

DEALING WITH THE RUSSIAN POPULATION IN ESTONIA, 1919–1921

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Discussion about the Russians of Estonia was closely related to the Tartu Peace Treaty (signed in February 1920) and its consequences. As a result of the treaty, Estonia obtained a new zone on its eastern border with the majority of population there being Russians with little connection to Estonia. In addition, Estonia had some 20,000 recent Russian refugees, and approximately the same number of Russians were living already in Estonia.¹ For as long as the war against Soviet Russia had been ongoing, Estonia's decision-makers had been able to postpone the resolving of the situation with the eastern areas and their inhabitants. In the beginning of 1920, this changed. Soon after the Tartu Peace Treaty, Estonia's government decided to integrate the eastern areas – the “won lands” – with the rest of Estonia as closely as possible.²

Another reason why the discussion around Russians was suddenly increasing was that until the year 1920, the Russian question had been overshadowed by issues with the Germans. Becoming free of the German occupation, the land reform, and the Landeswehr war in 1918–1919 had kept the Germans in the political spotlight. However, by the summer of 1920, all German issues had been more or less resolved. Their aspirations for political power had been defeated and their financial privileges had been abolished.³ However, with Russians the situation was more complex and remained unresolved. What made the situation even more difficult was that Estonia was now dealing with a greater number of people; there were almost five times more Russians than Germans living in Estonia. The Russian areas on the eastern border – the Petseri region and the area behind

¹ 1922. a. üldrahvalugemise andmed: vihk X: Tartu ja Valga maakonnad: tabelid (Tallinn: Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, 1924), 18–23. See also E. Kübarsepp, “Vähemusrahvused Eestis”, *Eesti. Maa. Rahvas. Kultuur*, ed. by Hans Kruus (Tartu: Haridusministeeriumi Kirjastus, 1926), 1252–1253.

² Kalle Lõuna, *Petserimaa: Petserimaa integreerimine Eesti Vabariiki 1920–1940* (Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 2003), 26–29.

³ See Kari Alenius, “Under the conflicting pressures of the ideals of the era and the burdens of history: ethnic relations in Estonia, 1918–1925”, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 35:1 (2004), 36–37.

the Narva River – would prove to be quite problematic for the Estonian government and also the Estonian-language press.

The integration of Russian areas with the rest of Estonia

The fact that Petseri and the areas behind the Narva River belonged to Estonia was causing mixed feelings within the Estonian government. On one hand, the peace treaty could be seen as a success since Estonia had obtained even more than all the areas in the east that they could ethnographically ask for. At the same time they had been able to form a military safety zone to protect their eastern border. On the other hand, the Russian majority of the east was considered a safety threat, and in general organizing Petseri and the areas behind the Narva River to be equal with the rest of Estonia politically, culturally, and financially seemed like a massive and an expensive task. However, this kind of integration was necessary unless they wanted to leave the new eastern areas outside of the rest of Estonian society as a separate, undeveloped unit.⁴ That kind of indifference would have only increased the disloyalty and dissatisfaction of the Russian majority towards the Estonian government. Therefore, organizing the affairs of the eastern areas was not a matter of minority politics or merely “handling” the Russian-speaking population of Estonia. It was a matter of balancing the differences in development within Estonia, and the differences were most obvious in Petseri and in the areas behind the Narva River. Balancing these differences was seen as a way of stabilizing Estonian society and increasing the security of the country.

Because the situation of the eastern areas was not clear prior to the Tartu Peace Treaty, the Estonian government decided that the people living in the eastern zone could not participate in the elections of the National Assembly in the spring of 1919. After the conquering of the Petseri region, the area was under military rule for a little over six months, but in the autumn of 1919 town council and municipal council elections were held with universal suffrage. The newly elected councils stepped into office in December 1919.⁵

One of the greatest concerns of Estonia’s government was the cold attitude the Russian officials of the eastern municipalities had towards Estonia and their indifferent attitude towards their own duties. According to an

⁴ Ministry of the Interior, annual report 1920, Estonian State Archives [ERA], f. 14, n. 1, s. 279, l. 71; Ministry of the Interior, annual report 1921, ERA, f. 14, n. 1, s. 578, l. 16. See also Jüri Ant, *Eesti 1920: iseseisvuse esimene rahuaasta* (Tallinn: Olion, 1990), 63–65.

