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THE OCCUPATION REGIMES AND THEIR CRIMES IN THE BALTIC 1940-1991





**The fatal handshake:
Joseph Stalin, dictator of the USSR,
and Joachim von Ribbentrop,
German foreign minister,
after signing the pact of 23 August 1939**



**The leaders of the countries that triumphed in the Second World War,
Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill,
did not wish to give back to the occupied Baltic peoples their freedom**

**Their suffering
must not be forgotten**



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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE INDEPENDENT BALTIC STATES (1918–1940)

The 20th century will be recorded in history not only as a time of outstanding achievements in the sciences, literature and art, along with a rapid technical progress, but also as a century that witnessed two world wars and the collapse of empires, with corresponding changes on the world political map. The two world wars also changed the fate of the Baltic States and their peoples. As a result of World War I, when the Russian Empire collapsed, three Baltic States appeared among other new independent states on the map of Europe: the republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. They succeeded in defending their statehood in a struggle against both internal and external enemies. **In 1920, bilateral peace treaties were signed between Soviet Russia and the Baltic States. In 1921, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were recognised internationally as sovereign states and joined the League of Nations.** In terms of population, the Baltic States were small countries, with a total population of about 6.5 million.

The constitutions of the Baltic States, which were adopted soon after the attainment of independence, stated that they were democratic parliamentary republics, where the supreme power was in the hands of the people. The laws of the newly established states guaranteed extensive civil rights (equality before the law, inviolability of the person and the home, freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and the right to private

property), as well as ethnic minority rights. The Baltic States had multi-party systems. The local organisations of the Communist Party, working under the supervision of the Comintern, opposed independence and supported the incorporation of these three countries into the Soviet Union. In consequence, the Communist Party was declared illegal, and these organisations went underground. Communist Party membership in the Baltic States fell markedly in the 1930s, and the Party's social influence thereafter was insignificant.

As in other countries of Eastern Europe, parliamentary democracy in the Baltic States was supplanted by authoritarian regimes (from 1926 in Lithuania; from 1934 in Estonia and Latvia). The parliaments were dissolved or lost any real power; activities of political parties were restricted and later banned altogether; censorship was introduced and control exercised over the activities of municipal authorities, professional bodies, and social organisations. However, although these regimes were blatantly undemocratic, they were not repressive. The dictatorships established here can be described as mild ones. Moreover, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were not a threat to any of their neighbours. Quite on the contrary, they strove to consolidate their independence and security by adopting a peaceful foreign policy. Much hope was placed in the idea of creating a regional security organisation. However, no such regional union (a 'Baltic Entente') was established. An Understanding and Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1934 between Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which was purely declarative and did not envisage any kind of joint defence in case of aggression or the threat of aggression.

Under such conditions, the Baltic States were forced to manoeuvre between the two major powers threatening Europe: Nazi Germany and the

Communist USSR. There was no real promise of security, either in the bilateral non-aggression treaties concluded between the Baltic States and the Soviet Union, or in those concluded by Latvia and Estonia with Hitler's Germany. In 1939–1940, the lack of unity was very successfully exploited by both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the latter gaining control, in spring 1939, of the Klaipėda region of Lithuania.

As regards the economic development, the Baltic States were not rich countries. Agriculture constituted the main sector of the economy, and the largest part of the population were farmers. Industry began to develop more rapidly in the 1930s, when Latvia had one of the fastest-growing industrial sectors in Europe. Industry was less developed in Lithuania. On the other hand, the standard of living in the Baltic was higher than in many other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, although, of course, it lagged behind the living standard in the most developed European countries. Generally, it may be said that Estonia and Latvia, at least, were fairly developed European countries.

Independence was a stimulus for the development of education and national culture. Particular attention was given to building of a national system of education and research, and in this field considerable success was attained. The national institutions of higher education developed into the main research centres. Estonia and Latvia were the first and second, respectively, in terms of student numbers per 10,000 inhabitants. This was also a time of major achievements in national literature and art.

THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (1939-1940)

The Baltic States were drawn into the whirlpool of World War II against their own will even before the actual outbreak of war because the fate of these sovereign states was decided by secret pacts signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. For both totalitarian powers, the three countries were pawns in a new division of Europe. During World War II, the Baltic States were powerless to oppose the designs of the two dictators. Much more powerful countries, with ancient traditions of statehood and democracy, were also occupied at that time. However, only the Baltic States suffered three occupations during World War II.

The path to the outbreak of World War II was opened with the conclusion of a non-aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin on 23 August 1939. **The secret protocol attached to the pact – the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – set out the spheres of interest of the two countries in the Baltic and Eastern Europe.** As a result of this criminal agreement between Berlin and Moscow, and the Friendship and Frontier Treaty of 28 September 1939, the Baltic States were soon to be occupied, and Latvia and Estonia were to lose their traditional German minorities, which had deep historical roots and rich cultural traditions here.

Responding to an appeal from the Third Reich and fearing occupation by the USSR, in 1939-1941, more than 100,000 Baltic Germans left their homeland.

The Soviet Union strove to make maximum use of the opportunities provided by the pact. In the autumn of 1939, threatening the use of force and deploying a large army along the frontier with Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, the USSR forced the three countries to sign bilateral Mutual Assistance Pacts, known as the 'Agreements on Bases', which envisaged the establishment of **Soviet army, naval, and air force bases** in their territories.

By the spring of 1940, there were already 67,000 men stationed in these bases, almost matching in number the combined strength of the armies of all three Baltic States (about 73,000 men). However, the Soviet forces were far superior in terms of tanks, aircraft, and artillery. Most of the Soviet bases were located in the western parts of the Baltic States, and in case of a military conflict, the Baltic armed forces would have been encircled, and mobilisation would have been difficult.

