to authorise a lawyer to represent her in court without her husband's written permission. Thus, in this case, the court lacked any substantive arguments on the issue of ethnicity determination. For this case see Beatrice Mill against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.613. Baltic Private Law was adopted in 1865 and still in force in independent Estonia since new private law could not be established within two decades of Estonia's first independence period. See P. Varul. Legal Policy Decisions and Choices in the Creation of New Private Law in Estonia. – *Juridica International*, 2000, 5, 104–118 (here 108).

44 Decision in the case of Elfriede Treumann against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.649. In fact, both the application and complaint were accompanied by certificates (thereby not identical) stating that the minor in question as well as her father had belonged to a German-language congregation. The judges did not comment on either certificate, thus failing to assess their suitability as evidence. See Certificate issued by the pastor of the St. Nicolas' congregation, August 1925. RA, ERA.14.1.1127; Certificate issued by the pastor of the St. Nicolas' congregation, 23 September 1925. RA, ERA.1356.2.649.

45 In one exceptional case from 1929, this nuance was also emphasised by the lawyer

were at least not self-evident and natural, but would have required substantial justification.

The Supreme Court, however, took a different position without explaining its motivation. As exemplified by the case of Martha Thiel, the first nine decisions regarding adults make evident that the court relied heavily on sections 8 and 9 of the Autonomy Law in these cases in a similar way to the above-mentioned minor's case:

According to § 20 of the constitution, every Estonian citizen is free in determining his or her ethnicity and in those cases where personal determination is not possible, it shall happen according to the procedure prescribed by law. There is no general special law which would determine the procedure and conditions for the actual use of the right to determine ethnicity. However, in the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities (*R[iigi] T[eataja*] no. 31/31 – y. 1925), this question is generally resolved for those ethnicities that are recognised as ethnic minorities in Estonia, according to § 8 of the mentioned law. § 9 of this law provides that “The fact that a member of a minority belongs to an autonomous organisation shall be established by the national register, in which Estonian citizens of the nationalities mentioned in paragraph 8, who are at least 18 years old, may have their names entered”.⁴⁶ From the explanatory memorandum to the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities (Minutes of the II *Riigikogu*, session 7, y. 1925, pp. 209–219) submitted to *Riigikogu* by the General Committee, we incidentally read that the regulations of the draft law on the right to determine one's ethnicity submitted to *Riigikogu* by the General Committee must be understood to mean that “inclusion in the national register is optional, based on the principle of the recognition of ethnicity by those citizens who are at least 18 years old” and “the determination of ethnicity of every individual citizen happens through the free determination by the person him or herself”. *Riigikogu* has passed the parts of the draft law on determining the belonging to the ethnic minority submitted by the General Committee without changes and therefore the explanatory memorandum of the General Committee must be considered when interpreting this law. In accordance with § 20 of the constitution and § 8 of the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities, § 5 of the Regulation adopted by the Government of the Republic on 17 April 1925 (*R. T.* no. 65/66 – y. 1925) provides that inclusion in the German national register will be “based on the data received from the police and municipality governments as well as on the declarations of individual citizens about their ethnicity”.

The second subsection of the same section provides that “in cases where personal declaration about one's own ethnicity differs from the data received

Walter von Stackelberg. See Stackelberg to the Supreme Court in the case of Kurt Frey, 19 November 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.589.

⁴⁶ The translation of this quote comes from the official translation by the League of Nations. The remainder of this passage and all the quotes presented below are the author's.

from the municipality governments or police, the person who made the declaration will be included in the list if he or she submits to the authority which draws up the lists a corresponding confirmation from the Ministry of the Interior about the correction of ethnicity in his or her relevant documents of legitimation (identity document, etc.) within the term prescribed by § 5 and 11”.

It follows from the above that general principles of the right to determine ethnicity are set out in § 20 of the constitution and in the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities, and, since the regulation issued by the Government of the Republic being based on § 17 and 29 of the latter law explicitly provides the right and possibility to correct the notes on ethnicity relying on the declarations of citizens. Since there are no restrictions on the right to determine one’s own ethnicity for those Estonian citizens who are at least 18 years old in the applicable laws and binding regulations, if they determine their ethnicity according to one of those ethnicities that are recognised as ethnic minorities the Ministry of the Interior has no legal basis to arbitrarily impose restrictions and to refuse to correct the notes on ethnicity in the identity documents.⁴⁷

This landmark judgement has several underlying assumptions. First, by stating that “[t]here is no general special law which would determine the procedure and conditions for the actual use of the right to determine ethnicity”, the judges assumed that a special law was necessary for ethnicity determination in any case, regardless of a person’s age or legal capacity, otherwise there would have been no need for such a statement. Second, by stating that the issue of ethnicity determination was “generally resolved for those ethnicities that are recognised as ethnic minorities” in the Cultural Autonomy Law, the judges assumed that the scope of this law can be expanded into a general special law on ethnicity determination. Third, by emphasising the explicit possibility of changing the ethnicity record in an identity document provided for in the April 1925 regulation, the judges assumed that, since the complaints specifically

47 Marta Thiel’i voliniku vann. adv. Valter Stackelberg’i kaebus siseministri resolutsiooni peale 31. aug. 1925 a. rahvuse nimetuse parandamise asjas. – 1926. aasta Riigikohtu otsused. “Õiguse” väljaanne, Tartu, 1927, 23–24. The decision in the file of Martha Thiel’s case: Decision in the case of Martha Thiel against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.644. Analogous decisions of the same date: Decision in the case of Voldemar Rose against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.631; Decision in the case of Johanna Rautsa against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.625; Decision in the case of Helene-Marie Mend against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.610; Decision in the case of Herbert Mend against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.611; Decision in the case of Emma Liva against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.605; Decision in the case of Karl Johan Lipping against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.604; Decision in the case of Harry Lipping against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.603; Decision in the case of Valeska Grosset against the Ministry of the Interior, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.592.

concerned the ethnicity records in the identity document, but not any other expression of ethnic belonging, there should be a clarifying legal act that would regulate the role of identity documents. These assumptions together make evident that the judges were not willing to recognise the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification as completely unrestricted.

In the light of the explicit constitutional freedom, however, the court had little legal means to set such restrictions as would have satisfied the Ministry of the Interior. There was a tiny chance to go along with the argument of the ministry and the prosecutor that this constitutional freedom could only be used once when issuing a new identity document.⁴⁸ The court, however, initially ignored this argument (as well as the reference to the relevant 1921 regulation of the Minister of the Interior) and later explicitly rejected it. It is possible that the judges were affected by the argument of the lawyer Woldemar Hartmann who, during the discussion of one case, stated that when a person could use the freedom of ethnic self-identification only once, there would actually no longer be a freedom.⁴⁹ In the midst of this complex situation, the judges may have had difficulty finding legal arguments to refute Hartmann's claim and justify the ministry's statements instead. The Autonomy Law, at the same time, allowed for a simplified motivation for the inevitable decision of declaring the activity of the Ministry of the Interior unconstitutional and simultaneously helped place arbitrary restrictions on full freedom.

The Ministry of the Interior, of course, was not satisfied with restrictions that did not help fight Germanisation and thus, after the first 10 cases, more of the same followed. While the Supreme Court forced the Ministry of the Interior to process the complainants' applications again and satisfy them, the ministry nevertheless continued to reject new applications. A few of those new cases added smaller details to this years-long legal saga. The court deemed it necessary to emphasise first, that the surname could not be a reason to reject an application; second, that it was not always obvious that a person had already used the freedom of ethnic self-identification in cases where the second identity document was based on the first one issued before the entry into force

48 See e.g. Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Emma Liva, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.605; Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Herbert Mend, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.611; Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Johanna Rautsa, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.625; Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Karin Kengsep, 26 October 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.599.

49 Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Herbert Mend, 26 February 1926. RA, ERA.1356.2.611.

of the constitution; third, that the constitution did not provide that ethnicity can be determined only once, thus refuting the main argument of the Ministry of the Interior and its 1921 regulation; and finally, that the Ministry of the Interior had no right to require applicants to submit evidence about their ethnicity when processing applications.⁵⁰ Some other cases, however, did not offer any new arguments.⁵¹ Thus, over years, an established legal practice emerged.

It is impossible to know whether, and if so how, the decisions could have been different if a person had filed a complaint against the Ministry of the Interior with the desire to self-identify as a member of any ethnic minority other than German. Apparently, the court would not have had any reason to alter its decision if the requested ethnicity had been a legally recognised ethnic minority. However, it is unclear what would have happened if the complainant had desired to belong to an unrecognised ethnic minority. Much would have then probably depended on the competence of lawyers and the willingness of judges to change the previous legal practice in the light of a new situation. It is nevertheless doubtful that the court would have reached a position in such hypothetical cases that any special law was not needed to determine the ethnicity of an adult and legally capable person.

What prompted the court's perceived need to restrict complete freedom of choice in this way is not immediately obvious, but can at least partially be explained by the fact that this perceived need was not unique to Estonia. Although in Europe, the principle of personal freedom of ethnic self-identification has been internationally and domestically recognised at least since late imperial Austria, there have always been difficulties in implementing this principle in legal or administrative practice. It was and is typical that in disputed cases the freedom of choice tends to give way to 'objective' features or external evaluation that should support any personal choice. The need to impose some kind of restriction has thus constantly accompanied European legal practice of ethnicity determination for more than a hundred years.⁵²

⁵⁰ Relevant cases, respectively: Harry Umblija against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.650; Hildegard Lane against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.600; Ernst Lindemann against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.602; Paul Riik against the Ministry of the Interior. RA, ERA.1356.2.630. The decision of 20 December 1926 in the case of Ernst Lindemann that allowed multiple ethnicity determinations for a person later became a kind of precedent, to which the lawyers representing the complainants repeatedly referred.

⁵¹ Decision in the case of Elisabeth Wiren against the Ministry of the Interior, 30 March 1928. RA, ERA.1356.2.655; Decision in the case of Aleksander Treikeller against the Ministry of the Interior, 30 March 1928. RA, ERA.1356.2.648; Decision in the case of Johannes Blumberg against the Ministry of the Interior, 17 May 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.581.

⁵² See e.g. B. Kuzmany, *Objectivising National Identity*; L. Djordjević, *Introduction: Ethnic*

What can be considered special in the Estonian case, however, is the fact that arbitrary restrictions were not justified by ‘objective’ features or the need for an external evaluation, but in a simplified manner only by existing legislation.

The court’s simplified approach may have appeared to create some legal clarity on a difficult issue, yet such simplification of ethnicity, which did not cease to be an ambiguous and complex concept, began to complicate the handling of further complaints. On 19 December 1929, the Supreme Court again issued decisions in 10 cases at once. These decisions were largely based on previous ones, but one particularly interesting argument was added. Specifically, the representative of the Ministry of the Interior (or more precisely, the Ministry of Courts and the Interior, as it was called at that time) argued during the hearing of one of these cases that the Supreme Court’s previous practice would lead to the abuse of the freedom of ethnic self-identification. Arguably, in conditions of such complete freedom, one could also “consider oneself to belong to some coloured race”.⁵³ Judges, in turn, to react to the arguments of the Ministry of the Interior and, in conditions where they had already defined ethnicity according to the Autonomy Law, were now forced to explicitly construct two opposing meanings of this concept to show the irrelevance of the ministry’s argument:

The Law on the Cultural Self-Governments of Ethnic Minorities does not make a citizen’s membership in a certain cultural self-government of an ethnic minority dependent on the citizen’s membership in a certain ethnicity as race, but rather provides an opportunity for citizens to recognise themselves as belonging to the ethnocultural association permitted in the Republic to which they feel close, regardless of ethnicity as race. Therefore, the Ministry of Courts and the Interior has no legal basis to refuse to correct the ethnicity records made in the identity documents of Estonian citizens who are 18 years old. The requirement laid down in the note to section 6 of the Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers adopted by the Government of the Republic and published in *Riigi Teataja* nr. 101/102 – y 1925, that the applicant must submit the necessary evidence of his or her ethnicity, is not in accordance with the law, because the Law on the Cultural Self-Government of Ethnic Minorities, on the basis of sections 29 and 30 of which the Regulation was adopted, does not contain such a requirement. There is no provision in the law to allow one to demand recognition of belonging to an ethnicity

Data and Minority Protection. – Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, 2020, 19, 2, 1–13; K. Nieminen. Implicit and Explicit Boundaries of Belonging: Indigenous and Minority Identities. – Research Handbook on Law and Courts. Ed. by S. M. Sterett, L. D. Walker. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2019, 365–378; A. L. Pap. Is There a Legal Right to Free Choice.

53 Minutes of the court hearing in the case of Paul Riik, 13 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.630.

that does not have cultural self-government in the Republic of Estonia, or even to a coloured race.⁵⁴

This addition to the argumentation of court decisions clearly demonstrates how the complexity of the issue led the judges astray. First of all, while previously the freedom of ethnic self-identification was limited to those ethnic groups that met the conditions set by the Autonomy Law, now it was limited to those that already had their own cultural self-government, and these were only Germans and Jews. The judges probably did not intend to impose such a restriction with this decision inasmuch as there is no explanation in the argumentation that would have explicitly revoked earlier, differently worded and less restrictive decisions. Perhaps due to this presumably unintended error, the sentence is not found in the later decisions.⁵⁵ Yet the questionable argumentation was not limited to this mistake.

