

## MINUTES OF 1939 ESTONIAN-SOVIET NEGOTIATIONS

*Below is a translated transcript of the full negotiations leading up to the Soviet occupation of Estonia. Since they are so long, a few key comments have been excerpted.*

### **Negotiation Excerpts:**

**Molotov:** *(into the telephone)* Comrade Stalin, come here. Mr. Selter and the other Estonian gentlemen are here with me. He and his associates argue against our new proposal. They call it occupation and other dreadful names. Come and help me to persuade them of the necessity of our proposal.

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**Stalin:** *The measures we provided in this pact are absolutely necessary. To these measures belong also the garrisons of our troops in Estonia totaling 25,000. Do not force us to look for other possibilities 'for the security of the Soviet Union'. Do not be afraid of these garrisons. We assure you again as we did before, that the Soviet Union does not want in any way to harm either the Estonian sovereignty, government, economic system, or the internal life of Estonia, or her foreign policy.*

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**Stalin:** *The agreement has been achieved. I can tell you that the Estonian government acted well and wisely in the interests of the Estonian people by concluding the agreement with the Soviet Union. It could have happened to you what happened to Poland. Poland was a great country. Yet, where is Poland now? Where is Moscicki, Rydz-Smigly, Beck? Yes, I am telling you frankly—you acted well and in the interests of your people,*

**Selter:** *This is also the opinion of my government, my colleagues and myself. There remains one more matter for me to touch upon. In the last days your warplanes have been repeatedly violating Estonian borders and flying over Estonian territory. So far, we have been abstaining from shooting at them. But I lodged protests with your Minister in Tallinn and with Mr. Molotov. These flights are inappropriate, especially now, during the time of our negotiations. We know that you have plenty of planes, many more than those that have been flying: over Estonia in demonstration. We know that the Soviet Union is strong. What is the purpose of overdoing the demonstration of your power?*

**Stalin:** *Well, these were young inexperienced airmen. They make errors. They are not attentive enough to their orders. But we can make an end to that. That will not happen again.*

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## Full Discussions at the Kremlin on September 24, 1939

The Foreign Minister of Estonia, K. Selter, with his wife arrived in Moscow on September 24, 1939 at 4 P.M. upon invitation of the Soviet Government. With him came the Director of the Division of Commerce of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, E. Uuemaa. At the station were to receive him besides the Estonian Minister Rei, and his wife, other officials of the Legation, and from the Soviet Union such representatives as customarily have been meeting the Foreign Ministers of other countries recently [for instance lately the German Foreign Minister).

The same evening, at 9 o'clock, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and Foreign Commissar, Molotov, received the Estonian Foreign Minister at the Kremlin. At the reception were from Estonia Minister Rei, from the Soviet Union Trade Commissar Mikoyan.

The first part of the conversation revolved around the commerce between Estonia and the Soviet Union, whereby it was recalled that Minister Selter had been in the Soviet Union in 1934, concluding a commercial treaty which brought a change into the trade relations of both countries that have been developing smoothly and satisfactorily. At this point Molotov led the conversation to the political field as follows:

**Molotov:** The commercial relations seem to be in order and the new trade treaty, for the formal signing of which the Soviet Government has invited you to visit Moscow, is ready. But the political relations between the Soviet Union and Estonia are not in order, they are bad. The escape of the interned Polish submarine from Tallinn shows that the Estonian Government does not care very much about the security of the Soviet Union. The Estonian Government either does not want or is not able to keep order in its country and thereby endangers the security of the Soviet Union. The written explanation of the Estonian Government given in this matter through Minister Rei is not enough.

You admit that there were certain failures in the mechanism of the submarine. Consequently—and this is confirmed by our information—the interned submarine was put in order in Tallinn, was supplied with fuel, 6 torpedoes were left aboard, and then she was let to leave. The explanation of the Estonian Government does not refute this suspicion. In this manner a submarine has gone to sea from which the Soviet Union can fear an attack upon its shipping.

The Soviet Union; having great interests in the Baltic Sea: the large port of Leningrad, a large merchant marine and also a large navy, is not in any way protected against such surprises also in the future. The mouth of the Gulf of Finland is in the hands of other countries and the Soviet Union has to be satisfied with what other countries are doing at that entrance. That cannot continue in this way. It is necessary to give to the Soviet Union effective guaranties for the protection of her security. The Politbureau of the Party and the Government of the Soviet Union have decided to demand from the Estonian Government these guaranties and for that purpose to suggest to conclude a military alliance, or mutual assistance pact, which would give to the Soviet Union the right to have on Estonian territory naval and air support points or bases.

