

COMMEMORATION OF INDEPENDENCE DAY IN THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA 1919–1940

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ABSTRACT

World War I led to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, generating widespread political upheaval across Europe that provided numerous ethnic groups within those former empires the opportunity to break free and begin the process of independent nation-building. New nations need to create a history for themselves and their people to legitimate their existence. Estonia was one such nation. It was forced to fight a War of Independence at the very beginning of its existence as a separate entity to establish its right to statehood. This war served as Estonia's founding myth and even while it was still being fought, the war was integrated into the narrative of the Estonian people's great, centuries-long struggle for liberation from the yoke of Baltic German oppression. The achievement of independence was seen as the culmination of Estonian history. This article explores the customs that evolved for commemorating Independence Day from the perspective of performative, collective memory. These customs form the basis for analysing the shifts that took place in the politics of memory and history when a *coup d'état* carried out in March of 1934 established an authoritarian regime in Estonia in place of parliamentary democracy. Thenceforth the narrative was adjusted so that the culmination of Estonian history was no longer merely the achievement of independence. Instead, the narrative claimed that independence was won when Estonians defeated their Baltic German historical enemy once and for all. The way that such ideological precepts were reflected in commemorative practices is examined together with the corresponding implications for the creation of a national Estonian identity.

KEYWORDS: Estonian history, collective memory, commemorative practice, Independence Day, national days, national flag, national identity, propaganda

The Republic of Estonia officially recognises 24 February 1918 as the date on which Estonia's independence was declared. The retreat of the Russian Army ahead of the advancing German Army along the Eastern Front at that time during World War I created a power vacuum lasting only a few days, providing patriotic Estonian activists with a window of opportunity. The Germans already occupied parts of Estonia when independence was

declared and German forces entered the capital Tallinn on 25 February. Within a week, the Germans occupied all of Estonia, thus for the time being halting Estonian designs on nation-building. When the war ended with Germany's defeat, Estonia's Provisional Government began to operate on 11 November 1918. Germany's *Generalbevollmächtiger* (general representative) in the Baltic lands August Winnig signed an agreement on 19 November 1918 transferring power in Estonia to its Provisional Government, which can be interpreted as Germany's recognition of Estonia's Provisional Government. Soviet Russia attacked and captured the Estonian border city of Narva on 28 November 1918, thus starting a conflict that became known as the Estonian War of Independence. Estonia successfully defended its independence and the war ended on 2 February 1920 with Soviet Russia's recognition of Estonia's independence.¹

During that war, Estonia celebrated its first anniversary of independence on 24 February 1919. In a meeting of Estonia's Provisional Government held on 12 February 1919, 24 February was designated as the official date on which independence had been declared.² In its meeting on 19 February 1919, the Provisional Government decided that the first anniversary of independence would be celebrated by all institutions and businesses on 24 February.³ On 27 April 1920, Estonia's Constituent Assembly passed a regulation designating 24 February as Estonian Independence Day.⁴ It is the celebration of Independence Day as Estonia's national day that is the focus of this article.

A simple description of the various ways in which Independence Day was commemorated, however, is not sufficient for developing an understanding of the processes involved. Such an understanding is contingent to a great extent on an awareness of the collective nature of the celebration of Independence Day, and its connection to social, political and cultural memory. This is common to all official public commemorations – collective

¹ *Eesti ajalugu V: pärisorjuse kaotamisest Vabadussõjani*, ed. by Sulev Vahtre, Toomas Karjahärm, Tiit Rosenberg (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2010), 428–431 for the declaration of independence; 433–434 for the German occupation; 436–437 for the transfer of power and the start of the War of Independence.

² Rahvusarhiivi riigiarhiiv [The National Archives of Estonia, State Archives, henceforth ERA], f. 31, n. 1, s. 13, l. 69–71 (collection 31 – State Chancellery): Eesti Ajutise Valitsuse koosoleku protokoll nr. 25 [Minutes no. 25 of the meeting of Estonia's Provisional Government], 12 February 1919.

³ ERA, f. 31, n. 1, s. 13, l. 82–84: Eesti Ajutise Valitsuse koosoleku protokoll nr. 29 [Minutes no. 29 of the meeting of Estonia's Provisional Government], 19 February 1919.

⁴ ERA, f. 15, n. 2, s. 517, l. 11 (collection 15 – Chief Committee of Constituent Assembly Elections, Constituent Assembly): Regulation concerning holidays and days off.

events are connected to memory. This leads us to the concept of collective memory, which is meant to help interpret how human communities share common memories. So much has been written by now about collective memory that it is beyond the scope of this article to provide anything approaching a comprehensive overview of the relevant discourse. Marek Tamm's historiographical overview provides a sound introduction to the subject matter.⁵ In lieu of a broader discussion of the literature that has been published to date on collective memory, this article will restrict itself to only a very broad outline in order to arrive at a workable definition of collective memory in the context of Independence Day celebrations.

The spectrum of approaches to collective memory is very broad. At one end are historians such as Reinhart Koselleck, in whose opinion there is no such thing as collective memory, there are only collective conditions that make memory possible.⁶ At the other end is the philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, for whom there is no such thing as a strictly individual memory. Instead, culture, tradition and language are frameworks within which individual memories are located. Thus according to Halbwachs, individuals remember only as group members, whether it be family, religion or nation.⁷ Other authors writing on the topic fall somewhere between those two extremes – collective memory does not exist *versus* people remember only collectively.⁸ From among Estonian scholars, the historian and ethnologist Ene Kõresaar has used the concept of collective memory in connection with collected autobiographical life stories as told by ordinary Estonians. She explores how collective memory, including memories of political traumas, affects what people consider to

⁵ Marek Tamm, "Ajalugu, mälu ja mäluajalugu: uutest suundadest kollektiivse mälu uuringutes", *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 2013, 1 (143), 111–134.

⁶ Siobhan Kattago, *Memory and representation in contemporary Europe: the persistence of the past* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ A thorough and balanced analysis of the discourse on collective memory is provided in Barbara Misztal, *Theories of social remembering* (Maidenhead, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003). An important work on how history and collective memory are related to places of memory, symbols and traditions is Pierre Nora, *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The interrelation between the present and the past is focused on in Chris Lorenz, "Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past", *Performing the past: memory, history, and identity in modern Europe*, ed. by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 67–102. Astrid Erll has worked out a model for analysing processes of remembering in culture in her book *Memory in culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

be worth remembering.⁹ Marek Tamm's *Monumentaalne ajalugu* (Monumental History) examines the co-effect of (collective) memory and history on how Estonians view the past and the present. According to Tamm, the "community of memory" is by its nature a narrative community with its own narrative of the past, which in turn feeds social practices. The identity of such a community of memory is founded on particular events from the past ascribed with special meaning.¹⁰ The key defining event for an Estonian community of memory that cherishes the ideals of freedom and self-determination was naturally the realisation of the dream of Estonian independence through the creation of Estonian statehood.

The collective commemoration of Independence Day is also performative since it consists of the performance of certain commemorative acts. British anthropologist Paul Connerton analyses collective memory from its performative aspect in his book *How societies remember*, where he argues that images and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by ritual performances. Connerton employs the definition proposed by Steven Lukes of ritual as "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance".¹¹ This article likewise employs the same definition of ritual. Collective memory is viewed from its performative aspect in the context of this article as expanded upon by Paul Connerton, Jay Winter and Aleida Assmann. According to Winter, "memory performed is at the heart of collective memory. [...] A community of memory galvanises the ties that bind it together and deposits additional memory traces in the minds of its members through the expression, embodiment, interpretation or repetition of a script about the past. These renewed and revamped memories frequently vary from and overlay earlier memories."¹² Thus what we remember and how we through re-enactment remember it should mutually affect one another. Aleida Assmann has convincingly elaborated on Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, arguing that personal memories include much more than what individuals themselves have experienced. Individuals acquire memories not only via lived

⁹ Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad: kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes* (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2005).

¹⁰ Marek Tamm, *Monumentaalne ajalugu: esseid eesti ajalookultuurist* (Tallinn: SA Kultuurileht, 2012), 89–90.

¹¹ Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3–4, 44.

¹² Jay Winter, "The performance of the past: memory, history, identity", *Performing the past*, 11–23 (11).

experience, but also by interacting, communicating, identifying, learning and participating. In her view, collective memory consists of social, political and cultural memory. Social memory refers to the past as experienced and communicated within a given society. Political memory refers to memory that the state creates for itself using monuments, museums, commemoration rites and ceremonies. Cultural memory perpetuates what a society has consciously selected and maintains as vital for a common orientation and shared remembering. Its institutions are among others museums, school curricula, holidays, shared customs and remembrance days.¹³

Independence Day belongs to a particular category of historical red-letter days known as national days, the celebration of which has also attracted the attention of scholars. The book *National days: constructing and mobilising national identity* is a collection of articles on national days in several different countries. The aim of the book is to explore how national days have been invented, revived and reconstructed, employed for cultural and political objectives and even renounced.¹⁴ Mieczysław Biskupski has thoroughly researched the Polish example, detailing how interwar Poland was torn by opposing independence narratives of the political left and right, failing to unite behind a single national day.¹⁵ A contribution to the study of the history of national days in the Estonian context is provided by Karsten Brüggemann's article "Victory Day: the Battle of Cesis as the culmination of Estonia's national history", which gives an account of the enactment of Victory Day in Estonia, discussing its historical background and the symbolism associated with it.¹⁶

This article takes its place alongside other studies of national days, focusing on the commemoration of Independence Day in interwar Estonia as performative social practice that fostered the narrative claiming that Estonians had struggled for their freedom for hundreds of years. Theoretically, collective memory of winning independence and the commemoration of that independence should mutually affect each other and it would be interesting to see if that holds true in practice. The emergence of manifestations of such mutual influence, however, is almost certainly a long-term process, but Estonians were able to commemorate their Independence Day for only

¹³ Aleida Assmann, "Re-framing memory", *Performing the past*, 35–50 (41–44).

¹⁴ *National days: constructing and mobilising national identity*, ed. by David McCrone, Gayle McPherson (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁵ Mieczysław B. B. Biskupski, *Independence day: myth, symbol and the creation of modern Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Karsten Brüggemann, "Võidupüha: Võnnu lahing kui Eesti rahvusliku ajaloo kulminatsioon", *Vikerkaar*, 10–11 (2003), 131–142.

