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Relations between Soviet Security Organs and the Estonian Communist Party in 1940–1953. A Case of Mass Deportations in March 1949

Life under Soviet rule is often described using numerous orders and regulations made by different authorities from central, republican, regional, or institutional levels. Where does one level end and the next one begin? What are the boundaries of the levels like? The places where these issues overlap, differentiate, or contrast may remain rather obscure in descriptions. The study of the Soviet period in Estonia began with the determination of its institutional system and hierarchies, as well as surveillance frameworks. The Soviet era cannot be analysed without including the dimensions of centre and periphery or a survey of the work of Party and State Security apparatuses and their mutual relations.¹

The Soviet regime aimed to keep all of society and every individual under total control using the secret police and repressive state apparatus; society was engaged in an endless fight with deviations from established norms. In most studies and stories describing the Soviet period, party members and employees of power ministries emerge as central characters.² The Cheka (and its successors: the OGPU, NKVD, NKGB, MGB, MVD, and KGB) is mostly considered to have been a means of implementing such control and the Red Terror, which had to operate according to Communist Party directives and under the Party's control. The situation at the centre in Moscow appears to have been clear – the prevailing position is that the use and control of the State Security apparatus was Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's "monopoly".³ But what were the power relationships between the Party and the State Security apparatus in the regions? How extensive was the role that the local Party organi-

- 1 TANNBERG, Tõnu (ed.): *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940–1953. Sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis*. Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, Tartu 2007; RAHI-TAMM, Aigi – JANSONS, Ritvars – KAASIK, Peeter: *Estonia i Łotwa*. In: PERSAK, Krzysztof – KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz (eds.): *Czekaści. Organy bezpieczeństwa w europejskich krajach bloku sowieckiego 1944–1989*. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw 2010, pp. 151–188; GETTY, Arch J.: *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2013; GORLIZKI, Yoram – KHLEVNIUK, Oleg V.: *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953*. Oxford University Press, New York 2004.
- 2 FAINSOD, Merle: *How Russia Is Ruled*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1965; FITZPATRICK, Sheila: *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999; HARRISON, Mark: *One Day We Will Live Without Fear. Everyday Lives Under the Soviet Police State*. Hoover Institution Press – Stanford University, Stanford 2016.
- 3 See, for example, KHLEVNIUK, Oleg: *1937-i. Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obschestvo*. Respublika, Moscow 1992. All translations from Russian have been done by the authors.

zation played in the mass repressions? And how extensive was the role of the State Security apparatus? Who controlled whom?⁴ We will answer these questions using the example of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR), focusing on the years 1940–1953, and particularly on the mass deportations of March 1949.

The March deportations, carried out as “Operation Priboi”, was the largest post-war deportation operation in the Soviet Union. Like the Great Terror of 1937–1938, such major operations allow for an analysis of the mutual relations between Party authorities and Soviet State Security structures, as well as the character of the cooperation and division of labour, since both authorities were involved in its implementation. This article aims to focus on these relations. Nonetheless, they cannot be fully analysed, as a significant part of the documentation has not been published.

Furthermore, archival materials on several events in the period 1940–1960 are only partly available to scholars, as a number of them are located in Russian archives. On the other hand, this period is quite well covered with sources in Estonian archives and that also allows for a more detailed investigation of the mutual relations between different power structures. It is important to examine how local activists were used for the implementation of Moscow’s goals.

Tasks and activities of the security organs and the Estonian Communist Party

The Soviet Communist Party and security organs acquired their first experience of sovietizing the conquered territories in the initial stages of World War II in 1939–1941, before war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union (USSR). By that time, these institutions had been developing for about two decades. The eastern region of Poland, today comprising Ukraine and the western part of Belarus, were the first to feel the grasp of the chekists. Thereafter, in June 1940, it was the turn of the countries on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Red Army together with chekists marched into these countries without any combat activity.⁵ Like the former Polish territories, the formation of the Communist Party and State Security apparatus also took place in the Baltic states after the annexation of their territories and incorporation into the Soviet Union.

The NKVD of the Estonian SSR was formed according to the USSR model as a territorial subunit of the latter in accordance with a directive from the head of the

4 HARRIS, James: Dual subordination? The political police and the party in the Urals region 1918–1953. *Cahiers du monde russe*, 2001, Vol. 42, No. 2–4, pp. 423–445.