**Selter:** The mutual relations between Estonia and the Soviet Union have been constantly good. I have come here also for the purpose of emphasizing those good-neighborly relations.

As far as the new issues are concerned which you have brought up, permit me first of all to mention that during the period of internment, also escape of the submarine, there did not exist officially a state of war between the Soviet Union and Poland. Therefore, there would arise in the first place the question whether and to what extent could the Government of the Soviet Union reproach Estonia

about the infringement of any international rules and base any demands upon the fact of the infringement of these rules.

If we are speaking about the rules of neutrality, then the entry of submarines of the belligerent parties into harbors of Estonia, as a neutral country, is prohibited, except for certain special cases. Sea peril, that is also a mechanical breakdown, is a special case. This situation was known to the Soviet Union. In our explanation it is stated that the submarine based its reason for entry upon sea peril and demanded her release. However, the Estonian Government found that the mechanical failures did not prevent the vessel from moving and therefore did not correspond to the meaning of sea peril. Only the fact that the vessel was able to move gave us the right to intern the vessel. If the vessel would not have been able to move, because of mechanical failures, it would not have been possible to intern her.

Therefore there is no basis for the accusation that the interned vessel had been put in order by Estonia. Whether the failures which have occurred in the mechanism have for the present moment been eliminated, that we do not know.

As to the escape of the Polish submarine, I can assure once more that in this incident there is no basis for suspecting the Government of Estonia either in connivance or negligence. To the contrary, the Estonian Government and authorities have in their best judgment taken measures for holding the vessel. If she nevertheless has escaped, then it has been to a great extent a misfortune which we ourselves regret most.

However, in no way can it be concluded from this case that the Government of Estonia is not able to protect its country's neutrality, or, as you have stated, to keep order in Estonia. Much less would it be possible to draw from this case any extensive conclusions with respect to Estonian-Soviet relations. I can add that a judicial inquiry into the escape of the submarine is in progress and it would be advisable to await the results thereof.

However, as to the question you have raised concerning a mutual assistance pact and bases, I am not authorized to talk about it. But I can say that these proposals are directly contrary to the policy of neutrality towards all countries in general which has been so impeccably followed by Estonia heretofore, and especially during the last years. This policy is so deep-rooted in our country that I am convinced that Estonia does not want to depart from this neutrality policy course, nor does she want to conclude a military alliance with a great power, in this case the Soviet Union, even if it is called a mutual assistance pact.

**Molotov:** Who does not want? You do not want; the ruling group does not want, but the large masses in Estonia and the people want. This is known to us.

**Selter:** I dare contend that neutrality and non-entanglement with the politics of great powers is the deep political conviction of the overwhelming majority of our people which our people do not want to abandon.

**Rei:** Neutrality has been the leading line of the foreign policy of Estonia already since the year 1920.

**Molotov:** But you have a military alliance with Latvia. You can have the same relations with the Soviet Union.

**Rei:** Latvia is a small country, but the Soviet Union is a great power. The treaty of alliance between Estonia and Latvia is not inconsistent with the neutrality of either country, because we consider the

Estonian-Latvian neutrality as a common entity. A treaty of alliance with a great power could easily make the small country dependent upon the great power and be detrimental to its independence.

**Selter:** A relationship of military alliance with a great power would affect the free exercise of the sovereignty rights of Estonia and would be detrimental to the peaceful progress of our country and people. The harmful consequences would be especially evident in the present circumstances where the Soviet Union as an ally would establish on Estonian territory her naval and air support points. The 20-year development of the state of Estonia has so clearly proven the right of the Estonian people to live as a sovereign and independent nation that this right cannot be impaired in this way for the benefit of another state.

**Molotov:** Do not be afraid, the assistance pact with the Soviet Union would not bring you any perils. We do not want to impair your sovereignty or form of government. We are not going to force Communism upon Estonia. We do not want to hurt the economic system of Estonia. Estonia will retain her independence, her government, parliament, foreign and domestic policy, army and economic system. We are not going to touch all this.