22 years before foreign occupation brought on by World War II made the practice illegal. Therefore, this time period is too brief for studying the process of mutual affect between collective memory and the corresponding commemoration and thus this article will not attempt it. The aim of the article is twofold. The first traces changes in the practice of commemorating Independence Day over the interwar period to determine which changes meaningfully impacted political and cultural memory. The evolution of the various commemorative practices in democratic Estonia until 1934 is outlined and contrasted with changes and developments affecting commemoration in the authoritarian era in 1934–40. The second aim is to determine whether there is any sign that commemorative practices contributed to the shaping of a particular Estonian self-image founded on a self-perception of shared personal attributes that can be ethnic, political or patriotic, and whether the authoritarian regime of the latter half of the 1930's can be seen as taking on a more conscious and active role in such identity shaping. To place the commemoration of Independence Day in the context of its own time, we will briefly consider how it fit in with the way other holidays were celebrated in Estonia.

Newspapers published in Estonia in 1919–40 on and around Independence Day are an important source for this study. There are several drawbacks to using the press as a source and the author of this article has tried to take this into account. Firstly, every newspaper article is subject to space limitations, forcing journalists to report only what they consider to be the most important points, leaving out other aspects of reported events. So we get a condensed version of an event that may ignore important details. Next is the general tendency to simplify the message for newspaper readers, which can lead to inaccuracies and distortions. Finally, during the interwar period in Estonia, newspapers were the mouthpieces of political parties and their reporting was slanted accordingly.¹⁷ A kind of balance can be achieved by comparing reports from different newspapers but in general, the overall picture remains a view of the commemoration of Independence Day as depicted by the press and not necessarily an accurate portrayal of how events actually transpired. Regardless of the issue of how accurate it may have been, this press depiction of commemoration was all that many people of that time had to go by and thus necessarily had to affect the col-

¹⁷ One such related example is that in years when Konstantin Päts, the leading politician in Estonia's Agrarian Party, did not serve as leader of the government on Independence Day, the Agrarian Party's mouthpiece, the newspaper *Kaja*, consistently omitted reference to the current *riigivanem* by name.

lective remembering of the relevant celebrations. So while the way the press depicted events may not be entirely accurate, it may actually be a reasonably accurate reflection of the public perception and reception of Independence Day celebrations since it formed the basis for that reception by the public. From September of 1934 onward, the *Riiklik Propaganda Talitus* (National Propaganda Bureau, hereinafter RPT) was responsible for censoring the press and so this must be borne in mind regarding press reports from the latter half of the 1930's.¹⁸ Interestingly, Estonian newspapers of that time engaged in self-censorship owing to the desire of the boards of directors of those newspapers not to risk being shut down. Prior to publication, the editors-in-chief of newspapers themselves removed articles they believed might displease the government.¹⁹ Thus newspaper reports from this later period can be considered to present the version of events that the government wanted to see presented in the press.

A number of archival collections at the Estonian National Archives contain various types of information on the commemoration of Independence Day, including schedules for festivities and speeches given at festive assemblies. Unfortunately, the search for more personal insights into the celebration of Independence Day from memoirs and diaries has thus far yielded but one brief reference.²⁰ Further research on this topic must certainly include continued efforts to unearth relevant references from autobiographical sources in Estonia and if possible, in other countries as well.

The commemoration of Independence Day consisted of a number of ritualistic acts of commemoration. This article traces the evolution of the relevant commemorative events over the course of Estonia's democratic period, grouping them according to function beginning with morning events and proceeding to the main events of the day, the military parade and the festive assembly.²¹ Each commemorative act is considered separately, tracing changes and bearing in mind its role in commemoration

¹⁸ *Valitsuse Informatsiooni ja Propaganda Talitus* (Governmental Information and Propaganda Bureau, hereinafter VIPT) was established by the authoritarian government led by Päts on 26 September 1934. The name of this institution was changed to *Riiklik Propaganda Talitus* on 18 September 1935. On the RPT, see Laura Vaan, "Propagandatalitus Eesti Vabariigis 1934–1940", *Tuna*, 3 (2005), 43–54.

¹⁹ On self-censorship of Estonian newspapers in the latter half of the 1930's, see Meelis Saueauk, "Nõukogude anneksioon 1940. aasta Eesti ajakirjanduse kõverpeegli", *Tuna*, 4 (2010), 8–23 (9).

²⁰ See note 58 in this article.

²¹ It was also customary to hold parties and balls in the evening yet these were relatively free-form undertakings. The fact that such events were not governed by any particular rules does not facilitate their consideration as rituals.

as a whole. Thereafter the changes in commemorative practices that the authoritarian government implemented after the coup of March, 1934 are outlined. Such changes are analysed to determine whether they reflect any shift in focus in the commemoration of Independence Day, leading in turn to conclusions concerning differences in the dynamics of commemoration in the democratic and authoritarian periods.

Lead-in commemorative events

The process of the *de jure* recognition of the Republic of Estonia by foreign countries lasted from 1920 to 28 July 1922, when the United States finally consented to recognise Estonia's independence. Estonia became a member of the League of Nations in September of 1921.²² As a member of the League of Nations, it follows that the *riigivanem* could begin receiving the congratulatory visits of accredited foreign diplomats at his residence on the occasion of Independence Day and this practice was initiated in 1922. In addition to foreign dignitaries, Estonian politicians and representatives of local organisations also paid visits to the *riigivanem* on this occasion.²³

Torchlight processions can be considered as lead-in events since they were mostly held intermittently on the eve of Independence Day. It became a tradition only in the city of Kuressaare where, led by the volunteer fire brigade, it was held for 9 years in a row on 23 February from 1920 to 1928.²⁴ The procession was cancelled in 1929 because of a nationwide flu epidemic but was not started up again in subsequent years.²⁵ The only known attempt to revive this tradition was in 1935.²⁶ Torchlight processions were of an episodic nature elsewhere in the country. Tallinn's Male Chorus Society

²² Summary of the recognition process in *Eesti ajalugu VI: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni*, ed. by Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2005), 109.

²³ "24. veebruaril pidustused", *Tallinna Teataja*, 25.02.1922, 5 (publication dates of newspapers are given in this article in the format day-month-year); "Eesti wabariigi 4. aastapäewa pühitsemine ja wabaduseristide väljajagamine Tallinnas 24. webruaril", *Kaja*, 26.02.1922, 2.

²⁴ "Kohalik elu", *Meie Maa*, 28.02.1920, 3; "Rongkäigud Eesti wabariigi aastapäewa puhul", *Meie Maa*, 26.02.1921, 1; "Kohalik elu", *Meie Maa*, 01.03.1922, 1; "Eesti Wabariigi 5 aastapäewa pidustused", *Meie Maa*, 28.02.1923, 1; "Kohalik elu", *Meie Maa*, 27.02.1924, 1; "E. W. 7-aastapäewa pidustused Kuressaares", *Meie Maa*, 25.02.1925, 1; "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine Kuressaares", *Meie Maa*, 27.02.1926, 4; "Wabariigi aastapäewa pidustused", *Meie Maa*, 26.02.1927, 1; "Wabariigi 10-da aastapäewa pidustused Kuressaares", *Meie Maa*, 28.02.1928, 1.

²⁵ "Wabariigi aastapäew Kuressaares", *Meie Maa*, 26.02.1929, 1.

²⁶ "Wabariigi 17. aastapäew Kuressaares", *Meie Maa*, 25.02.1935, 1.

held such processions in successive years in 1924 and 1925.²⁷ Three separate processions were held in Tallinn on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of independence in 1928, with another two in Tartu and one each in Paide and Rakvere.²⁸ Tallinn's volunteer fire brigade organised processions in 1933 and 1935 and even the little village of Tailova held its own torchlight procession in 1935.²⁹ The random nature of torchlight processions implies that fluctuating self-initiative was behind them.

Fire has very many symbolic meanings, the thorough consideration of which would not be justified in this article, considering how intermittently fire was used in Independence Day commemorations. Briefly, fire can among other things symbolise purification and rebirth, but it can also mean destruction and death.³⁰ Fire is a phenomenon that according to Gaston Bachelard is simultaneously both intimate and universal.³¹ In the context of Estonian Independence Day, fire appears to have had the meaning of celebrating victory in the processions mentioned above, expressions of joy and thankfulness. Buoyant marches played by brass bands enhanced the victorious, celebratory mood in these processions. From at least 1933 onward, however, the memorial meaning of fire began to emerge with reports of torchlight processions to cemeteries to remember the fallen. An eternal flame was ignited in front of the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris in 1921 to symbolise the eternal memory of French soldiers who fell in World War I. Estonia did not adopt this kind of symbolisation of eternal memory. Here the memorial flames of torches burned in honour of the war dead at wreath-laying ceremonies but nowhere was it considered necessary to keep the flame burning in perpetuity.³² Torchlight processions to remem-

²⁷ "Riigiwanema K. Pätsi austamine 50-a. sünnipäewa puhul", *Kaja*, 25.02.1924, 1; "Eesti iseseiswuse 6. aastapäewa pühitsemine pealinnas", *Rahwaleht*, 27.02.1924, 3; "Riigiwanema K. Pätsi austamine 50-a. sünnipäewa puhul", *Teataja*, 26.02.1924, 4; "Iseseiswuse päew Tallinnas", *Waba Maa*, 26.02.1924, 5; "Pealinn Wabariigi iseseiswust pühitemas", *Rahwaleht*, 25.02.1925, 3; "Tõrwikutega rongkäik. Meestelauluseltsi poolt 2 laulu presidendile ette kantud", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1925, 3.

²⁸ "Wabariigi juubelpäewa ilud, ehted ja pidustused Tallinnas", *Kaja*, 25.02.1928, 3; "Juubelpidustused Tartus", *Kaja*, 25.02.1928, 4; "Kaitseliidu ja sõjawäe rongkäigud Tallinnas", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1928, 2.

²⁹ ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 222, l. 9, 75 (collection 1093 – Information Centre); "Tallinna pidutuju wabaduspäewa õhtul", *Kaja*, 26.02.1933, 4.

³⁰ The ritualistic and symbolic aspects of fire in the commemoration of three important Estonian historical events are examined in greater detail in Marge Allandi, "Kolm tuld: Jüriöö, Vöidupüha, laulupidu", *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 2014, 2/3 (148/149), 173–206 (174–175).

³¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The psychoanalysis of fire* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

³² ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 222, l. 52: Wabariigi aastapäewa pidustuste aruanne Tartu linna EV 17. aastapäewa pühitsemise toimkonnalt RPT-le [Report on Independence Day celebra-

ber the dead were quite common in the latter half of the 1930's.³³ Based on information currently available, the use of torchlight to memorialise the fallen appears to have replaced its earlier function as an expression of the elation of victory.