First, while the Autonomy Law did define ethnic minorities, it did so merely through a national register without any substantive defining characteristics. The judges' argument that the Autonomy Law refers to ethnicity as "ethnocultural association" was probably drawn on the explanatory memorandum to the law that explicitly defined the concept referred to by the Estonian word *rahvus* as cultural community rather than tribe (*sugu*; the word *rass* in the meaning of race was not used), yet the law itself does not contain such definitions, and any definitions should have been valid only for autonomy, not for identity documents.⁵⁶ The court also did not consider a hidden but important political nuance. Defining ethnicity as "ethnocultural association" in the form of a cultural self-government was not a self-evident principle but merely resulted from

54 Quote translated from the case of Paul Riik: Decision in the case of Paul Riik against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.630. Analogous decisions of the same date: Decision in the case of Meta Riik against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.629; Decision in the case of Marie Adamson against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.577; Decision in the case of Klara-Elisabet Fromhold-Treu against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.590; Decision in the case of Alma Pajo against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.618; Decision in the case of Viktor Sihle against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.639; Decision in the case of Helmi Sitska against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.640; Decision in the case of Alma Zero against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.642; Decision in the case of Jenny Taube against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.643; Decision in the case of Valentiina Tomingas against the Ministry of the Interior, 13/19 December 1929. RA, ERA.1356.2.646.

55 Decision in the case of Ellen Frey against the Ministry of the Interior, 4 April 1930. RA, ERA.1356.2.588; Decision in the case of Kurt Frey against the Ministry of the Interior, 4 April 1930. RA, ERA.1356.2.589; Decision in the case of Harry Ojasuu against the Ministry of the Interior, 1 April 1930. RA, ERA.1356.2.616; Decision in the case of Karlos Schüler against the Ministry of the Interior, 1 April 1930. RA, ERA.1356.2.636.

56 Lisa nr. 87, column 212.

Estonian politicians' attempts to link the compiling of national registers of cultural self-governments with the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification in order to avoid the compulsory national registers desired by German minority politicians.⁵⁷ While this definition might have been somewhat reasonable for the organisation of cultural self-governments, if ethnicity as such was to be defined so narrowly outside the context of cultural autonomy, only Germans and Jews and not even the Estonian majority could have legally existed in interwar Estonia.

The second problematic nuance was related to the judges' obvious reaction to the exaggerated speech of the representative of the Ministry of the Interior. They were inevitably in need to respond to the argument about the hypothetical absurd situations to which full freedom of ethnic self-identification could lead. Whereas in previous cases it was rather implicit that the judges also saw such a hypothetical risk as something that should be minimised with legal means, it now becomes obvious. The decision shows that judges could not without reservations reject the argument of the Ministry of the Interior, as they probably did not want Estonians to start self-identifying as belonging to a "coloured race" either. Thus, the court's argument implies how the judges perceived ethnicity not merely as a cultural community that could have a legal framework such as a cultural self-government, but also as something inherent that apparently could not be one's free choice. In constructing this dual meaning of ethnicity, the court did not explain why the ethnicity record in the identity document affecting all adult Estonian citizens should not have been associated with the other, broader definition, but with the definition of the Autonomy Law, which applied only to a limited number of citizens. The most obvious alternatives in this situation, however, would have been to build on the idea of inherent nature of ethnicity and thus reject the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification, or, conversely, completely reject the idea of inheritance, which, as the court's argumentation implies, was unacceptable to both the judges and society.

Like many of their colleagues in many parts of Europe earlier and later, the Estonian judges aimed to find a balance between full freedom of choice and the perceived inherent nature of ethnicity, and thus, tried to rule out any situations that crossed the implicit red line in ethnic self-identification. That this balancing with the help of the Autonomy Law finally affected small, weak and harmless minorities and individuals who, by self-identifying with such minorities, apparently did not cross

57 T. Tark. Does Non-Territorial Autonomy Essentialise Ethnicity.

any red lines, was rather an unintended side effect, since the issue of the legal existence of small minorities was not the focus of the cases and the judges were actually not motivated to restrict the freedom of choice of their members.

THE IMPACT AND LIMITATION OF COURT DECISIONS

Analysis of the court cases demonstrates that although they were caused by the desire of numerous people to self-identify with the German minority and the interest of the German minority elite to achieve the self-identification of many people as German, the Supreme Court in Estonia in the 1920s had little legal opportunity to impose restrictions on this trend, even if the judges had the moral willingness as members of society to do so. Instead, by imposing restrictions on the selection of the ethnicity record in identity documents based on the definition of ethnic minority and the list of recognised minorities in the Cultural Autonomy Law, the court – at least theoretically – deprived those persons who wished to self-identify with ethnic groups that did not meet the conditions of the law (i.e. those ethnicities not recognised as existing legally as ethnic minorities) of freedom of choice. However, this restriction would actually have affected small minorities and their members only if these court decisions had been systematically taken into account when issuing and changing identity documents.

Yet, the Ministry of the Interior together with the Police Administration, which was partially involved in the processing of applications for ethnicity changes, two institutions directly affected by the court decisions, generally did not adhere to the interpretation of these decisions when processing new applications. In the second half of the 1920s, that is, after the first court decisions, on several occasions people were granted the right to select some of those small and legally non-existent minorities as the ethnicity record in their documents.⁵⁸ There is only one exceptional case from 1931 when the ministry rejected

⁵⁸ See e.g. The decision on the application of Evdokia Trass to change the ethnicity in the identity document from Russian to Ukrainian, 11 May 1927. RA, ERA.1.6.115; The decision on the application of Boris Verzinsky to change the ethnicity in the identity document from Russian to Polish, 8 September 1928. RA, ERA.1.6.125; The decision on the application of Anna Linde to change the ethnicity in the identity document from Estonian to English, 4 October 1928. RA, ERA.1.6.125; The decision on the application of Johann Abraitis to change the ethnicity in the identity document from Polish to Lithuanian, October 1929. RA, ERA.1.6.141.

the application of a certain Valentin Raban to replace his initial ethnicity record with “French” on the grounds that “according to the Supreme Court’s explanation, it is permissible to demand recognition of belonging to those ethnicities that have cultural self-government in the Republic of Estonia”, thus relying on the most restrictive interpretation, which the judges abandoned in their later decisions.⁵⁹ As the uniqueness of this case suggests, the court decisions appeared to have no wider impact on the handling of ethnicity records in identity documents, both when making changes and presumably also when issuing new documents, and their only effect was thus to pressure the Ministry of the Interior to revise its rejections in each particular case. At the same time, this unique case shows that the possibility of implementing court decisions in administrative practice was recognised.

The limited wider social impact of court decisions is also evident in the further legislative activities of politicians, particularly in the alterations of the Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers. Although the Supreme Court had explicitly stated that the demand for evidence about ethnicity in this regulation was not lawful, which could have led to a respective change, this happened neither immediately after the relevant court decisions nor later.⁶⁰ The regulation’s conflict with the law might have been easy to ignore so far as the identity documents were used as a proof and people were expected to have the freedom to select the ethnicity record in this document. Yet, from 1930 new identity documents with a new design were issued that no longer contained an ethnicity record. This situation should now have clearly highlighted the unlawfulness of the regulation. Instead of altering the regulation now, in these new conditions, a new system of ‘evidence’ was developed. According to this system, anyone wishing to be included in a national register had to submit a personal declaration of their ethnicity and two witnesses had to sign it to confirm that the declaration was true.⁶¹ This new system implies that the perceived need to restrain Germanisation outweighed the authority of the court decisions.

Against the background of these developments, it appears that while the court decisions placed restrictions on the definition of ethnic

59 The decision on the application of Valentin Raban to change the ethnicity in the identity document to French, 26 February 1931. RA, ERA.1.6.151.

60 For amendments to the regulation, see *Rahvusnimekirjade pidamise määruse osalise muutmise määrus*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1931, 107, 1233; *Rahvusnimekirjade pidamise määruse osalise muutmise määrus*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1933, 1, 3–4; *Rahvusnimekirjade pidamise määruse muutmise määrus*. – *Riigi Teataja*, 1934, 97, 1667–1668.

61 T. Tark. *Does Non-Territorial Autonomy Essentialise Ethnicity*, 517; T. Aava. *Minorities and the State*, 246.

minorities and the individual freedom to self-identify with any ethnic group, there was no real will in society and state institutions to change the established administrative arrangements of ethnicity determination according to these decisions. There was also no need to strictly adhere to the decisions, since most of the minority rights, such as native language education, were not available to small minority groups due to their small population size. Therefore, the state did not need to allocate expenditure, for example, for maintaining schools in these minority languages, which could have provided a motivation for not recognising the existence of such minority groups.⁶² In addition, small minorities, unlike Germans, were not perceived as a threat to the survival of Estonians. In a sense, it was thus precisely the marginality of small ethnic minorities that usually granted the individual freedom to self-identify with them even after the court decisions.

CONCLUSION

Court cases in 1920s Estonia regarding ethnic record in identity documents show that the issue of ethnicity determination was complicated and sensitive leading to controversial decisions. Although all the cases concerned the right of individuals to change the previous ethnicity record in their identity document to “German”, the court’s reasoning was much broader. Relying on the Cultural Autonomy Law meant that the right of individuals to select the ethnicity record and thus to exercise the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification was limited to ethnic groups recognised as ethnic minorities in this law. Since the court relied on the Autonomy Law in making its decisions on an issue that was not related to cultural autonomy, it legally declared small ethnic minorities non-existent outside the specific context of autonomy, while at the same time leaving open whether and to what extent these decisions could or should have had any real meaning and impact on these ethnic groups as collective entities and on individuals desiring to self-identify with them.

Remarkable about these decisions is that although they could have triggered processes with wider impact, both in terms of the possibility of individuals to select the desired ethnicity record for their identity document and in terms of the maintenance of national registers of

62. The cost of minority schools was an important consideration in the eyes of politicians and officials. See T. Tark. Valikuline kohustus, 72.

cultural self-governments, neither of these happened. Those who wished to self-identify with small ethnic minorities were generally able to continue to change the ethnicity record according to their wish and presumably select the desired ethnicity record when they applied for a new document. The requirement for evidence of ethnicity in the Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers also remained in force, even though the court had declared it unlawful. One of the reasons for this situation was the fact that the court had no need to take a position on small ethnic minorities. Declaring them legally non-existent in terms of issuing and changing identity documents was a side effect of decisions that did not concern these minorities and thus easy to ignore. The second reason was the fact that, while small minorities had almost no social impact, there was clear social and political interest in restraining the much more impactful German minority elite in recruiting members to their cultural self-government and thus the court's argument against the requirement of evidence when including individuals in the national register was ignored.

This article thus highlighted the often neglected complex connection between legal existence of ethnic minorities and personal freedom of choice demonstrating its ambiguity and dependence on social conditions. By discussing this connection in terms of everyday bureaucracy and legal practice, the article showed that while the legal recognition of the existence of ethnic groups as collective entities may affect the individual freedom to self-identify with the desired ethnic group in theory, the consequences are not always obvious in practice. It appears that these consequences depend on various factors, including the complex and multifaceted nature of ethnicity, the understanding of which requires the social context to be taken into account.

KAS VÄIKESEARVULISTE
VÄHEMUSRAHVUSTE ÕIGUSLIK
EKSISTENTS TÜHISTATI?
RIIGIKOHUS RAHVUSEST
1920. AASTATE EESTIS

Triin Tark

Siinne artikkel käsitleb vähemusrahvuste õigusliku eksistentsi probleematikat, analüüsides näidisjuhtumina Eesti 1920. aastate kohtukaasusi isikutunnistuse rahvumärke küsimuses. Senine uurimisseis viitab, et Riigikohus tunnistas oma lahenditega õiguslikult eksisteerivateks ainult 1925. aasta vähemusrahvuste kultuuroromavalitsuse seaduses nimetatud rahvusrühmi (sakslased, venelased, rootslased ja vähemalt 3000 indiviidi suurused rahvusrühmad), samuti piiras põhiseadusega sätestatud rahvuse määratlemise vabaduse kehtivaks ainult neile indiviididele, kes soovisid ennast määratleda vähemusrahvuste kultuuroromavalitsuse seadusega õiguslikult tunnustatud rahvusrühmade liikmetena. Artikkel täpsustab kohtuasjade süvaanalüüsi abil selle potentsiaalselt väikese-arvulisi vähemusi negatiivselt mõjutada võinud otsuse tagamaid ja laiemat ühiskondlikku mõju.

Kohtutoimikutest ilmneb, et Riigikohus seisis silmitsi siseministeeriumi ja ühiskonna ootusega aidata võidelda „saksastumise“ vastu. Samas piiras kohtu võimalusi sellele ootusele vastata põhiseaduse paragrahv 20, mille järgi kõik täisealised Eesti kodanikud olid vabad oma rahvust määratlema. Sellegipoolest ei soovinud riigikohtunikud täit rahvuse määratlemise vabadust võimaldada, käies sel moel üht jalga Euroopas varem ja hiljem tavapärase õiguspraktikaga mitte tunnistada täielikku individuaalset valikuvabadust ka siis, kui taoline vabadus on mingite õigusnormidega deklareeritud. Otsides rahvuse määratlemise vabadust piiravale otsusele seadusandlusest argumente, tugines kohus vähemusrahvuste kultuuroromavalitsuse seadusele, ehkki selle seos isikutunnistuse rahvumärkega polnud isenesestmõistetav. Laiendades sel moel autonoomiasaaduse ulatust, leidis Riigikohus esiteks, et vähemusrahvused saavad Eestis olla vaid need rahvusrühmad, mis vastavad seaduses sõnastatud tingimustele, ning teiseks, et põhiseaduslik rahvuse määratlemise vabadus saab kehtida ainult neile isikutele, kes soovivad ennast pidada kuuluvaks mõnda vähemusrahvusesse selle seaduse mõttes. Kuna see jättis indiviididele täieliku vabaduse määratleda ennast sakslasena, ei vastanud otsused siseministeeriumi ja ühiskonna ootustele.