**Selter:** Regardless of these assurances, I maintain my position. The relations of Estonia and the Soviet Union are governed by the Peace Treaty and the Non-Aggression Treaty. On the basis of them, both parties have been able to live and progress, and it would be completely incomprehensible to Estonia why it would be necessary to search for new bases. The incident with the submarine which you have raised is too trivial and casuistic for making upon Estonia such radical demands.

**Molotov:** We consider this submarine affair very important in itself as a symptom. This boat at sea can do much harm to shipping of the Soviet Union. The affair with this boat shows also that the Soviet Union lacks security which she urgently needs. In this sense the present situation is unnatural. The Soviet Union would have to be content with a small corner of the Gulf of Finland. Twenty years ago you made us sit in this Finnish "puddle". You don't think that this can last so forever.

Then the Soviet Union was powerless, but in the meantime she has greatly grown economically and culturally and also militarily. The Soviet Union is now a great power whose interests need to be taken into consideration. I tell you—the Soviet Union needs enlargement of her security guaranty system; for this purpose she needs an exit to the Baltic Sea. If you do not want to conclude with us a mutual assistance pact, then we have to use for guarantying our security other ways, perhaps more drastic, perhaps more complicated.

I ask you, do not compel us to use force against Estonia. The demands of the Soviet Union are not in contradiction with the obligations which the Soviet Union has previously taken upon herself. The demands develop them by assuring the security which the existing agreements were supposed to give but 'unfortunately have not given.

**Selter:** I note first of all that the Estonian-Soviet peace treaty does not represent a condition forcefully imposed on the Soviet Union, but a voluntarily negotiated just peace. The Non-Aggression Pact has greatly developed these originally, established peaceful relations and, in our opinion, "it should now serve us as a firm guidance.

We have been always of the opinion that the neutrality of Estonia, as well as the fact that Estonia has not bound herself with any great power or group of great powers has been of benefit also to the Soviet Union, because through such an attitude Estonia has been contributing to the pacification of the shores of the Baltic Sea. Our policy heretofore has been directed towards maintaining of peace in

our area by following a road of neutral, friendly relations and avoidance of international tension.

For the achievement of these aims we have considered appropriate only treaties of passive nature, like .for instance, non-aggression treaties. We are afraid that as soon as we conclude with a great power, for example the Soviet Union, a treaty of alliance, we will fall under serious suspicion in the eyes of other' countries and will violate the normal, balanced relationship at the Baltic Sea to such an extent as to risk to be dragged through this fact into controversies between foreign countries. These controversies that inevitably would rise sooner or later would be harmful not only to Estonia, but to other countries bordering on the Baltic Sea as well. Of that we are sure.

Keeping to the strict line of peace in our foreign policy, of which I spoke before, we signed a non-aggression pact also with Germany, to give you an example. In our opinion there is no danger threatening the Soviet Union through Estonia, or Estonia threatening her own citizens, the Estonians, for that matter. We believe that through our policy. of peace and neutrality we have rendered a meritorious service to the cause of security on the Baltic shores. Your proposal, however, is also 'in a certain contradiction to the Estonian-German non-aggression treaty, i.e. to the aims of peace the treaty proclaims to have.

**Molotov:** Against that we have nothing to say. The Soviet Union has friendly relations with Germany. In order to eliminate the grave danger of conflict and to establish peace in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union recently signed a non-aggression treaty with Germany. If you are afraid of a contradiction between the Estonian-German non-aggression pact and the Soviet Union's demands, then I can assure you that Germany will, give her consent to the conclusion of an Estonian-Soviet mutual assistance pact if you wish, I can myself procure, this consent. Anyway, the Soviet Union considers the conclusion of such a mutual assistance pact absolutely necessary.

**Selter:** I am expressing the general ideas of Estonian foreign policy and not touching upon questions concerning one or another country at a given moment. The general ideas I exposed are valid also in respect to other countries, whom we have not even mention by name. The Estonian-German non-aggression pact I mentioned only as a concrete example of the media through which we have so far successfully contributed to the stabilization of peace on the Baltic shores.

**Rei:** If the relations between the Soviet Union and Germany are based on the non-aggression pact, there certainly could be no danger for fear in the area of the Baltic Sea. Against whom does the Soviet Union desire to protect herself by proposing to Estonia a mutual assistance pact providing military bases?

