

## **STALIN'S GEOPOLITICS AND BORDER POLICY 1944: FROM THE HEART OF ASIA (IN FULL SECRECY) TO THE BALTIC SEA**

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**Abstract.** In October 1944, Churchill presented to Stalin a proposal for division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, unaware that at the same time the Soviet Union annexed the Tuva People's Republic. This state was reduced to a subordinate entity within the USSR. Declassified documents, released fifty years later, revealed that the Soviet leadership had coordinated its pre-World War II expansionist policies in both the Baltic-Black Sea region and in centre of Asia. Motivated by Churchill's proposal, Stalin swiftly adjusted his geopolitical strategy in negotiations with Finland, adding territorial reconfigurations within the Soviet Union. Some territories of the Karelo-Finnish and Estonian SSR's were rapidly transferred to the Leningrad oblast. Ironically, Molotov, one of the architects of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, would later conclude his career by signing the agreement about transfer of Soviet territory (part of Tuva) to Mongolia, a gesture aimed at preserving Soviet-Chinese relations in 1958.

**Keywords:** geopolitics, spheres of influence, percentages agreement, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov

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## 1. Introduction

In July-August 1990, I fulfilled one of my lifelong dreams by visiting the geographic centre of the Asian continent, which today is the Republic of Tuva, part of Russian Federation. In 1921–1926 it was the Tannu-Tuva People's Republic, in 1926–1944 the Tuva People's Republic, which was in secrecy seized and annexed by Joseph Stalin during the Second World War. Similar political tactics and legal games which were used to occupy and annex Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, part of Finland, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 were also used against this Asian nation. Hard-to-reach Tuva, however, remained a region where the local population, the Tuvans, outnumbered the Russians (206,000 Tuvans and 98,000 Russians in 1990). Visitors from the Baltic states, who were demanding the restoration of their independence, were pleased to see that the spirit of freedom that Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika had unleashed in the Soviet empire was also visible in Tuva. Particularly in the local press. Reading about the activities of the local popular front, parallels with the Baltic states immediately sprang up, and thus the article "Tuva – a state reawakens" was born. Thanks to Dr Alan Sanders, it was published in the 1992 Glasgow University journal "Soviet Studies" (Alatalu 1992b) and received a great deal of attention. As the original version of the article "Tuva-Pribaltika: historical parallels" was besides the Estonian language also published in Russian in the journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia "Politika" (Alatalu 1991a, 1991b), I fortunately had the good sense to send this number to the editorial office of the most progressive newspaper there, "Moloděž' Tuvy" (Youth of Tuva). Its publication on January 24, 1992 (the full text in one issue!) (Alatalu 1992a) proved to be a real political coup for the locals, as for the first time they were able to learn a lot about the history of their statehood and its abolition in a clarifying bird's eye view. This was information that had hitherto been hidden. The article was also translated into Tuvan language, discussed and criticised, and thereafter the logical next step was taken: the leader of the Tuvan People's Front, Kaadyr-ool Bicheldey, disclosed the then secret documents relating to the capture of Tuva's independence in October 1944 at an extraordinary parliamentary session on 28 February 1992. They were quickly published in the press (Materialy 1992).

I have of course been proud for revealing to public attention – in a single article – the fate of a country (the size of Greece) that had been wiped off the world map by a dictator, and at the same time decisively pushing forward the political process in Tuva. This culminated in a referendum on 12 December 1993 in which the Tuvans rejected (31% in favour, 69% against) the draft constitution of the Russian Federation and adopted their own constitution (54% in favour, according to the Tuvan Popular Front the support was even 62%). The latter text had been debated for several months and, under §1, the Republic of Tuva expressed the right for self-determination and the right to secede from the Russian Federation by way of a nation-wide referendum. In addition, §2 stated that, in times of martial law, or a state power or political crisis in the Russian Federation, Tuva would be subject to its own Constitution and laws and to "The Law on Ensuring the Security and Sovereignty of the Republic of Tuva" (Konstitucija 1993: 4-5).

These were sensational messages to the world about what was going on in Russia's periphery, but the main world powers were in no hurry to back them (one unused opportunity is mentioned at the end of the article). Under pressure from Russia's new president, Vladimir Putin, in May 2001 the text of Tuva's constitution was rewritten and the paragraphs allowed secession were removed. The restoration of Moscow's influence in Tuva, however, took a long time, but, differently from other republics who tried to preserve as long as possible their national features (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, etc.), a special interdependence had developed between Kyzyl and Moscow at the personal level – Tuva had its own man in the Kremlin for decades, whose career at the top of the Russian Federation only went uphill. This meant and ensured a lot. As did Putin's holidays in Tuva. Tuvian Sergei Shoigu (b. 1955) was a popular leader among the citizens of the empire and served as Russia's Minister of Emergency Situations 1991–2012, as one of the three co-leaders of the ruling United Russia party 1999–2004, as Governor of Moscow Oblast in 2012, as Minister of Defence 2012–2024, and is today Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

## **2. Stalin-Churchill's negotiations in Moscow and the Tuvan impact on the Estonian state border**

In the matter of Estonian statehood and its borders there still exists unclarity on why during WW2 Moscow ordered and rapidly carried out two handovers of Estonian territory to the Russian SFSR – in August 1944 the Petseri County (*Petserimaa*) and in November 1944 the territory on the Eastern bank of the Narva River. A logical question rises as to why Estonia was deprived twice and with an interval of three months while with Latvia it happened only once when in August 1944 Russia annexed and incorporated the Abrene County (neighbour of Petseri County). Additionally, Leningrad oblast was enlarged on November 24, 1944 not only at the expense of Estonia (Eastern bank of Narva River) but also at the expense of the then Karelo-Finnish SSR. In my opinion the explanation of these strange moves lies in happenings related to the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Winston Churchill's visit to Moscow in October 1944.

### *2.1. Winston Churchill's visit to Moscow October 1944 and his naughty proposal*

It is possible to affirm that one of the key words of this summit was Tuva, a place which was not mentioned during the negotiations, this word is also absent in Churchill's monumental work "The Second World War". As known, Churchill wrote about this visit only many years later and it was published in the last book of the memoirs, published in 1953. His 'percentages agreement' astonished the public then and continues today if the reader knows the chronology of events and consequences of Churchill's proposals in a situation where he had no knowledge about Stalin's steps exactly during the same hours in and far from the Kremlin.

Churchill described that on 9 October 1944, at the very beginning of the Soviet-British summit in the Kremlin<sup>1</sup>, he had proposed to Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, the sharing of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Churchill began the talk with offers in Romania, Greece and Yugoslavia, and by the time it was translated he had written the famous piece of paper: "In Romania, Russia 90%, others 10%; in Greece, Great Britain (in agreement with the USA) 90%, Russia 10%; Yugoslavia 50%-50%; Hungary 50%-50%; Bulgaria: Russia 75%, others 25%" and handed it to Stalin (Churchill 1953: 227).

The offensive of Soviet Army had just reached these countries and brought along radical changes in political leaderships. According to Churchill, Stalin examined the paper, made some remarks on it in blue pencil and handed it back. When Churchill asked whether this was not a cynicism against millions of people and offered to burn the paper, Stalin replied that he would keep it.