Finland chose to follow a different path. It refused to bow to Soviet pressure, and did not sign an 'agreement on bases.' This refusal was followed by aggression on the part of the Soviet Union. In November 1939, the **Winter War** began, a war that ended in March 1940 with a peace treaty between the two countries. Finland lost part of its territory but managed to preserve its independence.

In May 1940, when France was occupied by Germany, and when Britain was expecting a possible German attack, the Soviet Union began preparations to occupy and annex the Baltic States. An additional force of hundreds of thousands of men was stationed along the frontiers of the three countries. The Soviet leadership did not exclude the possibility of armed resistance; thus, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs was ordered to prepare places at the camps of the Gulag to receive more than 60,000 POWs from the three Baltic States.



Soviet tanks in the streets of Riga, the capital of Latvia, 17 June 1940

Other preparations were made as well: Soviet citizens of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian background who had survived Stalin's 'Great Purge' of 1937 were mobilised so that they might play a role in the Sovietisation of the Baltic States immediately after the occupation.

THE FIRST YEAR OF SOVIET OCCUPATION (1940–1941)

For the Baltic States, occupation meant the loss of freedom, vicious persecution, trampling of the nations' pride, and rule by hostile foreign powers. The Soviet occupation meant a fateful change in the life patterns of the peoples of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, with tragic consequences not only for the countries and their societies in general, but also for each individual.

Falsely accusing the Baltic States of not fulfilling their obligations under the Mutual Assistance Pacts, the Soviet Union, on 14 June 1940, issued an ultimatum to Lithuania, followed by similar ultimatums to Latvia and Estonia on 15 June, demanding a change of government and permission for unlimited numbers of the Red Army forces to enter the Baltic States. In the face of this military threat, the Baltic States, feeling resistance to be hopeless, decided to accept the Soviet ultimatum. More than 400,000 Red Army soldiers crossed the frontier of the Baltic States and invaded the countries. Even before the occupation, the USSR organised armed provocations at the frontier. On 14 June 1940, a passenger plane flying from Tallinn to Helsinki was shot down over the Gulf of Finland. On 15 June, armed provocation attacks were made against the Masļenki frontier post on the Latvian–USSR frontier, and the Uta frontier post on the Lithuanian–USSR frontier, during the course of which several border guards and civilians were killed and several others were captured. The Soviet navy blocked the Baltic ports.

The Kremlin dispatched plenipotentiaries to the Baltic States, who had the task of coordinating the take-over of power. This post was held in Lithuania by Vladimir Dekanozov, in Latvia by Andrei Vishinsky, and in Estonia by Andrei Zhdanov. These were the real powers behind the puppet governments obedient to Moscow that were set up immediately after the occupation and were referred to hypocritically as 'People's Governments'.

These governments were formed in order to lend the annexation an outward semblance of legitimacy. Indeed, right at the beginning, the Soviet authorities were able to dupe not only people in the Baltic States, but also the international community. In June 1940, the democratic countries of Europe and the US diplomatic representatives did not object to these 'national rearrangements'. It was only after the conclusion of the annexation process that the Western countries changed their stance.

The main task of the puppet governments was to organise parliamentary elections, under the supervision of Moscow's emissaries, in such a way that only candidates nominated by the local organisations of the Communist Party and approved at the Soviet embassies would be elected. The parliaments had to change the state system and ensure that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were annexed to the Soviet Union as Soviet republics – a plan that was brought to fruition.

The true intentions of the Soviet Union in the Baltic States are shown, for example, in the order to establish a Baltic Military District, which was to include Latvia and Lithuania, an order issued already on 11 July 1940, even before the Soviet power was formally proclaimed in the occupied states.

On 14–15 July 1940, parliamentary 'elections' were held simultaneously in the three occupied countries, in an atmosphere of uncertainty and apprehension.

Only previously approved candidates were permitted to stand for election, and the voters had no freedom of choice. Moreover, the army of occupation also voted in the elections. These can be seen as the first Soviet-style 'elections': it was possible to vote only for candidates 'proposed by the Communist Party and government'. The voters suffered from intimidation during the elections, and the results were in any case falsified.

The first sessions of the parliaments 'elected' in this way also took place simultaneously in all three countries, on 21 July. **The 'People's Parliaments' declared Soviet power in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, renamed the countries 'Soviet Socialist Republics' and petitioned that their countries be permitted to join the USSR.**

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Lai dzīvo Padomju Sociālistiskā Latvija — 15. Republika Padomju Savienībā!



PSSR, Padomju Latvijas valdība un LKP pārstāvis Valdis Jozis balstoties apvieno grozījumus konstitūcijai. VMR un kreisā — Padomju Latvijas valsts prezidents vietnieks no-
 stema, priekšsēdētājs P. Krievs, LKP 2. sekretārs Z. Kņevs, priekšsēdētājs Svieta A. Jankovskis, PSSR sēdētājs V. Dzeržinskis, LKP 1. sekretārs J. Kalakšēvičs. Zāle no PSSR sē-
 dētājiem J. Sokolovs, M. Yermolovs.

Front page of a newspaper carrying the news of Latvia's incorporation into the USSR

Other decisions were also taken, aimed at accelerating the process of Sovietisation of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Sovietisation meant the abolition of institutions of the independent states and realignment of the countries' domestic policy in accordance with that of the Soviet Union. This process began immediately following the occupation and continued when the countries were re-occupied at the end of World War II.

The first step was the takeover and abolition of the administrative and governmental structures of the Baltic States. General nationalisation was to take place immediately, with no compensation: industrial and transport companies, financial institutions, housing, etc., were to be expropriated, and agrarian reform was carried out.