**Molotov:** Our treaty with Germany is valid for a fixed period. Thus, neither we nor Germany are laying down our arms. In the future there might come to the Baltic Sea the forces of other great powers and endanger the Soviet Union. The Polish-German war has shown that a great power cannot entrust the safeguarding of its security to others. The events also show security of Soviet shipping in the Baltic Sea is not 'adequate, wherefore it is natural that the Soviet Union will take, into her own hands the safeguarding of this security.

**Rei:** What "other great powers" do you mean?

**Mikoyan:** For instance, Great Britain.

**Selter:** in my opinion, I have stated with sufficient clarity the position of Estonia. However, taking into account the importance of the question, raised by you, I want to report to my government the contents of today's conversation.

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**Molotov:** This matter cannot be delayed. I will give you a direct connection line with Tallinn. We could then continue our discussions right away, just like we did with German Foreign Minister.

**Selter:** As a minister responsible to Parliament I have, besides my President and Government, to inform also the Parliament and that cannot be done by telephone or so quickly. For that purpose I shall return to Tallinn as soon as tomorrow.

**Molotov:** I stress once more: the matter is urgent. The situation demands immediate solution. We cannot wait long. I advise you to yield to the wishes of the Soviet Union in order to avoid something worse. Do not compel the Soviet Union to use force in the achieving of her aims. In considering our proposal do not rely on Britain or Germany. Britain is not able to do anything in the Baltic and Germany is tied up in the West due to the war.

At the present time all hope for foreign assistance you might hold is entirely illusory. Thus you can be sure that the Soviet Union in one way or another will see to her security. In the case you will not comply with our proposal, the Soviet Union would carry out the safe guarding of her security in another way, at her own discretion, without bothering to care for Estonia's consent.

The talks ended at 10:15 P.M.

Having left the Kremlin, the Foreign Minister and Minister Rei drove to the Legation and began making arrangements for the return flight for the Foreign Minister with the first plane which was scheduled to leave next morning. After about 30 minutes there came a call from the Kremlin that Mr. Molotov requested Minister Selter to return to the Kremlin at 12 o'clock midnight.

The same night, at 12 o'clock, Foreign Minister Selter and Minister Rei went to the Kremlin for the second time. 'The Soviet government was represented again by Molotov and Mikoyan. Molotov stated that he had prepared a written draft of the agreement together with an additional protocol which the Soviet Union was proposing to Estonia to be concluded. He suggested that by taking the draft as a basis for the discussions the matter of the discussions would proceed more rapidly. At the same time he gave a general explanation concerning the proposal (draft), declaring: 1) the wording of the draft is tentative and can be amended in the course of discussions; 2) the Soviet Union is seeking only such strategic aims that are necessary for the safeguarding of her security. The sovereignty of the Estonian state, its form of government, 'also its economic system must remain untouched. These guaranties are embodied in the additional protocol to the draft.

Foreign Minister Selter declared that, though as a matter of principle he must argue against the entire proposal and though he is not authorized to conduct negotiations in this respect, he, however, would like to present a few questions for the purpose of clarifying the text of the Soviet proposal. Without, this clarification it might be difficult for him to report in Tallinn what the Soviet government had meant in different articles.<sup>7</sup>

**Molotov:** (asks to be presented with questions).

**Selter:** Section 1 of the draft speaks of mutual assistance in case the other contracting party is attacked by a third European state, or in case the security of the other contracting party is threatened by a third European state. Could such a third European state be, for instance, also Romania? If so, how could Estonia's assistance to the Soviet Union be conceived in such an event?

**Molotov:** No. What is meant is an attack or threat in the Baltic region only. The draft can be made



more precise in this regard.

**Selter:** Could the “threat to security” mentioned in Section 1 of the’ draft be anything else but an outside attack? In the affirmative case, how to explain the meaning of “threat to security” which is very indefinite? As to the meaning of “attack” there. are certain rules in the existing legal norm, but as stated in this draft, the meaning of a threat to security seems to be extremely vague.

**Molotov:** This means an outside attack, much as a situation where a third state threatens the security of the Soviet Union or Estonia.

**Selter:** With what could this third state threaten the security? The meaning of security is so wide that it could touch on economic, cultural, and internal policy questions. Given such a wide field, it might be too difficult or too easy to define the *casus foederis*. Outside military assistance might be necessary only in the case of military attack, in other circumstances each contracting party could take ‘care for itself of a “threat to security”’.