Newspaper reports create the general impression that practically everyone flew the national flag on Independence Day and that generally speaking, all houses were expected to display the flag on this holiday.³⁴ Recent research on the history of the Estonian flag, however, indicates that the raising of the flag was not so self-evident and not particularly widespread in the 1920's. Display of the national flag allegedly did not become popular until the RPT promotional campaign started up in 1935 as a corrective measure to foster patriotic feelings. Head of the *Kaitseliit* (Defence League, a voluntary paramilitary organisation for contributing to the internal defence of Estonia) Johannes Orasmaa felt that the national flag did not have cult status in the 1920's and customs for when to raise the flag had not yet developed.³⁵ In the space of five years dating from the start of the campaign, the flag had indeed become a cherished symbol for Estonians by the time World War II brought the interwar independence of Estonia to an end.³⁶ It can be assumed that the flag promotion campaign played a

tions from the Tartu organising committee to the RPT]; ERA, f. 2966, n. 4, s. 361, l. 111 (collection 2966 – Tartu Municipal Government): Vabariigi 19. aastapäeva pühitsemise kava Tartus 24 veebruaril 1937 [Programme of events in Tartu commemorating the 19th anniversary of Independence Day on 24 February 1937]. The idea of erecting a mausoleum with an eternal flame was considered in 1936, though instead of Tallinn, it would have been planned for the small town of Paide – “Mausoleum Paide”, *Waba Maa*, 22.05.1936, 3.

³³ “Wabariigi aastapäew paraadideta”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1936, 5; “Linn ja maa pühitses wabariigi 19. aastapäewa”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1937, 3; “Rahwuskangelaste mälestamisõhtu”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1938, 2; “Aastapäew teistes linnades ja maal”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1938, 6; “Üle maa peeti parade, aktusi ja mälestati langenuid”, *Järwa Teataja*, 26.02.1940, 3.

³⁴ A report from the town of Haapsalu from 1920, for example, complains that many of the houses that under Russian rule had displayed the Russian flag on the appropriate holidays and under German occupation had displayed the German flag had not bothered to acquire the Estonian flag during the intervening two years of independence, linking the display of the flag to a show of loyalty. This is indicative of the general expectation of displaying the flag as expressed in the press. See A. S., “Eesti wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine Haapsalus”, *Tallinna Teataja*, 27.02.1920, 2.

³⁵ Toomas Hiio, “Sini-must-valge lipp “vaikival ajastul” (1934–1940)”, *Eesti lipp 120: 5. juunil 2004 Tartus peetud teadusliku konverentsi materjalid*, ed. by Meelis Burget, Toomas Hiio (Tallinn: EÜS Kirjastus, 2007), 37–48 (44–45). Hiio refers to a report from Orasmaa to Minister Ants Oidermaa, who was head of the RPT, see ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 305, l. 1–9 (collection 1093 – Information Centre): E. V. Kaitseliidu ülem minister A. Oidermaa'le, 12.02.1940, nr. 453.

³⁶ There is a wealth of evidence affirming the importance of the national colours for Estonians from World War II onward. Toomas Hiio expands on Estonia's national



Figure 1. A public building in Tartu illuminated on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Estonian independence, 24 February 1938 (Estonian Film Archives, 5. 0-27748).

role in this though the extent to which this is true can only be speculated on. The display of the national flag was accompanied by the decoration of public buildings with wreaths and garlands, a practice that carried over from the custom under Russian rule of using such decorations to mark Romanov anniversaries and royal visits.³⁷ The practice of using electric illumination to decorate public buildings began in 1924.³⁸

History knows no human communities that have not engaged in rites of thanksgiving to deities. In Christian tradition, thanksgiving is one of the four fundamental purposes of worship (the other three being adoration, prayer for something, and repentance).³⁹ Thus church services for thanks-

colours as a symbol of resistance and on how difficult it proved to be for the Soviets to obliterate the memory of the flag in the minds of Estonians. Toomas Hiio, “Lipud N. Liidu okupatsiooni esimesel kahel kuul”, *Eesti lipp* 120, 49–57. Küllö Arjakas, *Eesti lipp* (Tallinn: Menu, 2013) provides ample insight into the flag as the symbol of resistance (79–114), the hiding of flags (including the original Estonian flag) during the Soviet occupation to prevent their destruction (161–166), and the significance of the flag among exile Estonians abroad (114–117).

³⁷ “Iseseiswuse päewal linnas”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1919, 1.

³⁸ “Ilutulestus õhtul linnas”, *Kaja*, 26.02.1924, 3.

³⁹ Concerning thanksgiving church services, see Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian feasts and customs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958), 320–322.

giving are well established in Christian countries. Old Livonia (which was composed of the territories that became the republics of Estonia and Latvia in the twentieth century) became Lutheran in the course of the Reformation, and when independence was won, the Republic of Estonia continued in the Lutheran Christian tradition. Thus the church service for thanksgiving was an inseparable part of Independence Day commemorations. A categorical discrimination between secular and spiritual spheres is clearly discernible during the first years of independence. The house of God belonged to the spiritual sphere and secular manifestations had no place there. Thus the singing of the Estonian national anthem in church at thanksgiving services constituted an intrusion of the secular into spiritual space. It could not initially be taken for granted that it was appropriate to sing the anthem in church. Newspapers stressed how unprecedented this was in those first years of independence and even in 1924 after six years of independence, it was expressly pointed out how the singing of the anthem at the festive church service fit in wonderfully well and did not at all come across as being secular.⁴⁰ If it was appropriate to sing the anthem in church, in other words if it belonged in the sacred sphere, then it could be said that the anthem and the statehood that it represented had also become sacred. The sacred status of the anthem is alluded to by the way it is sung – standing up at attention with bared head. Thus the thanksgiving church service held on Independence Day can be considered to have contributed to the sacralisation of the idea of Estonian statehood. This sacralisation, in turn, contributed to the formation of what according to Aleida Assmann would be the political memory of Estonian statehood. A memory that has become sacred, in turn, is no longer open to debate and the community of memory that considers that memory to be sacred will not easily relinquish it.

Thanksgiving church services also illustrate the fundamental difference between the memory politics of Estonians and of the country's second largest ethnic minority, the Baltic Germans. On the first anniversary of Estonian independence in 1919, committees organising the celebration of Independence Day required that Estonia's Declaration of Independence be read out loud in churches across the land. There are reports of Baltic German pastors who refused to do so, to the displeasure of Estonian members of the congregation.⁴¹ There was apparently something more, however, in

⁴⁰ "Iseseiswuse püha Tartus", *Postimees*, 25.02.1919, 2; "Kohalik elu", *Meie Maa*, 28.02.1920, 3; "Eesti wabariigi 6. aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Wõru Teataja*, 26.02.1924, 1.

⁴¹ "Eesti iseseiswuse manifest Tallinna Saksa kirikus" and "Eesti iseseiswus ja Saksa soost waimulikud", *Tallinna Teataja*, 26.02.1919, 3; "Wabariigipüha pidustused Kuresaases", *Waba Saaremaa*, 26.02.1919, 1.

the behaviour of these reluctant pastors besides simply putting uppity Estonians in their place. The Declaration begins with the words: “The Estonian people have not lost its longing for independence over hundreds of years. From generation to generation, the secret hope has persevered that regardless of the dark night of slavery and the government of violence imposed by foreign peoples, the time will once again come in Estonia when ‘all torches will ignite at both ends’ and that ‘mighty Kalev will finally return home to bring fortune to his children’. Now that time is at hand.”⁴² Marek Tamm has aptly pointed out that the narrative of Estonian history as a constant “great struggle for freedom” reached its logical conclusion with independence, thus giving the events of preceding centuries their true teleological meaning.⁴³ The Declaration of Independence is a statement of memory politics, that is to say politics that aims to shape society’s collective memory, establishing understandings of what to remember from the past and how to interpret that which is remembered.⁴⁴ The memory political position of the Declaration of Independence was diametrically opposed to that of the Baltic Germans. Their historical narrative told of the civilisation of the Baltic lands by the Germans, bringing culture and Christianity to underdeveloped barbaric pagans.⁴⁵ Thus the reluctance of Baltic German pastors can be seen as a fundamental position. The Baltic German minority in Estonia on the whole appears to have subsequently resigned itself to the existence of the independent Republic of Estonia, considering the fact that Baltic German representatives commonly participated in the Independence Day parade and the community also held its own festive assemblies to mark the day.⁴⁶ Such a conciliatory Baltic German position was no doubt fostered by the Law on Cultural Autonomy passed in

⁴² *Riigi Teataja*, no. 1, 27.11.1918.

⁴³ Tamm, *Monumentaalne ajalugu*, 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁵ The signature historical work that sets forth this memory political interpretation of the unequivocally positive role of Germans in the history of the Baltic region is Leonid Arbusow, *Grundriss der Geschichte Liv-, Est- und Kurlands* (Riga: Jonck und Poliewsky, 1918). The positive self-image of Baltic Germans in the discourse on their role in colonising the Baltic region is also discussed in Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands: Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebenswelten, Kolonialphantasien 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 262–282.

⁴⁶ “Eesti wabariigi esimene aastapäew Tallinnas”, *Sotsiaaldemokraat*, 25.02.1919, 3; “Iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine”, *Kaja*, 26.02.1921, 1; “Eesti wabariigi 4. aastapäewa pühitsemine ja wabaduseristide väljajagamine Tallinnas 24. weebruaril”, *Kaja*, 26.02.1922, 2; “Eesti 7-da iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine”, *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1925, 1; “Pealinn oli iseseiswuspäewal piduehtes”, *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1933, 1; “Iseseiswuse pidustusi üle Eesti”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1934, 1; “Kogu Eesti pühitset wabariigi sünnipäewa”, *Kaja*,

Estonia in 1925, which the Baltic German minority made extensive use of. Estonians, on the other hand, attentively kept an eye out for instances of continued memory political opposition. As late as 1935, it has been noted that although a religious service at the Nõmme German church was supposed to mark Independence Day, the guest Baltic German pastor invited for the occasion held an ordinary church service without any mention of Independence Day.⁴⁷

Military parade

Estonia's Independence Day parade marked national independence that had been successfully defended militarily. The Estonian Army's roots, however, were in the Imperial Russian Army. A total of nearly 100,000 Estonians had been mobilised into the Russian Army over the course of World War I.⁴⁸ Estonian officers received their training at Russian military schools, mostly in abbreviated wartime courses.⁴⁹ When military units consisting entirely of Estonians started being formed in the Russian Army in 1917, their formation took place according to Russian army regulations, and those same regulations continued to set the example for the formation of the Estonian Army over the course of Estonia's War of Independence.⁵⁰ Officer training at Estonia's military school that was started up during the War of Independence was based on the corresponding Russian training manuals and this remained the case until 1927.⁵¹ By implication, it seems reasonable to assume that the way Estonian Army military parades were organised had to also derive from experience in Russian Army parades at the military schools where Estonian officers received their training and in active service in the parades where their military units participated.