Kuna rahvuse määratlemise vabaduse piirang oli suunatud mitte endid sakslastena määratleda soovinud isikutele, vaid neile, kes soovisid ennast määratleda väikesearvuliste vähemusrahvuste liikmetena, jäi kohtuasjade ühiskondlik mõju väikeseks. Ilmneb, et otsused, mida toetav argumentatsioon oli potentsiaalselt laiaulatusliku mõjuga, survestasid siseministeeriumi vaid kohtusse pöördunud isikute isikutunnistuse rahvusmärke muutmise taotlusi uuesti üle vaatama ja neid rahuldama. Kuigi kohtulahendid võinuks mõjutada edaspidist isikutunnistuste väljastamise ja muutmise praktikat, seda tegelikult ei juhtunud. Isikutunnistuse rahvusmärke muutmise toimikud näitavad, et ka pärast mitmeid kohtuotsuseid oli üldjuhul (ühe erandiga) võimalik rahvusmärkeks valida mõni õiguslikult mitteeksisteerivaks tunnistatud rahvus. Samuti jättis riigi poliitiladvik reageerimata kohtuotsustes sisalduvad argumentid, et kultuuro-mavalitsuste rahvusnimekirjade pidamise määru-ses sõnastatud rahvuse tõendamise nõue neile, kes soovisid mõne rahvusnimekirjaga liituda, oli seadusevastane.

Nii demonstreerib Riigikohtust läbi käinud juhtumite analüüs, et rahvusrühmade eksistentsi õiguslik tunnustus ja selle seosed isikliku rahvuse määratlemise vabadusega olid mõjutatud mitmesugustest ühiskondlikest teguritest, mitte ainult mustvalgetest õigusnormidest. 1920. aastate Eestis tagas ühiskonna keskendumine saksastumise probleemikale selle, et ehkki kohtuasjade kõrvalmõju oli väikesearvuliste vähemusrahvuste õigusliku eksistentsi näiline tühistamine, ei peetud ametkondlikus asjaajamises ilmtingimata vajalikuks kohtuotsuste valguses piirata ennast mõne marginaalse vähemuse liikmena määratleda soovivate isikute valikuvabadust.

Volõõnia sakslaste poliitiline integratsioon sõdadevahelises Eestis kodakondsuse taotlemise näitel

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Kokkuvõte. Volõõnia sakslased olid enne I maailmasõda agraarse sisserände tulemusel Eestisse saabunud lihtrahvas, keda kahe maailmasõja vahel oli Eestis alla tuhande. Artiklis käsitletakse selle rahvusrühma poliitilist integratsiooni Eesti Vabariigis, tuginedes Rahvusarhiivis säilitatavatele seni vähe kasutatud kodakondsustoimikutele. Volõõnia sakslaste naturalisatsiooni-protsess kestis kogu sõdadevahelise perioodi ja hõlmas suuremat osa rühmast. Sageli venis menetlus nõutavate dokumentide puudumise ja taotlejate vähese asjaajamiskogemuse tõttu aastatepikkuseks. Kodakondsuse taotlejad esitlesid end riigile lojaalsete ja usaldusväärsete kodanikena, rõhutades oma kohanemist Eesti ühiskonnaga. Analüüs näitab, et osa taotlejaid oli assimileerumas ning see protsess algas enne kodakondsuse taotlemist ega sõltunud poliitilise integratsiooni kulgemisest.

Märksõnad: baltisakslased, ränne, kodakondsus, integratsioon, assimilatsioon

Sõdadevahelises Eestis elas umbes miljon inimest, kellest alla 20 000 olid sakslased, keda tavaliselt tähistatakse ühisnimetusega „baltisakslased“. Üsna sageli on baltisakslasi samastatud ülemkihiga, mis on väär, sest Baltikumi saksakeelne elanikkond ei olnud kunagi homogeenne, vaid

koosnes erinevatest ühiskonnakihtidest.¹ Juba rohkem kui kümme aastat tagasi kritiseeris Norbert Angermann levinud arusaama baltisakslastest kui „ülemkihist“, leides, et selle ekshiarvamuse põhjuseks on asjaolu, et Balti kultuurimälus ei ole pööranud tähelepanu alamkihtide baltisaksa identiteedile, ja kutsus üles „parunite“ kõrval uurima ka Baltikumi saksa lihtrahvast.²

Käeolev artikkel ongi tõukunud Angermanni üleskutsesest, pidades ühtlasi silmas asjaolu, et vahepeal ei ole olemasolevale napile baltisaksa alamkihtide uurimistööle lisa tulnud. Minu uurimisobjektiks on enne I maailmasõda Venemaa lõunapiirkondadest Eestisse asustatud saksa talupojad, täpsemalt Ukraina aladelt pärit asunikud, keda tuntakse Volõõnia sakslastena. Lihtrahva uurimist võib pärssida allikate puudus, paremal juhul nende nappus või piiratus; sama kehtib täiel määral ka Volõõnia sakslaste kohta. Arhiividesse on ladestunud mõningal määral ametiasutuste dokumentatsiooni ning leidub asjakohast ajakirjandust, kuid peaaegu üldse ei ole biograafilisi ega autobiograafilisi allikaid. Arusaadavalt on ka senine uurimistöö olnud tagasihoidlik, kuid mõningaid töid, kus Volõõnia sakslasi puudutatakse, on siiski põhjust välja tuua. Nende hulgas torkavad silma agraar-, asustus- ja rahvastikuajaloo käsitlused, kuid uurimused Volõõnia saksa talupoegade vahekorra riigivõimuga puuduvad.

Esiteks tuleb nimetada juba 1930. aastate lõpus ilmunud Rudolf Schulzi ja majandusajaloolase Hans-Jürgen Seraphimi käsitlusi, mille valmimist mõjutas kindlasti Natsi-Saksamaa huvi välissaksluse (*Auslandsdeutschtum*) ja Ida-Euroopa saksa asustuspiiride vastu, millele lisandus natsionaalsotsialistlik talupojaideaal, mis nägi talupojas saksa rahva elujõudu.³ Ideoloogilisest laetusest hoolimata aitavad tollased kirjatööd mõista, kuidas saksa talupoegade olukorda Baltikumis nähti. Ühtlasi on need käsitlused senijani asendamatud Eesti ja Läti Volõõnia saksa

- 1 O. Liivik. Zwangsmigrationen der Deutschen aus Estland während des Zweiten Weltkrieges und danach. – Vertreibung und Erinnerung: Forschungsstand und Geschichtspolitik im östlichen Europa. Hrsg. von K. Boeckh, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2026, 207–227, siin 208.
- 2 N. Angermann. Die Deutschbalten – eine Oberschicht? – Mythen der Vergangenheit: Realität und Fiktion in der Geschichte. Hrsg. von O. Pelc. V&R Unipress, Göttingen, 2012, 247–266.
- 3 R. Schulz. Der deutsche Bauer im Baltikum: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte eines deutschen Bauernstandes im Baltikum. (Zur Wirtschaftsgeographie des deutschen Ostens, 16.) Volk und Reich, Berlin, 1938; H.-J. Seraphim. Die Wandlung der Agrarverfassung der deutschen Volksgruppe in den baltischen Staaten. – Agrarverfassung der deutschen Auslandsiedlungen in Osteuropa, Bd. 1. Hrsg. von M. Sering, C. von Dietz, F. Vahlen, Berlin, 1939, 87–127. Hans-Jürgen Seraphimi uurimuse Volõõnia sakslasi käsitlev ümbertöötatud osa avaldati postuumselt, vt: H.-J. Seraphim. Die deutschen Kolonisten aus Wolhynien. – Sozialgeschichte der baltischen Deutschen. Hrsg. von W. Schlau. Wissenschaft und Politik, Köln, 2000, 259–270. Edaspidi viidatakse autori ümbertöötatud ja lühendatud käitlusele.

kolonistide – nagu neid nimetasid nii kaasaegsed kui ka enamik hilisemaid autoreid – agraar- ja sotsiaalmajanduslike tingimuste võrdlemisel. Seejuures väärib märkimist, et uuritava rühma olukorda Lätis on kirjeldatud märksa süngemates toonides kui Eestis. Hilisemast perioodist on agraarajaloolisest perspektiivist Volõõnia saksa talupoegi puudutanud oma uurimistöös Tiit Rosenberg.⁴ Värskemates töödes on aga keskendunud nende asustus- ja rändeloole laiemas ajalises ja ruumilises perspektiivis.⁵ Lisaks on ilmunud folklorist Kaisa Langeri uurimus Volõõnia sakslaste kujutamisest Eesti sõdadevahelises ajakirjanduses, kuid selle töö allikabaas on napp ja käsitus pinnapealne.⁶ Viimasena võib nimetada kahte uurimust sakslaste 1945. aasta küüditamise kohta, milles käsitletakse mitut Volõõnia sakslaste perekonda.⁷

Käesolevas artiklis vaatlen Volõõnia sakslaste naturaliseerumist, mida mõistan poliitilise integratsioonina, ja püüan kindlaks teha selle mustreid sõdadevahelises Eestis. Marco Martiniello määratluse järgi hõlmab poliitiline integratsioon immigrantidele antud poliitilisi õigusi, samastumist vastuvõtva ühiskonnaga, demokraatlike normide omaksvõttu ning poliitilist osalust, mobilisatsiooni ja esindatust.⁸ Sellest vaatenurgast on kodakondsus poliitilise integratsiooni keskne ja vältimatu samm, mis loob eeldused ligipääsuks täielikele poliitilistele õigustele ja poliitilise kogukonna liikmelisusele.

Täpsemalt otsin vastuseid järgmistele küsimustele: kuidas Volõõnia sakslased ennast kodakondsuse taotlemise protsessis ametiasutustele esitlesid; kuidas mõtestati oma varasemat riiklikku kuuluvust ja määratleti end rahvuslikult; kuidas suheldi kodakondsusmenetluses riigi ja kohalike omavalitsustega; miks taotles osa Volõõnia sakslasi Eesti kodakondsust

- 4 T. Rosenberg. Saksa kolonistid Baltikumis 18.–20. sajandil. – Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi aastaraamat 2006. Õpetatud Eesti Selts, Tartu, 2008, 247–251; T. Rosenberg. Baltisaksa põllumehed Eesti Vabariigis ja Läänemaal 1919–1939. – Läänemaa Muuseumi toimetised. Toim. Ü. Paras. Läänemaa Muuseum, Haapsalu, 2003, 25–55. Edaspidi viidatakse autori artiklikogumikule, kus mõlemad mainitud artiklid on taasavaldatud, vt: T. Rosenberg. Künnivaod: Uurimusi Eesti 18.–20. sajandi agraarajaloo kohta. (Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi kirjad, IX). Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2013.
- 5 T. Buchen. The Portrayal of the (Russian) German Colonists as Settlement Pioneers 1880–1945 – Copernico: History and Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe, 18.09.2024. <https://doi.org/10.25355/tqrp-8102>; J. Musekamp. The History of the German-speaking Volhynians as Part of a Global Migration History – Copernico: History and Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe, 10.05.2022. <https://doi.org/10.25355/300>.
- 6 K. Langer. New Farmers for Germany's Oldest Colony. – Copernico: History and Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe, 18.09.2024. <https://doi.org/10.25355/dy9a-8644>.
- 7 O. Liivik, A. Leht, A. Rahi-Tamm, H. Tammela. Nationalitäts- und Identitätsfragen am Beispiel der 1945 aus der Estnischen SSR deportierten Deutschen. – Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte, 2022, 17, 93–124; O. Liivik. Sakslaste küüditamine Eestist 1945. aastal: keda, kust ja mis alusel välja saadeti. – Tuna, 2024, 3, 71–91.
- 8 M. Martiniello. Political Participation, Mobilisation and Representation of Immigrants and Their Offspring in Europe. – Migration and Citizenship Legal Status, Rights and Political Participation. Ed. by R. Bauböck. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2006, 83–105, siin 84.

vahetult pärast Eesti Vabariigi loomist, samal ajal kui teised sellega viivitasid; kas Volõõnia sakslaste saksa päritolu või mõjutada nende kodakondsuse taotlemise menetlust; mida näitavad kodakondsusmaterjalid taotlejate sotsiaalse, haridusliku ja perekondliku tausta kohta; ning kas kodakondsusmaterjalide või muude allikate põhjal on võimalik tuvastada Volõõnia sakslaste kultuurilise ja sotsiaalse kohandumise ning eestlaste hulka assimileerumise märke.

Minu uurimistöö tugineb Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsuse taotlemise juhtumitel. Rahvusarhiivis on sõdadevahelisest perioodist üle 20 000 kodakondsustoimiku, kuid sellest rikkalikust kollektsioonist ei eristu Volõõnia sakslaste toimikud.⁹ Nende tuvastamiseks olen kasutanud 1939.–1940. aasta ümberasumise korras Saksamaale lahkunute nimekirju¹⁰ ning sakslaste rahvuskatastrit,¹¹ milles leiduvad elukohaandmed võimaldavad kindlaks teha Volõõnia sakslaste asundustes elanud talupoegi ning kontrollida, kas nende kohta on säilinud kodakondsustoimik. Mujal elanud Volõõnia sakslased on välja selgitatud peamiselt varasema, sakslaste küüditamist käsitletud uurimistöö kaudu. Uurimistööd koostades vaatasin läbi rohkem kui 40 toimikut, mis moodustab umbes poole teadaolevatest Volõõnia sakslaste kodakondsustoimikutest. Artiklis käsitlen neist kümme juhtumit, mis on valitud eesmärgiga näidata Volõõnia sakslaste poliitilise integratsiooni eri mustreid. Nende hulgas on varaseid ehk 1920. aastate alguse ja hilisemaid kodakondsuse taotlejad, saksa asundustes ja väljaspool neid elanud sakslasi, talupidajaid ja endisi mõisatöölisi.