It was a long and carefully prepared surprise move by the British, and Churchill, after describing it, mentions that he had also written an explanatory note the next day, but had not sent it to Stalin. He does, however, set out London's approach to percentages in the following pages. According to Churchill, these are – and disclosure of what is proposed must be avoided – merely a method of making clear how near the two sides are to each other in the current fighting, with a view to reaching a full agreement. Churchill stressed that London and Moscow were now linked by a 20-year treaty of alliance (signed on 26 May 1942 – T.A.), thanked Stalin for his pledge not to interfere by force or by communist propaganda in the Balkans, and praised the dissolution of the Comintern as proof of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. He was convinced that, as everyone wanted to make their people's life richer and happier, the differences between the systems in Britain, the US and Russia would become smaller and smaller, and that if there were 50 years of peace, only scientists would be left to deal with the differences that remained. (Churchill: 231-233).

Churchill's recollections are sometimes shorter, sometimes longer. Given the time when these pages were written, one is struck by the scant description of Stalin's first visit to the British Embassy, where talks continued on 11th October. Churchill writes: "Every precaution was taken by police. One of my guests, M. Vyshinsky, on passing some of the NKVD armed guards on our staircase, noted: "Apparently the Red Army has had another victory. It has occupied the British Embassy."'" The author of this quite provocative citation was Andrei Vyshinsky, the then Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, but at the time when Churchill composed this part of memoirs, he was Soviet Foreign Minister (1949–1953). He was the only Soviet comrade accompanying Stalin at dinner, mentioned by name in Churchill's memoirs. It is possible to consider his citation as Churchill's ironic but late recognition of the fact that Vyshinsky said then something which Churchill did not know and was not able to understand a real content of message. Exactly at the same time, on 11th October 1944, the annexation of the People's Republic of Tuva to the Soviet Union was being formalised in one of the Kremlin offices. Churchill goes on to recall the evening

<sup>1</sup> Also The Second Moscow Conference of Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, 9–19 October 1944.

at the embassy with the statement that there was a very open atmosphere until the early hours of the morning, and quotes Stalin's assertion that he had no doubt of a Conservative win in the forthcoming British general election. The paragraph ends with a vague thought – "it is harder to understand the politics of other countries than those of your own" (Churchill: 229-230). Obviously, something of the reality of the situation is to be gleaned from this – Churchill went down in history as the winner of the war, but his party lost general elections (even twice – in July 1945 and in February 1951) and regained power only in October 1951.

The offer of October 1944 has been little analysed, as – nothing was implemented. Documents published by David Reynolds (University of Cambridge) and Vladimir Pechatnov (Moscow, Russki Mir) as result of a joint executive research on Stalin's war-time correspondence with Churchill and Roosevelt, allows to state that after the proposal's paper decline by Stalin, Churchill started to explain it as a naughty proposal adding that he had not discussed it with anyone else. As said, he made the happening public in favourable for him political situation – he was again Prime Minister (1951–1955) and had in 1954 assured Dwight Eisenhower, the US president (1953–1961) that Stalin had followed his percentage on Greece. (Reynolds and Pechatnov 2018: 486-495, 604). In each case the naughty proposal was a calculated one, but with unforeseen results and in unforeseen places.

For Stalin, who had secretly hijacked Tuva, Churchill's proposal came as a complete surprise, but what followed the talks in Moscow confirms that he made immediate swift and geopolitical use of it. In principle, he was prepared for this kind of offer as it was something normal in the great powers relations. Clearly softening the real message of Churchill's offer, it is presented today as the Percentages agreement (see Wikipedia<sup>2</sup>), although its idea and substance – agreeing between us sharing states and spheres of influence – it looks like the 23 August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop's secret protocol on dividing Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (Bessarabia). Besides, Churchill and Stalin had by then already zoned a country together – the agreement for the joint occupation of Iran was made in London on 13 August 1941 and carried out by Soviet and British forces on 25–31 August 1941 (Churchill 1971: 426-427). It was the fresh Allies' joint military operation to prevent Iran and its oil from falling under possible German control.

The post-Moscow summit steps reflected the fact that Stalin was keeping a reckoning and was ready for action along the entire USSR border. He had his own geopolitical understanding of the key positions and the ability to see them as a whole. It was this that allowed him to make quick decisions today in the West, tomorrow in the East, and then again in the West or South. In cooperating with Hitler, for example, Stalin had to take account of Japan, which had conquered much of China. It was therefore logical that the Soviet Army, under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, attacked Poland on 17 September 1939, but it took place on a day after the Soviet troops had concluded an armistice with the Japanese at Halhingol in Mongolia.

Mir Jafar Bagirov, the leader of the Azerbaijani SSR Communist Party, for example, expected – being familiar with Stalin's tactics – that after the Soviet Army's

<sup>2</sup> Percentages agreement, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Percentages\\_agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Percentages_agreement).

entry into Iran a repetition of the post-MRP Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia capture would take place, i.e. the annexation of Northern Iran to the USSR (Gasany 2003: 13) (although the latter had not previously been part of the Russian Empire). The positive moment of the occupation of Iran was certainly that in its capital Tehran – where Allied troops only briefly entered and left – the first face-to-face meeting (November–December 1943) of the Big Three (Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin) took place, which largely determined the course of the Second World War.

The final solution for the partition of Iran was still to be found, but on 19 September 1944, London and Moscow together had already partitioned Finnish territory into the Soviet Union. It was the armistice treaty that ended the Continuation War (1941–1944) and restored the USSR's post-Winter War (1939–1940) conquests and borders as recorded on 15 March 1940, when the Second World War was in progress and Stalin and Hitler were allies. In September 1944, Moscow also gained the whole of the Petsamo region, and this time there were three parties to the treaty – Finland and, opposite it, the USSR and the United Kingdom. Only one man signed the armistice on behalf of the other hand – Andrei Zhdanov<sup>3</sup>, as the representative of the Allied (Soviet) High Command and of the Governments of the USSR and the United Kingdom (see Armistice 1944). The British or Churchill's government involvement in the signing of this treaty is also still too little reported. Behind the common policy was the pursuit of a specific business interest. In particular, the takeover of the assets of the Anglo-Canadian company Mond Nickel Co in Petsamo and compensation for London. This was swiftly resolved with the participation of the British Ambassador in Moscow (Hansalu 2005: 370–371) and is reflected in Article 11 of the peace treaty, which speaks of the property of the Allied States and their nationals. The second main reason for Britain's involvement was the common border between the USSR and Norway, an Allied country, created by the occupation of Petsamo.

London's participation in the Tripartite Pact ensured the geographic coverage of Finland's punishment. The inclusion of British business interests in it, however, paved the way for the birth of the Percentages agreement and a new state of relations between the future winners – now everyone's cards were on the table. Hence Stalin's remark – keep your offer on paper – sounded particularly evil. The very next month, Stalin seized land from Finland and granted to Leningrad oblast territories taken from the Karelo-Finnish SSR and – for the second time – from the Estonian SSR.

Churchill's *magnum opus* leaves no doubt how superficial and naïve the knowledge of the regime in the USSR among the British and US elite then was. However, because they were making great policy together, their actions in a complete vacuum of information at times is particularly striking.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948) was Stalin's right-hand man, member of the Politburo and secretary of the CC of the CPSU, party leader in Leningrad and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The latter was the body to implement the start of the process of so-called accession of new states and new territories to the Soviet Union during peacetime.