25.02.1935, 3; "Paraad vihmawarjude all", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1935, 5; "Sakslased wabariigi juubelil", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1938, 9.

⁴⁷ ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 222, l. 20: Vabariigi aastapäeva pidustuste aruanne Nõmme linna Eesti Vabariigi 17. aastapäeva pühitsemise toimkonnalt RPT-le, 1. märts 1935 [Report on Independence Day celebrations in the city of Nõmme from the local committee for organising the celebration to the RPT, 1 March 1935].

⁴⁸ Tõnu Tannberg, *Eesti mees Vene kroonus: uurimusi Baltikumi ja Venemaa sõjaajaloost impeeriumi perioodil 1721–1917* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2011), 189–190.

⁴⁹ Mati Krõonström, *Kaptenite ja leitnantide sõda: Eesti sõjaväe juhtkoosseis Vabadussõjas 1918–1920* (Tartu: Tänapäev, 2010), 8.

⁵⁰ Vitali Lokk, *Eesti rahvusväeosad 1917–1918: formeerimine ja struktuur* (Tallinn: Argo, 2008), 52, 64, 124, 133, 160–161.

⁵¹ Andres Seene, *Eesti sõjaväe ohvitseride ettevalmistamise süsteemi kujunemine ja areng 1919–1940* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2011), 38–47.

Independence Day was first celebrated under wartime conditions on 24 February 1919. Parades were held in Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu and Viljandi.⁵² Peace had been made in time for the second anniversary the following year, when parades were held in all centres with military garrisons. Everywhere else, local fire fighters and societies organised processions.⁵³ The *Kaitseliit* began participating in military parades in 1925 while also organising its own parades in areas without a regular army garrison.⁵⁴

Local fire brigades participated in the military parades held throughout the country, thus the Independence Day parade has never been a purely military affair. Additionally, representatives of other local organisations often participated in parades, including representatives of minority communities in Estonia, most notably Baltic Germans, Russians, Latvians and Jews. Sometimes schoolchildren, boy scouts and girl guides marched in the parade as well.⁵⁵ It appears that the participation by these volunteer civilian organisations was greatest during the first years of independence, after which it fluctuated from the mid-1920's to the mid-1930's. During the jubilee celebrations in 1928 and 1938, local organisations were very active in the parades.⁵⁶ The direct participation of representatives from as broad a range of society as possible symbolically demonstrated solidarity between the army and the people. The inclusion of civilians increased the numbers of active participants (compared to passive spectators), thus expanding the performativity of the parade. Parades were not held in 1929, 1932 and 1936 due to extremely cold weather.⁵⁷ In the latter half of the 1930's, however,

⁵² "Peetri platsil", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1919, 1; "Iseseiswuse püha Tartus", *Postimees*, 25.02.1919, 2; "Eesti riiklise iseseiswuse aastapäew", *Postimees*, 26.02.1919, 2; "Eesti iseseiswusepüha – 24. weebruari pidustused Pärnus", *Pärnu Postimees*, 25.02.1919, 1; "Kohalik elu", *Sakala*, 25.02.1919, 3.

⁵³ "Kodumaalt" and "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine Tartus", *Päewaleht*, 27.02.1920, 3; "Iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine pealinnas", *Tallinna Teataja*, 26.02.1920, 2; "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Waba Maa*, 26.02.1920, 1; "Wabariigi aastapäewa Haapsalus", *Waba Maa*, 27.02.1920, 2.

⁵⁴ "Wabariigi seitsmes aastapäew Tallinnas", *Kaja*, 25.02.1925, 3; "Eesti 7-da iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1925, 1.

⁵⁵ See note 46 in this article.

⁵⁶ "Juubelipäewa paraad wabadusplatsil", *Kaja*, 25.02.1928, 3; "Suur sünnipäew õnnestus hästi", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1938, 5.

⁵⁷ "Wabariigi aastapäew paraadideta", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1936, 5; "Iseseiswuse 11. aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Kaja*, 26.02.1929, 2. The local fire brigade held a procession in spite of the cold in Puka but without music since it was too cold to play musical instruments. See "Wabariigi aastapäew Pukas", *Lõuna-Eesti*, 26.02.1929, 3; in 1932, the weather was milder in Tartu, Elva, Viljandi, Narva, Rakvere and Jõhvi, allowing parades to be held in those locations, "Wiljandimaal peeti hulk paraade, aktusi ja pidusid", "Tartus oli sõjaväe paraad" and "Narwas wõttis paraadi wastu kindr. Tõnisson", *Kaja*, 25.02.1932,

it appears that only the *Kaitseliit* and the local fire brigades participated in the military parades of 1937, 1939 and 1940. The last parade in 1940 is a special case since it was held at a time when the Estonian government had under duress agreed to allow the Soviet Union to establish military bases on Estonian territory, meaning that Estonia was under a kind of unofficial semi-occupation.⁵⁸ So that really leaves only two parades, which is far too little for deciding on any trends regarding civilian participation. The fact remains that these last parades exhibited a more military appearance. The fire brigades had always had their own parade uniforms and by the mid-1930's, so did the *Kaitseliit*. Soldiers in proper uniforms marching smartly create a favourable impression for onlookers, implying a high level of discipline and effectiveness, inspiring a sense of trust in their ability to defend the country. A bunch of armed men dressed in their own clothing can never achieve a similar effect. The satisfaction expressed in the press when one or another unit of the *Kaitseliit* appeared on parade in new uniforms is an indication of this kind of psychological effect.⁵⁹ The participants in those last parades of the interwar period, therefore, were all in uniform, creating a more professional impression.

Parades held throughout the country were modelled on the main parade in Tallinn, so we will focus here on how the main parade was organised. The parade began when the *riigivanem* (the head of the government in Estonia, his role combined some of the functions of the president and the prime minister in other democracies yet with very little power to act independently of parliament or the government cabinet) arrived at the parade grounds accompanied by the minister of war and inspected the assembled troops and civilians, stopping to greet each unit separately. This ritualistic act took place to the accompaniment of the *Porilaste marss*, a march

1, 3; "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine kodu- ja wälismail" and "Wabaduspüha pidustused Elwas", *Kaja*, 26.02.1932, 3, 6.

⁵⁸ The entry for 24 February 1940 in the diary of Estonia's Auditor General Karl Soonpää reads: "At the parade at Liberty Square with Henn [Soonpää's son]. Henn thinks the parade is small. Only the infantry, Kaitseliit and fire brigade march past, 8 men per row." – *Faatum: Eesti tee hävingule 1939–1940: riigikontrolör Karl Soonpää päevik Eesti Vabariigi saatuseaastatest 1939–1940: Molotov-Ribbentropi pakti tagamaad: dokumente ja materjale*, comp. by Küllö Arjakas (Tallinn: Kirjastus SE ja JS, 2009), 273. The press confirms that the cavalry and military hardware were excluded and that the President's speech and the march-past lasted only 25 minutes in total. This is the only parade where the army marched in 8-man rows, the usual custom having been 4-man rows. It can only be speculated whether the longer rows were intended to strengthen the impression of military might in lieu of military hardware or simply to get the march-past over with as quickly as possible. See "Soovime rahus elada", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1940, 1.

⁵⁹ "Eesti 7-da iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1925, 1.



Figure 2. Riigivanem Jaan Tõnisson speaking at the parade in Tallinn marking the 10th anniversary of Estonian independence, 24 February 1928 (ERA, f. 4399, n. 1, s. 5, l. 94).

borrowed from Finland. The march was replaced in 1923 by the *Pidulik marss*, composed by an Estonian.⁶⁰

It should be pointed out that the central square in Tallinn that served as the parade grounds was known as Peter's Square since it featured an enormous statue of Tsar Peter I at its centre. The square formed a "monumental landscape of memory" that proclaimed the memory politics of the demised Russian Empire.⁶¹ It was clear that the main square of Estonia's capital could not remain that way after the achievement of independence. Much to the chagrin of the more impetuous Estonian nationalists, it took Estonian authorities until 1922 to finally remove the statue and rename the square Liberty Square, regardless of the fact that there was no competing community of memory that would have favoured preserving the statue.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Iseseiswuse 5. aastapäewa pühitsemine – Iseseiswuse päew Tallinnas", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1923, 3; "Wabariigi 5. iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Kaja*, 26.02.1923, 3; Peeter Saan, *Eesti riigimuusika ja sõjaväeorkestrid* (Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud Oppeasutused, 2008), 21, 23–25.

⁶¹ Concerning this concept, see further Tamm, *Monumentaalne ajalugu*, 92–93.

⁶² "Peetri lahkumine Wabadusplatsilt", *Waba Maa*, 02.05.1922, 7.



Figure 3. Riigihoidja (President-Regent) Konstantin Päts speaking at the parade in Tallinn marking the 20th anniversary of Estonian independence, 24 February 1938 (www.estonica.org).

After the review of the troops came the *riigivanem*'s speech. Loudspeakers were set up for the benefit of the onlookers in 1926, and as of 1927, the speech was broadcast on radio live from the parade.⁶³ Beginning in 1922, the speech went hand in hand with a moment of silence to remember the fallen. Everyone present bared their heads and the orchestras played the church chorale *Ma kummardan Sind, armuvägi* (known in German as *Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe*).⁶⁴ Thereafter all assembled participants marched past the *riigivanem* and the minister of war. The marchers were followed by a display of artillery, armoured cars and tanks. Weather permitting, Estonian military aircraft circled about overhead, the airplane motors often drowning out the *riigivanem*'s speech.⁶⁵

The chorale played during the moment of silence for the fallen had been composed by Dmitri Bortniansky (1751–1825), a Russian composer from Ukraine. It was replaced in 1924 by a chorale of English origin, *Nearer my*

⁶³ "Paraad Wabadusplatsil", *Kaja*, 26.02.1926, 3–4; "Paraad Wabadusplatsil suure rahvahulga osawõtmisel", *Kaja*, 26.02.1927, 5.

⁶⁴ "Eesti wabariigi 4. aastapäewa pühitsemine ja wabaduseristide väljajagamine Tallinnas 24. weebruaril". *Kaja*, 26.02.1922, 2.

⁶⁵ "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1920, 1; "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Waba Maa*, 26.02.1920, 1.

God, to Thee,⁶⁶ while the Bortniansky chorale remained in use among Russian-speaking communities in southeastern Estonia.⁶⁷ This is an indirect indication that this change in the choice of religious music can perhaps symbolically be seen as turning from an eastern orientation towards the west. Here as well, the press raised the question of why there was no chorale of Estonian origin for remembering the fallen. Unlike the festive march, this did not prompt any effort to come up with a new Estonian chorale.