**Molotov:** But the situation might be such that an attack need not yet have occurred, but there is a threat of attack.

**Selter:** Would the assistance take place automatically or at the request of the other contracting party? In case of the obligation of automatic assistance a situation might arise where Estonia, on her own initiative, would rush to assist the Soviet Union, for instance, if in Estonia’s opinion the Soviet Union is threatened by a Balkan state. Such assistance might come at a very inopportune moment and in a very undesirable manner. The same could happen the other way around: The Soviet Union might find Estonia to be endangered in a case where Estonia herself does not find it so, but considers an uninvited assistance even harmful to herself.

**Molotov:** Assistance would be extended upon the request of the other party. From the text of the draft it is clear that rendering assistance would be an obligation, not a right. The government of the Soviet Union thinks’ that in this’ respect there will be no misunderstanding. Of course—both parties want to protect themselves against an aggressor and make use of mutual assistance.

**Selter:** This question is not sufficiently solved in the draft. Don’t you find that the “economic and diplomatic assistance” promised in Section 2 to Estonia sounds inappropriate? We’ recently agreed on ‘an interchange of goods, the agreement made did not contain any assistance, the economic relations were based on the equilibrium of the balance of payments. Diplomatic assistance under normal circumstances is not necessary, in case of “attack” such assistance would become obligatory under Section 1.

**Rei:** Certainly, it would not be advisable to take into the draft a clause which in its scope and meaning is not clear and which might create only misunderstandings and arguments. From this standpoint the second part of Section 2 seems unsuitable.

**Molotov and Mikoyan:** This part of Section 2 that speaks of economic and other assistance could be omitted, if the Estonian Government finds it superfluous.

**Selter:** Why doesn’t the draft state more specifically in what Estonian ports it is contemplated to establish Soviet naval bases? In the present form the draft is ambiguous as to which harbor might become a base and which might remain free.

**Molotov:** Naval bases could be established on the islands as well as in Tallinn, Pärnu and perhaps

also in other places.

**Selter:** Under no condition could Tallinn be considered as a naval base, because Tallinn is the capital of Estonia. Pärnu is unsuitable for the reason that it is covered with ice for nearly 4 months in the winter.

**Rei:** Besides, Tallinn is a commercial port. It would be very inconvenient, if not entirely, impossible, to establish a naval base there. Existing side by side, neither the naval base nor the commercial port could properly work or develop.

**Molotov:** What' other ports have you? Maybe, it is possible to manage also without Tallinn and Pärnu.

**Selter:** In my personal private opinion, there are good harboring places on the island of Saaremaa.

**Molotov:** That will not be sufficient. One place would not be enough.

**Selter:** I cannot say, but perhaps a suitable harboring place could be found on the 'island of Hiiumaa.

**Molotov:** The islands Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are of interest to the Soviet Union mainly as air bases. It is imperative to have a naval base also on the mainland. What ports do you still have on the mainland?

**Mikoyan:** The landed properties for the air bases could be separated on rental or concession terms. The land itself would remain a part of Estonian territory.

**Selter:** Since Tallinn and Pärnu cannot come under consideration, there remains the port of Paldiski in Estonia.

**Rei:** (points out the location of Paldiski on the map and describes its condition.)

**Molotov:** Perhaps Paldiski would prove suitable indeed. However, one place would not be enough. Tallinn is not absolutely necessary. What other places on the islands might come under consideration?

**Selter:** A suitable place on Saaremaa could be Tagalahe. Incidentally, what is the reason for setting the duration of the treaty for 10 years?

**Molotov:** The duration of the treaty has been brought into accord with the period of the Soviet-German non-aggression treaty. With regard to the additional protocol, we want to confirm that the government of the Soviet Union has no desire to enforce Communism or Soviet regime on Estonia, nor in general to infringe in the slightest degree the sovereignty at Estonia and her independence. The entire social system and public regime together with Estonia's own government and Parliament, foreign representations, etc. remain unalterably in force as an internal matter of the Estonian state.

**Selter:** Taking note of the proposals and explanations of the Soviet government, I take it upon myself to inform of them the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Estonia.

**Molotov:** That means you want to delay the matter?

**Selter:** That does not mean a delay, but a necessary allowance of time for consideration of the question.



**Molotov:** When can you be expected back?

**Selter:** About Thursday, today is Sunday.

**Molotov:** As I said, the matter is extremely urgent and of undelayable nature. Every day and hour is precious. It would be best, if we could continue right, away.