*2.2. Stalin's winning card – pseudo-legal annexation of Tuva.  
Chronology of main steps made as a rule in secrecy*

As has been said, Churchill had no idea that on 11 October 1944, when Stalin visited the British Embassy in Moscow, in another Kremlin cabinet, the formalisation and annexation of the People's Republic of Tuva on the border with Mongolia to the Soviet Union was beginning. This was an area the size of Greece – 170,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Stalin's largest territorial war booty in the Second World War!

It took 48 hours to turn an independent state into a 4th-rank administrative unit of the empire, because the Stalinist constitution of 1936 was followed, which laid down in detail the procedure for the admission of new states. In fact, it was done using only some paragraphs of the law and violating its main provisions and core. First (on 11 October 1944), at a meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, chaired by Mikhail Kalinin, independent Tuva was admitted to the Soviet Union, and then the document was transferred to another cabinet, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR (Nikolai Shvernik, Chairman), which on 13 October 1944 formalised Tuva as an autonomous oblast. It was written as a request to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in the second paragraph of the decision of 11th October. The decisions of the two Presidiums, which disregarded the law, were intended to abolish Tuva's statehood altogether, because, unlike the autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts were not treated as historical subjects at that time but were only taken as part of the surrounding larger entity (Alatalu 1992b: 889).

On the same 13th October, and in the following days, discussions continued on borders as in the Kremlin as in the various residences, and Churchill and Stalin held joint and separate talks with the head of the Polish government-in-exile and the leaders of the Moscow-backed Lublin Committee, during which Stalin rejected all attempts to grant Poland the old state border. Naturally, Stalin was immediately informed about the disappearance of independent Tuva and listened to his interlocutors with a satisfaction.

Stalin outwitted not only Churchill, but also the other bigwigs and observers of events. Cleverly suppressing what had happened, they made no great fuss about it, only to justify themselves cunningly later. To illustrate this, an article published in 1947, was appropriately titled at the time – "Tannu-Tuva – The Soviet 'Atom City'" – made the uranium reserves the main attraction of this walled-off region. The article was written by Fyodor Mansvetov (1884–1967, USA), an essayist and leader of the former Far Eastern Republic<sup>4</sup>, who claimed that foreign journalists only learned of the disappearance of the state of Tuva in October 1945, when the list of districts for the election of the new USSR Supreme Soviet was published and the district of the autonomous oblast of Tuva was added to the Irkutsk oblast (Mansvetov 1947: 11). A typical message from the British can be seen in the reply of the Deputy Foreign Minister, Hector McNeil, in the British House of Commons on 11 December 1946, that the Soviet Union had not yet provided any explanation

<sup>4</sup> A buffer state created by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War to keep Japan at distance, the Far Eastern Republic (April 1920 – November 1922), with a capital in Chita (Burjatia), favoured the independence of Mongolia and Tuva.

for the illegal incorporation of the People's Republic of Tuva, which Britain did not recognise (Tannu-Tuva 1946).

The independence of the Tuvan People's Republic was recognised only by the USSR and Mongolia in the days of its existence. Although Russia had still declared Tuva its protectorate in 1914, Beijing continued to treat Tuva and Mongolia (also known as Outer Mongolia) as territories that had been subject to itself since 1756. As the main theatre of the Second World War shifted to Asia, the US forced its allies, the Soviet Union and the Republic of China (led by Marshal Chiang Kai-shek), to conclude a treaty of friendship and alliance on 14 August 1945, one of the conditions of which was recognition of Mongolia's independence by the latter. With the help of the Soviet Union, a plebiscite was held in Mongolia on 20 October 1945, with a turnout of 98.5% and all 487,409 participants voting in favour of independence. As a countermeasure, in a statement issued on the occasion of the enforcement of the UN Charter, Beijing declared that it did not recognise the incorporation of Tuva into the USSR, but recognised Mongolia's independence in January 1946.

The situation became ambiguous after the Chinese Communist Party came to power on 1 October 1949. Mao Zedong's government was quick to recognise Mongolia, but Chiang Kai-shek's government, which had fled to Taiwan and retained a seat on the UN Security Council until 1971, revoked the friendship and alliance treaty of February 1953, as well as the recognition of Mongolia. In 2002, the latter was recognised again, but nothing was said about Tuva. In other words, even today, Taiwan does not consider Tuva to be part of the Russian Federation. The fact that this was Russia's biggest territorial expansion before the seizure of Crimea in February-March 2014 is periodically remembered in the world press (Tazhutov 2022).

The seizure of Tuva, carried out in violation of international and Soviet laws, as well as the laws of Tuva, and in great secrecy, began on 17 August 1944, when the unauthorised Tuva Small Khural (parliament), following an affirmative response from Moscow, endorsed the request of the local communists to join the Soviet Union, which had still been made on 26 April 1941. This had been preceded by a plenum of the Central Committee of the Tuva People's Revolutionary Party on 15th August, but these meetings of both institutions were not made public until 1 November 1944, when the delegation that had been in Moscow had returned and a new meeting of the Small Khural was held in Kyzyl (Otroshchenko 2017: 41-42).

The events of 15th and 17th August need additional clarification. According to the documents, the final process of joining started on 17 June 1944, when the Tuvan delegation headed by Salchak Toka, was received by Vyacheslav Molotov in Moscow. After that on 26 June 1944 the Central Committee of Tuvan PRP and Tuvan government sent a joint appeal to Vyacheslav Molotov and Gleb Malenkov (Deputy of Stalin in Politbureau of the party), in which all previous appeals and talks were reminded, incl. conversation with Molotov on 18 March 1943 about a possible joining of Tuva to the USSR, – and asked to consider it – as a new autonomous oblast of the Krasnoyarski krai – once more. (Kharunova 2011: 52).

As said, Moscow formally responded to the request on 26 April 1941. It is still unclear, what was more important in choosing of this date for the request – to stress



that the Tuvan leaders became worried about their fate before 22 June 1941 which created a new relationship between the USSR and Tuva, or to stress that it took place after 13 April 1941, i.e. after signing of the USSR-Japan neutrality pact? The decision-makers in autumn 1944 knew well what went on in Eastern Europe after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939. Several researchers have already stated that the fate of Tuva was partly the outcome of Stalin's geopolitics towards Japan and China (Moskalenko 2004: 162, Khomushku 2002: 16), but did it without developing the topic further. The general picture of controversial developments in Asia and Far East in 1941–1945 is too complicated to find an answer to the disappearance of a mysterious state, which can satisfy everybody.

In any case, on 21 August 1944 Salchak Toka informed Malenkov that the abovementioned legal procedures had been done (Moskalenko 2004: 165). All this took place in total secrecy between June–July to 1 November 1944 and with the disclosure of the events to the world in Kyzyl. These announcements appeared in print on 2 and 7 November 1944 in the newspaper “Tuvinskaja Pravda” (Rupen 1977: 150).

The secrecy was strengthened by the fact that Salchak Toka (1901–1973) was the leader of the TRRP in 1932–1944 and then until 1973 the First Secretary of the Committee of the Communist Party of the Autonomous Oblast of Tuva and then the Autonomous Socialist Republic of Tuva. His wife, Khertek Anchimaa, was the head of the Presidium of the Little Khural, the first female head of state (in the modern world) from 1940–1944. As a result, the fate of state was solved as a family affair.