⁵ Correspondence on the parliamentary elections, ERA, f. 2, n. 1, s. 50; Ministry of the Interior, annual report 1920, ERA, f. 14, n. 1, s. 279, l. 72.

estimate by Estonia's Ministry of the Interior, this was seen with all Russian officials, from the police to teachers and municipal councillors. Soon after the conquest of the eastern areas, the central government began to hear complaints of the disorderly situation and sheer criminality, especially among the local government. The Ministry's own inspections done in 1919 confirmed the accusations. For instance, local officials could not organize the tax system in the way the laws required, and therefore all the expenses of cultural and social affairs had to be paid from the central budget. In addition to the insufficient leadership by local officials, security issues were also a problem. The loyalty of the local Russian population towards Estonia was quite questionable, and there were also many war refugees and others without Estonian citizenship who had come from the east and were living near the eastern border. Illegal border crossing was very common, and Soviet Russian spies and people suspected of spying were frequently caught near the border.⁶

All suggestions for improvement offered through official channels fell through, and so Estonia's Ministry of the Interior had to take direct action. They began a special operation to "obtain an order required by the law and to guide the local administration into the right track, making sure their actions follow the law".⁷ On 31 August 1920, a special office of the governor (*maaiülem*) of Petseri, who operated directly under the Ministry of the Interior, was founded. He was given broad discretionary powers in order to achieve the goals of the central government. He had the right to inspect public offices and give instructions in improving their functioning, he could bring lawbreaking officials to justice, and he could also discontinue activities that he saw as unfit to continue. The governor could also order fines or arrests, as well as dismiss officials and order a substitute for the discharged official until the office in charge appointed a replacement. The governor also confirmed all nominations into office. All the institutions of the government and municipality, apart from the courts and military, were under the command of the governor.⁸

The area behind the Narva River caused similar problems for the Estonian government. However, since the area was much smaller and had fewer inhabitants than Petseri, exceptional actions were not required. There the

⁶ Ministry of the Interior, annual report 1920, ERA, f. 14, n. 1, s. 279, l. 71; Ministry of the Interior, Reports of inspection 1919, ERA, f. 2, n. 1, s. 50; Bishop of Virumaa to the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Estonia, 12 May 1920, ERA, f. 1278, n. 1, s. 415, l. 17; "Petserimaa asjad", *Waba Maa*, 10 September 1919.

⁷ Ministry of the Interior, annual report 1921, ERA, f. 14, n. 1, s. 578, l. 16.

⁸ *Riigi Teataja*, 141, 142 (1920), 1121–1122.

official routes of action within Virumaa's administration were utilized in order to improve the situation.

Minister of the Interior Karl Einbund appointed the former chairman of Harjumaa's council Johannes Reinthal as the governor of Petseri in mid-October. He took office on 23 November 1920. His closest cooperator was the chief of Petseri's police A. Toots, who operated directly under the Ministry of the Interior, as did the governor. The arrival of this pair promised tough times for the Russian officials. The new governor began to discipline and replace officers he felt were not fulfilling the demands of the job or were not sensitive enough to the needs of the Estonian central government. The first one to be dismissed was Petseri's newly appointed mayor, and many more officials followed him during the next few months. Less harsh punishments such as notices, warnings, and fines were given every month. The reported reasons for the punishments were typically unnecessary delays in fulfilling orders, misconduct in office, misuse of the official position, and using Russian instead of Estonian when dealing with the central government.⁹

For the most part, the Russian officials in the Petseri region received punishments despite of their nationality, since the cases often were pure misconducts in office. However, to some extent the situation resulted from the ethnic and political tension between the Estonian central government and the local Russian official elite. The question of language was especially flammable. Most of the officials in Petseri's public administration could not speak any Estonian.¹⁰ Moreover, it seems that many of them were unwilling to learn Estonian and in general were quite reluctant in following the language orders of Estonia's constitution. The temporary constitution, as well as its later permanent form, stated quite clearly that Estonian had to be used in all interaction with the central government. Even though most of the officers were unable to speak Estonian, appointing an Estonian-speaking person or hiring the necessary translation services could have corrected the situation. However, for the most part things went according to the language laws, therefore the language disputes were not of great significance.

In addition to improving the administration and ensuring the loyalty of the officials, the governor had another important task: clearing the Petseri area of unwanted persons. The police board of the Ministry of the Interior paid special attention to this beginning in December 1920, with the aim

⁹ Governor's orders of the day, ERA, f. 13, n. 1, s. 3, l. 3–30; Governor's reports, ERA, f. 13, n. 1, s. 6, l. 2–10. See also Ant, *Eesti 1920*, 64–65; Lõuna, *Petserimaa*, 62.