5 JANSONS, Ritvars: Totalitārā režīma represīvo institūciju mijiedarbība un nozīme sabiedrības pārvaldē Latvijas PSR (1945–1959). In: ERGLIS, Dzintars (ed.): *Totalitārie okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940.–1964. gadā: Latvijas vēsturnieku komisijas 2003. gada pētījumi, Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti, 13. sēj.* Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, Rīga 2004, pp. 442–488; STARKAUSKAS, Juozas: *Represīnu struktūru ir komunistu partijās bēnradarbiavīmas itvirtināt okupacīnī režīmā Lietuvoje 1944–1953 m.* Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, Vilnius 2007; SAUEAUK, Meelis: *Propaganda ja terror. Nõukogude julgeolekuorganid ja Eestimaa Kommunistlik Partei Eesti sovetiseerimisel 1944–1953.* SE & JS, Tallinn 2015.

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People's Commissariat of the NKVD of the USSR, Lavrentiy Beria, dated 29 August 1940. Estonia did not have a Soviet-type security apparatus, such as those that existed in Soviet satellite states of the Eastern Bloc. Rather it was a territorial subunit of Soviet State Security. A majority of cadre chekists were brought to Estonia from the Soviet Union and locals merely played the role of a "screen" (some local Communist Party activists) or provided assistance.

Broadly speaking, this also applied to the Estonian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (ECP/B/) apparatus, because, at first (in the summer of 1940), the number of local party members was around 150 people altogether. In July 1940, the ECP(B) remained the only party authorized to act, and the membership started to grow. Thereafter, the membership of the Estonian Communist Party, which was turned into a subordinate section of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party (VKP/B/) on 8 October 1940, grew considerably, primarily thanks to new arrivals from the Soviet Union, but also including local recruits.⁶

The test of loyalty for the latter was participation in a supporting role in the "mass operation" carried out by the State Security apparatus in mid-June 1941, when, over the course of a few days, approximately 1 percent of the entire population of Estonia, around 10,000 people, was taken to prison camps or forcibly resettled in the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1941, deportations hit all the regions that had been occupied by the Red Army in 1939–1940. In the course of this occupation, these regions had to be "cleansed" of counterrevolutionary and nationalist elements consisting of members of various "counterrevolutionary organizations" and their families.⁷

After Estonia's occupation by German forces in 1941, the chekists were evacuated and the NKVD of the ESSR was liquidated in November of the same year. Since leaders of the ECP(B) had negative experiences with the State Security apparatus, they tried to seize the initiative in the Soviet rear area. In July 1943, when the Red Army was already going on the counteroffensive, new ECP(B) leader Nikolai Karotamm (1901–1969) asked the government of the Soviet Union to form an NKGB (People's Commissariat for State Security, established in 1943) Estonian operative group as quickly as possible, which could be used if Estonia were to be taken by the Red Army. But this attempt failed – that was not part of the ECP(B)'s jurisdiction. The so-called chekist operational groups of the NKGB and NKVD were only formed for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on 30 November 1943. Their main task was to carry out mass arrests, not only of individuals who had collaborated with the Germans but also of members of the Estonian independence movement. In 1944 the National Commit-

6 See HIIO, Toomas – MARIPUU, Meelis – PAAVLE, Indrek (eds.): *Estonia 1940–1945. Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*. Inimsusevastaste Kuritegude uurimise Eesti Sihtasutus, Tallinn 2006; TAMMELA, Hiljar – LIIVIK, Olev: Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei liikmeskond 1940–1941: allikad ja mehaanika. *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri*, 2020, No. 1, p. 60–71.

7 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi: Deportations in Estonia, 1941–1951. In: KUKK, Kristi – RAUN, Toivo (eds.): *Soviet Deportations in Estonia: Impact and Legacy. Articles and Life Histories*. Tartu University, Tartu 2007, p. 9–54; MARIPUU, Meelis – KAASIK, Peeter: Deportations of 14 June 1941. In: HIIO, Toomas – MARIPUU, Meelis – PAAVLE, Indrek (eds.): *Estonia 1940–1945. Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*, p. 366–373.