Salchak Toka retained his leadership of Tuva for the rest of his life. Khertek Anchimaa (1912–2008) had to move down the power ladder in the USSR – she was Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Autonomous Oblast of Tuva in 1944–1961 and Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Socialist Republic in 1961–1972.

In the context of great power relations, the drafting of the joining petition was influenced by the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Treaty (13 April 1941) – Moscow had already fought a war with Japan on Mongolian soil and had to be prepared for any possible developments. In addition to the last successful offensive by Japanese troops (April–June 1944) in China, the unexpected visit of the US Vice President Henry Wallace to the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar in July 1944 also had an impact on the immediate start of the joining process (Sanders 2017: 49). It was also known that at the Cairo Conference in November 1943, Chiang Kai-shek explained to the US President Franklin Roosevelt China's rights to Mongolia as well as Tuva. Therefore, the appearance of the US vice-president in Mongolia was taken as an alarm bell in Moscow and the prepared endgame began.

The arrival of the US Vice-President in the centre of Asia can and must also be seen as a counterpoint to the visits to Mongolia and Tuva by Alexei Badayev, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, probably on 23 February 1943, the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Red Army. The vagueness in the timing and content of this visit are due to its high profile and complete secrecy, as Badayev, known as a drunkard, continued to make a fuss

abroad, including demanding women into his bed. The scandal, initiated either by the Mongols or the Tuvans, ended with Badayev's dismissal on 9 April 1943 (since the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR was not convened until March 1944, it is often recorded as 4 March 1944, when the decision was legally formalised). The evidence of what actually happened is confirmed by Badayev's next post – head of the trust Glavpivo (the main beer-producing trust in the USSR) in 1943–1951 (Badayev 2015, c. 248), appointment which reflects Stalin's devilish sense of humour.

It is important to note that no high-ranking figures from Moscow visited the Baltic states in 1938–1940, while Tuva was visited even during the war time. If for the delegation, headed by Badayev, Kyzyl supposedly was more a stopover during a flight to Mongolia, another and more important delegation arrived in Tuva in August 1944. Headed by Ivan Vlassov, who was acting Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR when its *de jure* Chairman Badayev already organised all-Union production of beer (see above – T.A.). At that moment Vlassov was Deputy to Nikolai Shvernik, the new Chairman of the Presidium. Formally the delegation arrived to attend the celebration of the 23rd anniversary of proclamation of the independence of Tuva, but in fact the task was to draw conclusions on Tuvan society's preparedness to join the USSR (Otroshchenko 2019: 209).

It is interesting to state that Tuvan own ministry of internal affairs presented a report that in the country there are still 1,194 people's enemies (ex-feudal lords, shamans, Russian white guards, Buddhists, kulaks etc). The number of members of the Tuvan PRP was then 6,807. (Kharunova 2009: 147). Soviet delegation returned with a lot of information, but its influence on the following – a covert and blatant degrading of Tuva into an autonomous oblast – was dubious as the final solution had already been made. It must be added, however, that one of the Kremlin's rare decisions to restore somewhat later even partial fairness remains the transformation of the Tuva AO into the Tuva ASSR by a decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR on 9 October 1961 and its approval by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 10 October 1961, one day before the 27th anniversary of the nullification of the neighbouring state's independence (Sbornik zakonov SSSR 1975: 79-80).

### **3. Double geopolitics in enlargement of the Leningrad oblast**

The implementation of the Kremlin's plan meant (pseudo legal) changing the borders of the USSR and the Russian SFSR in the East and it is interesting to add that in August 1944 the same was done quickly in the West. On August 15/23, 1944, the Petseri County of Estonia and Latvian Abrene regions were included in the newly created Pskov oblast of the USSR<sup>5</sup>, thus changing the borders of the Estonian SSR and the Latvian SSR with the Russian SFSR. This took place at a time when the Soviet army had only just begun the battles to re-occupy Estonia and Latvia.

<sup>5</sup> On August 15, 1944, Petserimaa region was included in the Leningrad oblast of the RSFSR and on August 23, 1944, it was transferred to the Pskov oblast of the RSFSR, which was formed on the same day.

The question arises – why did Stalin, who in 1940 considered it possible to annex Estonia and Latvia within the borders established by the 1920 peace treaties, rush to change them 4 years later? Estonia's border even on two occasions. The area East of Narva was incorporated into the Leningrad oblast on 24 November 1944. In the case of Petserimaa and Abrene, there were formal requests from the leaderships of the Estonian SSR and the Latvian SSR that refer to the wishes of the local population, formulated the day before, i.e. on 22 August 1944. The Presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet had also drafted a submission on the issue of surrender beyond Narva, which was sent out on 22 November, while the leadership of the Russian SFSR had prepared its appeal to the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet the day before (Dokumente 1991: 1956). As the requested paper arrived late (see Mattisen 1996: 75), the request of the Presidium of the Russian SFSR does not mention the leadership of the Estonian SSR – it only mentions the wish of the inhabitants of Narva and three other municipalities on the Eastern bank of the river and the establishment of the border between the ESSR and the RSFSR along the Narva River (Sbornik zakonov RSFSR 1946:56). This is probably the most unprecedented text in the history of the change of internal borders of the USSR. However, both in scientific research and in popular literature, the date of its final formalisation by the leadership of the Estonian SSR – 18 January 1945 – is often recorded as the date of the losing areas east from Narva. Unfortunately, this approach – the first definite date on both sides – has for a long time hindered the placement of this conquest in the correct geopolitical space. In fact, it was part of a larger great powers politics and the decisions that came under it.

As is well known, at the Tehran Conference in 1943, President Roosevelt left the Baltic states to Stalin, but he had previously repeatedly called for a referendum in these countries two years after the war, to which Stalin had given mixed responses (see Vares and Osipova 1992: 239-241, Zubkova 2008, 132-136). In any case, a certain ambiguity remained in the air. After all, the war was still going on, the end of the war was not clear enough given the composition of the Allies, and it can be argued that Stalin was quick to claim half of what Russia had lost to the Estonians in the war in 1920. Adding Ivangorod<sup>6</sup> and the rest of the Eastern bank of the Narva River as a new booty in November 1944 was prompted by the encouragement given to Stalin by the agreed business deal in Petsamo and, especially by Churchill's night-time offer in the Kremlin (even he was ready to divide spheres of influence!) and his overreach other leaders in capturing Tuva.

Given the ongoing disputes over the future of the Baltic states and the timing of the decision-making, the seizure of the hinterland of Narva from Estonia – compared to Petseri County – clearly comes across as taking place in a completely another and international geopolitical setting. More precisely, as part of the geopolitics of the USSR towards Finland. Its aim was, after all, to ensure the security of Leningrad City through military control of both shores of the Gulf of Finland. Unlike in 1940,

<sup>6</sup> Ivangorod was in 1649–1944 the suburb of the Narva City on the eastern bank of the Narva River. In 1944 it was separated from the Estonian SSR to become territory of the Russian SFSR. Town since 1954.

four years later the USSR claimed a naval base closer to Helsinki at Porkkala-Udd instead of Hanko peninsula. Bringing the outpost to the East on the Northern coast logically brought up the issue of greater Leningrad security on the Southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, and the decision was taken to capture the area behind Narva. Above, the tardiness of the leaders of the Estonian SSR was mentioned, but the timing of the decision was dictated by an agreement from the higher cabinets, where the ESSR leadership had no access. In parallel, the security of the Leningrad City was decided to strengthen also on expense of transmitting part of territory of the Karelo-Finnish SSR to the Leningrad Oblast.