Vähemal määral olen kasutanud saksa rahvusnimekirja, mida peeti seoses Saksa Kultuuroromavalitsusega, baltisakslaste ümberasumist puudutavaid dokumente, kaasaegset ajakirjandust ning 1945. aastal küüditatud sakslaste isikutoimikuid¹² ja pärast sõda NSV Liitu repatrieerunute elamislubade ja kodakondsuse taotlemise materjale.¹³

9 Kodakondsustoimikud asuvad Rahvusarhiivi Siseministeeriumi fondis ERA.14, nimistud 12–16.

10 O. Angelus. Eestist Saksamaale ümberasunute nimestik = Verzeichnis der aus Estland nach Deutschland Umgesiedelten. Tallinn, 1939; Eestist Saksamaale ümberasunute täiendav nimestik [pärast 1. detsembrist 1939 ümberasunud] = Ergänzendes Verzeichnis der aus Estland nach Deutschland Umgesiedelten. Tallinn, 1940.

11 Vt Nationalkartei [Saksa Kultuuroromavalitsuse Eesti Vabariigis liikmete kartoteek], RA, ERA.85.1.542.

12 Eestist küüditatud sakslaste toimikud asuvad Rahvusarhiivi fondis ERAF.2-MO ning asumiselt põgenenud sakslaste toimikud Eesti NSV Siseministeeriumi 1. eriosakonna uurimistoimikute kollektsiooni fondis ERAF.16SM.

13 Toimikud asuvad ENSV Siseministeeriumi viisade ja välismaalaste registreerimise osakonna toimikute kollektsioonis Rahvusarhiivi fondis ERAF.7SM.

VOLÕÕNIA SAKSLASTE RÄNDEST JA ASUSTUSEST EESTIS

Piirkonnaga, mille kaudu neid identifitseeritakse, olid Volõõnia sakslased õigupoolest seotud suhteliselt lühikest aega. Valdav osa sakslasi jõudis Venemaa koosseisu kuulunud Volõõnia kubermangu alles pärast Poola ülestõusu 1860.–1880. aastatel peamiselt Varssavi ja Łódźi ümbrusest, mida tunti tollal Kongressi-Poolana. Sinna oldi omakorda tulnud pärast Poola jagamisi Saksa aladelt. Pärast massilise sisserände lõppu elas 1889. aastal veidi alla kolme miljoni elanikuga Volõõnias, mis hõlmas tänapäeva Ukraina kolme oblastit, ligikaudu 150 000 sakslast. Paarkümmend aastat hiljem oli sakslaste arv hoolimata märkimisväärsest väljarändest (peamiselt Kanadasse ja Ameerika Ühendriikidesse) tänu kõrgele loomulikule iibebe juba ligikaudu 210 000. Sakslaste, aga ka teiste vähemuste (nagu juudid) väljarände põhjuseks oli Vene võimude diskrimineeriv poliitika. Sakslaste puhul avaldus see Vene valitsuse püüdluses vähendada nende maaomandit (nt talude laenulepingute lõpetamine), mida põhjendati julgeolekupoliitiliste kaalutlustega, sest sakslasi vaadeldi kui võõrast rahvusest sisserändajaid. Peale selle tuli sakslastel nagu muudelgi vähemustel taluda keelelist ja religioosset tagakiusamist.¹⁴

Nõnda pole ilmselt liialdus väita, et väljarändamisel Baltikumi kohtusid Volõõnia saksa talupoegade ja Balti aadli (küll vaid selle väikese osa) huvid. Balti aadel taotles saksakeelse elanikkonna tugevdamist, et hõlbustada oma kolonisatsiooniplaanide elluviimist Baltikumis. Seejuures on saksa talupoegade sisserände puhul oluline eristada saksa koloniste, kellele mõisnikud jagasid maid, ja saksa põllutöölisi, kes toodi mõisatesse palgatöölisteks.¹⁵ Viimasel ettevõtmisel olid põhiliselt majanduslikud kaalutlused, sest pärast 1905. aasta revolutsiooni oli süvenenud mõisamajanduses töökäte puudus. Tegemist oli pikaajalise nähtusega, sest probleemid olid avaldunud juba 19. sajandi teisel poolel, kuid 20. sajandi alguses tööjõukriis süvenes.

1905. aasta revolutsioonile järgnenud aastail kuni I maailmasõja puhkemiseni saabus Baltikumi umbes paarkümmend tuhat saksa, talupoega põhiliselt, Volõõniast, aga ka Volgamaalt.¹⁶ Valdavas enamuses

14 J. Musekamp. The History of the German-speaking Volhynians, 2, 3; T. Buchen. The Portrayal of the (Russian) German Colonists, 4.

15 R. Wittram. Baltische Geschichte: Die Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180–1918. Oldenbourg, München, 1954, 235, 236.

16 Baltikumi saabunud saksa talupoegade täpne arv ei ole teada. Konservatiivsematel hinnangutel oli neid 15 000–20 000. Vrd J. von Hehn. Die Umsiedlung der baltischen Deutschen – das letzte Kapitel baltischdeutscher Geschichte. (Marburger Ostforschungen, 40.) J. G. Herder Institut, Marburg, Lahn, 1984, 16.

tuldi Kuramaale, vähemal määral Liivimaale, aga paari mõisa Eestimaalgi. Volgasakslaste puhul on kirjanduses välja toodud, et nad kohanesid Baltikumi oludega halvasti ja läksid suuremalt jaolt tagasi.¹⁷

Enne I maailmasõda Eesti alale jõudnud saksa talupojad paiknesid valdavas enamuses Tartu- ja Võrumaal. Tiit Rosenbergi hinnangul toodi Eestisse ligikaudu 400 peret umbes 1000–1200 põllutöölisega.¹⁸ Enamuses elasid sakslastest põllutöölised hajutatult, ent Võrumaal Sõmerpalus rajati 1911. aastal koloonia, millele anti 1920. aastate keskel nimi Heimtal. Asunduse moodustanud Volõõnia sakslased soetasid 35 talu, milles enne I maailmasõda elas 306 sakslast. Pärast sõda müüs osa sakslasi oma talud maha ja rändas välja, mille tõttu kahanes ka asunduse elanike arv – 1934. aasta rahvaloenduse andmeil oli asunduses 198 elanikku, kuid neile lisandus natuke rohkem kui 100 heimtallast, kes olevat leidnud tööd lähemates linnades ja eesti taludes.¹⁹

Heimtali lähedal Võrumaal asus ka väiksem Volõõnia sakslaste asundus Viira ning Tartumaal, kus saksa põllutöölisi oli kõige arvukamalt, tekkisid maareformi käigus Kaarepere-Visusti ümbruses sakslaste talukohad, kus Eesti Vabariigi aastail olevat elanud 80–90 saksa asunikku,²⁰ aga suuremal asustusosal Tartu- ja Viljandimaa sakslaste hajaasustuspiirkonnas üle 200 sakslase.²¹ Lisaks leidis Volõõnia saksa taluperesid veel Valga- ja Pärnumaal ning Põhja-Eesti maakondades ja linnades. Kui 1922. aasta rahvaloenduse andmeil elas Eestis 18 319 ja 1934. aasta loenduse andmeil 16 346 sakslast, võis Volõõnia sakslasi neist olla umbes 700–800, sest vaatamata I maailmasõja järgsele väljarändele hakkas Volõõnia taustaga sakslaste arv tasapisi tänu kõrgele iibele taastuma. Näiteks raporteeritakse 1934. aasta baltisaksa aastaramaatu baltisaksa kultuuritöö ülevaates, et 1932. aastal oli Heimtali asunduses 5 surma kõrval koguni 14 sündi, mis paarisaja elanikuga küla kohta on igal juhul muljetavaldav.²²

Volõõnia sakslasi mõjutas tugevasti baltisakslaste ümberasumine (*Umsiedlung*), mille käigus läks valdav enamus neist Saksamaale. Eriti üksmeelne paistis olema sakslaste lahkumine Sõmerpalust. Eesti ajakirjanduses väideti 1939. aasta sügisel, et maha jäänud vaid kolm segaperet, kuna kõik saksa pered, keda olnud 75, läksid ära.²³ Mujalt Eestist ei olnud ümberasumine nii ulatuslik, pärast II maailmasõda võis Eestis

17 H.-J. Seraphim. Die deutschen Kolonisten aus Wolhynien, 260, 261.

18 T. Rosenberg. Künnivaod, 427.

19 R. Schulz. Der deutsche Bauer im Baltikum, 104, 135.

20 T. Rosenberg. Künnivaod, 426, 427.

21 R. Schulz. Der deutsche Bauer im Baltikum, 138.

22 Die Deutsche Bauernsiedlung Heimtal. – Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums 1934, 64–65.

23 Võrumaalt lahkus 400 sakslast. – Postimees, 02.11.1939, 5.

leiduda veel sadakond või rohkemgi Volõõnia taustaga sakslast, kellest paljud saadeti koos järeletulijatega 1945. aastal Venemaale asumisele.²⁴

EESTI KODAKONDSUSE PÕHIMÕTETE KUJUNEMINE JA VOLÕÕNIA SAKSLASED

Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsuse institutsioonile pandi alus Maanõukogu määrusega 26. novembrist 1918 (MNK). Sisuliselt oli tegemist Eesti esimese kodakondsusseadusega, milleks teda kõnepruugis nimetatigi. Määruse tähtsaimaks ülesandeks oli määratleda isikute ring, kellele Eesti kodaniku õigused automaatselt laienesid. Nendeks olid rahvusest ja usutunnistusest sõltumata isikud, kes vastasid kolmele tingimusele: 1) elasid Eesti Vabariigi piirides; 2) olid 24. veebruarini 1918 endise Vene riigi alamad; 3) olid pärit Eesti Vabariigi osadest või seisid Vene riigi asutuste poolt Eesti alal peetud elanike nimekirjades. Kui isiku päritolemine seoti kohaga, kus vanemad tema sündimise ajal alaliselt olid elanud, siis Eesti ala elanike nimekirjadena käsitleti kirikuraamatuid ja niisuguseid seisuslikke nimekirju nagu valla hingekirjad, linnakodanike nimekirjad ja aadlimatriklid.²⁵ Paljude Volõõnia sakslaste puhul jäi viimane tingimus täitmata, sest ei oldud lastud ennast kanda kohalikku vallaelanike nimekirja; seetõttu tuli neil Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsust taotleda naturalisatsiooni korras. Läti puhul on Rudolf Schulz rõhutanud, et Volõõnia saksa talupojad jäid endiste vallakogukondade liikmeteks, sest uue elukoha järgesse vallanimekirja võtmiseks tulnuks nad kõigepealt endise kogukonna nimekirjast kustutada, seda peeti aga arvatavasti tülikas. Noores Läti Vabariigis maksis see neile kätte, sest välismaalaseks kuulutamise korral, mis paljude Volõõnia sakslastega juhtuski, jäid nad ilma õigusest maaomandile; maaomanikest saksa talupojad pidid taotlema Läti kodakondsust, et oma maavaldus säilitada.²⁶

Arvatavasti oli nii Lätis kui ka Eestis talupidajaid või siis mõisate põllutöölisi, kes kaalusid endisesse elukohta tagasipöördumist. Kui nende endine kodukoht oli aga läinud Nõukogude Venemaa koosseisu, langes tagasipöördumine päevakorrast ära. Just nõnda on põhjendanud Juuru kihelkonna Härgla mõisa põllutöeline Rudolf Wersch (snd 1882) 1921. aastal Harju maavalitsusele oma kodakondsussoovi, selgitades, et ei

24 O. Liivik. Sakslaste küüditamine Eestist 1945. aastal, 78.

25 H. Rohtmets. Kättemaks põlisele vaenlasele? Baltisakslaste kodakondsusküsimus vastloodud Eesti Vabariigis. – Ajalooline Ajakiri, 2010, 1, 42.

26 R. Schulz. Der deutsche Bauer im Baltikum, 83, 115, 116.

saa kodumaale rännata, „sest seal on kommunistline valitsus“, kes teda vastu ei võtvat.²⁷

Kuid varaste 1920. aastate alguse kodakondsustaotlejate hoopis suuremaks mureks oli, et nende esimesele kodakondsustaotlusele ei vastatud. Sellele on osutatud mitmes 1920. aastate alguse Volõõnia sakslase kodakondsuspalves. Kas sellistel juhtudel oli tegemist noore Eesti Vabariigi asjaajamise ülekoormatuse ja haldussuutmatuse, õigusnormide puudulikkuse või mõne muu põhjusega, jääb ebaselgeks, sest peale taotlejate avalduste või nende endi viidete varasematele palvekirjadele muid jälgi toimikutes enamasti ei leidu.