¹⁰ Governor to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 May 1921, ERA, f. 13, n. 1, s. 1, l. 57.

of relocating war refugees and disarmed soldiers of the Russian Northwest Army to elsewhere in Estonia, and in general the number of foreign citizens should be diminished. People crossing the border illegally should be questioned and sent back immediately. According to the Tartu Peace Treaty, all Estonians who were living in Russian areas were now under Russian rule and therefore had to be sent back as well, subjecting them to the normal procedures in appealing for Estonian citizenship. These measures were taken, in part, because Soviet Russia was quite eager to use Estonian nationals in tasks related to spying and propaganda. The region's police and border guard detachment took action immediately, and it seems that the situation was corrected during the winter of 1920–21.¹¹

Deportations and other punishments mostly involved Russians. However, the political view of the Estonian government was not based on solely ethnic factors, as was shown by the way they dealt with Estonian nationals who were trying to cross the border. The most important aim was to improve the security of the border regions by deporting the people whose loyalty to Estonia was questionable. However, the way these deportations were interpreted in Petseri is another issue, as was their impact on the Estonian-Russian relations. It is possible that the relatively harsh treatment some Russians received increased the ethnic tension of the region.¹²

Russian immigrants cause concern for the government

In 1920–21, Russian immigrants were not only a problem of Petseri and the area behind Narva River, though most of the interned former soldiers of the Russian Northwest Army and civilian refugees were staying in camps near the eastern border. The poor conditions of the camps increased the spread of infectious diseases, killing as many as a few thousand Russian refugees during the spring. Thousands of civilians returned home to Russia after the Tartu Peace Treaty and many former soldiers moved on from Estonia to Western Europe during the following months. Due to all this, of the original 60,000 Russian soldiers and civilian refugees that had come to Estonia, only 20,000 were still there by the end of 1920. They were unable to get Estonian

¹¹ Chief Police Government (18 December 1920) and Chief of Petseri region's police (4 March 1921) to the Governor, ERA, f. 13, n. 1, s. 1, l. 1–2, 37; Governor's reports, ERA, f. 13, n. 1, s. 6, l. 2–19.

¹² Ant, *Eesti 1920*, 51–55; Karsten Brüggemann, *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des „Einen und unteilbaren Russland“: Die Petrograder Front des Russischen Bürgerkrieges 1918–1920* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 397; Sergei Isakov, *Russkie v Estonii 1918–1940: Istoriko-kulturnye ocherki* (Tartu, 1996), 7–8, 11–14.

citizenship quickly, although many of them did not want that either.¹³ Suppressing the Bolsheviks and returning to Russia in some conceivable future was undoubtedly still in the minds of some Russians in 1920, though at that point the Russian civil war had already been turning against the Whites.

The Estonian government was not too eager in taking care of the needs of the Russian refugees. The country's financial resources were running low, therefore the maintenance of the refugees was left mostly to international organizations, such as the Red Cross and YMCA. This unwillingness to help had political reasons behind it, too. The presence of Russian White immigrants was straining relations between Estonia and Russia. This situation became even more acute in 1920, when Russian refugees began to organize and show their willingness to fight against the Bolsheviks by means other than war. For example, the refugees founded newspapers in Estonia with the main purpose of using propaganda as a weapon against Soviet Russia's rulers. As a result, Estonia's Ministry of the Interior had to follow the newspapers on a daily basis, giving notices or banning the publication of papers when necessary. However, in many cases where the papers had been suppressed altogether, the publication continued quite soon under another name.¹⁴

Russian refugees were first and foremost a political risk for the Estonian government. Therefore, the government was glad to see the refugees leave the country (though they did not actually deport them themselves). From the Estonian point of view, Russian immigrants were clearly unwanted aliens. The Estonian government wanted to keep their numbers from growing and to keep the ones that were already there under strict surveillance.

This surveillance was meant to ensure the loyalty of Russians towards Estonia. In 1920, Estonia's government took a relatively strict approach in this matter. The deportations of some Russian Orthodox clergy in the summer of 1920 caused perhaps the most public uproar. The Russian National Alliance and representatives of *Deutsche Partei in Estland* disputed the deportations, demanding an explanation from the Estonian government. The government responded that the Russian clergy as a whole had a negative view of Estonia's independence. The government had allowed the Russian Orthodox priests to stay in the country on the condition that they would withhold all public criticism towards the government. Now, however, the

¹³ Committee of the Russian Emigrants in Estonia to the Ministry of the Interior, 1 September 1921, ERA, f. 1, n. 9, s. 430, l. 3. See also Ant, *Eesti 1920*, 55–56; Brüggemann, *Die Gründung der Republik Estland*, 390–92; Isakov, *Russkie v Estonii 1918–1940*, 7–8.

¹⁴ Ant, *Eesti 1920*, 56–57; Isakov, *Russkie v Estonii 1918–1940*, 13–14, 144–153.