The fact is that the formalisation of the territorial consequences of the Continuation War in the Leningrad Oblast and the seizure of the Narva backwater from Estonia took place on the same date – 24 November 1944. There are two different rulings of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. One is entitled “On the inclusion of settlements on the right bank of the Narva River in the Leningrad Oblast”, the other “On the inclusion of Vyborg and Keksgolm towns, and Vyborg, Keksgolm and Yashino districts on the Karelian Isthmus in the Leningrad Oblast.” Or exactly the same titles as on the two petitions by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of RSFSR from 21 November. The text of the latter petition explains the change “with territorial closeness and economic links of this areas with Leningrad City” and that “they are excluded from the Karelo-Finnish SSR” (*Sbornik zakonov RSFSR* 1946: 57).

The simultaneous expansion of the Leningrad Oblast both westwards and north-eastwards took formally place within the borders of the USSR, but the starting point of the changes was still the establishment of the new state border of the USSR in March 1940. The text of this international treaty was reiterated in 1944, and this was accompanied by administrative-territorial rearrangements inside the oblast along the state border, which as such had formed part of the geopolitical space of the peace treaties from the outset. At one point, this space was extended to the area beyond Narva, the capture of which can be considered a unilateral addition to the international and geopolitical peace agreement. While the seizure of Petseri County remained/remains a domestic geopolitical (the new oblast centre was moved away from the border) move of the Kremlin.

The fact that Karelo-Finland and Estonia had to cede their territories to the Russian SFSR at once and overnight was clearly great politics, where the smaller, in this case the union republics had to swallow the handshake (Alatalu 2024: 1101-1103).

It is hard to suppose that the capture of Narva was still planned on 19 September 1944. It was a decision following the offer of percentages and the capture of Tuva. It is logical to assume that the addition of Ivangorod to what had been taken from Finland under the armistice agreement was largely the idea of the Leningrad party leader and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Andrei Zhdanov, who as late as 1940 was in charge of the occupation and annexation of the Baltic states in Tallinn and Moscow, and who now became the prime mover of developments in Finland and its neighbourhood.

Otto Kuusinen (1881–1964), the former head of the puppet government of the Finnish Democratic People's Republic (1939–1940) and the then head of the Karelo-Finnish SSR (1940–1956), who was trusted by Stalin as a Comintern theoretician, probably also had a say. It turned out that Kuusinen was a political survivor. The Operation Finnish Democratic Republic was a total failure, the Karelo-Finnish SSR lost an important part of its territory, but Kuusinen remained in the leadership of the USSR for the rest of his life. The more patronising text on the Estonian SSR may therefore have been intended as a kind of reassurance to the Karelo-Finnish strongman. Unfortunately, the author has no concrete information on the role of Zhdanov and Kuusinen in the decisions of 24 November 1944.

As noted above, what had been done to Tuva was public by then. Stalin's message to Churchill can therefore be understood as follows: We'll divide the other countries between us, but I'll take some extra! Blatantly, memorably, if one considers the division of the city on the two banks of river into two – an unprecedented move in the light of all the border changes during the World War. This kind of bluster must have caught the eye of London, with whom the Kremlin had a special score to settle over the latter's involvement in the Estonian War of Independence in 1918–1919. In Tehran, Stalin lied to President Roosevelt that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania did not have autonomy in Russia before the revolution (see Zubkova 2008: 134) – in fact, Estonia did get it in April 1917 – a feat that did not go down well with the Bolsheviks and also gave them grounds for punishing the Estonians afterwards.

Other possible motives for the seizure of the Narva hinterland include the desire to erase from the memory of the people(s) the first (in history of all Russian areas) referendum in Narva and the Narva hinterland, which took place on 10 December 1917 after the Bolshevik seizure of power, and which was carried out by local (Red) Estonians. As a result – 7355 people for and 2537 against – the region was included in the Estonian governorate (Davõdov 2008). In November 1944, a handful of individuals annulled this democratic decision, moreover by dividing the city of Narva between the two union republics. It is possible that the double, or post-, extra-occupation of Estonia – which could not have gone unnoticed – may have had something to do with the over-activity of ESSR leaders within the Soviet power apparatus. There have always been rules of the game, and if we look for a reason why Moscow clearly delayed confirming Hans Kruus as Foreign Minister of the ESSR in 1944, it was probably the proposal made a year earlier to appoint him Deputy Foreign Minister of the USSR (Tannberg 2011).

In Moscow, you must know what to expect and know what and whom to tell.

It is also necessary to consider the Kremlin's general distrust for the people on the border areas. The territory of the Republic of Estonia behind Narva River (375 km<sup>2</sup>) was part of the historical area of Ingria where aside Estonians and Russians lived a small Ingrian Finns population. In 1941 all Ingria was turned into theatre of war when the front reached Leningrad and its long siege started. Under the German military occupation rule 18,000 Ingrian Finns managed to resettle in mainland Estonia in 1942. With Berlin's consent, they and a total of 63,000 Ingrian Finns were evacuated to Finland through Estonia in 1943–1944. The Armistice agreement



(its Article 10) obliged Finland to send them back to „the homeland” in 1944–1945. After the new occupation of mainland Estonia (October 1944), Moscow obtained a lot of information about Estonians and Finns reciprocal help under occupation rule in war time. It was decided to prevent development of such relations in the future and therefore the returning Finns (57,000 in total) (Noormets 2001, 40–41) were placed under the control of the Russians Leningrad oblast’s authorities.

This is the right place to point out another little-told fact, such as the mentioned percentages pact and the single signature on the armistice agreement by Zhdanov on behalf of the two allies and the fate of Ingrian Finns (the majority was deported to Siberia). Namely, why did the Kremlin not attempt to take territory from the third Baltic state of Lithuania in 1944? In 1939–1940 Lithuania had lost and gained it.

However, in August–October 1944, the US, the United Kingdom, China and the URSS held a conference in Dumbarton Oaks on the creation of the United Nations, at which Moscow tried to secure for itself in addition initially 15 votes, i.e. a seat for all its union’s republics. At one moment, it was agreed that due to their contribution and sufferings in the war only the Ukrainian SSR, the Belorussian SSR and the Lithuanian SSR would become members of the United Nations (Churchill 1971: 357). It was not until February 1945 that the decision was taken to limit membership to the first two (Churchill 1971: 360). Today, 80 years later, the juxtaposition of Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference seems a complete misunderstanding. But then Stalin’s proposals had more weight in the space of the former Czarist empire.