Ometi ei saa välistada, et osa sakslasi taotles Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsust lihtsustatud korras, milleks andis võimaluse MNK säte „eluliste huvide“ kohta, milleks võis olla Eesti Vabariigi piires asuv kinnisvara, ettevõtte, äri või mingi muu varaline või elukutseline huvi.²⁸ Lihtsustatud korras kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmiseks tuli aasta jooksul pärast määruse kehtima hakkamisest muretseda elukohajärgse omavalitsuse nõusolek ja kinnitus, et taotlejal on tõesti Eestis eluline huvi ning ta suudab ennast ja oma perekonda üleval pidada. Päris kindlasti võinuks erandi alla mahtuda kaks Sõmerpalus elanud venda, Ludwig (snd 1893) ja Emil Lau (snd 1896), kes olid 1913. aastal tulnud oma vanemate ning nelja noorema venna ja õega Žitomiri maakonnast Baraschewi vallast Eestisse, kus vanematest said talupidajad.²⁹ Vendadest vanem, Ludwig, selgitab 1921. aastal sõjaministrile adresseeritud palvekirjas, et astus 1918. aasta detsembris vabatahtlikult rahvaväkke, kuigi oli välismaalane. Ta väidab, et sai Landeswehriiga peetud sõjas jalast haavata ning talle anti 1920. aasta lõpus tunnistus tasuta maa saamiseks „normaaltalu“ suuruses.³⁰ Noorem vend Emil oli astunud vennaga samal ajal rahvaväkke, kuid tema sõjaministeriumile esitatud avaldusest ei selgu, et talle oleks selle eest tasuta maad lubatud.³¹ Mõlema venna kirjapandu õigsust kinnitas 3. jalaväepolgu ülem, sest selles polgus olid noormehed teeninud. Ehkki vendade kodakondsusmaterjalides puudub vähimigi vihje lihtsustatud korras kodakondsuse andmise võimalusele, said nad kodakondsuse võrdlemisi kiiresti – kuus kuud pärast avalduse esitamist sõjaministeriumile.

27 Rudolf Wersch Harju Maakonna Valitsusele, 2. mai 1921. RA, ERA.14.16.2345, l 3. Teadaolevalt elas Eestis samuti sakslasi, kelle endine kodukoht Volõõnias läks 1921. aastal pärast Nõukogude Venemaa ja Poola vahel sõlmitud rahulepingut Poola koosseisu.

28 H. Rohtmets. Eesti kodakondsuse kujunemine: põhimõtted ja praktika. Magistritöö. Tartu Ülikool, Tartu, 2005, 23, 24.

29 Sõmerpalu vallavalitsuse tunnistus, 24. mai 1921. RA, 14.14.216, pagineerimata.

30 Ludwig Lau siseministrile, aprill 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.218, pagineerimata.

31 Emil Lau siseministrile, aprill 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.218, pagineerimata.

Loomulikult tõestas Eesti Vabariigi eest relv käes võitlemine taotleja lojaalsust riigi vastu. Juhul kui taotleja ei olnud Eesti rahvaväes teeninud, aga seda olid teinud tema pojad või vennad, osutati ka sellele – nii esitleti ennastki usaldusväärse ja lojaalse kodanikuna. Olgugi et riigikaitstes osalemine pidanuks olema piisav põhjus kiiresti kodakondsust taotleda, leidis Volõõnia sakslasi, kes naturalisatsiooniga ei kiirustanud. Kuna tegemist oli mõisatöolistega, võib oletada, et maareformi järel tundsid nad majanduslikku ebakindlust ja kaalusid Eestist lahkumist. Näiteks nähtub Võrumaal Mooste riigimõisas töötanud Villem Kohleri (snd 1902) kodakondsustoimikust, et ta oli arvatud 1923. aastal kaitseväeteenistusest reservi ning mees elas 1928. aastani Mooste (Moisekats) vallas elamisloaga, mille oli saanud kaitseväes teenimise eest tasuta.³² Miks Kohler esitas kodakondsuspalve just 1928. aastal, toimikust ei selgu, kuid tõenäoliselt olid selleks perekondlikud asjaolud: ta oli äsja abiellunud eesti rahvusest naisega ja isaks saanud.

Tuleb märkida, et Eesti Vabariigi esimene, 1922. aastal vastu võetud kodakondsusseadus sätestas lihtsustatud korra kodakondsuse saamiseks ka neile isikutele, kes olid elanud Eestis vähemalt kuus aastat, aga ei olnud Eesti alal peetud elanike nimekirjades, kuid kellel oli Eesti piirides alaline elukoht ning kes olid kuni 24. veebruarini 1918 endise Vene riigi alamad ega olnud astunud mõne teise riigi kodakondsusesse. Selleks et omandada Eesti Vabariigi kodaniku õigused, tuli neil kuue kuu jooksul alates seaduse jõustumisest esitada vastav teadaanne koos tõenditega maa- või linnaomavalitsusele.³³ Kuigi Volõõnia sakslased vastasid neile tingimustele, kasutati seda võimalust arvatavasti vähestel juhtudel, sest osa neist oli juba asunud kodakondsust taotlema naturalisatsiooni korras, teised aga tegid seda hiljem.

Peaaegu kõik mittekodanikest Volõõnia sakslased vastasid juba Eesti kodakondsuse põhimõtete kujunemisel naturalisatsiooni korras kodakondsuse taotlemise peamisele tingimusele. Nimelt nägi 1918. aasta regulatsioon ette, et kodakondsuse taotleja peab olema Eestis elanud vähemalt viis aastat. Kodakondsustaotlusi sirvides torkab aga silma, et leidis taotlejaid, kellel oli raskusi Eestisse saabumise aja tõendamisega, sest vastavad dokumendid puudusid. See seletaks sedagi, miks ei taotletud kodakondsust lihtsustatud korras. Juhul kui Eestis oli elatud pikemat aega ühes ja samas kohas, võis appi tulla vallavalitsus, kust väljastatud tunnistuses taotleja Eestis elamise aeg üldjuhul vähemalt aasta täpsusega

32 Villem Kohler siseministrile, 13. märts 1928; kaitseväest vabastamise tunnistus, ärakiri 14. märts 1928; Moisekatsi vallavalitsuse tunnistus, 13. märts 1928. RA, ERA.14.13.3047, 1,2,3.

33 Kodakondsuse seadus, 27. oktoober 1922. – Riigi Teataja, 1922, 136, 661.

fikseeriti. Samas tuleb lisada, et juba 1920. aastal otsustati viieaastast tähtaega vajaduse korral lühendada või sellest hoopis loobuda. Teisalt ei nõutud alguses kodakondsuse taotlejatelt eesti keele oskust, kuid 1922. aasta kodakondsuseadusega see nõue kehtestati, ehkki taas olid võimalikud erandid.³⁴ Kodakondsuse andmise otsustas siseminister, kellel oli nii MNK kehtimise ajal kui ka hiljem õigus keelduda „eluliste huvide“ alusel naturalisatsiooni korras kodakondsust taotlevate isikute vastuvõtmisest. Seda võidi teha näiteks juhul, kui taotlejat peeti Eesti riigile ohtlikuks või poliitiliselt kahtlaseks, nagu Landeswehris teeninud ja Saksa okupatsioonivõimuga koostööd teinud baltisakslaste puhul.³⁵

RUDOLF PENKI KAASUS

Rudolf Penk oli sõdadevahelises Eestis üks ühiskondlikult aktiivsemaid Volõõnia sakslasi. Baltisaksa ajakirjanduses figureerib ta Heimtali koolitegelaseks, kes esindas kooli Saksa Kooliabi ühingus, ta oli Saksa Kultuur-omavalitsuse kultuurinõukogu koolide kuratooriumi liige ning pürgis n-õ suurde poliitikasse, kandideerides Saksa-Balti erakonnas Võrumaalt riigikokku.³⁶ Aga et Saksa-Balti erakond oli rahvuslik nišipartei, ei olnud tal lootustki valituks osutada, sest sakslased piirdusid riigikogus tavaliselt vaid kahe-kolme kohaga.³⁷

Penki kodakondsusjuhtum väärib tähelepanu mitte tema silmapaistva isiku tõttu, vaid seepärast, et Sõmerpalu vald vaidlustas talle kodakondsuse andmise. Teadaolevalt ei juhtunud seda ühegi teise Volõõnia sakslasega ning ka laiemalt esines niisuguseid juhtumeid harva. Märkimist väärib seegi, et erinevalt paljudest prominentsetest baltisakslastest, kellele

34 Kodakondsuse seadus, 27. oktoober 1922, 661. Kodakondsuse taotleja eesti keele oskust pidi kinnitama tema elukohajärgne kohalik omavalitsus, kuid alles 1938. aastal vastu võetud kodakondsuseaduse teostamise määrusega sätestati, et taotleja keeleoskust peab tõendama koolitunnistuse või maavanema, linnapea või linnavanema poolt antud tunnistusega, mis kinnitab, et soovivavaldaja saab aru eestikeelsest kõnest ja kirjast. Vt Kodakondsuse seaduse teostamise määrus, 19. november 1938. – Riigi Teataja, 1938, 97, 2220. Autor tänab määrusele viite eest Helen Rohtmets-Aasat.

35 Vt lähemalt: H. Rohtmets. Kättemaks põlisele vaenlasele?, 37–57.

36 Vt nt Dorpater Nachrichten, 23.04.1923, lk 5; Revaler Bote, 29.04.1924, lk 1, ja 25.04.1925, lk 4; Estländische Wochenschau, 12.05.1929, lk 7; Revalsche Zeitung, 25.03.1931, lk 1, ja 13.05.1932, lk 3.

37 Vt O. Liivik. Baltisaksa poliitika 1920. aastate algul. – Umsiedlung 60: Baltisakslaste organiseeritud lahkumine Eestist: 24. novembril 1999 Tallinna Linnaarhiivis toimunud konverentsi ettekanded. Koost. S. Kivimäe. Baltisaksa Kultuuri Selts Eestis, Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, Tallinn 2000, 13–30; M. Kuldkepp. A Union of Friendship Between Two Entire Nationalities: The Estonian Swedes and the German-Swedish Bloc in the 1929 Estonian Parliamentary Elections. – Acta Historica Tallinnensia, 2024, 1 (30), 50–82.

Eesti kodakondsust ei antud, ei olnud Penk pärast Saksa okupatsiooni lõppu ega Vabadussõja ajal Eestist ära käinud.³⁸

Tema kaasuse analüüs annab võimaluse peatuda veidi lähemalt ka kodakondsusmenetlusel, millele senises uurimistöös ei ole tähelepanu pööratud. Rudolf Penk esitas esimese palve Eesti kodakondsusesse astumiseks siseministeeriumile 17. detsembril 1919.³⁹ Avaldusest nähtub, et 1881. aastal Poolamaal sündinud luteri usku⁴⁰ Penk oli Eestis elanud üle seitsme aasta, ostnud Sõmerpalu mõisalt talu, oli abielus ja suurpere isa: tema ülalpidamisel oli kaksteist alaealist last (tema esimesest abielust, naise esimesest abielust ja paari ühised lapsed). Nagu kõikide teadaolevate saksa talupoegade kodakondsuskaasustega, ei hakanud temagi asi liikuma enne 1921. aasta kevadet. Temagi esitas siseministrile kordusavalduse, kuhu oli lisatud tema Eestis elava isa Karli nimi, kelle juhtumit aga hakati menetlema eraldi, sest perekonnaks loeti reeglina abikaasasid, nende alaealisi ja vanematega veel koos elavaid, äsja täiskasvanuks saanud lapsi.⁴¹ Kordusavaldusele reageeriti ning siseministeerium pöördus 21. mail 1921, nagu kord ette nägi, Võru maavalitsuse poole, täpsustades ja pärides avalduse esitaja kohta kohalikul omaavalitsuselt mitmesuguseid andmeid, sealhulgas nime, sünniaega, perekonnaseisu (naise ja laste andmed), rahvust, usutunnistust, elukutset ja varanduslikku seisut, ristimistunnistust ja Vene passi (juhul kui taotleja oli endine Vene alam) ning taotleja alaliselt Eestis elamise aega.⁴² Võru maavalitsus pöördus 31. mail 1921 omakorda Sõmerpalu vallavalitsuse poole, kes pidi Penki kohta ministeeriumist nõutud andmed saatma maavalitsusele ja ühtlasi avaldama arvamust, kas Penki vastuvõtmine kodakondsusesse on soovitatav.⁴³

14. juunil 1921 on Sõmerpalu vallavalitsus saatnud maavalitsusele käsitsi kirjutatud vastuse, mis oli kirjutatud samale blanketile, mis neile mai lõpus Võrust saadeti. Vallavalitsusel puudusid vastuväited Penki naturaliseerimise küsimuses, kuid edasist arengut silmas pidades on põhjust märkida, et vallavalitsusse ei jäänud Penki kohta koostatud arvamuse ära kirja. Sõmerpalust saadeti maavalitsusele kõik ministeeriumist küsitud andmed, millel ei ole põhjust pikemalt peatuda. Märkimist väärib siiski

38 Sõmerpalu valla vastuseisu tõttu ei saanud Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsust Jakob Link, enne I maailmasõda Eestisse tulnud Volöönia saksa talupoeg, kuid mitte Vene, vaid Saksa alam. Ta oli olnud maailmasõja-aastail perekonnaga Venemaal, kuid tuli 1918. aastal tagasi. (vt RA, ERA.14.14.766).

39 Rudolf ja Herbert Penk siseministeeriumi passijaoskonnale, 17. detsember 1919. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 2, 2p.

40 Kõik Eestisse sisserännanud Volöönia talupojad olid teadaolevalt luteri usku.

41 Rudolf Penk ja tema perekond siseministrile, mai 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.392, pageerimata.

42 Siseministeeriumi administratiiviasjade peavalitsus Võru maakonnaavalitsusele, 31. mai 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 3.