Estonian government had received information that some of the clergy had openly refused to accept the Estonian state and its government, while keeping in touch with the former leaders of the Russian Northwest Army. For this reason, the government saw no other alternative but to deport the priests in question, despite the problem that the Russian congregation would be left without its leaders.¹⁵

In November 1920 the teacher nominations of Tallinn's Russian high school caused a similar altercation. In the beginning of the term in August 1920, the school had nominated about 40 teachers. However, soon after this the Ministry of Education sent a letter to the school saying that all teachers must be Estonian citizens. Since over half of the teachers of the Russian school of Tallinn did not fill this requirement, the Ministry did not approve their nominations. The Russian member of the Estonian parliament, A. Sorokin, raised the question in the National Assembly and demanded an answer from the government. The people appealing against the decision saw the actions of the Ministry as being against the law, interpreting the firing of the teachers as actions oppressing the Russian minority.¹⁶

The government's response was similar to the case of the Russian clergy. The government's view was that any teacher in Estonia had to be an Estonian national and loyal to the state and the nation. Russians without nationality, who were staying in Estonia only temporarily, were not seen fit to teach Estonian youth. This was the position of the majority of the National Assembly, too, when the trust of the Minister of Education and the government was voted on.¹⁷

In December 1920 a third case relating to Russians came to light, emphasizing the uncompromising attitudes of the Estonian government and some other Estonian officials towards Russians. In Permisküla, in Northeast Estonia, a fight had broken out in October between local Russian men and soldiers of the Estonian army, resulting in the death of one soldier. Contradictory stories were told about the real reasons of the fight, but the officials claimed that the accused men had attacked the army guards. As a result the fighters

¹⁵ Bishop of Virumaa to the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Estonia, 12 May 1920, ERA, f. 1278, n. 1, s. 415, l. 17; A. Sorokin, M. Bock and G. Stackelberg to the Government of Estonia, 1 July 1920, ERA, f. 15, n. 2, s. 960, l. 2; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu* (The National Assembly), nr. 146 (27) (20 June 1920), 1214–1218; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 149 (30) (2 July 1920), 1348–1355.

¹⁶ A. Sorokin, N. Kann and A. Uibopuu to the Government of Estonia, 16 November 1920, ERA, f. 15, n. 2, s. 966, l. 1–2; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 162 (8) (16 November 1920), 358–361.

¹⁷ President of the National Assembly (Rei) to the Government, 2 December 1920, ERA, f. 15, n. 2, s. 966, l. 3; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 163 (9) (1 December 1920), 409–438.

were field court-martialed, and two men were given the death penalty and the third man received a long prison sentence (12 years). Aleksei Sorokin, the Russian representative in the Estonian National Assembly, demanded an official explanation from the government of this incident, too.¹⁸

Some members brought up the view in the National Assembly that similar incidents between soldiers and civilians had become quite frequent in Estonia. According to them, the reason behind the trouble was the abuse of authority of some army officials, which was often related to the use of alcohol. According to the critics, in cases like this the wrongdoings of the army officials were belittled and the role of the civilians was exaggerated.¹⁹ Looking back, it is very difficult to determine the truth. However, the harsh sentences given to the Russian participants of the Permisküla incident do draw attention. One can ask whether this reflected the negative attitudes towards Russians, which was quite visible also in the army, or did the nationality of the civilians even matter? (The death penalty was not often given in Estonia, except in the case of treason.) Assumedly the Estonian government and the army were trying to maintain order, with a tight hand if necessary. After all, they were in the first few months of peace after years of war and internal battles for power. Perhaps the Russian men in Permisküla served as examples, warning both political revolutionists and any possible national separatists that rising against the government meant dealing with harsh punishments.

Between the end of 1919 and the autumn of 1921, Estonia's government tried actively to make sure that Russians living in Estonia, both citizens or refugees, could not endanger the security of the land. The role of Russian immigrants in Estonian society was limited to a minimum, and the political trustworthiness of citizens born in Russia was constantly monitored. The government had the support of the majority of the National Assembly, and for the most part public opinion seemed to follow along the government's lines. The actions of Estonia's national governments did not much differ from each other. However, the opinions of different parties' newspapers as well as impartial publications had more differences.