#### **4. Estonian communists kept an eye on Mongolia, Tuva on Baltics and Karelo-Finland?**

Vyacheslav Molotov, head of government of the USSR (1930–1941) and foreign minister (1939–1949, 1953–1956), mentioned in September 1939, when presenting an ultimatum to the Estonian foreign minister Karl Selter, that the Soviet troops present in Mongolia do not threaten the independence of this country. Such a comparison gave rise to thoughts, which the Estonian minister immediately conveyed to the US ambassador in Estonia and Latvia (Baaside lepingust: 52). It is also known that the so-called June-communists of Estonia discussed obtaining a similar status of Mongolian dependency from Moscow (Köörna 1990: 127). Hans Kruus, the deputy prime minister and the People’s Commissar and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ESSR (1940–1941, 1944–1950), is remembered by many as a fighter for the ‘Mongolian Way’ (Arumäe 1991: 1384–1385). This possibility was supported by the ‘elections’ of the Riigikogu held on 14–15 July 1940 as the election platform of the Union of the Working People of Estonia had declared: “/.../ in the field of foreign policy: friendship between the peoples of Estonia and the Soviet Union and close alliance between the Republic of Estonia and the Soviet Union” (Köörna 1990: 135). Undoubtedly it underlined the relations between two different countries. As for Tuva, Mongolia’s neighbour, the Comintern, that was preparing for



a world revolution, was aware of what was happening in the latter, as its handiwork was the above-mentioned April 1941 request for Tuva to join the USSR. It is also interesting that in April 1941, the communists of Slovakia – the country that Hitler created on the ruins of Czechoslovakia – received instructions from the Comintern to “prepare to repeat the experience of the Baltic comrades” (Rupnik 1989: 90-91, Alatalu 2000). In other words – Stalin also conspired against Hitler?

It is certainly interesting to know that the developments in 1939–1940 in the Baltic republics and Finland were carefully followed also in Tuva. Even more – Tuva and Mongolia recognized the puppet state of the Democratic Republic of Finland (1.12.1939–12.03.1940) or the Terijoki government, created to conduct the war and conquer the Republic of Finland by Moscow (Lopukhovskiy and Kavalerchik 2010: 386). At the end of the Winter War the ‘new’ Karelo-Finnish SSR was formed on the base of merging of the puppet state and of the Karelo-Finnish ASSR (1923–1940 and 1956–1990), which was already part of the USSR. (Today it is the Republic of Karelia and part of the Russian Federation.) According to documents Salchak Toka discussed with his assistants in the international department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party in Moscow at the end of 1941 the question of whether to join the USSR as a union or autonomous socialist republic or as an autonomous region. Toka had signed the document with the first option. Based on his own later testimony, the political office of the Central Committee of the All-Union C(b)P had abandoned the first two because the name would then have the word socialist, but it was difficult to consider Tuva as such due to the absence of the proletariat. However, Stalin himself ensured the Tuva Autonomous Oblast’s direct subordination to Moscow – all other autonomous oblasts at the time were part of the Union Republics or Krai – due to its distance from large centres (a trip to the centre of the nearest Krasnoyarski Krai required a week at the time) (Baiyr-ool 2012). According to Sholban Kara-ool, who was Putin’s choice as the head of state of Tuva (2007–2021), due to direct subordination after 1961 it allowed more free decision-making and management. (Gosudarstvennyi doklad: 2014), a statement that in a way explains also the initial success of the People’s Front there during the years of the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

Less control from above also meant, unfortunately, the long-term stay in power of the local Stalin – Salchak Toka, who was elected a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU only in 1971.<sup>7</sup> Majority of Tuvan and Russian historians consider him as the main promoter of the idea of Tuva joining to USSR, but all his actions – what and when – depended on the orders of his master – Joseph Stalin (see Otroshchenko 2017: 42, Kharunova 2011: 51).

Let us also note that in 1944 a 16-member delegation was sent to Moscow, of which only three made it to the sitting of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of

<sup>7</sup> During Stalin’s time in 1952, at the XVIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Party, Toka was elected as a candidate member of the Central Committee. Known to be responsible for the 1930s repression in Tuva, the Kremlin, after exposing Stalin’s cult of personality, avoided to elect Toka to the CPSU Central Committee on three occasions, but he was allowed to continue to govern. In 1971, Toka’s ‘sufferings’ – he was also a laureate of Stalin’s literary prize (1951) – were even double compensated being proclaimed Hero of Socialist Labour.

the USSR: Toka, Prime and Foreign Minister Saryg-Donggak Chimba, and Oorzhak Lopsanchap, a cattle breeder and head of one of the local khural. The dossier with their biographies and entry permit was labelled Top Secret (Oyun 2012). In other words, those who took Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian statehood away and brought it to the Kremlin in August 1940 were clearly treated better.

To get a complete picture of the extent of Stalin's geopolitical thinking, planning and smooth transitions, it should be noted that immediately after the end of the war in the Far East on September 2, 1945, the creation of two buffer states in the Soviet zone of Iran began. On September 3, 1945, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party leading the process was formed, with the help of which a separatist people's government was announced in November and the Kurdish Mehabad Republic in December. Of course, these bodies created in Northern Iran had to support Stalin's previous venture in the neighbourhood – on 7 June 1945, i.e. after the end of the war in Europe, People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov presented the Turkish ambassador with an ultimatum to hand over the territory – 26,000 km<sup>2</sup> – to the Soviet Union and establish a Soviet military base in the Straits (Tsitskin 2017: 43-53). The Kremlin's adventures in Turkey and Iran came to an end by March 1946, and the USSR had according to the agreement of 29 January 1942<sup>8</sup>, to withdraw its troops from Iran. Stalin's quick response to this retreat was the declaration of the Königsberg Special Military District on 4 July 1946 as the Königsberg Region belonging to the USSR. A few months later, it was renamed Kaliningrad Oblast.

Heads of state and government who held border talks with Stalin have noted in their memoirs that he was well informed about all the topics discussed and that he thought quickly. At the same time, it is interesting to note that even in the most comprehensive overviews of how Stalin changed the state borders, the occupation of Tuva is often not mentioned, and the change of the USSR-Tuva state border is bypassed in connection with border changes elsewhere (see Wolff 2011).

As noted above, Churchill's offer of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe came as a surprise to Stalin and remained a secret for almost ten years. Stalin's great conquest of Asia, or surprise to the leaders of the other great powers, was made public about a year later, but the real reason for the shifting of the borders along the Gulf of Finland under the influence of Churchill's offer was not unravelled for decades. Mainly since Tuva, Petsamo and the hinterland behind Narva are small entities and so far apart. The reality is that those who deal with small countries do not even bother to consider that – unlike them – long distances are not a problem for the leaders of the great powers to make interconnected geopolitical moves.

For now, it is important to tune in to the fact that Russia's current President Putin is also a geopolitician as it was Stalin. It should be mentioned that in 2004–2005 or at the turning point of modern history, when the main attention was on enlargement of NATO and the European Union, the Kremlin tried (after signing of the state border agreement with Ukraine on 28 January 2003) to solve border issues simultaneously in Europe and in Asia or with Estonia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, China and Japan. Border treaties were then concluded with Estonia, Kazakhstan and China,

<sup>8</sup> Tripartite Treaty Alliance of Iran, Great Britain and USSR.

but Russia quickly recalled its signature from the treaty with Estonia, which was again a geopolitical decision (Alatalu 2013). Another feature of Stalin border policy – using the so-called satellite states on border areas as tools in international relations (abovementioned reciprocal recognition of Tuva and Teriyoki's governments), resurged when the Kremlin-backed Republic of South Ossetia on 18 June 2014 recognised the independence of the impromptu proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Eastern Ukraine. As known, the Kremlin-backed Republic of Abkhazia was forced to close its Embassy in Syria in December 2024.