**Selter:** I must explain once more that as a minister of a parliamentary government I cannot start deliberation of the question before informing the organs of Parliament. It is for this reason that my presence in Tallinn is unavoidable.

**Molotov:** (agrees to that).

**Selter:** What about plane reservations for me and my party?

**Molotov:** I can arrange that on tomorrow's plane, leaving Moscow at 8 A.M. there will be a reservation for you, Mr. Selter, Mrs. Selter and three seats for your companions.

**Selter:** Since I had been invited to come to Moscow for the purpose of signing a trade agreement, this agreement deserves also certain mentioning.

**Mikoyan:** The agreement was ready for signature, but then political developments intervened that need prior clarification.

**Molotov:** When you return to Moscow, Mr. Selter, then we shall sign the trade agreement.

The meeting ended at 1:10 A.M.

Some comments are in order on the talks described in the above document. In the first place, the official invitation extended by the Soviet government to the Estonian Foreign Minister to come to Moscow expressly for the signing of a Soviet-Estonian trade treaty was but a maneuver to lure the Minister to Moscow. Second, the Soviet demands for an assistance pact and military bases in Estonia came utterly unexpected to Selter. They were presented in a brusque manner, under the use of threats.

The pretext for putting the demands (the Polish submarine affair) was a very poor one. Of interest is also the fact that the Soviet government gave repeated pledges to respect the sovereignty, independence as well as the political, economic and social order in Estonia—pledges, each of which it broke at a later date, and which it did not even intend to honor at the moment of their presentation. Lastly, the Soviet government tried to rush the signing of the assistance pact by attempting to force the Estonian Minister to conclude the treaty on the spot, without letting him have a chance to confer with his government. Only the adamant stand of Selter in resisting the Soviet bullying gave Estonia short respite before the actual advent of the disaster the Soviets had in store for her.

Mr. and Mrs. Selter, together with Rei and members of the Estonian trade delegation took a plane the same morning of September 25 and arrived in Tallinn late in the evening. While Selter was in Moscow the following events took place in Tallinn. In the morning of September 24 General Laidoner, Commander in Chief of the Estonian Armed Forces, ordered Col. Maasing, First Assistant to the Chief of General Staff, to proceed to Berlin to obtain an answer to the question: "Would Germany, presently controlling the communication lines connecting Estonia with the West, allow Estonia to

obtain war materials by sea from the West”?

Upon inquiry the German Military Attaché in Tallinn advised Col. Maasing that owing to the war conditions he would not be received by the General Staff in Berlin, but arrangements had been made for his reception by two representatives of the German General Staff in Königsberg. At the meeting in Königsberg Col. Maasing gave a brief survey of the Soviet military preparations on the Estonian border, indicating the intention of the Soviets to attack Estonia.

The German representatives (a General and a Colonel) said that the German High Command knew about Soviet troop concentrations and about the Soviet intentions to become aggressive in the Baltic area. However, they declared: Our Foreign Minister Ribbentrop signed a treaty with Soviet Russia that does not permit us to help Estonia. Even in the event of the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Estonia, we must take a hostile attitude toward Estonia. Germany cannot allow Estonia to receive deliveries of war materials via routes under German control. Besides, such deliveries would be impossible to imagine because of the present Anglo-French-German war. In our present situation we cannot afford a conflict with Soviet Russia because of the existing soviet-German treaty.

The German General revealed this information without attempting to disguise his aversion and bitterness regarding the recently established friendly, relations with the Soviets, and blamed Ribbentrop for this unnatural state of affairs.<sup>8</sup>

On September 26, Col. Maasing reported to General Laidoner the outcome of his talks with the German military representatives. On this date Estonia became fully aware that 1) if a Soviet-Estonian war were to break out, Estonia would stand entirely alone; 2) as a result of the destruction of Poland, Estonia had become completely isolated from the outside world; 3) Soviet troops concentrated on the frontiers of Estonia could not be contained by the Estonian army; 4) through conditions of war the Baltic Sea had fallen under the dominance of Germany and Russia and there was no hope for Estonia to get war materials by sea; 5) the air was dominated by the Soviet air force; 6) Finland and Scandinavia shied away from Estonia; The Latvians, immediate southern neighbors of Estonia were even as cautious as to forbid their Commander' in Chief, General Balodis, to meet General Laidoner at the Estonian border town Valk, though General Laidoner had asked for such a meeting; 7) Nazi Germany had made an alliance with Communist Russia; 8) Estonia had no war industry of her own. She also had no strategic rear area where to retreat under the pressure of superior enemy forces. Also, she could not carry out a general mobilization under the prevailing condition of Soviet air dominance over her territory.<sup>9</sup> It was in this grave situation that the Estonian government held a meeting on September 26, to decide on the course of action to be taken. We submit the minutes of this meeting:

Meeting of the government on September 26, 1939, at 16 hours, under the chairmanship of President Konstantin Päts

Foreign Minister Karl Selter made a report on the situation: a) Soviet invitation to proceed to Moscow for the signing of a trade agreement; a) Molotov's proposal to conclude a mutual assistance pact on the basis of a Soviet draft, which the Foreign Minister read to the meeting; c) escape of the Polish submarine on which Molotov based his proposal, saying that this incident threatened the interests of the Soviet shipping; d) Molotov's warning "to achieve through other means" the safeguarding of the security of the Soviet Union, should the Estonian government refuse to conclude the proposed pact and e) Molotov's statement that the Soviet government considers the solution of the problem "very urgent". At the end of his report the Foreign Minister turned to the President with a request to hear also a report from the Minister to Moscow, August Rei, who was present at the talks in the Kremlin.

Being invited by the President to make a statement, Minister Rei said that there remained no doubt in his mind that Molotov's proposals represented an ultimatum. Rei described how Molotov repeatedly used the expressions: "I ask you not to compel the Soviet government to use force for the safeguarding of our security" and "If the Estonian government should not 'comply with the Soviet proposals, the Soviet Union will achieve the accomplishment of her aims through other ways, using other means". Also, taking into consideration the situation prevailing in Moscow prior to these talks, Rei expressed his belief that the Soviet proposal was serious and urgent and that, if Estonia refused to accept it, the Soviet Union would give effect to, her warnings.

Following Rei's analysis, Foreign Minister Karl Selter stated:

The proposals 'of the Soviet Union are of a nature that are adverse to the understandings and convictions of the Estonian people, and government, also the .proposals stand in contradiction to the principle of state sovereignty. Therefore they would have been rejected without hesitation, if Estonia were in, the position to have a free decision regarding these proposals. But in, all probability, the chances of the Soviet Union to carry out her aims against the will of Estonia look rather good. The international situation is extraordinarily favorable for the Soviet Union. The European war has tied up the hands of the Western powers and Germany, Poland has been destroyed. The Soviet Union needs not fear an intervention by 'force on the part of the great powers, should she desire, with certain amount of tactical finesse and skill, to start to accomplish her designs in the Baltic—designs, which were so clearly demonstrated in the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations this summer.

Following these considerations, the hindrances to the Kremlin plans might exist not in the factors of force but rather in the circumstance how the Soviet step would appear in the light of legal and moral aspect—a point that normally is kept in mind by every great power—and also in consideration as to whether Estonia could succeed in her hope of getting outside moral and diplomatic aid. Notwithstanding the fact that Estonia has a non-aggression pact with Soviet Russia and regardless of the Estonian official declaration of neutrality which the Soviet Union confirmed and accepted in writing, on September 18, 1939, the general situation is such as to allow the Soviet Union to act rather freely.

The escape of the Polish submarine has compromised the moral status of Estonia as a neutral state, morally separating us from other neutral states. Perhaps for this reason the Soviet Union might not expect a condemnation of her acts by world public opinion, should she decide on an arbitrary action against us. The only effective defense weapon small nations have is justice and morality. It cannot be denied that the escape of the submarine has affected this weapon to a great extent. Looking around we see no help anywhere.

Sentiments in Finland with regard to us seem to be reserved in their outward 'appearance, in substance they are excited. This is apparent from the press as well as from personal contacts. The Latvians, though generous in the expression of their sympathies, are haunted, by fear. As you know, General Laidoner was scheduled to meet General Balodis at Valk on September 20. This meeting was agreed upon a short time ago. Yet on September 19, Riga informed us that since General Balodis was heavily engaged with the internment of the retreating 'Polish military personnel he was .unable to keep the date and asked for the postponement of the meeting. The Latvian Minister here, to whom our Foreign Office gave a brief survey of the situation, showed but a frightened interest and uttered 'but sympathy. To be sure, that is practically all that Latvia could offer us in the present situation or all she is allowed to offer.