43 Võru maakonnaavalitsuse administratiivosakond Sõmerpalu vallavalitsusele, 31. mai 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 5.

hinnang keeleoskuse kohta, mida tollal veel ei nõutud. Vallast kirjutati, et Rudolf Penk valdab eesti keelt, kuid mitte „täiesti“. See hinnang võis olla aus, sest perekond elas Eestis alles 1913. aastast saadik ning erinevalt paljudest teistest Volõõnia sakslastest elasid Penkid saksa asunduses, mistõttu oli nende läbikäimine eestlastega harvem ning võimalusi keelt praktiseerida vähem. Maavalitsuses tõlgendati Penki keeleoskust teistmoodi, sest siseministeeriumile edastatud ankeedis langetati tema keeleoskus puudulikuks.⁴⁴

Kokkuvõttes oli hinnang Penkide kohta siiski positiivne. Nimelt kinnitab vallavanem, et Rudolf Penk ja tema pere liikmed on vallas elamise ajal „ausad inimesed olnud“ ning Penk ühes perekonnaga vallanõukogu otsusel hiljuti valla liikmeks vastu võetud.⁴⁵ Väga võimalik, et vallavalitsuses tol korral Penki juhtumisse süveneda ei jõutud: 1921. aasta varasuvel oli sakslaste paberitega tavapärasest rohkem tööd, sest umbes samal ajal võeti valla liikmeks terve hulk Volõõnia saksa perekondi, kes samuti taotlesid Eesti kodakondsust. Siiski tuleb lisada, et osa Volõõnia sakslasi oli juba varem vallakogukonna liikmeks vastu võetud ning suure tõenäosusega automaatselt ka Eesti Vabariigi kodanikeks saanud.

Jätkates Penki kaasuse käsitlemist tuleb märkida, et kuna Rudolf Penk oli enda, oma naise, alaealiste laste ja vahepeal 18-aastaseks saanud poja Herberti eest tasunud kodakondsusmaksu,⁴⁶ võis Võru maavalitsus kõiki asjaolusid arvesse võttes anda 16. juunil 1921 siseministeeriumile teada, et nende poolt Penkide kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmiseks takistusi ei ole.⁴⁷

Kodakondsuse taotleja kohta teostasid taustakontrolli ka kriminaalpolitsei (karistused) ja kaitsepolitsei⁴⁸ (poliitiline meelsus), kusjuures Helen Rohtmets-Aasa väitel, kes on uurinud Vene emigrantide naturalisatsiooni, võis kodakondsusesse mitte vastuvõtmise puhul määravaks saada just viimase negatiivne arvamus.⁴⁹ Penki toimikus ei ole kummagi asutuse tõendit, kuid siseministeeriumis koostatud teadetelehel on märgitud, et nemadki ei näinud Rudolf Penki vastuvõtmiseks Eesti kodakondsusesse takistusi.⁵⁰ Niisiis tehtigi 7. septembril

44 Ankeet Rudolf Penki kohta siseministeeriumi kodakondsuse komisjoni otsusega 7. septembrist 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 6.

45 Sõmerpalu vallavalitsus Võru maakonnavalitsuse administratiivosakonnale, 14. juuni 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 5, 5p.

46 Kviitung Võru renteist, 13. juuni 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 4.

47 Võru maakonnavalitsuse administratiivosakond siseministeeriumile, 16. juuni 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 1.

48 1925. aastast kandis asutus nimetust poliitiline politsei.

49 Vt lähemalt: H. Rohtmets-Aasa. „Vastuolus Eesti huvidega“: ühe Vene valgeemigrandi kodakondsusest. – Tuna, 2026, 1, 60–71.

50 [Teadeteleht], kuupäevata. RA, ERA.14.15.391, l 6.

1921 siseministeriumis Penkide osas positiivne otsus, novembris võeti Võru maakonna valitsuses Rudolfilt ja tema vanemalt pojalt Herbertilt kodanikuvanne. Neil tuli ära anda Vene pass, mis oli olemas Rudolfil, aga mitte tema naisel Emmal, pass saadeti koos Rudolfi ja Herberti maa-valitsuses vastu võetud kodanikuvandega sama aasta lõpus pealinna.⁵¹ Siseministeriumi teadaanne Penkide Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmise kohta avaldati Riigi Teatajas 1922. aasta märtsis.⁵²

Penkide nimi Riigi Teatajas põhjustas Sõmerpalu vallavalitsuses hämmeldust, ehkki vaid mõni kuu varem oli juhtum läbi käinud nii vallanõukogust kui ka -valitsusest. 20. aprillil kutsuti kokku vallanõukogu koosolek, kus tehti otsus paluda siseministeriumil Rudolf Penki ja tema perekonna kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmise otsus tühistada ning mees takkapihta koos perekonnaga Eesti Vabariigi piiridest välja saata kui „kahjulik isik“. Vallanõukogu protokollis nimetatakse teda „Saksa valitsuse meeleliseks isikuks“, Eesti valitsuse vastaseks ja eesti rahvuse rõhujaks, seesugune hoiak iseloomustanud teda Saksa okupatsiooni ja Vabadussõja ajal, aga ühtegi näidet tema „kahjulikkuse“ tõestuseks välja ei toodud.⁵³ Vallnõukogu otsus saadeti Võru maakonnaavalitsusele ja sealt edasi siseministeriumi administratiivasjade peavalitsusele.

Valla ebamäärase süüdistuse põhjal Rudolf Penki kodakondsuse asja Tallinnas ei avatud. Siseministeriumi kodakondsusosakonnast on 8. augustil 1922 Sõmerpalusse saadetud lakooniline teadaanne, et „otsust, mis on seaduslike jõusse astunud, ei ole võimalik muuta“.⁵⁴ Selle vahejuhtumi tõttu võis viibida Penkidele kodakondsustunnistuse väljastamine, mis toimus 13. septembril 1922.⁵⁵ Siiski jäi Penkil piisavalt aega, et kandideerida riigikogu valmistel, mis toimusid 1923. aasta mais.

Tol korral jäid kodakondsusesse vastu võtmata Rudolf Penki abikaasa lapsed esimesest abielust. Rudolf Penk püüdis viga parandada 1926. aastal, kuid kodakondsustoimikust ei selgu, kas tema kasulapsed said teisel katsel kodanikeks või mitte.⁵⁶ Hilisemast ajast pärinevad andmed, et üks tema kasulastest, Berthold Fuhrmann (snd 1911), vabastati 1939. aasta sügisel Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsusest ümberasumise tõttu Saksamaale.⁵⁷

51 Võru maakonnaavalitsus siseministeriumile, 23. detsember 1921. RA, ERA.14.15.391, pagineerimata.

52 Riigi Teataja, 1922, 34, 156.

53 Ärakiri Sõmerpalu vallanõukogu koosolekust, 20. aprill 1922. RA, ERA.14.15.391, pagineerimata.

54 Siseministeriumi administratiivasjade kodakondsuse osakond Sõmerpalu vallavalitsusele, 8. august 1922. RA, ERA.14.15.391, pagineerimata.

55 Siseministerium Sõmerpalu vallavalitsusele, 13. september 1922. RA, ERA.14.15.391, pagineerimata.

56 Vt RA, ERA.14.15.393.

57 RA, ERA.14.2-2.169, kaart nr 2832.

KITSASKOHTADEST VOLÕÕNIA SAKSLASTE KODAKONDSUSE TAOTLEMISEL

Volõõnia sakslastest talupoegade kohanemise ja lõimumise hindamisel ei saa jätta kõrvale nende sotsiaalmajanduslikku ja kultuurilist tausta, mis mõjutas eriti vanemat põlvkonda, kes oli tulnud Eestisse täiskasvanuna. Kuigi osa Sõmerpalusse saabunuid olid varem olnud rentnikud ja majanduslikult paremal järjel ning võtsid Eestisse kaasa oma põllumajandusliku inventari, ei tundnud nad kohalikke maaharimise tingimusi ning olid alguses talupidamisega hädas.⁵⁸ Sõltumata sotsiaalsest taustast oli sisse-rännanud Volõõnia talupoegadel kehv haridustase või polnud nad üldse koolis käinud. Heimtali baltisakslasest pastor Gerhard Plath kirjutas 1929. aastal ajalehes, et endisel kodumaal oli neil hariduse saamise võimalusi vähe ning osa neist õppis alles Eestis vanas eas oma nime kirjutama.⁵⁹

Suurem huvi Eesti kodakondsuse võtmise vastu oli alguses Sõmerpalu saksa talupidajatel. Paljud mõisatöölised, kes jäid tööle riigimõisatesse või hakkasid eesti taludes sulasteks, ei taotlenud vabariigi algusaastatel kodakondsust. Põhjuse selleks võis anda majanduslik ja elukondlik ebakindlus või poliitiline indiferentsus. Viimast ei saa alahinnata, sest osa Volõõnia sakslasi jäigi kodakondsuseta, olemata majanduslikult kehvemal järjel neist, kes kodakondsuse naturalisatsiooni korras omandasid. Üsna paljudest 1920. aastate alguse kodakondsustaotlustest ilmneb, et kodanikuks saamisel ei olnud väheoluline, et mittekodaniku passi muretsemist peeti tülikaks, sest elamisluba tuli vähemalt kord aastas pikendada, ning leiti, et selle regulaarse pikendamise asemel on soodsam taotleda kodakondsus.

Kodakondsuse taotlemisel sõltusid vähemasti 1920. aastate alguses peaaegu kõik taotlejad abilistest, sest taotlejad ei osanud piisavalt eesti keelt või ei osanud nad kirjutada. Kirjaoskamatud olid 19. sajandi lõpus sündinud taotlejate hulgas ülekaalus. Säärastel juhtudel võidi avalduse lõppu kirjutada taotleja allkirja asemel kolm risti, aga sagedamini lisati sinna märkus, et taotleja ei oska „kirja“ ning isiku nimi, kes taotleja palvel avaldusele alla kirjutas.

Milliseid tarbetuid sekeldusi kirja- ja keeleoskuse puudumine kaasa tõi, illustreerivad mitmed üksikjuhtumid. Eesti keele kirjaoskuse puudumise tõttu oli sunnitud kodakondsusavalduse koostamisel abi kasutama

58 R. Schulz. Der deutsche Bauer im Baltikum, 104.

59 [G.] Plath. Von der deutschen Bauernkolonie Heimtal bei Werro. – Estländische Wochenschau, 29.04.1929, lk 4.

Tartumaal elanud Adolf Zilke (sünd 1884). Kes tema abistaja oli, pole teada, kuid 18. septembril 1920 Tartust siseministrile adresseeritud avalduses avastati mitmeid puudusi ja vigu.⁶⁰ Esiteks ei olnud avalduses pere liikmete nimesid, teiseks polnud ametnikud rahul, et Zilke oli Ukraina ristimistunnistuse asemel pannud taotluse juurde väljavõtte koguduse sünniregistrist, kuna ristimistunnistust tal ei olnud. Küll aga võinuks ametnikes tekitada kahtlusi tema etniline ja riikondlik kuuluvus. Nimelt väitis Zilke esimeses avalduses, et on ukrainlane, aga teises, 12. juulil 1921 koostatud palvekirjas, et on Ukraina kodanik,⁶¹ ehkki tal Ukraina passi ei olnud; aga tal puudus ka tsaariaegne Vene pass.⁶² Nõnda pandi Zilke Eesti kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmiseni kirja Ukraina kodaniku ja ukrainlasena. Olgu märgitud, et viga rahvuskuuluvuses sai õige pea parandatud, sest Saksa Kultuuromavalitsuse loomise ajal kanti ta ühes abikaasaga saksa rahvusnimekirja.⁶³

Veelgi suuremat tüli põhjustas endale ja teistele Pukal elukoha leidnud kirjaoskamatu põllutööline Luise Mallas (sünd 1887), kes oli lesk. Oma esimeses kodakondsuse palvekirjas, millele on alla kirjutanud keegi Jaan Hurt, väitis naine, et on Poola riigi kodanik.⁶⁴ Kui talt Eesti kodakondsusesse vastuvõtmiseks Poola valitsuse nõusolekut paluti, leidis ta kellegi, kes Euroopa poliitilist kaarti temast paremini tundis, sest järgmises kirjas seletab ta järgmist: „Õieti ei olegi mina Poola riigi kodanik, sest sellel ajal, kui mina sääl olin, ei olnudki Poola riiki olemas, vaid ühine Vene riik, mille alla mina oma perekonnaga kuulusin. Ka ei ole mina rahvuse poolest poolakas, vaid sakslane.“⁶⁵ Sellel korral kirjutas avaldusele alla keegi Afansasjev, kes ei teadnud või oli Mallas unustanud, et eelmises avalduses ei olnud naine oma rahvuskuuluvusele osutanud, ent Puka vallavalitsus oli ta sellegipoolest sakslasena kirja pannud.⁶⁶ Kolmanda palvekirja saatis Luise Mallas siseministeeriumile 29. septembril 1922, millele on alla kirjutanud keegi Krigolson.⁶⁷ Kirjast selgub, et Mallas ongi asunud Poola saatkonnaga asju ajama, käinud isiklikult Tallinnas,

60 Adolf Zilke siseministrile, 18. september 1920. RA, ERA.14.16.336, pagineerimata.

61 Adolf Zilke Tartu maakonnavalitsusele, 12. juuli 1921. RA, ERA.14.16.336, pagineerimata.

62 1920. aastate alguses võis Ukraina riiklik staatus peale Volõõnia sakslastest kodakondsuse taotlejate jääda segaseks ka Eesti ametnikele. Mõnes kodakondsustoimikus leidub näiteks Ukraina Emigrantide Komitee Eestis (Комітет Українських Емігрантів в Естонії) välja antud isikutunnistus, mis oli mõeldud Ukrainast pärit endisele Vene alamale reisi-dokumentiks. Vt näiteks Friedrich Altmanni kodakondsustoimik: RA, ERA.14.12.419. 15.