### **5. Moscow allowed the Mongols to mock Molotov**

Ironically, by annexing Tuva, Stalin also gained possession of the piece of land from where the loss of territory, or the shrinking of the empire, was to take place. This was done in the days of his successor Nikita Khrushchev, but it was carried out by Vyacheslav Molotov, who had long been Stalin's right-hand man and who went down in history for the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and of the start of the Cold War.

The highlight of his second foreign ministerial term (1953–1956) was the unleashing of the Red-China card in Europe in May 1955, when the founding meeting of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation was attended by Peng Dehuai, Minister of Defence of the People's Republic of China, who made a bellicose speech (on 14 May 1955), but China did not join the Warsaw Treaty Organisation.<sup>9</sup> After being defeated in a power struggle in the Kremlin, Molotov was appointed USSR ambassador to Mongolia (1957–1960), usually seen as his exile, but actually Molotov's task was to save Moscow's position in a country where the later openly pro-China Dashiin Damba had become local party leader (1954–1958). In any case, the situation when Molotov arrived was such that Mongolia, in the resumed border talks, claimed the territory of the Soviet Union, or more precisely the territory of the Tuva AO, which belonged to it. The self-confidence of a clearly weaker neighbour is shown by the fact that Mongolia's Foreign Minister Sononym Avarzed at one point declared to Molotov that it was not 1939 but 1957. Subsequently, Khrushchev himself intervened from Moscow and Mongolia sacked the courageous minister (Sanders 2017: 191). In any case, the result was a treaty that gave away territory of the USSR, as Mongolia emerged as the winner after the border was changed in several places. It is true that instead of the hoped-for 16,000 km<sup>2</sup>, (only) 2,300 km<sup>2</sup> of

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<sup>9</sup> There is still one important point to be clarified in the creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The delegation of the USSR, headed by the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Nikolai Bulganin, also included the heads of governments of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania (from Estonia – Aleksei Müürisepp). They all were named in the final communiqué of the meeting, but only Bulganin signed it. The logical question arises – why did the Karelo-Finnish and Moldavian SSR not take part in shaping of the new confrontation in Europe? Was some other status planned for them? A mysterious exception, like some other steps in the USSR's foreign policy behaviour in 1953–1955. Let us add that the rally at the end of the meeting had three speakers – the Polish head of government, Jozef Cyrankiewicz, Bulganin and Peng Dehuai.

the territory of the Tuva AO was obtained, which Tuva considered to be its own, but which was shared under the 1932 border agreement (Sonam 1992, see also Alatalu and Strupp 2012, Sanders 2017: 896).<sup>10</sup> Only details of the content of the treaty were initially presented, the minutes of the negotiations were made public in December 1991 (Territorial'nyje pretenzii 1991). Decades later, Kremlin-trust journalist Sergei Brilyov suggested that the cession of the key piece of land was related to the fact that it was the birthplace of Yumjaagin Tsedenbal, the leader of Mongolia's ruling party (1940–1954 and 1958–1984). (Brilyov 2013). In Mongolia, however, it has been confirmed that this birthplace went to Tuva, i.e. Russia (Sanders 2017: 261).

The resolving of the Mongolian – Soviet border dispute in favour of the former was accompanied and possibly influenced by an unexpected and unprecedented move from the Kremlin itself, which was clearly intended to discredit Molotov, who was preparing to sign the border treaty. The 13th Congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party was held shortly before this ceremony. Nikolai Ignatov, the leader of the CPSU delegation and Secretary of the Central Committee, unexpectedly devoted the final part of his welcoming speech on 20 March 1958 to the CPSU's top internal problems, i.e. condemnation of anti-party activities of Malenkov, Kaganovich, Molotov and Shepilov.<sup>11</sup> The same happened then at congresses of other Communist parties, but in Mongolia Molotov himself was forced to hear it. According to the *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* newspapers, the delegates of the 13th Congress greeted this denunciation with applause (Na XIII s"jezde 1958). Of course, everyone knew that the border talks were in progress and that they had only an interim foreign minister in office due to pressure from Moscow. It is not known how much, if at all, Khrushchev's move to publicly humiliate Molotov influenced the conclusion of the border talks, but the border treaty was signed on 26 March 1958.

Mongolia and China scored another victory on 7 July 1958, when the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR was renamed the Buryat ASSR, to affirm there is only one Mongolia.<sup>12</sup> The publicly disgraced Molotov remained ambassador to Mongolia for

<sup>10</sup> The Molotov-led delegation included Saryg-Donggak Chymba, head of the Executive Committee of the Tuva AO (1944–1961), who had to accept the so-called decision made over his head. See Sonam, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> At the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU on 18 June 1957, G. Malenkov, L. Kaganovich, V. Molotov and D. Shepilov, by a vote of 7:4, dismissed Nikita Khrushchev from his post as party leader. With the support of Defence Minister Marshal G. Zhukov, Khrushchev won an extraordinary plenum of the CPSU CC on 22 June, where he emerged victorious and declared the leaders of the opposition an anti-party group. On 29 June, the four officials were dismissed and Malenkov was assigned to work in Kazakhstan, Kaganovich to the Urals, Shepilov to Kyrgyzstan and Molotov as envoy to Mongolia.

<sup>12</sup> While Tuva lies to the west of Lake Baikal, an autonomous governorate of Buryatia was proclaimed in the town of Chitaa on 25 April 1917 in the territories to the east (with Poland's and Finnish autonomies in mind). During the Russian Civil War, a Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Oblast was created in April 1921 based on the Far Eastern Republic, and in January 1922 a Mongolian-Buryat AO was established in Irkutsk. On 30 May 1923, these were merged into the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR (capital Ulan-Ude). 08.10.1990–27.03.1992, it was the Buryat Soviet Socialist Republic, then the Buryat Republic of the Russian Federation. The Kremlin's 40-year-long game with the name of the formation was part of the struggle between Russia and China for control and domination of the territory, which included Tuva, Buryatia, Mongolia.

another two years and no doubt took part in the coup in November 1958, when Damba was dismissed and Tsedenbal was reinstated as party leader. In 1974, Tsedenbal also assumed the post of head of state to play the role of local Brezhnev for the next 10 years. During his visit to Moscow in October 1976, a new border treaty was signed, which included a land swap – Mongolia received 702 km<sup>2</sup> and the USSR 120 km<sup>2</sup>, so the balance remained in Mongolia's favour. It is interesting to add that the Mongolian – Russian border was demarcated only in December 2001, with financial support from the US Department of Defence (Sanders 2017: 897).

The cession of Tuva territory to the (allegedly) pro-Chinese Mongolian leader can probably be seen as one last attempt to smooth relations between the two superpowers in the Far East by a small concession. In geopolitical terms, this long-kept secret border treaty must be seen in the light of the return of Port Arthur to China in May 1955 and Moscow's promise in the USSR-Japan Declaration of 19 November 1956 to hand over the two Kuril Islands (Habomai and Shikotan) to Japan after the peace treaty – pre-emptive detours for the sake of the main interest. In any case, Molotov's involvement in the cession of the territory of Tuva avoids diminishing the value of what was done and can be said to be an ironclad refutation of the endless assertions of Khrushchev's successor presidents, Yeltsin and Putin, that Russia has never ceded its territory to anyone. Even Molotov could do it.