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tee of the Republic of Estonia was formed in order to restore Estonia's independence and, in September, Jüri Uluots, the last pre-occupation prime minister appointed the Estonian government. The government called for independence-minded citizens to take refuge in the forests and continue resistance in the case of a new Soviet annexation. Those who followed this call, including members of the armed resistance, are known in historical tradition as the Forest Brothers. The ECP(B) apparatus was given the task of recruiting additional manpower into these chekist-operational groups, but they were unable to find enough people and, likewise, its role in appointments to the leadership of the NKGB and NKGB party "nomenklatura" was simply formal. For this reason, the ECP(B) apparatus had, in fact, no rights to appoint State Security leaders to their posts nor could any patron-client relationships develop.⁸

When Estonia was invaded by the Red Army in 1944, political arrests once again reached the scale of a "mass operation" over the following year. Estonian independence-minded people, labelled as "bourgeois nationalists", were the focus of particular attention. The role of the ECP(B) apparatus was to carry out propaganda against them. At the same time propaganda was essential to justify aggressive sovietization and repressive Stalinist policies, as well as to incite political violence.

The Kremlin showed it distrusted the local Party leadership by establishing a particular kind of shadow cabinet in the Baltic states with a decision by the VKP(B) Central Committee (CC) on 11 November 1944. This distrust was mainly due to the fact that, contrary to the Kremlin's expectations, the national independence movement was an unpleasant surprise to the Soviet authorities and therefore it could not trust local staff to lead the sovietization process alone.

The VKP(B) Central Committee's Estonian Bureau, with a representative of the State Security apparatus as one of its members (in Estonia initially /1944–1945/ General Nikolay Sazykin /1910–1985/, and thereafter General Nikolay Gorlinski /1907–1965/) covertly steered the actions of both the local State Security and Party apparatuses until March 1947.⁹

Although the provision of propagandistic cover for the mass repression campaigns that were being carried out by the State Security apparatus remained the main role of the Estonian Communist Party, Soviet leadership also provided certain instruments at their disposal that could be used to exert pressure also on the State Security apparatus. At first, the first secretary of the ECP(B) Central Committee and the Central Committee departments were responsible for curating chekist Party organizations as well as the political and personnel work of the chekists, along with their main field of activity – the struggle against the independence-minded underground, members of which were declared "political bandits". After the reform of Party organs in 1948, all aspects

8 SAUEAUK, Meelis: "Erikaader". Nomenklatuur ja julgeolekuorganid Eesti NSV-s 1940–1953. *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 2015, No. 154, pp. 407–440.

9 TANNBERG, Tõnu: "Selle büroo ülesandeks on...": ÜK(b)P Keskkomitee Eesti büroo osas Eesti NSV sovetiseerimisel aastail 1944–1947. In: TANNBERG, Tõnu (ed.): *Nõukogude Eesti külma sõja ajastul. Eesti Ajalooarhiivi toimetised = Acta et commentationes Archivi Historici Estoniae*, 2015, No. 23. Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, Tartu 2015, pp. 11–30.

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pertaining to the work of State Security and other institutions of repression were concentrated in the newly created ECP(B) Central Committee's Administrative Department. This meant working with chekist personnel, supervising the fulfilment of directive decisions, and directing the work of institutions' Party organizations. Most of the five employees of the Central Committee's Administrative Department were from the Soviet Union and several had at least short-term previous work experience in State Security. Pavel Anissimov, an official of the Party apparatus who had been sent to Estonia in 1946, was appointed as head of the department. So-called cadre work, for instance, primarily consisted of formally approving officers who belonged to the Party "nomenklatura" and assisting with the recruitment of new personnel. In the case of the leadership of the State Security organs, the Estonian Communist Party was not authorized to decide on appointments, and this gave leading chekists even more independence from local Party authorities. Thus, conflicts and rivalry between them were already programmed into the system in advance. All in all, the leading role of the ECP(B) apparatus was not real, instead leadership was imitated according to instructions received from the Kremlin.

In the post-war years, the activities of the authorities of the Estonian SSR were primarily focused on suppressing the population's resistance. The repressive organs had to play a central role in this. While in 1940–1941 new institutional settings were established and systems introduced, control over society took more visible forms in the post-war period.¹⁰ The years 1944–1953 were marked by various campaigns and struggles, as recent war events had created numerous types of enemies. In 1945, the independence-minded armed resistance movement became the primary obstacle to sovietization. The suppression of this movement was assigned to the chekists, yet it also affected the Party organization and influenced relations between State Security and the Party. The Soviet regime treated the armed partisan resistance movement or the Forest Brothers, as they called themselves, as a criminal offence – "political banditry".¹¹ Since resistance was a very serious problem, it was precisely what enabled the ECP(B) to put pressure on the security apparatus. The ECP(B)'s role in the struggle against the armed resistance movement consisted of carrying out Party propaganda with the aim of finding support among the population in order to compromise the resistance fighters and to illustrate the senselessness of resistance. It also put pressure on the security organs to intensify the struggle against banditry, form destruction battalions, carry out campaigns to "legalize" those who surrendered, and so on. The joint decree issued by the ECP(B) CC and the ESSR Council of People's Commissars on 26 December 1945 prescribed that *the struggle against the bourgeois-nationalist underground and its bandits is the most important assignment for all employees of the Party, the Soviets, and Komsomol organizations in Estonia*.¹² In July 1946, the leadership of the