Attitudes towards Russians and Estonia's political parties

The newspapers of the two most influential parties in the Estonian government, the Labour Party's (*Tööerakond*) *Waba Maa* and the Estonian

¹⁸ Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 167 (13) (10 December 1920), 550–557.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

People's Party's (ERE) *Postimees*, agreed that the government was handling the Russian issues correctly, and in general Estonia should try to mentally separate itself from Russia and Russians. According to the people who wrote in *Waba Maa* and *Postimees*, this meant, for example, that Estonian civil service departments should be purged from elements that were favorable to Russians and the Russian influence on Estonian language and habits should be diminished. Russians were seen as less educated and less moral than Estonians; therefore Estonians had nothing to learn from the east. The fact that Russia was still quite undeveloped economically undoubtedly enhanced the negative attitudes towards Russians.²⁰

The differences in the views of the Estonian People's Party and the Labour Party in matters relating to society were quite obvious, but regarding Russians they did come together: they were both nationalistic and anti-Bolshevik. In addition, these attitudes manifested in a somewhat aggressive manner. Above all, when it came to Estonia's independence and the dominant position of Estonians in society, both parties saw minorities as threats. Naturally they both allowed minorities to have some basic rights, but that was all.²¹ Displays of political loyalty were expected from minorities, and concerns arose if the government lacked unconditional authority and control over internal affairs. The Russians of Estonia were obviously seen as vulnerable to both Bolshevik propaganda as well as "Great Russia" propaganda. In addition, both parties were worried about the possible cultural appeal the former rulers might have. That Estonians who were unsure of their nationality might identify themselves with Russians for reasons relating to prestige had to be prevented, even if it meant oppressing Russians to some extent. If belonging to the minority would clearly be a social and financial obstacle, being part of that group would not seem appealing.

These views of the Estonian People's Party and the Labour Party were shared by people outside the Estonian political elite, too, if one looks at the articles of Estonia's largest daily newspaper. The views portrayed in *Päewaleht* were in general very similar to the ones posted in the newspapers

²⁰ "Petseri, petserilased ja alkohol", *Postimees*, 10 February 1920; "Mis tahawad meist meie endised eestkostjad sakslased ja wenelased", *Postimees*, 5 March 1920; A. Tõlassepp, "Sõbrustused muulastega", *Postimees*, 12 May 1920; G. N., "Kindlamat kätt meie waenlaste wastu!", *Postimees*, 18 August 1920; A. J., "Külalised ei tohi häbemataks minna", *Postimees*, 15 March 1921; H. Sepp, "Wiidagu Peeter Suure ausammas Tallinnast kesklinnas kuhugi mujale", *Waba Maa*, 9 April 1920; H. Sepp, "Lahti wene mõjust", *Waba Maa*, 18 May 1920; "Wabariigi wastane Wene mustasajaliste organisatsioon Tallinnas awalikuks tulnud", *Waba Maa*, 23 June 1920; "Meie erakondade uue-aasta lootused", *Waba Maa*, 3 January 1921; "Wene seadus Eestis ja Eesti õigustunne", *Waba Maa*, 4 November 1921.

²¹ See Alenius, "Under the conflicting pressures", 39–40.

of both the ERE and the Labour Party.²² It can be surmised that suspicious attitudes towards Russians (and to Bolsheviks, which were in part connected with Russians) were quite familiar to many Estonians during the first years of Estonia's independence. Even though the views of the abovementioned instances cannot be directly seen as the views of ordinary Estonians, it would not be a surprise if the writings of the impartial newspapers as well as the political middle-ground would to some extent reflect the thoughts of ordinary Estonians on Russians and on minorities as a whole. After all, together the Labour Party and ERE had almost half of the mandates of the National Assembly and, based on their work in the parliament the Social Democrats also shared their views on minorities with the moderate left wing and the center-right wing. The conservative right wing (*Maaliit*) differed from the consensus the most.

Maaliit's newspaper *Kaja* did not directly declare their position regarding the way Estonians should see Russians. When it came to Russians and Russia, the newspaper was more focused on Soviet Russia's daily topics and issues relating to economy than to Estonia's national politics during the year 1920. This style was quite expected for the paper, which was strongly against Bolsheviks, especially since the Russian civil war was still ongoing. By describing Russia's internal problems and badmouthing Bolsheviks, the paper portrayed a negative picture of Russia to its readers. When *Kaja* wrote about the Russians living in Estonia, the focus was on immigrants. In principle, the White emigrants from Russia were ideologically closer to the people writing *Kaja* than to those on the opposite side of Russia's civil war, therefore it was easier to feel some sympathy towards them. Accordingly, the overall view of the newspaper was that the conditions of the Russian immigrants in Estonia and their relations with Estonians were quite good. However, the problem was the negative attitude towards Estonia's independence held by many of the White immigrants. *Kaja* focused its criticism especially on this; therefore the picture they portrayed of the immigrants was somewhat negative as a whole.²³

²² "Petersimaa majandusline elu (I-II)", *Päewaleht*, 13 April 1920, 14 April 1920; "Meie opteerimise komisjonid wõtawad wenelasi Eesti kodanikkudeks", *Päewaleht*, 18 August 1920; "Keeltepoliitika koolipõllul", *Päewaleht*, 15 September 1920; "Wenelaste kiriklised lahkpuüded ja Eesti kodanikkude huwid", *Päewaleht*, 20 September 1920; "Walitsuse asutused tuleb muulastest puhastada", *Päewaleht*, 21 October 1920; "Wene emigrandid Eestis paluwad rahwuswahelist kaitset", *Päewaleht*, 17 March 1921; "Keele wenestamine", *Päewaleht*, 13 June 1921.