The armies of independent Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were gradually abolished. First, they were subjected to ideological control. For this purpose, political commissars were appointed, just like in the Red Army. The national armies were renamed 'People's Armies', and then reorganised into Territorial Rifle Corps of the Red Army. After that, 'purges' commenced. Thousands of officers serving in the former armies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were killed or arrested, deported and incarcerated in the camps of the Gulag, such as the Norillag.

In spite of the Soviet propaganda claims that the Red Army had liberated the peoples of the Baltic States from the 'yoke of capitalism', in reality, **the standard of living in all three countries fell markedly within a year.** This fall in living standards was aggravated by the introduction of the Soviet rouble, at an unfavourable rate of exchange, instead of freely convertible currencies. In order to avoid dispelling the myth of 'a life of happiness in the Soviet Union', travel to the newly annexed republics was strictly regulated. Only Red Army officers and

organisers of Sovietisation, along with their relatives, were permitted to enter the Baltic.

In August 1940, the constitutions of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were adopted. They were essentially the same as the fundamental laws of the other union republics.

Before the occupation, the local organisations of the Communist Party in the Baltic States had been very small, with little popular support. However, after the occupation, the Communist Party became the sole ruling party (all other social and political organisations were banned), and thus the party membership grew rapidly. The local branches of the Communist Party, which were accepted into the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party in October 1940, had the role of directing the Sovietisation process in the Baltic.

The rapid rate of Sovietisation in the Baltic in 1940–1941 is attested by the evident aims of the agrarian reform that was instituted. The farms established as a result of the reform were small and economically weak, and this shows that the reform was intended to pave the way for collectivisation. Aware that rural people in the Baltic were afraid of collectivisation, the authorities promised that no such process would take place in the near future. Anyone spreading ‘false rumours about the establishment of collective farms’ was threatened with persecution. Nevertheless, already in the spring of 1941, measures were taken to promote the establishment of collective farms.

Sovietisation affected not only the political and economic life in the Baltic countries, but the spheres of culture and education as well. Strict censorship was established right from the first day of the occupation. The teaching process in schools and higher education was restructured along Soviet lines. The staffs of teaching



Books intended for burning, regarded by the Soviet censorship as harmful. 1941

institutions were 'purged', getting rid of 'ideologically unreliable' teachers.

All non-governmental organisations and societies, including those of ethnic minorities, were closed down. The occupation authorities turned with particular severity against the Russian and Jewish communities in the Baltic States.

Sovietisation was accompanied by extensive political persecution, which began immediately after the occupation. The first to be persecuted were the national

elites. The first arrestees were political figures from the period of independence, officers and policemen, as well as the economic, intellectual, and cultural elite. Gradually, however, the wave of arrests spread wider, coming to affect all strata of the population.

The mechanism of mass persecution, which by that time had been fully established in the Soviet Union, was transferred to the occupied states. Persecution was an essential aspect of the totalitarian regime. As this persecution became more intense, so did the general atmosphere of dread: nobody could feel safe.



In stock-cars to Siberia. The deportation of 14 June 1941

Persecution was undertaken by the People's Commissariats of Internal Affairs (the People's Commissariats of State Security since March 1941). In the occupied Baltic States, the Soviet Criminal Code was applied as an instrument of political power, and was regarded as having retroactive force. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which was introduced in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, with its infamous Article 58, was to serve as the 'legal basis' for punishing the citizens of the Baltic republics for their political, social, and other activities before the Soviet occupation.

However, even Soviet standards of legality were frequently contravened: people were arrested without any warrant of arrest or prosecutor's assent, held imprisoned for long periods without giving any reason, and so forth. The investigation files reveal that torture, humiliation, and similar methods were widely used to extract the required admissions of guilt.

The arrestees hoped for a fair trial. However, in 1940–1941, cases against people in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were heard mainly by various military tribunals, and by **Special Councils** of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. The Special Council was an extra-judicial body where judgement was passed *in absentia*, on the basis of documents (which in most cases were fabricated). A military tribunal cannot be described as a true court, since both prosecutor and defence counsel were absent, and witnesses were called only in rare cases. The death penalty was also adjudged in this manner, and the research shows that these made up about 10–20% of the total number.

In 1940–1941, under the Soviet occupation regime, almost 7,000 people were arrested in Estonia, more than 7,300 in Latvia, and more than 6,600 in Lithuania.

Latvia



Lithuania



Victims
of the Soviet regime



Estonia

However, it was the mass deportations of 14 June 1941 that produced a real psychological shock in the Baltic countries. The deportation took place simultaneously in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, in accordance with a decree passed on 14 May 1941 by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party and the Soviet of People's Commissars of the USSR. The families who were on the list of deportees were woken at night by armed Red Army soldiers, and were given an hour to pack their belongings. They were allowed to take with them only as much as they could carry. Nobody knew where they would be taken. All the property of the deportees was confiscated. They were brought to the railway station and put into stock-cars, which were filled to overflowing. Right there at the station, the heads of the families were separated from their dependants and sent to the Gulag camps, where they were later accused, interrogated once or a few times, and sentenced. Most of them died in the camps from starvation and diseases. A great many were also sentenced to death and executed. Their families were sent as exiles to distant parts of the USSR. **Almost 18,000 people were deported from Lithuania, more than 15,000 from Latvia and 10,000 from Estonia.** The majority of deportees were women, elderly people, and children up to the age of 16. There were infants among them, too. Many died on the way, and the bodies of infants were simply thrown out of the train by the guards. It has been calculated that of the deportees from Lithuania, only 40% ever returned. Only one tenth of the people sent to the Gulag camps returned.