The most basic purpose of the military parade and the accompanying display of military hardware is to demonstrate a nation's military might to reassure the nation's own people and as a warning to potential enemies. Estonians no doubt wanted such reassurance though how convincing that reassurance was is another question. In any given year, up to nine military aircraft could be seen circling overhead. Estonia had 16 World War I era tanks and 23 armoured vehicles.⁶⁸ All 16 tanks participated in the jubilee parade of 1928.⁶⁹ While these tanks might have perhaps created an impression of an army with some more or less contemporary hardware in the first couple of years after the War of Independence, as the years passed, the display of those same tanks started resembling more a travelling exhibition of museum pieces. The display of these old tanks on parade was finally discontinued in 1937 when all six of the new Polish tankettes acquired in 1934–35 were on parade.⁷⁰ Estonian civilians may have felt a certain pride in watching the best their army had to offer but as the events of World War II clearly demonstrated, such manifestations of will for self-defence did not convince any foreign countries that Estonia's military might had to be taken seriously.

Generally speaking, the basic features of how the parade was organised remained the same throughout the interwar period. The *riigivanem*'s speech typically accentuated the enormous difficulties involved in waging the War of Independence arising from the severe shortage of everything from weapons and ammunition to clothing for the troops and basic foodstuffs for the population. It was stressed that these difficulties were

⁶⁶ "Paraad Wabadusplatsil", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1924, 3.

⁶⁷ ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 222, l. 74: Vabariigi aastapäeva pidustuste aruanne Petserimaa Eesti Vabariigi 17. aastapäeva pühitsemise toimekonnast RPT-le, märts 1935 (Report on Independence Day celebrations from the Petserimaa committee for organising celebrations of the 17th anniversary of independence to the RPT, March 1935).

⁶⁸ *Sõja ja rahu vahel: Eesti julgeolekupoliitika 1940. aastani, I*, chief ed. Enn Tarvel (Tallinn: S-Keskus, 2004), 252.

⁶⁹ "Paraad Wabadusplatsil", *Waba Maa*, 25.02.1928, 3.

⁷⁰ "Wabariigi aastapäewa hoogsad pidustused", *Uus Eesti*, 25.02.1937, 3.

overcome through united effort and that Estonia had quickly blossomed as an independent country, ending with the reminder that everyone must be prepared to fight to defend Estonia's freedom in the future as well. Considering the fact that it was delivered in the open in winter, the speech had to be kept relatively brief and so one cannot expect it to be particularly original or thought-provoking. The speech was an annual confirmation of identity for the Estonian people as a very resilient, courageous, industrious, honest and resourceful people that can bear all manner of hardship and is willing to make great sacrifices for the sake of its independence, and that it can manage just fine on its own. Speeches at festive assemblies, which are considered later in this article, also ascribed such positive character traits to Estonians. Many of the traits highlighted in such speeches coincide with those that Ene Kõresaar has recorded in life stories told by Estonians after the restoration of independence, such as honesty, industriousness, patriotism, independent-mindedness, aspiration towards self-determination and a strong ethnic identity.⁷¹ This correspondence in terms suggests that what was said in speeches on Independence Day may well have contributed to the formation of an Estonian identity, and that this identity has persevered through a long period of foreign occupation.

The only noteworthy change in the parade ritual was made in 1931, when *riigivanem* Konstantin Päts skipped the review of the troops, going straight to the podium and greeting everyone by way of the loudspeakers. At the same time, *riigivanem* Päts discontinued the moment of silence for the fallen at the parade.⁷² No official explanation for this change has been found thus far. From a practical standpoint, it is possible that these omissions were meant to spare participants and onlookers from having to stand in the cold weather for too long by shortening the parade. Perhaps it was felt that remembrance of the fallen at the parade was redundant since this was done at practically all other events throughout the day. However, abandoning the review of the troops with the accompanying greetings for each separate unit in favour of the more impersonal general greeting from the podium detracted from the pomp of the ceremony, removing the opportunity for the orchestras to play stirring march music while the *riigivanem* made the round flanked by high-ranking military officers. It is also curious that it was no longer considered necessary to remember the fallen at the biggest parade in the country where thousands of soldiers were gathered.

⁷¹ Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*, 50–57.

⁷² “Wabariigi 13. aastapäewa pidustused”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1931, 1.

Where else if not at the nation's main parade? For better or worse, these changes remained in effect through to the end of the era of independence.

Festive assemblies

Festive assemblies were held throughout the country to commemorate Independence Day, with several separate events of this kind being organised more or less simultaneously in the larger cities.⁷³ In some years, a festive assembly was held for the ruling elite and the diplomatic corps at the Estonia concert hall (1924–28, 1935–36, 1939–40) though this was by no means a rule.⁷⁴ Assemblies were also held in all schools. In exactly half of the years that Independence Day was celebrated (1920–26, 1934–37), central assemblies were held at the Estonia Theatre and other halls in Tallinn for schoolchildren from many different schools.⁷⁵ These central assemblies featured a noteworthy emotionally charged ritual deriving from memory politics, namely the remembrance ceremony where the names of all teachers and pupils from Tallinn's schools who fell in the War of Independence were read out (5 teachers and 20 pupils).

⁷³ Numerous festive assemblies were held annually in Tartu, with the maximum number attained being 17 assemblies in the jubilee year of 1928, see: ERA, f. 2966, n. 4, s. 361, l. 425–427: Tartus korraldatavaist rahvaaktusist Vabariigi aastapäeva puhul [On festive assemblies held in Tartu to commemorate Independence Day]; a total of 18 festive assemblies were held in Tallinn on Independence Day in 1935, see ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 222, l. 10: Ülevaade EV XVII aastapäeva pidustustest Tallinnas [Overview of the festivities in Tallinn commemorating the Republic of Estonia's 17th Independence Day].

⁷⁴ "Pidulik aktus "Estoonia" kontsert-saalis", *Kaja*, 25.02.1924, 1; "Seltskonna auawal-dused tähtsatele külalistele", *Kaja*, 26.02.1925, 4; "Pidulik kontsert-aktus "Estoonia" kontsertsaalis", *Kaja*, 26.02.1926, 4; "Pidulik aktus "Estonias"", *Kaja*, 26.02.1927, 5; "Kui välisriigid Eestile õnne soovisid", *Kaja*, 26.02.1928, 1; "Aktus "Estonia" kontsertsaalis", *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3; "Wabariigi aastapäew paraadideta", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1936, 5; "Wabariigi aastapäewa aktus", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1939, 3; "Siin on waba rahwa waba maa", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1940, 2, 4.

⁷⁵ "Wabariigi aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Waba Maa*, 26.02.1920, 1; M. S. "Eesti iseseiswuse kolmandama aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Tallinna Teataja*, 25.02.1921, 3; "Tallinna teated", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1922, 4; "Wabariigi 5. iseseiswuse aastapäewa pühitsemine", *Kaja*, 26.02.1923, 3; "Wabaduspäewa pühitsemine, keskkooli õpilaste osawõttel", *Kaja*, 25.02.1924, 1; "Aktus Estoonia kontsertsaalis koolidele", "Aktus Estonia teatrisaalis", "Aktus Draamateatris algkoolide VI klassi õpilastele", "Aktus linna 21. algkoolis Raua tänaval", "Tütarlaste kommertsgümnaasiumis", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1924, 4; "Wabariigi seitsmes aastapäew Tallinnas", *Kaja*, 25.02.1925, 3; "Kuidas iseseiswuse püha möödus", *Kaja*, 26.02.1926, 3; "Noorte aktus "Estonias"", *Kaja*, 25.02.1934, 3; "Kooliõpilaste aktus "Estonia" teatrisaalis", *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3; "Rahvas liikwel", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1936, 5; "Wabaduspäewa hommik", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1937, 3.

At least one speech was given at the vast majority of Independence Day festive assemblies, with opening and closing remarks also being a common feature.⁷⁶ The speech was an opportunity to spell out exactly what should be remembered on Independence Day and from what vantage point. Two types of speeches can be discerned, though it must be pointed out that the following analysis of Independence Day speeches is far from exhaustive. The first type is the pointedly patriotic speech in its many variations, and the second is the problem speech. The patriotic speech relied on presenting the past in patriotic overtones that often involved comparison with what the nation and people had achieved during independence. As can be expected, the vast majority of speeches made on Independence Day were patriotic. The second type, the problem speech used Independence Day only to frame the problem the speaker wanted to point out to the effect that this problem must be solved if people want their young country to do well. The speech given at an Agrarian Party assembly on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of independence in 1923 by the farmer and journalist Jaan Lammas was of this type. He mentioned Independence Day only at the very beginning and end, otherwise focusing on the vital importance of religion in the nation's development, pointing to Finland as a positive example of a soberly Christian people and stressing how vital it was to continue teaching religion in schools in Estonia.⁷⁷ The legendary war hero Admiral Johan Pitka is also known to have favoured the problem speech whenever he spoke on Independence Day.⁷⁸

Music affects people on a deeper emotional level and as such, it plays an important role in human ritual. In Estonia, in the form of folk tunes and patriotic songs, it fostered positive, patriotic feelings at festive assemblies

⁷⁶ There were isolated exceptions, for instance the festive assembly at Alajõe Elementary School in Iisaku Rural Municipality in 1935, where pupils presented recitations instead of the usual speech – ERA, f. 2003, n. 1, s. 335, l. 180 (collection 2003 – Iisaku Rural Municipality): Iisaku valla 1935. a. Vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemise aruanne Vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemise Virumaa Toimkonna esimehele [Iisaku Rural Municipality report to the chairman of the Virumaa Independence Day Commemoration Committee on the commemoration of Independence Day in 1935]; Festive assembly programmes from Hellenurme Elementary School and several venues in Tartu in 1935 are typical examples – ERA, f. 2800, n. 1, s. 120, l. 3, 3p (collection 2800 – Educational Societies): 1935. a. piduliku aktuse kava Hellenurme algkooli ruumides [Programme for the festive assembly at Hellenurme Primary School in 1935]; ERA, f. 2966, n. 4, s. 361, pages not numbered: programmes of festive assemblies held in Tartu in 1937.

⁷⁷ ERA, f. 4006, n. 2, s. 4, l. 1–8p (collection 4006 – Collection of autographs and manuscripts of memoirs): Manuscript of the speech given by J. Lammas on the 5th anniversary of Estonian independence at the Agrarian Party festive assembly in Värdis, 1923.