²³ "Wene emigrantide kihutustöö Eesti wastu", *Kaja*, 12 March 1920; "Wene kongress Tallinnas", *Kaja*, 25 March 1920; *Kaja*, 17 September 1920; "Eesti de jure ja Wene

In matters purely relating to nationality issues, this newspaper supporting *Maaliit* reflected the mild and permissive views of the party.²⁴ The newspaper stated that in general it was against the oppression of minorities and it supported the use of minority languages. For example, people of Estonian origin who were immigrating back to Estonia from Russia spoke Russian, which was quite understandable according to the newspaper. After all, some of these immigrants had been born in Russia. *Kaja*, as well as the party it was supporting, naturally wanted Estonians to have independence; however, it demanded that Estonians understand things had changed. According to *Kaja*, some Estonians were mentally left in a state of inferiority despite the fact that Estonians had risen as the leading power. This inferiority was demonstrated by continuing to fight Germans and Russians, by searching for “national traitors” among their own people, and in general with the non-permissive attitudes in national issues – “need for persecution, which was learned from the former bad teachers”. *Kaja* announced that it was against this “fossilized form of nationality”, because if Estonians treated minorities as badly as the Tsar of Russia or the Baltic-German nobility, Estonians would lose the moral basis of their independence.²⁵

This view did not include propaganda for the “purification from all Russian influences”. All in all, the newspaper *Kaja* seemed to maintain its loyalty to *Maaliit*’s political views regarding minorities. These ideas were based on the idealistic views common to those times on national equality and the allowance of national diversity. When one regards *Kaja*’s claims that some Estonians were stuck in their position as the minority, one can say that *Kaja* might have been correct in saying this according to modern socio-psychological views. Psychological minority as a term refers exactly to the behaviour described by the newspaper: the majority, despite being greater in numbers and in power, see minorities as a threat to their own status and identity. Non-permissive attitudes towards minorities and towards diversity within their own group is part of the picture.²⁶

Views against the generally anti-Russian public discussion were heard from the opposite side of the political field, too. The newspaper *Wõitlus*, which supported the Socialists (i.e. the social-revolutionists, who had

emigrandid”, *Kaja*, 9 February 1921; M. K., ”Wene küsimus Eestis ja Wene pagulased”, *Kaja*, 8 April 1922.

²⁴ See Alenius, “Under the conflicting pressures”, 34, 39.

²⁵ “Kiwinenud rahwuslus”, *Kaja*, 1 November 1920.

²⁶ Kenneth J. Gergen & Mary M. Gergen, *Social psychology* (New York: Springer, 1986), 310–313; Vilho Harle, *The enemy with a thousand faces: the tradition of the other in Western political thought and history* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 10–19.

changed their name in 1920 to Estonia's Independent Socialist Labour Party) did not comment on ethnic questions in Estonia, therefore their attitude towards Russians cannot be determined. It is possible that their ideological sympathy towards Soviet Russia might have made their views on Russians somewhat positive. However, the supporting newspaper of the Social Democrats, *Sotsialdemokraat*, did publish (between the end of 1919 and the autumn of 1921) many broad articles commenting on the status of Russians in Estonia, as well as Estonia's ethnic questions in general.

To be more exact, *Sotsialdemokraat* published altogether ten editorials or articles on the subject during the abovementioned time. However, in this case the writings cannot be taken directly as the official opinion of the party or even the newspaper, since no fewer than seven of the articles were written by the same person, Karl Ast. One can claim that these views were not totally separate from party or newspaper, since Ast stayed as a member of the party and the newspaper continued to publish his writings. On the other hand, the opinions of the non-staff writers do not have to coincide with the views of the paper. Generally speaking, ideas differing from the consensus within individual parties were allowed in Estonia both in the parliament and in the media unless the issues were of great importance to the ideology of the party. However, Karl Ast, a member of the National Assembly, was mostly responsible for creating the picture *Sotsialdemokraat* portrayed of Russians and other minorities.