10 TANNBERG, Tõnu: Moskva institutsionaalsed ja nomenklatuursed kontrollimehhanismid Eesti NSV sõjajärgsetel aastatel. In: TANNBERG, Tõnu (ed.): *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940–1953. Sovietiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis*, pp. 227–228.

11 ANUŠAUSKAS, Arvydas (ed.): *The anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltic States*. Pasauliui apie mus – Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, Vilnius 2006.

12 *Estonian National Archives* (further ENA), ERAF.1. 4. 225, p. 112.

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ECP(B) CC issued an order to its Party organs to depict the Forest Brothers in Party propaganda as murderers and robbers and not as fighters with political objectives.

However, in May 1948, Party leader Nikolai Karotamm started speaking of the Party as the leader of the MGB. This marked the beginning of the application of pressure on the ESSR MGB. The MGB also subjected Party authorities to countercriticism, mostly concerning the results of propaganda work and the weak organization of the activities of the destruction battalions, or in Party language, *scant assistance from Party organs*. The destruction battalions were a characteristic example of relations between the Party and the security organs since redundancy in administration was a problem here as well. Initially, the destruction battalions (istrebitels) were formed under the aegis of the party organization, but, under the operational management of State Security, the role of the party diminished year by year until the battalions became its structural unit. The pro-Soviet “aktiv” formed the core of the destruction battalion. In November 1946, it had about 7,000 members.¹³ The next phase in the sovietization of the Baltic countries was intended to be the sovietization of villages.¹⁴ In the autumn of 1944, the redistribution of lands, which had been interrupted in 1941, continued. The attack on the village elite, which was stigmatized in keeping with the example of the Soviet Union using the term “kulak,” came to the fore as of the end of 1946 and culminated in the mass deportation operation of March 1949. As different studies show, the background of those who were declared to be “kulaks” was extremely varied. It not only concerned former great landowners and well-to-do people as one would assume, but also new settlers who had recently received acts for the lifelong use of land or a household, barely coping with everyday life.¹⁵

On 21 May 1947, the CC of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevist) Party adopted a decree on the *Formation of collective farms in the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian SSR*, setting a course for collectivization in agriculture. On 30 August 1947, the Council of Ministers of the ESSR adopted Decree No. 654, which established the criteria for defining a “kulak household”¹⁶ and imposed higher agricultural taxes for those who had been confirmed as “kulaks”. After this decision, both the ECP(B) CC and the ESSR State Security organs received assignments to attack “kulaks”. Now lists of “kulak farmsteads” rapidly began to grow longer in community executive committees. It is important to emphasize the provision in the decree which demanded the partici-

13 NOORMETS, Tiit – OHMANN, Valdur (eds.): *Hävitajad. Nõukogude hävituspataljoniid Eestis 1944–1954. Dokumentide kogumik*. Riigiarhiiv, Tallinn 2006.

14 KÖLL, Anu Mai: *The Village and the Class War. Anti-Kulak Campaign in Estonia*. CEU Press, Budapest – New York 2013.

15 FREI, Lauri: Kulakuks tegemine kui märtsiküüditamise ettevalmistav samm Tartumaa Äksi valla näitel. In: *Varia historica IV: Uuemaid aspekte märtsiküüditamise uurimisest*. Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, Tallinn 2009, p. 36–40; PAAVLE, Indrek: *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis 1940–1950* (Doctor’s Degree). Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu 2009.

16 In descriptions of “kulak households” a number of criteria were listed, such as, for example, they used regular farmhands or wage labour in a systematic way or systematically paid for non-family labour in kind, i.e. in products or use of machinery; they earned income from the lease of farm machinery, mills, or other subsidiary work; they rented out land for cash, or earned income from commercial activities.

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pation of village activists in selecting farmsteads to be listed.¹⁷ Thus new settlers and employees of the local community and party organizations had to begin to pay their “debts” to the state. All told, the selection of “kulaks” and “people’s enemies” turned out to be one of the most destructive processes in villages.