Persecution diminished after the mass deportation, but it gained force again after war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. In Latvia and Lithuania, hundreds of civilians

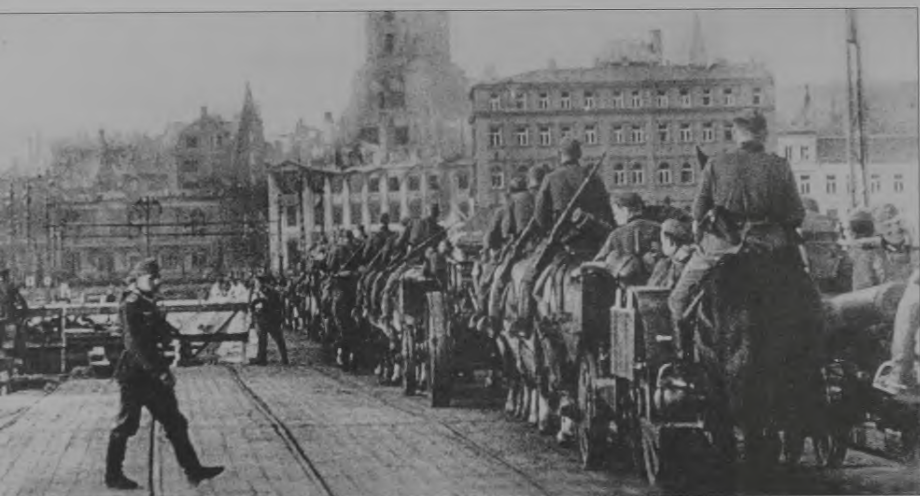
were shot simply on the grounds of suspicion. Arrests were also made by the Red Army units hastily retreating through these countries.

Estonia was the only one of the territories occupied by the USSR in 1939–1940 that Nazi Germany had not yet invaded by early July 1941, and men conscripted into the Red Army (more than 30,000) were forcibly evacuated to the USSR. In the period from June to October 1941, the retreating Red Army units and units of the People's Commissariat of the Interior, between them, killed more than 2,000 civilians in Estonia.

The mass deportation of 14 June 1941 was a catalyst for the emergence of a resistance movement, which rapidly grew in strength. Under the conditions of Soviet terror in the Baltic countries, the development of a large-scale resistance movement – particularly armed resistance, was difficult. Only in Lithuania was there an armed underground organisation. Young people were in fact the most active ones: there were many anti-Soviet groups among students and pupils, but for the most part, they were soon uncovered and their members persecuted.



Examples of the Soviet and Nazi propaganda



The forces of Nazi Germany enter Riga. 29 June 1941



THE OCCUPATION REGIME OF NAZI GERMANY (1941–1944/45)

When Nazi Germany occupied the Baltic States, the propaganda claim was made that these countries had at last been set free after ‘the year of horror under the Bolshevik yoke’.

The arrival of the German forces was indeed greeted with some hope, since the immediate wish was to re-establish independence. During the first days of the war between the USSR and Germany, an armed struggle began against the Soviet regime in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In Lithuania, this struggle developed into a large-scale uprising: the insurgents even succeeded in taking over power in Kaunas, Vilnius, and other major centres, and set up a Provisional Government.

However, the hope for the restoration of independence turned out to be completely unfounded.

The Third Reich had plans of its own for the Baltic States. In the course of the war, these plans changed to some degree, in accordance with the changing situation on the Eastern Front, but the general idea remained the same. The three countries were to be annexed to Greater Germany, but, for the time being, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, along with Belarus, were brought together under the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, with Riga as the administrative centre.

Like Soviet propaganda, Nazi propaganda strove to erase from popular memory all that was connected with the years of independence. In fact, the new regime

continued the economic policy of the previous one. Thus, the nationalisation implemented by the Soviets was not revoked, and companies were now transferred to the ownership of monopolistic German enterprises. The farmers, too, continued to be regarded only as users, not owners, of their land. Partial denationalisation was undertaken only in 1943–1944.

Nazi Germany tried to exploit to the maximum the economic and human resources of the conquered territories. Compulsory labour was introduced, and at the end of the war tens of thousands of civilians were forcibly taken to Germany, where they had to undertake physically demanding labour.

Under the Nazi German occupation, crimes against humanity were perpetrated in the territory of the Baltic States, crimes that also involved collaborators from among the local population.



Lithuania



Latvia

Extermination of the Jews



Kaunas (Lithuania)



Riga (Latvia)

Jews imprisoned in the ghetto

The most horrible of these crimes was the total genocide against the Jews. Thus, the Baltic, too, experienced the **Holocaust**. In several cities of Lithuania and Latvia, the urban Jewish population was first driven into ghettos, after which practically all of them were killed. Lithuania lost more than 200,000 Jews, between 65,000 and 70,000 were exterminated in Latvia, and 1000 were killed in Estonia.

- Tens of thousands of Jews were also brought for extermination to the occupied Baltic States from Germany and from other Nazi-occupied countries of Europe.

Concentration camps were also set up in the three Baltic countries. The largest of these were the Salaspils camp (in Latvia, not far from Riga) and the complex of about twenty camps at Vaivara (Estonia), where the prisoners (mainly Jews and Soviet POWs) were used as slave labour. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet POWs died in the camps. It is impossible to say how many of these prisoners perished in the camps from inhuman treatment and starvation, and how many were murdered.

A grave crime with far-reaching consequences for the people of Latvia and Estonia was the formation of the army legions. When the Third Reich began to fare badly in the war on the Eastern Front, it felt an increasing need for 'cannon fodder'. Thus, the decision was taken to form volunteer Waffen SS legions in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. These legions were designated as SS units, since they were to be recruited on a voluntary basis: under international law, the population of an occupied country was not to be drafted into an army of occupation. However, the legions were voluntary by name only. Since there were not enough volunteers, several mobilisations were carried out. Thus, in Latvia, only about 15 per cent of the legionnaires were volunteers.