Ast was most active on minority issues during the later part of 1920. He tackled the position of Estonia's Russians in his writings relating to Petseri. In the autumn of 1920 the Social Democratic Party formulated politics for integrating Estonia's new eastern areas with the rest of the country, and the resulting program seems to have treated Russians quite gently. The principles presented in *Sotsialdemokraat* stated that the eastern areas should be supported generously and the Russians of the area would be kept pleased and therefore loyal to Estonia if they had autonomy in local matters, as unlimitedly as possible. Autonomy would include also supporting local Russian culture as well as their language. Similar ethnic and cultural freedom would be allowed also for the people of Setumaa, i.e. Setus, instead of the tight, government-imposed "standard Estonian" way of being.²⁷

²⁷ "Petserlased, tähele panna!", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 7 October 1920; Karl Ast, "Setumaa olud nõuavad kiiret korraldamist (I–II)", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 15 October 1920; 16 October 1920; Karl Ast, "Ühest ebanähtusest, mis meie riikluse peale halba warju heidab", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 17 October 1920.

The program created by Ast and the Social Democrats for organizing the eastern areas can be partly interpreted as typical opposition politics. After all, in the autumn of 1920 the country had a minority government run by Jaan Tõnisson and ERE, which had just started to create order in the eastern areas with relatively harsh provisional orders. In a situation like this, the opposition is quite normally expected to create an alternative plan and perhaps this model presented in *Sotsialdemokraat* (and apparently mainly designed by Karl Ast) was such an example.

However, there might also be something else behind the situation, something relating to Karl Ast as a person, as well as to some of his ideological companions. Firstly, it was quite natural for the Social Democratic Party to rely on Karl Ast in forming their political concepts regarding the eastern areas and also to send him to Petseri to present the ideas, since Ast was originally from there. Therefore, Ast undoubtedly had a solid understanding of the circumstances of the Petseri region, including the relations between different nationalities. Secondly, one can say that among Social Democrats, Ast was exceptionally interested in issues of nationality. It is very likely that his own identity as a Setu Estonian and his own experiences in living on the border of Russian and Estonian worlds steered his interest towards these issues. His background was likely behind the fact that he was quite understanding towards the wishes of ethnic minorities and felt that the Russians of the border regions should be treated with care.

As Karl Ast had both interest and knowledge of the issues, it seems that he became quite easily the leading man in ethnic questions within Estonia's Social Democratic Party. He participated actively in the minority discussions of the Constituent Assembly and the National Assembly and wrote industriously. Based on the votes of the National Assembly, the majority of Social Democrats did not agree with Ast, however, he was not totally alone with his ideas. There were a few others among the Social Democrats, seen both in the discussions of the National Assembly and in the articles of the *Sotsialdemokraat*, who were interested in the nationality issues and who also were relatively positive in their attitudes towards minorities.²⁸

On the other hand, the Social Democratic Party had many people with quite different views from Karl Ast. For example, the longtime Estonian activist Mihkel Martna became known as a strong advocate against

²⁸ "Hoidkem rahvusliku waenu eest", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 6 March 1920; C. Puiskar, "Riiklisest politikast wähemusrahwuste suhtes", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 21 November 1920; W. Järg, "Petseri maaüleva instituudi likwideerimisest", *Sotsialdemokraat*, 7 November 1921; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 134 (15) (28 May 1920), 596; Minutes of *Riigikogu*, nr. 55 (16), 25 July 1921, 702–711.

Germans. In the National Assembly he tried to influence different issues in a way that Germans would be affected: the possessions of German organizations should be confiscated by the government as completely as possible and the position of German land owners should be brought down with the land reform. His suspicions were directed to other minorities, as well. For example, in the last stages of the handling of the constitution he tried to exclude the clause guaranteeing the primary teaching of minorities in their own language.²⁹ Therefore, one can say that Mihkel Martna personified the dislike towards the German upper class, created by Estonian nationalistic views.

Conclusions

In 1920 the Estonian government began a process of settling the matters with the Russian-speaking population. According to the peace treaty with Soviet Russia, broad areas with a local Russian-speaking majority were attached to Estonia, which made the situation more complex. On the one hand the Estonian government wanted to clarify their relations with the Russian elite, and on the other hand they wanted to ensure that the new eastern areas would remain with Estonia.

The integration measures had already been launched in 1919, though the actual work continued with a new impetus following the conclusion of the peace treaty confirming that the areas belonged to Estonia. The most essential issues from the point of view of the Estonian government were the negligence shown by the mainly Russian authorities regarding these areas and concern for political and military security. There was also some suspicion regarding the loyalty of the local Russian majority towards Estonia, especially in light of the presence of Soviet spies and political agitators.

The governor of Petseri, who had special discretionary powers and was working directly under the Ministry of the Interior, had started his work in November 1920. The most important tasks of the governor were improving the administrative system and securing the political and military security of the province. From Estonia's government's point of view, these actions seemed to have produced more or less the wanted results. Originally the governor was supposed to continue in his post to the end of 1921, but the fast improvement of the conditions in the province allowed the time to be shortened by two months.