⁷⁸ “Wabaduspäew Paides”, *Kaja*, 26.02.1932, 3.

and reinforced the narrative of the great struggle for freedom. By and large, works by Estonian composers and verses of Estonian poets put to music formed the repertoire.⁷⁹ Singing together is a powerful way to unite people in sharing a common feeling or goal. This effect was generally achieved at festive assemblies through the joint singing of the national anthem.

Comparison with how other holidays were celebrated in 1919–1933

A regulation passed in the Constituent Assembly on 27 April 1920 established Estonia's national holidays.⁸⁰ All except Independence Day were either folk or religious holidays that together formed the traditional annual cycle of time. The newcomer meant to celebrate national identity and rejuvenation was planted among long-established holidays – a unique, secular holiday with no traditional customs. Appropriate customs and rituals had to be borrowed or invented. Thus it is difficult to compare its commemoration to how religious and folk holidays were celebrated. The associated church services are not justifiably comparable because for religious holidays, they were part of the church liturgy. A proposal made in 1922 to add a second secular holiday, Peace Day to be celebrated on 11 November in solidarity with the Allied victors marking the end of the Great War, was voted down.⁸¹

⁷⁹ “Wiljandimaal peeti hulk paraade, aktusi ja pidusid”, *Kaja*, 25.02.1932, 1; “Pidulik aktus “Estonia” kontsert-saalis”, *Kaja*, 25.02.1924, 1; “Pidulik kontsert-aktus “Estonia” kontsertsaalis”, *Kaja*, 26.02.1926, 4; “Pidulik aktus “Estonias””, *Kaja*, 26.02.1927, 5; “Aktus “Estonia” kontsertsaalis”, *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3; “Vabariigi aastapäeva aktus”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1939, 3; “Aktus Estonia kontsertsaalis koolidele”, “Aktus Estonia teatrisaalis”, “Aktus Draamateatris algkoolide VI klassi õpilastele”, “Aktus linna 21. algkoolis Raua tänawal”, “Tütarlaste kommertsgümnaasiumis”, *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1924, 4; “Noorte aktus “Estonias””, *Kaja*, 25.02.1934, 3; “Kooliõpilaste aktus “Estonia” teatrisaalis”, *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3.

⁸⁰ ERA, f.15, n. 2, s. 517, l. 11 (collection 15 – Chief Committee of Constituent Assembly Elections, Constituent Assembly): Regulation concerning holidays and days off. This regulation established the following national holidays: New Year's Day (1 January), Epiphany (6 January), Independence Day (24 February), national day of prayer (date unspecified), Easter (5 days including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Monday), May Day (1 May), Ascension Thursday, Pentecost (3 days), St. John's Day (24 June), Martinmas, and Christmas (3 days).

⁸¹ ERA, f. 80, n. 1, s. 780, l. 3–4, 18 (collection 80 – Riigikogu (Parliament), compositions I – V): Seadus seadusandliku delegatsiooni poolt 27. aprillil 1920. a. vastuvõetud pühade ja puhkepäevade määruse (R. T. 67/68) muutmise ja täiendamise kohta [Act amending the holidays and vacation days regulation (R. T. 67/68) passed on 27 April 1920 by the Legislative Delegation].

In addition to national holidays, it would be appropriate to compare the commemoration of two dates associated with the War of Independence to the commemoration of Independence Day: Armistice Day on 3 January and Tartu Peace Treaty Day on 2 February. The former was commemorated from 1922 to 1939 with a military parade and two minutes of silence to honour the dead punctuated by cannon fire.⁸² The first anniversary of the latter was celebrated in grand style on 2 February 1921 with a parade worthy of Independence Day followed by a festive assembly at the Estonia concert hall and numerous parties held in the evening.⁸³ This, however, was a one-time affair and no further mention of the commemoration of 2 February is found in subsequent years.

One further anniversary can be considered complementary to Independence Day, and later to Victory Day, – 23 April, the anniversary of the St. George's Night Uprising in 1343. This event is seen as a concerted but failed attempt by Estonians to free themselves of the yoke of Baltic German oppression. It is an essential link in the narrative of the great struggle waged continuously by Estonians over long centuries for self-determination against German domination. In this narrative, the victory over the Germans on 23 June 1919 was the culmination of that perpetual struggle to finish the job started on St. George's Night in 1343, that is to win back the independence lost in the thirteenth century. It is logical that St. George's Night should also be commemorated as part of the sequence of events leading to the culmination of Estonian history. It was not until 1928, however, that St. George's Night was commemorated in Tartu, Võru and Tallinn by torchlight processions with marching bands, songs and speeches.⁸⁴ This tradition continued through the remainder of the interwar period.⁸⁵ Fire played a central role in these commemorative events since tradition has it that fire was used to signal the coordinated beginning of the uprising and that the burning of the manors of the hated Germans was a central line of action during the uprising.⁸⁶ Fire is the ritualistic symbol that links St. George's Night to Victory Day, and to a lesser extent with Independence Day. While Independence Day made modest and intermittent use of fire, as described above, fire became the defining symbol of Victory Day,

⁸² "Wabadussõjas langenute mälestamine", *Kaja*, 04.01.1922, 3.

⁸³ "Rahu aastapäev ja iseseiswuse pidustused", *Päewaleht*, 03.02.1921, 1.

⁸⁴ "Jüriöö Tartus" and "Jüriöö mälestamine Wõrus", *Päewaleht*, 24.04.1928, 3; "Tallinna teated. Tõrwiktuledge loit Harjumäel", *Päewaleht*, 24.04.1928, 6.

⁸⁵ "Jüriöö" pidustused", *Waba Maa*, 07.05.1929, 5; Maarda Lepp-Utuste, "Jüriöö pühitsemisest", *Uus Eesti* 23.04.1936, 8.

⁸⁶ *Eesti ajalugu II: Eesti keskaeg*, ed. by Anti Selart (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2012), 146–148.

turning the traditional bonfires of the eve of St. John's Day (24 June) into victory flames.⁸⁷ Though St. George's Night achieved considerable popularity in the 1930's as evidence of the indomitable spirit of Estonians and their irrepressible desire for freedom and self-determination, the fact that it nevertheless ended in failure was an insurmountable obstacle to gaining the necessary broad-based support to turn it into an official national holiday.⁸⁸ As an historic anniversary, however, it continued to resonate among Estonians until World War II and beyond.⁸⁹

Commemoration practices in 1934–1940

Konstantin Päts and Johan Laidoner executed a *coup d'état* in March of 1934, bringing the era of parliamentary democracy to a close in Estonia and ushering in the era of authoritarian rule that was to continue to the end of Estonia's interwar independence. These two leaders justified their action with the rhetoric of national unity, maintaining that the suspension of democracy was the only conceivable course of action to remedy the fragmentation and weakness that they claimed was the product of Estonia's parliamentary democracy.⁹⁰ This section will examine and analyse the changes in commemorative practice that can be traced to the authoritarian government.

The key commemorative change effected by the authoritarian regime was a shift in focus regarding the triumph of the aspiration towards Estonian independence. The mission of the Estonian side in the War of Independence was to repel the offensive of the Soviet aggressor, drive the Red Army out of Estonian territory and keep it at bay, thus safeguarding independence. The war did not end with the military defeat of Soviet Russia but rather with a truce, and the Estonian side accomplished its mission. This successful defence of Estonia's independence can justifiably be considered a victory. It follows that Independence Day was clearly associated with this defensive victory. In at least one instance, Independence Day (24 February) was even referred to in the press as a day of victory.⁹¹ The enact-

⁸⁷ Allandi, "Kolm tuld", 183–191.

⁸⁸ "Jüriöö-tuled põlesid", *Postimees*, 06.05.1930, 3.

⁸⁹ Tamm, *Monumentaalne ajalugu*, 65–81; Allandi, "Kolm tuld", 175–183.

⁹⁰ For the *coup d'état* and the pretexts for it offered by Päts and Laidoner, see *Eesti ajalugu VI*, 92–97.

⁹¹ "Kurwaks muutub siiski meie meel wõidu püha pühitsedes, kui mälestame langenuid Eesti poegi, kelle weri woolas isamaa wabaduse altariil." [We are nevertheless saddened as we commemorate our victory day when we remember the fallen sons of Estonia,

ment of Victory Day (23 June) by the *Riigikogu* (Estonian parliament) in February of 1934⁹² in effect redefined the concept of victory that was to be celebrated, replacing a defensive victory in a war of attrition, where the aggressor ultimately decided it was no longer worthwhile to continue military action for the time being, with an actual offensive victory in a particular battle, namely the Battle of Cēsis, against an altogether different enemy, namely the German *Landeswehr*. Konstantin Päts seized power in the interval between the enactment of Victory Day and its celebration for the first time in June of 1934. The Päts regime set about transferring the commemoration of victory from Independence Day to Victory Day. The degree to which the regime succeeded in establishing Victory Day in the people's consciousness over its six-year lifespan in the interwar period is open to debate.

The authoritarian regime's vehicle for effecting changes in commemorative practice was the already mentioned RPT.⁹³ The RPT started systematically standardising and controlling commemorations. Municipal and rural municipal governments were requested to submit plans for celebrating Independence Day to the RPT. After the conclusion of the celebrations, further reports were to be sent to the RPT on how the planned celebrations actually turned out. The *Kaitseliit* worked hand in hand with the RPT and was given a more central role in organising commemorative events locally. The RPT also drew up plans and guidelines for decorating and illuminating buildings. As has already been mentioned in this article, the RPT organised a campaign in 1935 to promote the national flag. Additionally, press reports of fines levied by the police for breach of regulations concerning the display of the flag on Independence Day can be found from the latter half of the 1930's while no such reports date from the parliamentary era.⁹⁴ This is an indication that the police were likely given license to more actively enforce these regulations. The focus, however, appears to have been on combating the display of faded, soiled or tattered flags, while no reports have been found of fines levied for failure to display the flag at all.

Police enforcement action was not limited to random inspections of the flags displayed on Independence Day. In 1935, the police were instructed to

whose blood flowed on the Fatherland's altar of liberty.] – "Eesti wabaduse 6. aastapäewa puhul", *Lõuna-Eesti*, 27.02.1924, 1.

⁹² *Riigi Teataja*, no. 18, 03.06.1934, Art. 122, 134: Pühade ja puhkepäevade seadus. 26. veebruaril 1934. a.

⁹³ See note 18 in this article.