The formation of legions succeeded only in Latvia and Estonia. In Lithuania, in contrast, with the support of the population, the anti-Nazi national underground movement urged a boycott of the mobilisation. Although the opponents of mobilisation were persecuted, the outcome was that the Nazis never managed to form a Lithuanian legion. In this way, the Lithuanian people avoided heavy losses at the front, while Latvia lost about 50,000 men and Estonia lost 10,000 on the Eastern Front.

Though initially very weak, the **resistance movement to the Nazi German occupation grew from year to year**. This was a consequence of the policies followed by the occupying authorities, including conscription into the army. National resistance movements, aiming at the re-establishment of democratic systems, emerged and developed in the Baltic countries. In 1943, the Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania was established for the purpose of coordinating the resistance movement, while in Latvia the Latvian Central Council began to unite various opposition forces. In Estonia, the National Committee of the Republic of Estonia began its activities in 1944. These organisations were engaged in non-violent resistance, disseminating leaflets and underground publications in which they urged the people not to support the occupation regime and to prepare for the restoration of independence after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The Communist resistance movement, supported by the Soviet Union, was initially very weak in the Baltic countries, since it lacked popular support. People remembered the persecutions under the Soviet regime in 1940–1941. The sole aim of the Communist underground and the Red Partisans was to re-establish the Soviet occupation after the victory over Nazi Germany, and the absolute majority of people in the Baltic countries found this aim unacceptable. In consequence,

the Communist resistance was entirely dependent on Soviet support. The Communist underground movement and partisans gathered information and undertook acts of sabotage and terror, the Nazi regime reacting with punitive expeditions, burning villages, and shooting local people suspected of supporting the partisans.

Most people in the Baltic dreaded the return of the Red Army: there was good reason to fear that persecutions would recommence under the Soviets. In the final phase of the war, in order to save their own lives and those of their loved ones, tens of thousands of Baltic people chose to leave their homeland for the West. **During the World War, an unprecedented number of political refugees fled from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.** Hundreds of thousands of people fled to the West, and this was yet another blow to the peoples of the Baltic States, in addition to the immense losses suffered during the war.



Baltic refugees (Lithuania). 1944

THE SECOND SOVIET OCCUPATION (1944/45–1991)

The Allied victory in World War II meant liberation for the peoples whose countries had been occupied by Nazi Germany. On the other hand, for the Baltic States, the end of the war meant a second occupation by the Soviet Union. Great Britain and the USA did not oppose this act perpetrated by their ally. At the end of the war, the fate of the Baltic States was once again decided by secret pacts, this time concluded between the powers that had joined forces in World War II. The incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR was tacitly recognised in agreements signed by the USA, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union at the summit meetings in Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam.

It was during the Cold War that the Baltic issue became topical internationally. Thus, from the early 1950s, the USA regularly began to remind the world about the occupation of the Baltic, and this influenced the stance of other Western countries.

The Allied victory in World War II clearly strengthened the international position of the Soviet Union and influenced internal processes in the country, but the essence of the regime remained the same. Just as it had been totalitarian before the war, the USSR remained a totalitarian country, where power was based on terror against the population and total control of all spheres of social life.

The second Soviet occupation continued until 1991, when Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia regained their independence.

The authorities in Moscow were well aware that most of the population of the Baltic States dreaded the return of the Red Army; therefore one of their priorities was not to permit a power vacuum during which the people might re-establish institutions of self-government. Accordingly, in the spring and summer of 1944, in Moscow the Central Committees of the Soviets of People's Commissars and the Communist Parties of the Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian SSR were girded into action. They formed '**operational groups**' the task of which was to obtain local power as soon as the Red Army arrived.

In accordance with Soviet propaganda claims, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were 'Soviet republics liberated from the Nazis', but during the war and in the early post-war years, Red Army soldiers and officers conducted themselves exactly as they did in the occupied enemy territories: there were many cases of robbery, violence, and rape, but the guilty persons were rarely punished.

In contrast to the situation in 1940, armed resistance to the Soviet regime began in the Baltic States immediately after the arrival of the Red Army.

This was the national partisan movement. The fighters in this struggle were popularly known as 'brothers of the forest'. The armed struggle was the fiercest in Lithuania. Resistance to the Soviet regime constituted a mass movement, particularly, in the first years after the war, when national partisans in the Baltic numbered some 40,000–50,000. This kind of large-scale resistance movement could never have existed without the support of the local population.

In their struggle against the national partisans, the Soviet authorities deployed not only armed state security units and 'extermination battalions' specially formed up for this purpose from among the local population,



**Bodies of national resistance fighters
displayed for identification and intimidation**

but even regular army units. Armed resistance was weakened by mass deportations, but continued up to the mid-1950s.

The national partisans had a firm belief that there was bound to be a war between the powers that had been allied in World War II, and that their countries would become free. Such hopes were bolstered by Western radio broadcasts and by the virulent anti-Western propaganda spread by the Soviets. However, the expected help from the West never came. The resistance fighters in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia could rely only on each other's help and on the support of the local population.

There was non-violent and passive resistance, too. However, for fear of persecution, few people in the 1960s and 1970s dared consciously and openly to oppose

the existing regime. Such courageous people were particularly among the youth. Thus, between 1954 and 1972, there were up to 205 underground organisations and groups in Lithuania, with more than a thousand members. At the same time, it must be said that the USSR's Committee for State Security (KGB) was successful in stifling almost all free expression.