63 RA, ERA.85.1.542, kaardid 17272 ja 17256.

64 Luise Mallas siseministeeriumi passiosakonnale ja Valga maakonna valitsusele, 20. juuni 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

65 Luise Mallas siseministeeriumi kodakondsuse osakonnale, 24. aprill 1922. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

66 Puka vallavalitsus Valga maakonna valitsusele, 19. juuli 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

67 Luise Mallas siseministeeriumi administratiivsjade peavalitsusele, 29. september 1922. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

kuid talle olevat saatkonnas öeldud, et ta peab neile tooma oma endise Vene passi, mida naisel ei olnud. Ta väitis ministeeriumile, et pass oli jäänud sõjas langenud mehe kätte ning palus seoses sellega siseministeeriumilt võtta ta Eesti kodanikuks vastu ilma Poola saatkonna nõusolekuta. Tema kodakondsusmaterjalidest tuleb välja, et naine ei olnud passi kadumise osas siiras. Nimelt küsis naise koduvalla Kuigatsi valitsus kaduma läinud passi kohta kohalikul politseinikult, kes vastas, et oli passi võtnud Mallaselt naisele ajutise isikutunnistuse muretsemiseks, aga andnud selle talle tagasi.⁶⁸ Vald oli aegsasti tema passi kadumisest teavitanud siseministeeriumi, kuid jätnud täpsustamata, millal ja kuidas see oli juhtunud.⁶⁹ Tuleb tingimata märkida, et vallavalitsus suhtus Mallase taotlusesse algusest peale heatahtlikult, pidades tema kodanikuks vastuvõtmist „soovitavaks“.⁷⁰ Pärast kolmanda palvekirja esitamist hakkasid asjad kiiresti liikuma: 25. novembril 1922 võeti Mallaselt kodanikuvanne ning 7. märtsil 1923 anti talle üle kodakondsustunnistus.⁷¹

Ei ole teada, et ükski Volõõnia sakslane, kes kodakondsust taotles, oleks kirjaoskuse puudumise või kehva eesti keele oskuse tõttu jäänud Eesti kodakondsusesse vastu võtmata. Samas oli Volõõnia sakslaste puhul üldiseks probleemiks, et taotlejal puudus mõni ametiasutuste nõutud dokument, mida muude sakslaste puhul tuli harva ette. Küll ei olnud taotlejatel dokumente, kus oleks kirjas olnud sünniaeg ja perekonnaseis – aga neid dokumente ei olnud enam võimalik ka hankida. Eesti kodakondsusesse astuda kavatsenud Michael Semke (snd 1879) on kinnitanud 1926. aastal, et nii temal, tema naisel ja vanematel lastel, kes kõik olid sündinud Venemaal endises Volõõnia kubermangus, puuduvad sünni- ja ristimistunnistused, mida tema väitel oli võimatu kätte saada. Arvatavasti nii oligi, sest see osa Volõõniast, kust perekond pärit oli, kuulus NSV Liidu koosseisu. Olukorraga leppisid ka ametnikud, pealegi oli Semke koostöövalmis ning pakkus ametnikele perekonnaseisutunnistust, mis võis olla välja antud juba Eestis, ja naise leeritunnistuse ärakirja.⁷²

Dokumentide puudumine võis muuta ka Volõõnia sakslaste rände kirjeldamise aeganõudvaks ja harvemini jäi see sootuks poolikuks. Vähe sellest, et paljudel ei olnud dokumente, mis oleks kinnitanud, millal nad Eestisse olid tulnud, võis hilisemate elukohtade kindlakstegemine Eestiski

68 Kuigatsi vallavalitsus Kuigatsi politsei rajooniülemale, 25. august 1921; Kuigatsi politsei rajooniülem Kuigatsi vallavalitsusele, 6. september 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

69 Kuigatsi vallavanem siseministeeriumi administratiivasjade peavalitsuse kodakondsusosakonnale, 13. september 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

70 Kuigatsi vallavalitsus Valga maakonna valitsusele, 19. juuli 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata.

71 Vt RA, ERA.14.14.1413.

72 Michel ja Matilde Semke siseministrile, 18. detsember 1926. RA, ERA.14.15.3511, l 1, lp.

osutada keeruliseks, sest ühest mõisast teise mõisa rännanud saksa põllutöölise elukohti alati ei registreeritud. Ent kodakondsusmenetluses tuli taotleja kohta koguda tunnistusi tema varasematest elukohtadest. Selle illustreerimiseks võib tuua näite eespool kirjeldatud Adolf Zilke sugulase Friedrich Zilke (snd 1874) kodakondsuse taotlemise juhtumist 1920. aastate lõpus. Tema puhul ei õnnestunud ametnikel kindlaks teha, millal ta Eestisse oli saabunud, sest ta ei osanud nimetada konkreetset aastat ja väitis üksnes, et oli tulnud enne 1918. aastat. Pole välistatud, et ta oli alguses elanud Liivimaa Läti-osas, töötanud põllutöölise või moonamehena, aga liikunud ajuti ka Eesti alal paiknenud mõisates. Alles 1920. aastate alguses olid Zilked pikemaks ajaks Konguta valda pidama jäänud, ent kuus aastat väldanud kodakondsusmenetluse jooksul jõudis perekond kolida Konguta vallast Võrumaale Kioma valda Viira mõisa, kus nad 1934. aastal Eesti kodanikeks vastu võeti.⁷³

ASSIMILEERUMISE ILMINGUD

Paljudest Volõõnia sakslaste kodakondsustoimikutest võib välja lugeda taotlejate assimileerumispüüdlusi või juba alanud assimileerumist. Sellele viitavad näiteks keelevahetus ning üldisem valmisolek ja avatus eestlaste hulka sulandumiseks. Samas tuleb arvestada, et osa sellistest eneseesitustest võis olla performatiivne, sest kodakondsuse taotlemisel oli taotlejal loomulik huvi jätta endast võimalikult soodne mulje. Seetõttu tuleb toimikutes leiduvat teavet käsitleda allikakriitiliselt. Ent mõnel juhul ei piirdu viited assimileerumisele üksnes taotlejate endi väidetega või sellega, mis nende nimel palvekirja kirja pandi, vaid neid toetavad ka ametnike hinnangud ja muud allikad.

Siinkohal on põhjust tagasi pöörduda Luise Mallase juurde. Oma 1921. aasta kodakondsusavalduses väitis ta, et mitte ainult tema, vaid ka tema viis poega on Eestis oldud aja jooksul omandanud nii eesti keele kui kombes. Veelgi enam: nad olla unustanud oma emakeele, mistõttu olevat juba ainuüksi selle tõttu kodumaale tagasipöördumine võimatu. Tema avaldus lõpeb deklaratiivselt: „Lapsed on kõik terved, tugevad poisid ja neist kasvavad truud Eesti riigi kodanikud.“⁷⁴ Luise Mallase poegade tegevusest ja elukäigust on vähem teada kui nende emast. Pereregistri

73 Siseministeerium Kioma vallavalitsusele, 26. september 1934. RA, ERA.14.16.338, l 24.

74 Luise Mallas siseministeeriumi passiosakonnale ja Valga maakonna valitsusele, 20. juuni 1921. RA, ERA.14.14.1413, pagineerimata. Eespool mainitud Jaan Hurt, kes koostas avalduse Luise Mallase nimel, on kasutanud peaaegu sama sõnastust ka ühe teise Pukas elanud Volõõnia sakslasest lesknaise 1921. aastal koostatud kodakondsusavalduses. Vt Margarete Deinise (snd 1879) kodakondsustoimik: RA, ERA.14.12.2489, l 1.

andmetel suri üks vendadest noorena.⁷⁵ Ülejäänud vennad jäid, nagu nende emagi, Eestisse ka pärast baltisakslaste ümberasumist aastatel 1939–1941 ega astunud Saksa Kultuuroromavalitsuse liikmeks. Tõenäoliselt ei õppinud ükski neist saksa õppekeelega koolis, kuid vanemad vennad ei olnud saanud üldse kooliharidust. Süütamises süüdistatuna 1928. aastal kohtu alla antud Edmund Mallase (snd 1907), kes oli vanuselt teine poeg, kohtutoimikust selgub, et ta ei olnud koolis käinud ning on kirjaoskamatu.⁷⁶

Päris kindlasti käisid Mallased läbi oma Volöönia sakslastest sugulaste ja tuttavatega, mille tõestuseks on vanuselt neljanda venna Eduardi (snd 1911) abiellumine Linda Videnhöftiga (snd 1912), kelle perekond ei olnud vähem assimileerunud kui Mallased.

Videnhöftid elasid Eestis väidetavalt 1915. aastast.⁷⁷ Enne seda olid nad olnud lühikest aega Liivimaa lätikeeles osas, kus sündis ka tütar Linda. Eestis oldud aja jooksul olid nad elanud Harjumaal Juuru vallas ja Viljandimaal Holstre vallas, kuni seadsid ennast sisse Pärsti vallas; erinevalt mitmest eespool käsitletud perekonnast töötasid nad 1920. aastate lõpul ikka veel eesti taludes. Kodakondsusavalduse esitas perepea Ludwig Vieidenhöft (snd 1887) 1929. aastal. Kuna ta oli kirjaoskamatu, allkirjastas avalduse tema naine. Avalduses väitis abielupaar, et oskavad eesti keelt, täpsustades, et naine kõneleb eesti keelt aktsendita, „kuna mehe juures veel võeras aktsent tunda on“.⁷⁸ Nende lapsed valdasid tõenäoliselt eesti keelt vabalt, sest avaldajad kinnitasid, et nad olid õppinud ja osalt veel õppisid eesti õppekeelega koolis.

Videnhöftide kodakondsusmenetlus jäi venima, sest neil puudusid mitmed vajalikud dokumendid. Näiteks nõuti neilt vallavalitsuse tõendit keeleoskuse kohta, kuid selle asemel et vallavalitsusest tõend muretseda, eelistasid nad kolm aastat hiljem koostatud järgmises kodakondsusavalduses oma keeleoskust üksikasjalikumalt kirjeldada, kirjutades: „Eesti keelt räägime õige vabalt ja nooremate laste tõttu, kellele Eesti keel kergem on rääkida, kui Saksa keel, võidab Eesti keel meil pinda koduse keelena. Miskisugust eksami keeles meie küll anda ei suuda, kuna meie kooliharidus puudulik on, mees näit. ei oska üldse kirjutada.“⁷⁹

75 Pornuse valla perekonnaregister, 3. köide. RA, ERA.5212.3.96, l 34.

76 Tartu-Võru rahukogu kriminaalosakonna akt, Eduard Danieli p. Mallas. RA, ERA.1947.3.2902, l 19.

77 Ludwig ja Lidia Videnhöft siseministrile, 27. september 1929. RA, ERA.14.16.2458, pagineerimata.

78 Samas.

79 Ludwig ja Lidia Videnhöft kohtu- ja siseministeeriumile, 25. september 1932. RA, ERA.14.16.2458, pagineerimata.

Ehkki Pärsti vallavalitsusest kinnitati sel korral, et taotleja oskab eesti keelt, nõuti Ludwig Viedenhöftilt täiendavat tõendit, milles oleks märgitud, et ta valdab eesti keelt nii kõnes kui kirjas. Selline nõue seadis kirjaoskamatud taotlejad, nagu Viedenhöft, ilmselgelt ebasoodsasse olukorda ning võis muuta Eesti kodakondsuse omandamise praktiliselt võimatuks. Lisaks nõuti temalt sünnitunnistust, Vene-aegset passi või väljavõtet koguduse personaalraamatust, kuid ka neid dokumente ei olnud tal esitada.⁸⁰

Kui sünnitunnistuse asemel oli siseministeerium nõus aktsepteerima Ludwig Viedenhöfti leeritunnistust, siis eesti keele oskuse tõendamisel päästis perekonna tupikseisust välja Pärsti vallavalitsuse tunnistus, milles muu hulgas kinnitati, et „Ludwig Veidenhofil on võimalik aru saada eestikeelest kõnest, kuna tema kirjast aru ei saa kirjaoskamatuset tõttu“.⁸¹ Laste kohta märkis vald, et pere nooremad lapsed õpivad eestikeeles Pärsti algkoolis.

Viedenhöftide koolivalik ei olnud saksa perede hulgas tavapärase, sest saksakeelset haridust peeti saksluse püsimise seisukohalt määravaks ning mittesaksakeelses koolis õppimist nähti sageli ümberrahvustumise ohuna, mida väljendab ilmekalt Baltikumi sakslaste loosung „Mitte ükski saksa laps ilma saksa koolita“.⁸² Ehkki sellest mõtteviisist tõugatuna olid baltisakslased Eestis saksakeelse koolivõrgu arendamisel küllaltki edukad ning näiteks Heimtalis, Visustis ja Sanglas olid saksa asunike jaoks loodud külakoolid, siis sakslaste hajaasustusega piirkondade peredest võisid need ja muud saksakeelsed koolid kaugemale jääda.⁸³ Kui lapsi ei soovitud just panna internaati, nagu pakkus näiteks Heimtali kool, võidigi valida pragmaatilistel põhjustel lähim kool, mis oli eestikeelne ja asus sageli samas külas. Seda kinnitab ka sakslaste endi koostatud statistika, mille järgi õppis 1920. aastate keskel 16,6% põhikooli- ja 5,1% kõrgemate koolide saksa peredest pärit lapsi mittesaksakeelses koolis, kuid maal ulatus see näitaja ligi 60%-ni.⁸⁴

Viedenhöftide koolivalikut lähima saksa kooli kaugus määrata ei saanud, sest nad elasid Viljandi lähedal, kus tegutses nii saksa õppekeelega põhikool kui ka gümnaasium. Seevastu võis vahemaa otsustavat rolli mängida Räpinas elanud Frankide perekonna puhul, kellele lähim saksa

80 Kohtu- ja siseministeeriumi administratiivosakond Ludwig Wiedenhöftile, 2. detsember 1932 ja 4. märts 1933. RA, ERA.14.16.2458, pagineerimata.