⁹⁴ For instance, the police issued fines to house owners who displayed soiled, faded or tattered flags, "Lipud olgu korralikud!" *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1939, 6.

investigate Rudolf Kivi, the conductor of the *Lohusuu Haridusselts* (Lohusuu Educational Association) orchestra. He was charged with failing to appear at the Independence Day celebrations in Lohusuu Rural Municipality, thus undermining the celebrations by leaving the orchestra without its conductor, and earning the displeasure and complaints of the local population.⁹⁵ The investigation concluded that his action was detrimental to the common weal and was meant “to demonstrate disrespect for the democratic system of government in effect in the Republic of Estonia”.⁹⁶ At the conclusion of the investigation, the chief of police banished Kivi from Tartu County, forbidding him to return to live there until such time that the state of emergency declared by the Päts government was lifted.⁹⁷ As might be expected, the issue in this particular case went beyond the simple fact that a local band leader somewhere in rural Estonia decided to skip the Independence Day celebrations. Rudolf Kivi was suspected of having connections with local activists of the War of Independence veterans’ movement (known in Estonia as *vapsid*), which Konstantin Päts considered to be his most bitter political opponent, and this was the real reason for why the police were instructed to deal so severely with this incident. This serves as an example of how the Päts regime employed patriotism in general, and more specifically the commemoration of Independence Day, to further its political aims, and as a weapon against its political opponents.

As noted above, Konstantin Päts did not reintroduce the custom of reviewing the troops and the moment of silence for the fallen into the ritual of the Independence Day parade after his coup of 1934. The continued omission of these features, with the effect of reducing the pomp and ceremony of the parade, is curious, considering the emphasis that the authoritarian regime placed on promoting patriotism and glorifying Estonia’s military exploits. Authoritarian regimes would generally be expected to enhance rather than detract from the pomp of their military parades. While no documentary evidence has been discovered in the archives concerning these changes, the fact that they were implemented in 1931 when Päts was

⁹⁵ Full details of this case are in ERA, f. 852, n. 1, s. 364, pages not numbered (collection 852 – Head of Internal Security): Rudolf Andrese p. Kivi Tartu maakonnast väljasaatmise asjas (kuni kaitseseisukorra kestuseni, lugupidamatuse avaldamise pärast kehtiva riigikorra vastu) [The case of the banishment of Rudolf, son of Andres, Kivi from Tartu County for the duration of the state of emergency for displaying disrespect towards the system of government in effect].

⁹⁶ ERA, f. 852, n. 1, s. 364, pages not numbered: Politseivalitsuse direktori otsus nr. 84 [Decision no. 84 of the Chief of Police].

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

in office and that he continued in the same vein after seizing power may add credence to the view that Independence Day as a legacy of the parliamentary era was problematic for him. It is possible that this was a subtle alteration that Päts continued to employ to lessen the emotional impact of Independence Day in favour of Victory Day. It is true that Johan Laidoner, reinstated as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, a post that had been discontinued after the conclusion of the War of Independence and was restored after the coup, initiated his own review of the troops from 1935 onward but this review took place prior to Päts's arrival at the parade grounds.⁹⁸ Previously the parade had always started with the arrival of the *riigivanem*, so it is debatable whether Laidoner's review should be considered part of the parade proper or as a kind of warm-up event leading up to the arrival of the leader. During the parliamentary era, it was customary for the commanding officer in charge of the parade to conduct his own review of the troops in advance of the arrival of the *riigivanem* and the start of the actual parade, so Laidoner's review may be considered a continuation of this preparatory review.

In the first celebration of Independence Day under the authoritarian regime in 1935, *riigivanem* Päts received the congratulatory visits of foreign diplomats at his residence, as had become established custom.⁹⁹ In another curious move, this practice was thereafter discontinued.¹⁰⁰ While these visits were clearly a formality, doing away with them still meant a reduction in diplomatic contact in any case, which could not have helped in a situation where Estonia found itself in increasing political isolation.¹⁰¹ It may be speculated that this was another subtle way in which Päts undermined the primacy of Independence Day, yet the absence of further relevant information means that such speculation cannot be objectively confirmed. Another example of such a subtle change may be the decision to hold key commemorative events related to the 20th anniversary of independence in 1938 on Victory Day instead of Independence Day, one of these being the festive assembly at the Estonia concert hall.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ "Tuhanded inimesed paraadiplatsil", *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3; "Linn ja maa pühitses waba-riigi 19. aastapäewa", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1937, 3; "Juubeli-aastapäewa piduhoog", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1938, 3; "Suur paraad Wabadusväljakul", *Päewaleht*, 25.02.1939, 3; "Soovime rahus elada", *Päewaleht*, 26.02.1940, 1.

⁹⁹ "Terwitajad Toompeal", *Kaja*, 25.02.1935, 3.

¹⁰⁰ "Pidustused diplomaatlikule korpusele", *Uus Eesti*, 25.02.1936, 8.

¹⁰¹ A concise summary of Estonia's position in international politics in the latter half of the 1930's can be found in *Eesti ajalugu VI*, 115–117.

¹⁰² The mouthpiece of the authoritarian regime reported that more extensive jubilee celebrations were planned to be held on Victory Day, see "Kogu Eesti 20. aastapäewa

In addition to supervising the organisation of festive assemblies marking Independence Day across the country, the RPT produced model speeches for the occasion. Many rural municipalities and local organisations sent the RPT written requests for copies of the model speeches. Rural municipalities often requested that government ministers or other prominent politicians be sent to deliver the keynote address at their local festive assembly and the demand far outstripped the supply of speakers. When the request for a speaker could not be filled, the RPT typically sent a copy of a current model speech to help the locals prepare their own speaker for the job. The model speech was a complete speech that could simply be read out word for word if necessary. It seems likely, however, that it was used more as a guide for speakers in developing their own speech. It should be noted that the model speech was not the invention of the RPT. The office of the minister without portfolio composed a model speech for Independence Day in 1925 when Karl Ast served as minister. The archival file contains numerous requests from across the country for copies of this model speech, much like the requests sent to the RPT in the latter half of the 1930's.¹⁰³ Significantly, the minister without portfolio was a new post in the government cabinet created after the failed communist coup attempt of 1 December 1924. One of the tasks of the minister without portfolio was to generate propaganda promoting actions taken by the government. The governing coalition led by Jüri Jaakson formed in the aftermath of the coup attempt collapsed on 16 December 1925 and the post of minister without portfolio passed into history with it.¹⁰⁴ Except for that one model speech from 1925, no other model

vaimustuses", *Uus Eesti*, 25.02.1938, 1.

¹⁰³ ERA, f. 48, n. 1, s. 6, l. 188–192 (collection 48 – Office of the Minister without Portfolio): Nr. 57, Lühike kõnekava 24. veebruari kõnede jaoks, 3. veebruar 1925 [Brief model speech for 24 February, 3 February 1925]. Requests for copies of this speech are interspersed throughout this file. Numerous requests from the latter half of the 1930's for copies of model speeches are contained in the following archival sources: ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 304: Eesti Vabariigi 21. aastapäeva kõnekavad [Model speeches for the 21st anniversary of Estonia's independence]; ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 275: Riikliku Propaganda Talitus. Kodanliku Eesti Vabariigi aastapäeva ja Võidupüha kõnekavad [RPT. Model speeches for bourgeois Estonia's Independence Day and Victory Day]; ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 291: Riikliku Propaganda Talitus. Kodanlaste Võidupüha, emadepäeva ja teiste tähtpäevade aktuste kõnekavad [RPT. Model speeches for festive assemblies marking the bourgeois Victory Day, Mothers' Day and other red-letter days].

¹⁰⁴ The propaganda function of the minister without portfolio appears to have been a known fact. In his letter to Minister Ast, the assistant head of the *Ülemaaline Eesti Noorsoo Ühendus* (ÜENÜ, Estonia-wide Youth Association) Järve region Aleksander Kereman addresses Ast as Propaganda Minister, see ERA, f. 48, n. 1, s. 6, l. 125: Kiri ÜENÜ Järve osakonna abijuhatajalt Aleksander Kereman Propakanda Ministriile, 18. veebruar 1925 [Letter from ÜENÜ Järve region assistant head Aleksander Kereman to

speeches prior to the RPT era have been found in the archives, indicating a clear connection between the model speech and some form of governmental propaganda institution.

Model speeches from 1937–40 have been preserved in the archives. The approach to Estonian history in these speeches is presentist, based on the teleological narrative of the great struggle for freedom waged by Estonians for hundreds of years. The inevitable result of this struggle had to be the achievement of independent Estonian statehood. It was emphasised that since the thirteenth century, all generations of Estonians had prepared the way for the victorious War of Independence.¹⁰⁵ Ancient Estonians were said to have been steeped in the feeling of freedom and entitlement characteristic of independent peoples. It was claimed that this feeling had persisted in the Estonian soul over the course of long centuries.¹⁰⁶ Even though Estonia's actual opponent in the War of Independence was Soviet Russia, the RPT shifted emphasis in its model speeches to the two-week campaign conducted during the same war against the German *Landeswehr*, which was attempting to assert German claims in Latvia. The Estonian state's official memory politics presented victory in the War of Independence as having been over the Germans, bringing the age-old struggle for freedom against the oppressive Germans to a just conclusion.¹⁰⁷ This sort of propagation led at least some children in 1930's Estonia to believe that the entire war was against the Germans, not the Russians.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, while the centuries-long struggle for freedom is a running theme, the enemy is usually obvious by implication yet not specified directly in RPT model speeches. Rather than vilify Germans as the enemy, the speeches tended to praise the courage, resilience and decency of Estonians. Such restraint in the wording of the speeches may be related to the international political situation of the latter half of the 1930's. Toning down anti-German rhetoric can be viewed as part of an effort to maintain cordial relations with Nazi Germany. The

the Propaganda Minister, 18 February 1925]; On the propaganda function of the minister without portfolio, see: Vaan, "Propagandatalitus Eesti Vabariigis 1934–1940", 43.

¹⁰⁵ ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 291 (pages not numbered): Model speech for the 20th anniversary of independence; ERA, f. 1093, n.1, s. 304, l. 1–5: Model speech for the 21st anniversary of independence, 08.02.1939; ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 304, l. 6–10: Model speech for the 21st anniversary of independence, 09.02.1939.

¹⁰⁶ ERA, f. 1093, n. 1, s. 317, l. 8: Model speech for the 22nd anniversary of Estonian independence.

¹⁰⁷ Brüggemann, "Võidupüha", 141.

¹⁰⁸ The well-known Estonian political scientist Rein Taagepera admits to having thought as a child in Estonia in the 1930's that the Germans were the enemy throughout the War of Independence. See Tamm, *Monumentaalne ajalugu*, 62–64.