At the close of World War II, Latvia and Estonia suffered territorial losses. Soviet propaganda claimed quests from the local population. This was simply untrue, since the decisions to add parts of Estonia (2330 km²) and Latvia (1202 km²) to the Russian Federation were taken without giving people any chance to voice their opinion. Estonians and Latvians were deported to their respective countries from the areas annexed to Russia.

Along with the Red Army units and operational groups, the USSR People's Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD) sent special units into the territory of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, the task of which was to screen the local population. In the Soviet Union, anyone who had lived in a Nazi-occupied area was open to suspicion of having collaborated with the Nazis, and all suspects were sent to special '**screening camps**'. Several such camps were established in the Baltic. Those found guilty of crimes against the Soviet state were tried and sent to the Gulag camps.

In addition to the screening camps, there were also about 20 camps for German POWs, holding tens of thousands of prisoners. Many of them perished from ill-treatment and diseases. The true scale of exploitation of German POWs as a labour force was one of the most carefully guarded secrets in the Soviet Union.

Throughout the period of Soviet occupation, the Baltic served as a kind of military base for the USSR, since it concentrated its most powerful forces along



A column in an official march in Riga (Latvia), watched by Soviet soldiers

the western border. The Baltic Military District, first established in 1940, was re-established after World War II. Lithuania was the most highly militarised one, while the command, supply, and training centre was in Latvia. Three Soviet military colleges were located there.

The Baltic countries swarmed with a great variety of military units. Apart from the land forces, there were units of the Baltic Fleet, frontier guards, strategic aviation, missile bases, and an extensive network of army garrisons. Large areas were put at the disposal of the army, used for stationing military units and establishing training ranges and technical repair works. Large areas along the coast were designated restricted areas,

accessible only with special permission. Thus, agricultural land, as well as the ports serving as military bases, was excluded from economic use, something that brought great losses to the economy in the Baltic States.

The aim of the leadership in Moscow was to integrate the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian SSR as quickly as possible into its political, administrative, and economic structure. In the first years after World War II, some minor differences still existed between the Baltic and the other republics of the USSR. Thus, in the Baltic, the private sector was permitted a limited existence and there were no collective farms yet. However, by 1950, all of these differences had been eliminated.

In the course of the 20th century, the rural population of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had experienced several land reforms. However, it was collectivisation, with the change in the form of ownership and production, that dealt the harshest blow to this traditional economic activity of the Baltic peoples. Collectivisation led to irreversible social and demographic changes.

The Soviet authorities failed in all their efforts to set up collective farms on a voluntary basis. The turning-point came in 1947, when the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party and the Council of Ministers of the USSR passed a decision on the implementation of collectivisation in the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian SSRs. Although collectivisation was ostensibly a completely voluntary process, in reality the collective farms were then created forcibly.

In spite of the extensive propaganda campaign and significant tax incentives for collective farm members, only a very small number of peasant farmsteads joined together to form collective farms. Rural people even preferred moving to the towns, rather than join the



Baltic deportees remember their fellows who had died, at Igarka Cemetery (Siberia). 1956

collectives. It was then that the Soviet regime applied its tried and tested methods of force.

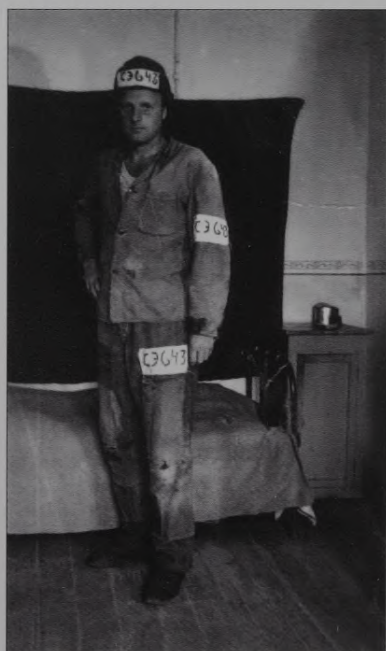
In March 1949, a second mass deportation took place simultaneously in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

This carefully planned and prepared operation was known in the secret documents of the USSR Ministry of State Security as the 'Coastal Surge'. Almost 100,000 people were sent away to distant parts of Siberia. Two thirds of the deportees were women and children up to the age of 16. The aim of the deportation was to force the farmers to join the collective farms 'voluntarily', and to weaken the national partisan movement, which relied on the support from the local population. Persecutions were particularly extensive in Lithuania. Here, mass deportation was undertaken not only in 1949, but already in 1948, when almost 44,000 people were deported, and again in 1951, when more than 21,000 were sent away. Between May 1945 and 1952, over 110,000 people were deported from Lithuania.

According to the KGB's investigation files, up to 20–25 per cent of the people deported from the Baltic died in exile or in the Gulag camps.

The Soviet regime achieved its aims through methods of terror. Soon after the 1949 deportation, *Cīņa*, the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, wrote hypocritically: “Now the farmers are already looking up to the collective farms as something very dear to them.” Soon, general collectivisation was complete in the Baltic. On the other hand, the pre-war level of agricultural production was regained only in the early 1960s.

The mass deportation of March 1949 was the most serious criminal act by the Communist regime in the Baltic. Although the mass political persecutions that had re-commenced immediately after the second Soviet occupation came to an end after the death of Stalin in



Lithuanian Balys Galdikas imprisoned in the camp of Jezkazgan (Kazakhstan). 1954



An anti-Soviet rally in Kaunas (Lithuania). 1972

1953, repression continued in the years that followed, and people continued to be arrested on political grounds. Under the Soviet regime, nobody could feel secure and safe from the institutions of repression. Altogether, persecutions under the Soviets (particularly the mass deportations of 1941 and 1949) affected almost every family in the Baltic: a total of more than 500,000 people altogether suffered from persecution.

