

## **THE SECOND HALF OF 1989 – BEGINNING OF THE REINSTATEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN ESTONIA and THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL**

30 years ago, during the second half of 1989, several important events took place in Estonia, which shaped the subsequent history (starting from the Baltic Way on 23 August until the local elections on 10 December) but the fall of the Berlin Wall was certainly the most notable event on an international scale. It was my fate to participate in this event in a unique and memorable way.

I have to note as a background for the historical coincidence of these liberation processes that the preparation of the Local Government Act was completed by autumn 1989. It was one of the first laws written in Estonia (and not translated from Russian) but it was at any rate the first local government act in former socialist countries, i.e. in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States.

Draft acts which were more interesting for the general public were passed by the Supreme Soviet in the hall of the then Political Education House of the Republic (Sakala Centre) to which the authors of the draft act were invited and where also many other interested persons could participate. Internet broadcasting was not known at that time and particularly the authors of the draft act were required to be present also as experts. The agenda of the 13th session of the XI composition of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian S.S.R. included “Second reading of the Draft Bases of Local Government Act”.

At exactly the same time I travelled home from an international meeting in Prague. I intended to arrive in Tallinn by 10 November. I had planned to fly from Prague to Moscow on 9 November 1989 and from there home. But there was dense fog at the airport in the afternoon, and passengers who wanted to fly to Moscow (about 60 people) were instructed to take a train leaving Prague at 22:00 to travel to Berlin and continue their trip the next morning. It is also important to emphasise that the trip was taken on a dark November night.

We were taken to a railway carriage with compartments with 3+3 seats. The train arrived in Dresden at about 2 o'clock at night. I was sitting in a compartment in the middle of the carriage. There was also a lady with a large suitcase there who was the only one who wanted to get off the train in Dresden. As her suitcase weighed at least fifty kilograms, I decided to help her. We had no idea what had happened the previous evening in the then German Democratic Republic. I came to the carriage door with this extremely heavy suitcase and saw above all teenagers on the platform which was very full of people. I left the lady at the carriage door with her suitcase and rushed back to my compartment because many Germans were already entering through the other door.

I could still sit on my seat. As a seat had become empty in our compartment and it was noticed, a clearly pregnant young woman came to sit there. There was silence in the compartment at first as those who had travelled from Prague were dozing off. But suddenly, at about four o'clock when it was still very dark outside, an older man in our compartment asked – what time is it and when will we arrive in Berlin? He did it in

Russian, of course. Oh my God! Now the German girl rushed out and shouted – there are Russians, there are Russians here! After that the young people shouted for ten minutes “Russen, Russen ...!” in the corridor.

As far as I knew, the train was to arrive in the Schönefeld Airport at about 7 o'clock in the morning. A couple of hours before that I grabbed my suitcase in my arms and started to shift my feet slowly in the corridor towards the door. The label Československo Airlines on my suitcase was examined and I also apologised a lot in German. I managed to pass through the carriage.

In the early morning of 10 November at the Schönefeld Airport I saw what was happening in the streets. The 2+2 lanes were packed with cars and only towards West Berlin. Traffic lights were not functioning and it was not possible to drive in the other direction or cross the highway. But it was at least as memorable to see all other fellow passengers looking out of the carriage windows baffled. I tried to invite them out, waving my hand, but they just shrugged. I think they were afraid to leave the compartments also because of the language.

I approached the Aeroflot counter at the airport. They already know there that we were coming and asked – where are the others? I said that they could not leave the carriage. Then the officials started to swear and shouted that they could not get from Ostbahnhof to the airport then. The situation that I had seen in the streets only confirmed that.

I remember my memorable experience from that night and the morning in detail even now, 30 years later.

The Bases of Local Government Act was passed on 10 November 1989 and a month later – on 10 December the local elections were held, the first free, multi-mandate elections after a half a century.

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