RPT model speeches also stressed national unity as the single most important prerequisite for the continued preservation of Estonia's independence and contrasted the unity of the Päts regime with the self-serving and self-destructive divisiveness and backbiting of the parliamentary era. Päts and Laidoner were naturally extolled as irreproachable patriots and defenders of that so vital national unity of purpose, the inspiration for all citizens to put aside their differences and to pull together for the common good. This is the message that the RPT model speeches were designed to disseminate throughout the country. By contrast, the model speech of 1925 is not saturated with patriotic-romantic pathos as it looks back at the chain of events leading to independence. It begins with the 15 November 1917 decision of the Estonian Diet declaring itself the highest power in Estonia and proceeds through the War of Independence to the events of the failed communist *coup* of 1 December 1924.¹⁰⁹

Summary

The commemoration of Independence Day was performed memory of the process of gaining Estonia's independence. In speeches, it was remembered as the successful achievement of the ultimate goal of the Estonian people's historical development, to which Estonians had aspired for hundreds of years. It was remembered that Estonians won their independence themselves, and this memory was underscored by the military parade. This parade was never in fact exclusively military since volunteer fire brigades always participated, and representatives of other civilian organisations were frequently included as well. This can be seen as symbolising solidarity between the military and the civilian population, and that independence was the product of everyone pulling together for a common cause. The inclusion of a broader segment of the population enhanced the performative nature of the parade, correspondingly broadening its impact on collective memory. The message of the thanksgiving church service was that God had blessed the Estonian people with freedom and independence. It is plausible that the commemoration of Independence Day and the singing of the national anthem in church contributed to the sacralisation of Independence Day and of the memory of how independence was won. This may conceivably have helped to embed the memory of gaining independence in the people of that time.

¹⁰⁹ ERA, f. 48, n. 1, s. 6, l. 188–192: Nr. 57, Lühike kõnekava 24. veebruari kõnede jaoks, 3. veebruar 1925.

The basic features of the way in which Independence Day was commemorated in Estonia had evolved by the mid-1920's and from that point onward remained constant for the most part. The only actual change in the series of commemorative events during the authoritarian era was the discontinuation of congratulatory visits paid to the *riigivanem* by foreign dignitaries and local politicians. The *riigivanem*'s review of the troops and the moment of remembrance for the fallen at the Independence Day parade had been abandoned in 1931 already, though the changes were implemented when Konstantin Päts was in office and remained in effect after he had seized power. The changes that emerged under the authoritarian regime could be characterised as a shift in points of emphasis and as the centralisation of control in the organisation of commemorative events, promoting their standardisation. The RPT drew up plans and regulations for how public spaces and buildings should be decorated for the occasion. Another characteristic of the commemoration of Independence Day under authoritarian rule was the increased role of the police in enforcing the observance of the relevant regulations. The RPT's model speeches stressed the vital necessity of the unity of purpose that allegedly could be guaranteed only by the leadership of the authoritarian regime. The speeches also placed a renewed emphasis on patriotism and presented the leaders Päts and Laidoner as the staunchest of patriots while fostering the presentation of Estonian political history as a great continuous struggle for freedom culminating in long-awaited independence guaranteed by the defeat once and for all of the historic German enemy. This running theme converged with the narrative for Victory Day. Independence Day had always been a patriotic occasion and it remained so. The authoritarian regime presented its own version where patriotism lay in unity at the expense of plurality, implying that the plurality of the parliamentary era was actually unpatriotic since it made unity impossible. By providing unity, the leaders Päts and Laidoner had saved the Estonian state from impending doom and in the process had preserved independence. It is this message disseminated by the RPT and the regime's shift of emphasis from Independence Day to Victory Day that reflected the changes in Estonia's politics of history ushered in by the end of democracy in Estonia in 1934.

A number of positive traits were ascribed to Estonians in the course of Independence Day commemorations. The struggle against overwhelming odds was said to have brought out the resilience, resourcefulness, industriousness, honesty and courage of Estonians. Estonians were said to be steeped to the core in the aspiration towards freedom and independence,

prepared to bear all hardships and make great sacrifices to achieve that goal. Estonians repeatedly received affirmation on Independence Day that they form a strong and industrious small people. Research conducted by Ene Kõresaar in Estonia after it regained its independence shows that Estonians who grew up in interwar Estonia describe their identity using the same attributes in their life stories. These attributes are not distinctively or exclusively Estonian and would likely be a part of most any nationalist narrative. The authoritarian regime of the latter half of the 1930's made more deliberate efforts to shape an Estonian identity through the flag promotion campaign of 1935, increased police enforcement of flag-related regulations, and the dissemination of model speeches. The Päts regime's particular brand of patriotism was grounded in the narrative of the great, centuries-long struggle for freedom crowned by decisive victory over the historic oppressor of the people, with the national flag as the rallying symbol. Clearly, no solitary factor can be singled out as being primary in establishing identity and no factor operated in isolation. The celebration of Independence Day was part of the whole of society's public sphere and as such, it was a contributing factor in the formation of a collective Estonian identity. Only the cumulative effect of these formative years on group and individual identity can be seen in subsequent decades, rendering discussions of the degree to which one or another factor contributed speculative.

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KOKKUVÕTE: *Vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemine Eesti Vabariigis 1919–1940*

19. sajandi teise poole ja 20. sajandi alguse eesti rahvuslased mõistsid, et eestlastel puudub oma ajalugu, mis on takistuseks nende kujunemisel rahvuseks. Vaid omaenese ajaloo rahvas võib loota ühtsustunde tekkimisele. Siit kasvas välja narratiiv eestlaste suurest vabadusvõitlusest, mis on kestnud läbi sajandite, muistsest vabadusekaotusest alates, ning polnud

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veel jõudnud lõpliku lahenduseni. Iseseisva Eesti Vabariigi loomine pani suurele vabadusvõitlusele punkti ning narratiivile vastavalt aetas kõik eelnevad ajaloosündmused teleoloogiliselt õigele kohale. Eestlaste ajaloo haripunktina nõudis iseseisvuse saavutamine pühitsemist. Käesolev artikkel uurib vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemise tavade kujunemist kollektiivse mälu perspektiivist ning analüüsib nende tavade edaspidiseid arenguid Eesti autoritaarsel ajastul, mis viitavad nihetele mälu poliitikas. Mälurituuaalide taasesitamine ehk teisisõnu performatiivsus on kollektiivses mälus kesksel kohal. Performatiivsed rituaalid vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemisel olid näiteks sõjaväeparaadid, erinevad rongkäigud (mõned neist tõrvikutega), pärgade panek Vabadussõjas langenute mälestuseks, tänujumalateenistused.

1920. aastate keskpaigaks oli vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemise kombestik võtnud kindla kuju, mis oma põhiolemuselt jäi selliseks kuni sõdadevahelise iseseisvusaja lõpuni. Kindel koht oli hommikul tänujumalateenistusel üle riigi. Kiriklikel jumalateenistustel Eesti hümnit laulmine tõi riigihümni sakraalsesse sfääri ning andis Eesti riiklusele pühalikkuse aura. Tänujumalateenistustega seoses ilmnisid sügavalt mälu poliitilised erimeelsused baltisakslastest vaimulike ja eestlastest koguduseliikmete vahel, mis tuginesid risti vastupidistele veendumustele ajaloolise tõe suhtes. Sõjaväeparaad kujunes pidupäeva keskseks sündmuseks, Eesti rippumatuse eduka kaitsmise rituaalseks taaselustamiseks. Riigivanema kõne kinnitas kuulajatele eesti rahva meeledindlust, tahtejõudu, vaprust, julgust, leidlikkust jt positiivseid omadusi, mis vaatamata pea lootusetusele olukorrale olid viinud sõjalise võiduni. Sõdurite paraadmars ja sõjatehnika näitamine pidi olema omadele julgustuseks ja vaenlastele hoiatuseks. Iseloomulikult ei olnud paraadid puhtalt militaarsed etteasted. Nendes osalesid ka kohalikud vabatahtlikud tuletõrjeseltsid ning sageli ka teiste seltskondlike organisatsioonide esindajad. Laiem osavõtjate ring suurendas paraadi performatiivsust, kinnitades sümboliseks, et vabaduse saavutamine oli sõjaväe ja rahva ühise pingutuse tulemus. Paraadi järel peeti kõikjal üle riigi pidulikke aktuseid, kus rahvuslusest kantud laulude ja kõnede abil tõsteti iseseisvuse saavutamisest esile seda, mida peeti mäletamisväärseks.

Pealtnäha jäi Pätsi riigipöörde järel vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemine enamasti samaks, ent lähemal vaatlusel ilmnevad kindlad nihked rõhuasetustes. Üks suund oli Võidupüha olulisuse kasvatamine uue riigipühana vabariigi aastapäeva keskse positsiooni arvelt. Sellise suunamuutuse väljendus oli näiteks Võidupüha määramine vabariigi 20. juubeliaasta põhiliste pidustuste päevaks, nihutades vabariigi aastapäeval Estonia kontsertsaalis

peetava piduliku aktuse Võidupühale. Pätsi enda poolt juba 1931. aasta paraadil ärajäetud sõjaväeosade tervitusringkäik ja langenute mälestus-
hetk jäid jätkuvalt paraadikombestikust välja ka autoritaarse valitsuse all, kahandades sellega mõneti paraadi vaatemängulisust ja mõjuvõimsust. Kõige olulisem muutus oli Riikliku Propaganda Talituse (RPT) loomine, mille üheks ülesandeks oli riiklike tähtpäevade pidustuste kavandamine ja korraldamine. Kohalikud vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemise korraldamise toimkonnad pidid esitama oma pidustuste kavad RPT-le, samuti ka aruanded pidustuste järel. RPT kavandas ja kirjutas ette avalike hoonete ning kaupluste vaateakende kaunistamise ja illumineerimise vabariigi aastapäeva puhul. Tulemuseks oli pidustuste ühtlustamine keskse kontrolli suurendamise abil.

RPT koostas aastapäevadel esitatavaid kõnekavasid, mille käsitlused eestlaste suurest läbi sajandite peetud vabadusvõitlusest langesid kokku Võidupüha retoorikaga. Ka vabariigi aastapäeval räägiti suurest võidust eestlaste ajaloolise vaenlase üle. Kaitsesõja eduka lõpu pühitsemine muutus otsustava lahingu võidu tähistamiseks Võnnu lahingu näol. Nendes kõnedes jäi kõlama Pätsi ja Laidoneri esiletõstmine suurimate rahvuslastena ning autoritaarse korra sisseseadmise ülistus Eesti iseseisvuse päästjana, mis seadis jalule riigi ja rahva ühtsuse ning tegi lõpu killustatusele. Killustatust ja omavahelist kemplemist serveeriti iseseisvuse suurima vaenlasena. Kõnekavade näol levitatav uue korra õigustus omariikluse päästjana oli ehk kõige olulisem muutus vabariigi aastapäeva pühitsemises 1934. aasta riigipöörde järel.