Soviet propaganda never ceased to clamour about the pace of industrial growth, which was truly immense. But rapid development of this sector was not actually in the interests of Latvia, Estonia, or Lithuania, and did not serve to improve the population's welfare, but was instead subordinated to the interests of the central authorities in the Soviet Union. Moreover, in the Baltic, 'socialist industrialisation' went hand in hand with **excessive immigration from other Soviet republics and rapid changes in the ethnic composition of the popula-**

tion. The slogan of 'proletarian internationalism' was in reality a front for implementing Russification. The Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian languages were gradually eliminated from many spheres of life.

It was Latvia that saw the most dramatic changes in ethnic composition, the result of excessive migration during the years of Soviet occupation. After World War II, the titular nation made up 94 per cent of the population in Estonia, 83 per cent in Latvia, and 80 per cent in Lithuania. By 1989, these figures had fallen to 61, 52, and 79 per cent, respectively. In Lithuania, because of the mass persecutions under the Soviets, the pre-war population level was reached again only in the late 1960s.

Back in the 1930s, Stalin had advanced the theory that different national cultures (and languages) would merge into 'one common socialist culture (and one common language) in the period when socialism triumphs throughout the world'. However, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union did not wait for the victory of socialism throughout the world before striving to implement the leader's ideas. **In the 1970s, the Party proclaimed that a new community of people had emerged in the Soviet Union – the Soviet people.** And it was Russian that had to become the language of this new Soviet people. In practice, it meant that people in the Baltic had to know Russian (at school, considerable attention was given to teaching the Russian language), while at the same time newcomers from other regions could do without knowledge of the local language, be it Latvian, Estonian, or Lithuanian, even though the local language was taught in the Russian schools.

Such a disparaging attitude towards language, national history, culture and tradition was the cause of a great deal of dissatisfaction among the Baltic peoples. These questions were the first to be raised to the fore-



Carrying portraits of the members of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU in an official march in Vilnius (Lithuania). 1980

front of discussion in the late 1980s, at the time of the 'Singing Revolution'.

Religion also experienced a revival at that time. Under the Soviet occupation, in its strivings to erase the national identity from the consciousness of the Baltic peoples, the regime had sought to blot out everything that reminded them of belonging to the Christian world. The policy on **religious matters** was aimed at a gradual eradication of religious organisations, the clergy, and the ideological role of religion. The Soviet Union followed a policy of atheism: Soviet propaganda was directed against religious believers, church property was confiscated, and many churches and monasteries were closed.

THE 'SINGING REVOLUTIONS' (1987-1991)

The term 'Singing Revolution' refers to the national liberation movement in the Baltic States in the years 1987 to 1991, when the peoples of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia joined forces in their efforts to break free of the Soviet Union and regain their independence and sovereignty. The term arose because the Baltic peoples have a choral singing tradition, more than a century old, and at the beginning of the so-called *Atmoda* (Awakening), during mass events people sang the songs that had been forbidden at the time of occupation.

In beginning a policy of democratisation, restructuring, and openness, Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, was aiming to preserve the Soviet Union, but actually it meant the beginning of the collapse of the totalitarian empire, and this opened the way for the Baltic States to regain their independence. Also very important was the increasing support for the freedom aspirations of the Baltic peoples voiced by the Western democracies, particularly the USA. Throughout the years of the Soviet occupation, the political refugees from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had worked together to remind the world that their countries were under occupation. To this end, a great number of joint activities were organised, such as the Baltic Tribunal in Copenhagen in 1985.



Baltic States freedom demonstration in Copenhagen (Denmark). 1985

Initially, the popular movement was united by demands to resolve ecological problems and halt various major building projects that would mean a new influx of migrant workers or would bring irreparable damage to the environment. At the same time, the progressive section of the Moscow press was beginning to uncover the truth about the crimes of Stalinism, and these efforts to reveal the true picture of recent history also reached the Baltic. Already on 14 June 1987, people gathered at the Freedom Monument in Riga to commemorate the victims of the deportation of 14 June 1941. On 23 August of the same year, the anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, people gathered in the capitals of all three Baltic republics. Some 10,000 people rallied in Riga, up to 5000 in Tallinn, and about 1000 in Vilnius. The demonstrations in Riga were broken up by force. However, from this time onwards, in

spite of persecution and propaganda attacks from the Soviet authorities, people in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia began to hold mass commemoration events on the anniversaries of historical events that had been concealed or deliberately misrepresented by the occupation regime.

This popular movement grew from strength to strength, and led to a rift between hardliners and reformers in the privileged *nomenclatura* of the Communist Party of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and among ordinary Party members, who were very well aware that the movement enjoyed the support of the great majority of Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians.

The popular initiative was taken over by the advocates of reform in the Communist Party and by creative organisations in the Baltic States. In the spring and summer of 1988, creative people from all spheres came together for joint sessions, where ruthless criticism was expressed against the local Communist Party organisations for their subservience to Moscow's dictate. The demand was voiced for national interests to be taken into account, and open discussion of the painful questions of history began.

In the Baltic States, the Popular Fronts came into being. These were the largest-ever popular movements in the history of the Baltic countries. Initially, they pledged support for Gorbachev's ideas of democratisation and restructuring. Gradually, the idea of national independence entered the discussion, and such aspirations were only strengthened by the obstinate efforts on the part of the conservative section of the Soviet Union's ruling elite and by orthodox Communists to preserve the Soviet Union and retain their privileges and ruling status at any cost. In order to oppose the strivings for freedom of the Baltic peoples, 'Workers' International Fronts' were

set up, mainly bringing together representatives of the Russian-speaking population.