Although the propaganda for setting up collective farms became increasingly intense after 1947, it did not have much influence on the population. By 1949, only 10% of farmsteads had joined a collective farm. It was the excessive tax burden that made people join collective farms. The peasantry tried to maintain their economic independence as long as possible.¹⁸ The pace of collectivization accelerated only after the mass deportation on 25–30 March 1949 gave a boost to the process. Within ten days of the deportation about half of peasant households submitted applications to join a collective farm; by 1951, 92% of Estonian farms had been collectivized. Thus, propaganda was not efficient enough to collectivize Estonia, and direct violence had to be committed in order to achieve this aim. This also entailed rapid urbanization: whereas a third of the population lived in towns in 1945, half of the population were residing in them by 1953.

The deportation of March 1949 was the most large-scale act of repression and a crime against humanity in the post-war Soviet Union. This operation encompassed both “nationalists”, “bandits”, and other organizers of resistance, as well as “kulaks” and their families. It is important hereby to emphasize that the Forest Brothers’ activity was only possible thanks to assistance from country people who gave them food and other provisions, and also were in contact with them and offered them shelter. The deportation operation had to liquidate the social basis of the anti-Soviet struggle in all Baltic countries.¹⁹ We will now examine in detail the 1949 operation, whose organization reveals the relationships and chains of command between State Security organs and the party more clearly.

Preparation and organization of “Operation Priboi” in 1949

In early 1948, Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948), the secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) AUCP(B), received a report which claimed that the formation of kolkhozes in the Pribaltika was being hampered by the activities of bourgeois nationalists and their armed gangs, as well as by the farm system in general.²⁰ On 29 January the following year, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted final decision No. 390-138ss: *On the deportation of kulaks and their*

17 KIVIMAA, Ervin: Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine aastail 1947–1950. In: *Sotsialistliku põllumajanduse areng Nõukogude Eestis: artiklite kogumik*. Kirjastus Eesti Raamat, Tallinn 1976, p. 234.

18 FEEST, David: *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum: Die Sowjetisierung des estnischen Dorfes 1944–1953. Beiträge zur Geschichte Osteuropas 40*. Böhlau Verlag, Cologne 2007.

19 ZUBKOVA, Jelena: *Baltimaad ja Kremli 1940–1953*. Varrak, Tallinn 2009, p. 134.

20 SAUEAUK, Meelis: O roli Kommunisticheskoj partii Estonii v provedenii martovskoi deportatsii 1949 goda. *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* (Spetsvypusk po istorii Estonii XX veka) 2010, p. 154–163. After the death of Andrei Zhdanov in August 1948, Georgi Malenkov (1902–1988) began to supervise issues concerning the Estonian SSR in Moscow.

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families, illegal persons, families of bandits and nationalists killed in armed conflicts or convicted in court, legalized bandits continuing resistance activities, and their families, as well as persons assisting the families of repressed bandits, from the territories of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.²¹

Two weeks previously, on 18 January 1949 at a late hour (from 10.05 p. m. until 10.50 p. m.), party leaders from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were summoned to the Kremlin for an audience with Stalin. The Kremlin wished that the deportation of the “kulaks” would be publicized as a collective initiative of the party leaders of the republics, although the decision to carry out such a mass operation had been made within a close circle.²² After some consultations at the Central Committee of the AUCP(B), the decision to carry out the deportations was compiled. Stalin gave Beria (deputy chairman of the council of Ministers of the USSR) the specific orders to prepare the operation and he in turn gave respective orders to the MGB and MVD. Some days later, security ministers of the republics were also summoned to Moscow to discuss the organization of the operation, determine the categories of families to be deported, and the numbers involved. This was followed by a respective decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and organizational directives of the Ministry of State Security.

The following processes were mainly directed by the MGB of the USSR. According to the quota of families to be deported, which had been assigned to the Estonian SSR, 7,500 families were to be expelled, with counties having to divide this number up amongst themselves. This was followed by a phase that saw the rapid compilation of identification papers and the completion of documents in the MGB's offices. The documentation necessary for expelling each family was put together in an official file at the department overseeing the region in which the family resided. Documents and facts concerning the deportees were obtained from various institutions, from the beginning of February until the middle of March.²³

Simultaneously with compiling the files of deportees, the MGB departments were also dealing with concrete action plans. Calculations concerned personnel, transport facilities, and communications, as well as the operative groups responsible for conducting the operation in various places. Obviously, the human resources of the MGB were not enough to carry out such a massive operation. Reinforcements had to be obtained from the Ministry of the Interior, MGB and MVD troops, and the Border Guard. But even more additional forces, local activists, and officials (sovparktaktiv)