81 Pärsti vallavalitsuse tunnistus, 12. jaanuar 1934. RA, ERA.14.16.2458, pagineerimata

82 Vrd M. Garleff. „Kein deutsches Kind ohne deutsche Schule“: Das deutsche Schulwesen im unabhängigen Estland bis zur Übernahme durch die Kulturselbstverwaltung. – Nordost-Archiv, 1992, 1/2, 309–333.

83 K. Laurits. Saksa kultuurimavalitsus: Monograafia ja allikad. Rahvusarhiiv, Tallinn, 2008, 132, 133.

84 Samas, 105.

kool asus Tartus. Seetõttu on mõistetav, et nende 1910. aastate alguses sündinud tütreid õppisid üksnes eestikeelses koolis. Märkimisväärne on aga see, et koolivalikut ei muudetud ka pärast Saksa Kultuuroomavalitsuse liikmeks astumist 1925. aastal. Nõnda pole ka üllatav, et tütarde täiskasvanuks saades lasi perekond end kultuuroomavalitsuse nimekirjast kustutada, mis võib viidata nõrgale rahvustundele. Kõigele lisaks jäi kogu perekond Eestisse ning eesti koolis õppinud tütreid abiellusid eestlastega ja eestistusid.⁸⁵

Viedenhöftid ületasid siiski kõik bürokraatlikud takistused ning said viis aastat kestnud menetluse järel 1934. aastal Eesti kodakondsuse. Nende lõimumisprotsess sellega ei lõppenud: nimede eestistamise kampaania ajal võtsid nad 1935. aastal Viedenhöfti nime asemele, mille kirjapilt oli eestlastele ja võib-olla neile endilegi keeruline, lihtsa eesti nime Kallaste.⁸⁶ Tuleb tingimata märkida, et eestipärase nime võtmine ei olnud sakslaste hulgas tollal midagi erakordset. Mitmeid nimevahetajaid leidis ka Volõõnia sakslaste hulgas. Näiteks võtsid Tartumaal Sanglas elanud Vutsked uueks nimeks Pärnpuu, aga Virumaal elanud perekond Mantaist sai nimede eestistamise kampaania käigus Mäepere. Nime tahtis vahetada koguni Nanseni passiga⁸⁷ elanud Wilhelm Mantai (snd 1906), kes pretendeeris Mäepere asemel nimele Mandre, kuid kodakondsuseta isikuna ei lubatud tal nime muuta.⁸⁸ Üsna pea taotles Mantai, kelle vanemad olid Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsuse saanud 1920. aastate keskel, Eesti kodakondsust, mille ta sai 1937. aastal. Nime ta vahetada enam ei kavatsenud, küll aga abiellus eestlannaga, mis oli tema põlvkonna Volõõnia sakslaste hulgas tavaline.⁸⁹

Sellegipoolest elas Eestis veel märkimisväärsel hulgal Volõõnia sakslasi, kes Eesti kodakondust ei taotlenud, aga nende lõimumine Eesti Vabariiki vääriski omaette uurimust, eriti mõistmaks, millisenä nägid nad oma suhet Eestiga, eriti kui loobuti II maailmasõja puhkemise järel Saksamaale ümberasumisest.

85 O. Liivik, A. Leht, A. Rahi-Tamm, H. Tammela. Nationalitäts- und Identitätsfragen am Beispiel der 1945 aus der Estnischen SSR deportierten Deutschen, st Deutschen, 120.

86 Vt Viedenhöfti perekonnanime muutmine. RA, ERA.5201.2.118546.

87 Rahvusvahelise kokkuleppe alusel eeskätt Vene põgenikke silmas pidades välja töötatud spetsiaalne kodakondsuseta isikute isikutunnistus, mille algatajaks oli Rahvasteliidu põgenike ülemkomissar Fridtjof Nansen, kelle järgi hakatigi dokumenti kutsuma. Eestis hakati seda dokumenti välja andma 1923. aastal. Vt H. Rohtmets. Suletud ukсед: Eesti Vabariigi sisserändepoliitika 1920. aastatel. – Ajalooline Ajakiri, 2013, 1, 55–78, siin 72.

88 O. Liivik. Sakslaste küüditamine Eestist 1945. aastal, 84.

89 Abielutunnistus, 5. märts 1937. RA, ERA.14.14.1469.

LÕPETUSEKS

Volõõnia sakslaste naturalisatsiooniprotsess kestis Eesti Vabariigis ligikaudu kaks aastakümnet. Paljudel juhtudel venis kodakondsusmenetlus mitme aasta pikkuseks, mille põhjuseks ei olnud taotlejate rahvuskuuluvus, vaid nõutavate dokumentide puudumine ja vajadus neid asendada muude tõenditega. Sellest hoolimata ei jäänud teadaolevalt ükski taotleja ainuüksi dokumentide puudumise tõttu naturaliseerimata. Esimestel aastatel domineerisid kodakondsustaotlejate hulgas talupidajad, kellest paljud elasid Heimtalis, aga leidus ka põllutöölisi, kellel maaomandit ei olnud. Varased kodakondsuse taotlejad olid suures enamuses sündinud 19. sajandi viimasel veerandil ning rännanud Eestisse koos abikaasa ja lastega. Enamus neist valdas vähemal või rohkemal määral eesti keelt, aga nende seas oli ka märkimisväärne hulk kirjaoskamatu, kes pidid kodakondsustoimingutes kasutama eestlastest abilisi. 1920. aastate keskpaigast alates kasvas endiste mõisamoonakate osakaal Eesti Vabariigi kodakondsuse taotlejate hulgas, aga taotluste arv võrreldes aastakümne algusega langes. Muutus taotlejate vanuseline koosseis, sest lisaks Eestisse täiskasvanuna saabunutele lisandusid 20. sajandi alguses sündinud Volõõnia sakslased, kes olid siin üles kasvanud. Läbitöötatud kodakondsustoimikute põhjal võib teha järelduse, et taotlejate hulgas oli sakslasi, kes kavatsesid abielluda (reeglina eestlastega), aga neidki, kelle vanemad ei olnud naturaliseerunud või ei olnud nad kodakondsust varem taotlenud teadmises, et lahkuvad Eestist. 1930. aastatel taotlejate arv võrreldes 1920. aastate teise poolega märkimisväärselt ei muutunud. Kodakondsuse taotlejad olid nooremad, sündinud üldjuhul 20. sajandi kahel esimesel aastakümnel. Lisaks tihedamale lõimumisele Eesti kodumaaga võis taotlejaid motiveerida abiellumine eestlannaga, kuna kodakondsuseta sakslannad said Eesti Vabariigi kodanikuga abielludes automaatselt kodakondsuse. Kahe aastakümne jooksul oli taotlejate hulgas ka naisi, alguses leskedest perekonnapead, hiljem põhiliselt vallalised naised. Taotlejad esitlesid end, iseäranis 1920. aastatel, lojaalsete ja usaldusväärsete kodanikena, võimalusel riigi patriootidena, osutades Vabadussõjas osalemisele või teenimisele Eesti sõjaväes, samuti osutati perekonna tihedale lõimumisele Eesti ühiskonnaga; kuulumist sakslaste, veel vähem baltisakslaste hulka ei rõhutatud kunagi ning rahvuskuuluvus pandi kirja enamasti formaalse nõude täitmiseks. Mitmed taotlejad demonstreerisid valmidust assimileerumiseks, kirjeldades juba astunud ja tulevikus astutavaid samme.

Artiklis käsitletud Viedenhöftid, hilisemad Kallasted, panid näiteks oma lapsed eesti õppekeelega kooli ega kuulunud Saksa Kulturomavalitsusse. Samuti ei läinud nad kaasa ümberasumisega, nagu ka enamik siinses artiklis käsitletud perekondi. Suurem osa perekonnast pääses ka 1945. aasta küüditamisest, mis lubab oletada, et nad olid oma formaalset rahvuskuuluvust muutnud, eestlastena määratlesid nad end tõenäoliselt juba varemgi. Erandina saadeti asumisele vanim tütar Linda Mallas. Sama saatus tabas ka tema ämma Luise Mallast, kes naasis 1947. aastal loata Eestisse, kuid arreteeriti ja saadeti peagi asumisele tagasi. Ühel enne tagasisaatmist toimunud ülekuulamisel väitis ta, et on vabaabiellus eestlasega, peab oma kadunud vanemaid ja meest sakslasteks, aga mitte ennast ega mõista, miks ta välja saadeti, kuna teda ei olnud väidetavalt väljasaadetavate nimekirjas.⁹⁰

Penkide perekond erineb märkimisväärselt kõigist teistest artiklis käsitletud perekondadest: perepea Rudolf Penk oli ühiskondlikult aktiivsem kui ükski teine Volõõnia sakslane. Kogu perekond kuulus Saksa Kulturomavalitsusse ning Rudolf Penk lahkus ümberasujana Saksamaale koos abikaasa ja alaealiste lastega, kellest noorim oli kõigest kaheksa-aastane.⁹¹ Eestist lahkus ka suurem osa Penkide täiskasvanud lastest.

Eelkirjeldatud mustrisse ei sobitu kuigi hästi vennad Emil ja Ludwig Lau. 1939. aasta ümberasumise ajal pälvis tähelepanu Emil Lau perekonna juhtum – tema eestlannast abikaasa Ida Lau (snd 1903) keeldus esialgu mehega kaasa minemast ja jäi väiksemate lastega Eestisse.⁹² Peagi mõtles ta siiski ümber ja lahkus,⁹³ kuid tuli Poolast, kus ta kogu sõja vältel oli elanud, 1948. aastal repatrieerimise korras lastega tagasi Eestisse.⁹⁴ Samamoodi talitasid mitmed Volõõnia sakslased, nende hulgas Ludwig Lau, aga tema Volõõnia sakslasest abikaasa jäi Saksamaale. Ludwig Lau elas 1947. aastast Põlvamaal, abiellus uuesti ning teenis Nõukogude ametiasutuste andmetel elatist juhusliku tööga.⁹⁵

90 RA, ERA.16SM.1.179, l 5–7.

91 RA, ERA.14.2-2.169, kaardid nr 7120, 7121, 7122, 7123.

92 Võrumaalt lahkus 400 sakslast, 5.

93 RA, ERA.14.2-2.169, kaart 10416.

94 Ida Lau ülekuulamised: 14. september 1949, 23. jaanuar 1950, 2. august 1950. RA, ERAF.7SM.1.1624, l 6–8, 13–13p.

95 Õiend Ludwig Lau kohta, 5. august 1952. RA, ERAF.7SM.1.1625.

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POLITICAL INTEGRATION OF
VOLHYNIAN GERMANS IN INTERWAR
ESTONIA: THE CASE OF CITIZENSHIP
APPLICATIONS

Olev Liivik

Volhynian Germans were a relatively recent migrant group even in the region from which they derived their name. Most of them settled in the Volhynia province of the Russian Empire only in the decades following the Polish uprisings of the 1860s and 1880s, primarily from Congress Poland, where they had earlier arrived after the partitions of Poland. By the end of mass migration in 1889, approximately 150,000 Germans lived in Volhynia; about two decades later, around 1910, their number had increased to roughly 210,000 despite considerable overseas emigration, largely due to high natural growth.

In the years before the First World War, Volhynian German peasants, together with settlers from the Volga region, were brought to the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire as part of the settlement policies of Baltic German landlords. They were settled mainly in Kurland and, to a lesser extent, in Livland, including present-day Estonia. In total, approximately 20,000 German peasants were involved in this migration wave. These German colonists, as they were commonly referred to, included both farmers who acquired or leased land and agricultural labourers employed on estates. In present-day Estonia, they formed a relatively small group, consisting of about 400 families (approximately 1,000–1,200 individuals). During the interwar period, Volhynian Germans remained a minor subgroup within the broader German population, which numbered around 16,000–18,000, and themselves numbered roughly 700–800 persons.

This study is based on citizenship application files preserved in the Estonian National Archives. Approximately forty files concerning Volhynian Germans have been analysed, representing roughly half

of all identifiable cases. These citizenship files have not previously been systematically studied. As Volhynian Germans are not explicitly categorised as a distinct group in the archival records, they have been identified through a combination of sources, including the ethnic registers of the German Cultural Self-Government, resettlement lists from 1939 to 1941, and post-war deportation records of Germans.

The analysis shows that the political integration of Volhynian Germans in the Republic of Estonia was neither uniform nor linear. The timing and motivations of naturalization varied considerably. In the early 1920s, farmers were more prevalent among applicants, whereas agricultural labourers – often in a more precarious economic position – tended to postpone applying or refrained from doing so altogether. In later years, an increasing share of applicants belonged to a younger generation that had grown up in Estonia. Marriage to Estonians also played an important role in facilitating naturalization.

In many cases, the naturalization process of Volhynian Germans was prolonged, primarily for bureaucratic reasons. Most often, delays were caused by the lack of required documents, but the process could be further complicated by limited knowledge of Estonian and the fact that many applicants were illiterate and therefore had to rely on intermediaries. The findings of this study indicate that authorities were generally willing to act flexibly when applicants were otherwise considered suitable.

Citizenship applications also shed light on how applicants defined their identity. Previous political affiliation was often described inconsistently, and among earlier applicants, national belonging could be unclear and subject to change. Applicants typically emphasised their loyalty to the Estonian state and their integration into local society, presenting themselves as reliable and respectable individuals. Although such self-presentations could be partly strategic, they were often supported by broader patterns of social adaptation.

In many cases, signs of assimilation emerged independently of, or even prior to, naturalization. These included language shift, children attending Estonian-language schools, intermarriage, and the adoption of Estonian names. At the same time, political integration and cultural assimilation did not necessarily coincide: some families maintained a strong German identity and remained active within the German community, while others distanced themselves from it.



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