Especially important for strengthening national pride and consciousness was the official recognition of national symbols that had hitherto been forbidden. Thus, at the end of the 1980s, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia regained their national symbols – flags, anthems, and coats of arms.

In 1989, the popular movements in the Baltic demanded complete political and economic independence, and in the spring of 1990, Popular Front candidates won a great majority of seats in the elections to the Supreme Soviets of the union republics. In response to the attempted restoration of independence, in March 1990, Moscow began an economic blockade of Lithuania. The Moscow media began an active propaganda war, presenting a false and distorted picture of events in the Baltic. In the spring of 1990, the Supreme Soviets of the Baltic States passed Independence Declarations.

The situation became tense at the end of 1990, and in January 1991, Soviet army units, supported by tanks, attacked the Vilnius TV centre, which were defended by independence supporters. Fourteen civilians died in the attack. Blood was shed in Riga, too. These events brought an intense reaction around the world. In this situation, Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, came to Tallinn to sign bilateral agreements with Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, thus coming out in support of the Baltic States' strivings for independence.

The Baltic peoples regained true independence in August 1991, after a failed coup attempt in Moscow, and this was followed by international recognition of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATION

For 50 years, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were robbed of the opportunity to determine their own destiny, and the powers that occupied them used terror to accomplish their aims. Nazi Germany strove to impose on the Baltic peoples an ideology based on a criminal racial theory, seeking to pit one people against another. The Soviet regime, preaching friendship among peoples, aimed at creating a single 'Soviet people'. In fact, this slogan served to hide the crimes perpetrated both by the Nazi and the Soviet regime. Thus, the anti-Semitism practised at an official level in the Soviet Union actually prevented studies of the Holocaust.

The regimes of occupation were served by an enormous propaganda apparatus and all-pervading censorship. They were willing to resort to any means they could to stamp out activities directed against them or questioning their aims.

In spite of all these efforts, the regimes of occupation were unable to entirely crush the peoples of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Throughout these 50 years, the Baltic peoples preserved the memory of the independence they had lost, and when, in the late 1980s, a suitable opportunity arose, they voiced a clear demand for the restoration of independence.

It was only after independence was regained in 1991 that the Baltic peoples had the opportunity to learn the true scale of the harm done by the occupation.

The Nazi and Soviet regimes of occupation had tragic consequences in all spheres of life for the peoples of the Baltic States:

- As a result of the occupation, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia *de facto* lost their independence.

- The system of terror that was created led to the loss of the national elites of the Baltic peoples; at the same time, the elites of the ethnic minorities in the Baltic States were also wiped out; as a result of the pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR, the Baltic lost its German minority; and in the Holocaust, virtually all the Jews living in the Baltic up to World War II were exterminated.

- Mass persecution under the Soviet regime brought great losses to the population of the Baltic States; hundreds of thousands of people suffered persecution, so that it affected almost every family in the Baltic; although some of the deportees from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were permitted to return home in the late 1950s, their confiscated property was not returned and they remained 'second class citizens', many continuing to be watched carefully by the KGB; many career opportunities were closed to them and restrictions were placed on them in the sphere of education.

- The place of the deported people of the Baltic States was taken by migrants from other regions of the USSR (mainly Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine), as if there had been no native population here at all; the influx of migrants continued throughout the years of the Soviet occupation, because the standard of living was higher in the Baltic; the effect of this was felt particularly in Latvia: by the late

1980s, ethnic Latvians constituted no more than 52 per cent of the population, and the Latvians faced the threat of becoming a minority in their own land.

■ The Soviet regime implemented a policy of Russification, hypocritically concealed behind the slogan of 'proletarian internationalism'; the sphere of use of the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian languages was reduced, seeking to eliminate these languages from many walks of life, such as state administration, production, science, etc.

■ During the whole time of its existence, the Soviet regime ignored the human rights of the people of the Baltic States; this saw expression in various forms: although the Constitution of the USSR declared freedom of speech and association, as well as freedom of conscience, these rights were not respected; the Communist Party had a monopoly of power, something that was declared officially in Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution; all social organisations conducted their activities under the Party's direct supervision; a policy of atheism was followed in the Baltic, with persecution of the Church and religious believers; freedom of movement was restricted as far as possible; up to the late 1950s, the Baltic was closed to foreign tourists; for a long time, people in the Soviet Union were forbidden to communicate with their relatives who at the end of World War II had fled to the West, and so forth.

■ With the establishment of the collective farms and the elimination of the family farmsteads, the Baltic actually lost a whole social stratum, along with its traditional way of life and skills.

■ The people of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, living behind the 'Iron Curtain', were forbidden access to objective information, to contemporary movements in literature and art, to achievement in the humanities and social sciences; all-pervading censorship and a single, forcibly imposed ideology – Marxism-Leninism – were intended to erase from people's memory their true history and diverse cultural heritage.

■ As a result of ill-considered economic activities and an uncaring attitude towards the countries' heritage, irreparable damage was done to the natural environment and historical monuments in the Baltic; the strong Soviet army presence also had its toll on the environment; the true scale of the damage could only be ascertained after the army left, and the ammunition and chemicals they abandoned still threaten the lives of local people.

■ During 50 years of occupation, the people of the Baltic lost the experience of democracy that they had gained during the time of independence.

At present, International Commissions of Historians have been established at the offices of the Presidents of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; they are charged with the task of collating and studying materials relating to the crimes perpetrated by the two regimes of occupation, and the losses that they caused to the Baltic States and their peoples during those 50 years.

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**OBLIGĀTAIS
EKSPONĒTĀRIS**



**The Nuremberg Tribunal (1945–1946)
strictly condemned the crimes of Nazism**

**Will the crimes of Communism
be condemned**