²⁹ Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 118 (21) (23 March 1920), 847–853; Minutes of *Asutaw Kogu*, nr. 153 (34) (30 July 1920), 1488.

The overall position of Russians in Estonia generated a great deal of public debate between the years 1919–21. In this discussion the largest parties in Estonia were more or less in agreement about the big picture. *Waba Maa* and *Postimees*, the leading newspapers of the Labour Party and ERE, agreed that the government was handling the Russian issues correctly, and in general Estonia should try to mentally separate itself from Russia and Russians. The views expressed in the largest Estonian daily newspaper, *Päewaleht*, closely resembled those published in *Waba Maa* and *Postimees*, while *Kaja* (*Maaliit's* newspaper) and *Sotsialdemokraat* (Social Democratic Party) criticized the Estonian government for their policy which was partly considered to be too harsh.

However, none of the Estonian parties had any official programs regarding the Russians. Therefore, generalizations can only be made with serious reservations. Moreover, none of the parties tried to actively regulate the position of Russians or the relations between Estonians and Russians in detail anywhere else than in the eastern border areas of the country. The status of Russian in historical Estonian areas (Governorates of Estland and Livland) seemed no longer, especially after the Tartu Peace Treaty, to be such a daily topic that the parties would need to search for new solutions. Estonia's legislation was already by 1919 set to ensure that the cultural, political and economic needs of Estonians were met in a quite satisfactory way.

Nevertheless, the supporting newspapers of all the major parties published a number of articles and other writings, written by politicians, journalists and temporary assistants, which handled at least briefly the relation between Estonians and Russians. Only few editorials discussed these issues, which correspond to the fact that the parties did not include minority issues in their official programs. However, the fact that so many people wanted to address the issue in their writings shows that the question of Russian population in the country was important to relatively many Estonians. From the point of view of these writers at least, the relations between Estonians and Russians were still tense to some extent.

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KOKKUVÕTE: *Suhtumine vene elanikkonda Eestis 1919–1921*

Diskussioon Eestis elava venekeelse elanikkonna seisundi üle oli otseselt seotud Tartu rahulepingu ja selle tagajärgedega. Lepingu tulemusel omandas Eesti oma idapiiril ala, kus valdav osa elanikkonnast oli venekeelne. Varsti pärast Tartu rahulepingu sõlmimist otsustas Eesti valitsus “võidetud alad” ülejäänud Eestiga võimalikult tihedalt integreerida. Petserisse määrati ametisse erivolitustega keskvõimu esindaja – maaülem – kelle ametikoht küll juba järgmisel aastal kahepoolse kriitika tõttu kaotati.

Artikkel keskendub ajavahemikule Vabadussõja lõpust kuni Petseri maaülema ametikoha kaotamiseni 1921. aasta novembris, mida loetakse esimese rahuaegse stabiliseerimisperioodi lõpudaatumiks. Artiklis analüüsitakse värskelt iseseisvunud Eesti riigi valitsuse esimesi poliitilisi ja administratiivseid samme ning nende retseptiooni kohalikus ajakirjanduses.

Elkõige tekitas nii Eesti valitsuse kui ka juhtivate ajakirjandusväljaannete jaoks probleeme riigi idaalade venekeelse elanikkonna vähene lojaalsus ning passiivne vastupanu Eesti riigi suhtes ning vene keele ja kultuuri liiga intensiivne mõju. Valitsuse integreerimispoliitika esmane eesmärk oli vähendada erinevusi vene ja eesti elanikkonna vahel, mis leiti olevat prioriteetne ühiskonna stabiliseerimise ning turvalisuse suurendamise huvides. Tööpartei ja Eesti Rahvaerakonna väljaanded Waba Maa ja Postimees pidasid valitsuse abinõusid rahvusküsimuse lahendamisel igati kohasteks ning nõustusid, et üldiselt peaks Eesti ennast püüdma Venemaast ja venelastest eristada. Päevalehe vaated ühtisid eelnevatega, samas kui Maaliidu häälekandja Kaja ning sotside Sotsialdemokraat kritiseerisid valitsust kohati liiga karmikäelise integreerimispoliitika pärast. Üldiselt puudus aga kõigil Eesti poliitilistel parteidel ametlik programm vene rahvusvähemuse küsimuse lahendamiseks ning ükski neist ei püüdnud aktiivselt reguleerida seda mujal kui riigi idapiiril. Samas võib aga arvukatest kirjutistest ajakirjanduse veergudel välja lugeda, et suhted vene elanikkonnaga olid eestlaste jaoks üle kogu riigi siiski üsna pingelised.