- 21 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi – KAHAR, Andres: Deportation Operation Priboi in 1949. In: HIIIO, Toomas – MARIPUU, Meelis – PAAVLE, Indrek (eds.): *Estonia since 1944. Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*. Inimsusevastaste Kuritegude Uurimise Eesti Sihtasutus, Tallinn 2009, pp. 429–460. The text of this resolution has been published in *Lietuvos gyven-tojų' tre'mimai: 1941, 1945–1952 m.: Dokumentu rinkinys*, Vol. 1. Vilnius, 1994, pp. 303–305.
- 22 TANNBERG, Tõnu – SAUEAUK, Meelis: Kuidas võeti Kremlis vastu otsus ühise küüditamisoperatsiooni läbiviimiseks Balti liiduvabariikides 1949. aasta kevadel? Nikolai Karotamme ülestähendus kohtumisest Jossif Staliniga 18. jaanuaril 1949. *Tuna, Ajalookultuuri ajakiri*, 2015, No. 3, pp. 92–97.
- 23 KAHAR, Andres: Kuidas märtsiküüditamist ette valmistati. In: SAUEAUK, Meelis – MARIPUU, Meelis (eds.): *Toimik „Priboi“. Artikleid ja dokumente 1949. aasta märtsiküüditamisest. Eesti Mälu Instituudi toimetised nr 2*. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu 2019, pp. 41–55.

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had to be involved in the final stage of the operation. In Estonia, 2,100 operative groups were to be formed with each group being in charge of deporting four families.

Statistical calculations about the forces differ. According to the preliminary plans formulated (in February) by Lieutenant General Pyotr Burmak, who was in charge of preparing the MGB's Internal Forces for the Operation, in order to carry out the task in Estonia, it would have been necessary to employ 2,198 MGB operatives, 5,953 military personnel, 3,665 destruction battalion personnel,²⁴ and 8,438 party activists. The total number was 20,254 people, which means one deporting person per one deported person. Actually, their number was higher.²⁵

Along with the military personnel, who arrived from Karelia, Leningrad, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the political apparatus that had to ensure discipline had been staffed. In accordance with the rules, a member of the Communist Party or Komсомol who checked the activities of the military, had to belong to every operative group. On 6–9 March 1949, the personnel of the units as well as weapons and means of transport and communications were checked. The personnel underwent an overall check-up “from every aspect”; undisciplined or morally unreliable military were not allowed to participate in the operation. According to the plan, the task was not revealed to soldiers from outside the Baltic republics. The officers received instructions immediately before arrival at their places of destination. The concentration of troops in the Baltic republics was explained as a spring training manoeuvre.²⁶

How were the local activists recruited and included in the process? The deported persons and their families most vividly remembered the behaviour of local activists at this time, who worked as guides or made written records of their property. They did not remember operative workers who were unknown to them or officers who gave orders. The engagement of local people in fulfilling the task made them accomplices in the operation.

At the moment of the deportation, operative groups consisting of representatives of different institutions and soldiers were covertly taken to the expected regions. On average, one group was assigned for four households. At first, the buildings had to be blockaded, then the elder of the group entered the house with soldiers, identified the people in the house, and informed the head of the family of the deportation decision. Quick packing and the finalizing of documents followed. The deportees had to be taken to an assembly station (a municipal building, for example) or to a train, to a transfer station of the echelons. The operative groups were ordered to be ready for armed attacks and they had to use a red distress flare to summon assistance. After the task was completed, members of the groups had to act according to the instructions of the operations personnel; either to help other groups or work at transfer stations.

To estimate the mutual relations between the Party and the security organs, it is essential to ask: At what moment was the party engaged in the operation? What

24 The destruction battalions were first formed in 1941. These lightly armed units were often employed in various counterinsurgency operations aimed at the Forest Brothers and other anti-Soviet elements.

25 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi – KAHAR, Andres: *Deportation Operation Priboy in 1949*, pp. 435–439.