## **6. The unfinished war between Germany and Tuva**

As the Second World War linked the fates of the Baltic Sea states and Tuva, it is fitting to conclude this discussion by drawing the attention of the public and politicians to an unused opportunity to connect with a nation that stood up for itself in a dire geopolitical situation. They deserve to be addressed urgently, especially in connection with the war currently being waged, which the aggressor's propaganda calls a continuation/resumption of the Second World War/Great Patriotic War on Ukrainian soil.

It may be noted that in 1941–1944, the People's Republic of Tuva was – albeit in a minor role – an ally of the Soviet Union as an auxiliary and fellow combatant in the Great Patriotic War. It could even be said that it was Tuva that opened this list of allies. The fact is that on 22 June 1941, when Hitler's Germany invaded the Soviet Union of its former comrade Stalin and the rest of the world had to choose sides, Britain was the first to become an ally of the USSR in the war. Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced it on the BBC at 11 p.m. on the same evening. The US President Franklin Roosevelt announced the same at a press conference on 23 June, the following day. In fact, a full 11 hours before Churchill's statement, the first decision to “fight with the Soviet Union against the fascist aggressor until its final victory over him” was taken by the Great Khural of the People's Republic of Tuva, which happened to be assembled in its triennial session. All 334 deputies voted in favour of the declaration, and the decision was telegraphed to Moscow. Three weeks later Tuvan authorities received a message of congratulations for the



20th anniversary of republic from Joseph Stalin himself, in which he also expressed satisfaction with Tuvans readiness to fight together with Soviet people to defeat fascism. The victory of the Soviet people will be also victory of brotherly Tuvan people. (Brilyov 2013: 590). The message was dated 8 August 1941 as the official anniversary of TPR was on 15 August. So, it was not so quick a response to Great Khural statement. Similar wording and tactics were used in the Baltic countries in June-July 1940 (see above).

In practice, this meant not only Tuva's soldiers fighting on the front line, but Tuva gave even all its gold – worth 35 million roubles at the time – to Moscow. Dry statistics confirm that the USSR received 50,000 riding horses free of charge from Tuva in 1941–1945, three squadrons of fighter planes and two tank brigades were formed with the help of financial donations from Tuva, 52,000 pairs of skis, 10,000 semi-tracks, etc. In 1944, 30,000 cows were sent to Ukraine, which had been liberated from the Germans, and from this herd the post-war restoration of the Ukrainian meat industry began (Oyun 2010).

The sudden end of Tuva's independence during the war and its transformation into an autonomous oblast, one of the hallmarks of which was the loss of its own, separate history, contributed to the fact that it was only after the turbulent period of restoration of independence when the bigger picture began to emerge and it was discovered that Tuva had entered into the war with Germany but had not ended it. In purely legal terms, only Moscow had been contacted, but no one else in Europe had recognised Tuva, which meant that there was no possibility of officially informing Berlin. At the same time, the half-way procedure in history offered an excellent opportunity to start a cooperation in which both sides are clearly interested.

The logical consequence of this presumption was that the head of the parliament (1991–1998) and Tuvan Popular Front Kaadyr-ool Bicheldey<sup>13</sup>, went with a delegation to Germany in May 1992 ('Tuvinskaja Pravda' 1992, 2.VI), but the hoped-for high-level meetings simply did not take place. Given the situation in Russia and Russian – German relations at the time, this was no surprise. However, the fascinating fact of the non-recorded war continued to catch attention, despite Moscow's repeated attempts to suppress the debate (Mollerov 2004, Brilyov 2013: 580).

Today, it is only to be regretted that Germany missed an excellent and attention-grabbing opportunity to forge multifaceted links with Tuva, which would certainly have strengthened the self-confidence of the Tuvans who were going through a period of national awakening. I would also point out that, even before the 1993 Constitution, the then leadership of Tuva had made history by concluding a cultural and customary cooperation agreement for 1993–1995 with Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of the Buddhist World Buddhist Church, who was on an official visit to Tuva. The unique agreement was signed on 22 September 1992 by the 14th Dalai Lama (and his minister Kalzant Yeshe), the President of Tuva, the pro-Moscow

<sup>13</sup> Kaadyr-ool Bicheldey (b. 1950) graduated from the State University on Mongolia. Philologist, 1975–1990 researcher in Tuvan Institute of Language and History, 1990 headed the Tuvan Popular Front, 1991–1998 Chairman of the Tuvan Supreme Soviet and of the Great Khural, 1999–2003 member of the Russian State Duma, 2003–2017 – member of the Great Khural, Director of the Humanities Institute, minister of Education, since 2017 Director of the National Museum.



Sherig-ool Oorzhak, and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Tuva and leader of the People's Front, Kaadyr-ool Bicheldey (Soglašenije... 1992). The 14th Dalai Lama has not received this level of recognition since. At the time, however, it was possible. In 1995, Tuva's politicians consulted about the country joining the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and in 2006–2010 it participated in the work of the Unrepresented Peoples Organisation (UNPO), taking part in its conferences in Estonia.

Tuva's wealth lies in its mineral resources, particularly rare metals, but access to these remains a barrier to exploitation. In 2009, a rail link with Krasnoyarsk Krai (Kuragino-Kyzyl railway, 420 km) was announced, with a possible extension through Mongolia to China. In 2011, the construction was inaugurated by Putin in person, but it was immediately halted ('after the first kilometre') and has been repeatedly postponed and reopened, citing lack of funds. It is no coincidence that after revealing President Donald Trump's plan to establish the US control over the mining of rare metals in Ukraine, Putin immediately reacted inviting the Americans to make similar investments in some regions of Russia, including Tuva (Otvety 2025).

## **7. Conclusions**

In October 1944, when the offensive of the Soviet Army had already reached Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries to raise the question about their future, the British Premier Winston Churchill arrived in Moscow with a hope to find out the relevant plans of Joseph Stalin. The attempt was too late as Stalin was already engaged in his conquests in the Baltic Sea area. Moreover, during the days Churchill was in Moscow, in total secrecy the Tuvan People's Republic was absorbed into the USSR. Unlike mergers in 1939–1940, which the Kremlin presented as result of elections and representative bodies decisions in favour of joining URSS (in conditions of de facto military occupation), in Tuva's case they did not comply with the law. The truth of what happened was made public 50 years later without a significant impact on the idea of possible restoration of sovereignty. But, thanks to this we now have a full overview about Stalin's geopolitics in different border areas from the Baltics to the Sea of Japan. New studies and discoveries on his tactics are stimulated by open indications that President Vladimir Putin's imperial foreign policy is repeating the steps of his predecessor.

P.S. It is a curious repetition of history that while in 1943–1944 volunteers from the People's Republic of Tuva fought alongside the Soviet Army and on Ukrainian soil, Putin has found allies in the war against Ukraine in terms of manpower from even further away in Asia – North Korea. They have reportedly been engaged in fighting in Kursk Oblast since October 2024.

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