26 Ibid., pp. 436–437.

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were its tasks? And who carried the main responsibility for the operation's success? At first, only a few members of the ECP(B)'s Central Committee and the Council of Ministers were aware of the preparations. Everything had to be kept secret. The circle of informed people and structures expanded only a few days before the operation. Local activists were briefed practically at the moment the operation was launched. The success of such a large-scale operation was dependent upon its unexpectedness; to prevent people from fleeing or panicking, as well as to avoid attacks by the Forest Brothers, who were also feared. All the connected activities had to be carried out on a strictly conspiratorial basis, and with seemingly innocent pretexts. Disclosing, in even the slightest manner, what was about to take place, was forbidden and punishable. The circle of informed persons widened in mid-March when forces were spread out into counties. In the week preceding the operation, operative groups were formed, and leaders were assigned.

Issues related to Party activists and the Soviets were probably solved directly through the First Secretary of the ECP(B) CC Nikolai Karotamm. The ECP(B) CC sent its special representatives to the counties,²⁷ who arrived there by 22 March at the latest (three days before the operation). The activists were convened by party secretaries, who received this assignment from the local ECP(B) Committee's first secretary, who, in turn, had been instructed by the ECP(B) CC and Council of Ministers' special representative. It was strictly forbidden to inform the secretaries of the operation beforehand.²⁸

Reports concerning the recruitment of activists, how they were specifically chosen or, on the other hand, how they happened to be forced to serve the operation just by chance, are contradictory. Valga County activists, for instance, were picked out by ECP(B) County Committee First Secretary Aleksei Ovsjannikov, who found suitable individuals amongst Party members, membership candidates, Komsomol and Party employees.²⁹ At the same time, there are also plenty of examples where people were recruited into the operative groups just by chance. There are different examples, for instance, people leaving a cinema, who, along with others, were taken to the offices of municipalities, and were not permitted to leave until the beginning of the operation.

On the evening of 24 March, activists and others were convened under a false pretext: discussing the spring sowing, a party meeting, etc. As the local functionaries were required to convene a considerable number of people within a short period of time, the possibility of gathering a sufficient amount of participants depended on their activity, or the ability to attract people to the event (at some locations advertisements invited people to the cinema, a buffet, a meeting with Karotamm, etc.). Therefore, diverse groups were formed. It even happened that people included on the lists of deportees were also listed as activists. Such individuals were arrested during the operation. The decision of the deportation was announced to the activists at the

27 MERI, Arnold: Volinikuna Hiiumaal. *Edasi*, 19. 2. 1988.

28 At the Eighth Plenary Session of the ECP(B) CC, Minister of State Security of the ESSR Boris Kumm confirmed that he had no right to inform the secretaries about the matter. AROLD, Mart: *Märtsivapustused*. Tungal, Tartu 1995, p. 60.

29 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi – KAHAR, Andres: *Deportation Operation Priboj in 1949*, p. 440.

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moment when the heads of the operative groups arrived with the troops, and armed guards were posted at the doors.

Nikolai Karotamm's instructions to the activists were as follows: *In rural municipalities, conduct the gatherings without any unnecessary ears present. Send them out to the operation directly from the instruction room. The deportation note is not to be handed to the deportee. [...] The activists are to stay in the household. Most extensive political explanatory work is to be carried out on the same day. To explain who was deported and why. To confirm that the others would not be deported. To engage kolkhoz members in the process of deportation.*³⁰

“Operation Priboi” officially began in the early morning hours of 25 March, at 4 a. m. in the capital cities, at 6 a. m. in the counties, and it had to be carried out within three days. Appropriate orders were issued six to 10 hours before the beginning of the operation. Altogether, around 95,000 “people’s enemies” and “kulaks” (20,713 people from Estonia, 42,149 from Latvia, and 31,917 from Lithuania) were sent to Siberia.³¹

Despite the long-standing deportation experience of the security organs, the operation did not proceed as planned; many people were not captured. The main reason for this was that people had been staying away from home. In Estonia, some 10,000 people managed to avoid deportation. Reports submitted after the operation clearly signal that there were a number of problems, faults, and concerns.

The major drawback was the compassion for the “contingent” that was expressed by participants in the operation, and their “false attitude” to the operation as a whole. Orders were fulfilled incorrectly; in some places the people to be deported were warned; many people engaged in deportation turned up drunk, or slept at sentry posts; people were allowed to move along the railway platforms; little enthusiasm was shown for capturing fugitives – these were the primary features used to characterize the faults and oversight of those carrying out the operation, including servicemen. Although people with different backgrounds belonged to the operative groups who had to check on each other, this did not ensure the complete fulfilment of the orders. One of the motives why the MGB workers and soldiers were taken to the Baltic countries from such far-away places could have been the hope that they would not feel any compassion for the local population.

The behaviour of members of the operative groups was diverse. There were several incidents, one of the strangest of which happened in Viru county. Corporal Kondakov³² set up an ambush near a farm from where the dwellers had escaped. But two Party activists also went to the same farm and entered the house. Kondakov didn't know them, thought they were bandits, and ordered them to put their hands up. Instead of obeying orders, Party activist V. Burjak started loading his gun and, at the same moment, Kondakov shot Burjak. The subsequent investigation found out that the head of the operative group, Lieutenant Markin from the Kostroma Oblast, had not instructed his group as required.³³

30 RAID, Lembit: Kas peremees või käsualune? Parteiarhiivi materjalidest, III. *Kleio*, 1995, No. 12, p. 46.

31 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi: *Deportations in Estonia, 1941–1951*, pp. 19–33.

32 Where no first names are given, they are unknown.

33 ENA, ERAF.4-K.1.65, Report on the results of the operation in Viru county, 30. 3. 1949, pp. 96–97. An Oblast (province) is larger than a county (raion), specific to Russia.

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After the operation, a number of meetings were held to discuss people's political-moral state and the strengthening of service discipline. The little moral support that some of the deporting activists had had courage to show needed to be corrected by the organs, and the people had to be re-educated. In fact, the Party organs played a secondary role in the operation, and their contribution primarily depended on the individual members – how actively he/she participated or not. The security organs did not consider the activities of the ECP(B) CC special representatives important enough to even mention them in reports. The execution of the operation in all its stages was fully under the supervision and control of State Security. Conversely, local figures and activists are to the fore in people's memories, and their role as executors was remembered for decades. Stories about them are still told today. For the authorities, the fear of fellow citizens was an effective means of keeping the population under control.³⁴

For Moscow, the main culprit for various mistakes was ultimately the leadership of the ESSR in the person of First Secretary Nikolai Karotamm and the Minister for State Security Boris Kumm, who were dismissed from office in 1950. At the 1950 March-pleinary, when Karotamm was dismissed, faults in the March deportation were mentioned, but these issues were not included on the list of official accusations. Karotamm did not regret the deportations, but, instead, rued technical mistakes made during the operation. Neither Karotamm nor Kumm were repressed. The year 1950 was a turning point in Estonia in relations between the Party and the State Security apparatus. From that point onwards, the security agency almost completely ignored the Party's leading role.³⁵

This situation only began to change during the final months of Stalin's reign. On 4 December 1952, a decision *Concerning the situation in the MGB* was issued by the CPSU CC, and it prescribed that control over the MGB was the most important task of the Party organs. This decision no longer left any doubt that Party authorities had to start controlling not only the MGB Party organization, but also all the activities of the MGB, including operative-agency work. An ECP CC Bureau decision *Concerning the state of the Party political work of the ESSR MGB Party organization and measures for its improvement* was issued on 13 January 1953 in response to this. According to this decision, Party organizational work in the MGB was of a poor standard and a commitment was made to improve the situation. The MGB Party committee secretary was supposed to start making reports to the ECP(B) CC Bureau concerning the fulfilment of the decision. Yet, since political conditions changed due to Stalin's death, the relevant institutions did not manage to actually start implementing this decision.³⁶

34 RAHI-TAMM, Aigi: Stalinist Repression in Estonia: State of the Research and Open Questions. *Croatian Political Science Review*, 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1–2, p. 43.

35 LIIVIK, Olev: "The Estonian affair" in 1949–1952 and the Eighth Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party in 1950. In: HIIO, Toomas – MARIPUU, Meelis – PAAVLE, Indrek (eds.): *Estonia since 1944. Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*, pp. 131–149.

36 SAUEAUK, Meelis: *Propaganda ja terror. Nõukogude julgeolekuorganid ja Eestimaa Kommunistlik Partei Eesti sovetiseerimisel 1944–1953*, pp. 357–363.

Conclusion

An analysis of the March 1949 deportation clearly reveals the leading role of the security apparatus, including their relations with Party organs, in such extremely important operations concerning the sovietization of Estonia. The ECP(B) CC Bureau later approved the deportation in its decision. Thus, the Party authorities are jointly responsible for the planning, implementation, and consequences of the March deportation, and the policy of violence as a whole. Regardless of whether the ECP's leading position was factual or fictitious, its leadership assumed the duty of directing the security organs in a serious manner and demonstrated initiative in this regard. The security organs almost completely ignored the Party as an institution, and this only started to change gradually in the final months of the Stalinist period.