Legally speaking, it is even doubtful whether there exists the *casus foederis* stipulated in the Estonian-Latvian treaty, because Latvia could argue that the Soviet attack—if it should take, place—was not unprovoked. The German press tried to suppress and soften the effect of the escape of the

Polish submarine. The German government made no protest. We have not used this favorable circumstance for seeking from Germany something substantial to ease our situation, because such an endeavor would aggravate our status in Moscow, should the Kremlin get wind of our steps.

German aid at the moment, it possible at all—I have my ‘doubts about it—could be, as already stated, only of moral and diplomatic nature and could in the best case contribute to the solution of our controversy with the Soviets only through conciliation. There has been no time yet to clarify the positions of the British and French governments. But taking into account the fact that in the course of the summer Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations the British and French government agreed— notwithstanding the objections raised by the Baltic states for safeguarding Soviet security under a contemplated guaranty pact, it cannot be hoped that now, in the grave situation of war, the British and French governments would undertake to support us before the Kremlin agitates its demands for “security guaranties” Despite the failure of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, the British and French governments would not dare even now to look for trouble and disputes with Moscow for “comparatively little matters”.

This is illustrated by the reserved attitude of Great Britain when she heard the news of the Soviet invasion of Poland. The press of other countries, including that of Scandinavia, engages itself in nothing else but sensational reportages about our troubled relations with the Soviets. Taking account of the situation and considering the facts, confirmed by Minister Rei, it is to be feared that in the case of our refusal to sign the pact the Soviets are demanding from us, relations with the Soviet Union would become strained and Estonia would have to face serious dangers.

The Commander in Chief might express his views on the prospects Estonia could possibly have in the dangerous case of an Estonian Soviet conflict. But there remains a question—would it be possible to achieve more favorable results through delaying negotiations on the Soviet proposals? Minister Selter asked this question to be posed to Minister Rei, the proper person to evaluate the present conditions in Moscow.

In answering the question, Minister Rei declared that Molotov had stressed repeatedly—the Soviet government considers the conclusion of the pact “an urgent matter”, and that “it demands an immediate solution that cannot be delayed”. Rei got the impression that we would not succeed in any delaying action. General Laidoner, Commander in Chief, stated: 1) At the present time when there is war between Germany and Britain-France no hope can be entertained for assistance on the part of these powers, should we reject the Soviet powers. 2) Small states have been so terrorized through the catastrophe which befell Poland that in their fright they cling desperately to their proclaimed neutrality and would not dare to get involved in our dispute with Soviet Russia. 3) Latvia is acting in concert with others and no hope can be placed on her. In troublesome matters, like the one under discussion, it is fruitless to keep council with Latvia. We have to decide the question ourselves. 4) Concerning our own military strength, it must be said that we will not be able to resist for long. Especially, if one considers the fact that the enemy aircraft are in the position to deny us the carrying out of mobilization.

Times are very dangerous indeed. For the reasons mentioned, it is my considered opinion that we should enter into negotiations with the Soviet government and sign the pact it wants to impose on us. In my opinion, any delaying action would bring no betterment of the results.

Other members of the cabinet, like Minister of Economics, Leo Sepp, Minister of Social Welfare, Oskar Kask, Minister of Agriculture, Artur Tupits, also agreed that there is no other way but to accept the Soviet proposal. The Prime Minister, Kaarel Eenpalu, joined the opinion of the members of his

cabinet. Summarizing all the expressed views, President Konsantin Päts declared that he, too, believes that the conclusion of the proposed pact cannot be avoided.

He stated: Our supreme task is to lead the Estonian people and state unharmed through the present great war. Heretofore we have been successful in carrying out this task. The war has lasted about a month. But despite this comparatively short time the state of Poland and her armies have been destroyed, the country and the towns ravaged, a great number of the Polish people killed. Estonia together with other Baltic states has chosen the right road of neutrality and thanks to that she has been lucky to be left untouched from the calamities of military conflicts, left untouched so far.

Now, when Germany, Britain and France are at war, and the balance of power has become upset in the Baltic through the destruction of Poland as well as through the engagement of Germany in the West and the exclusion of Britain from the Baltic Sea, Moscow has found the time to be ripe to advance Soviet Union's expansionist policies. The escape of the submarine gave the Soviet government a pretext for the presentation of its threatening demands. Even in the absence of this particular pretext any other would have served the Soviets as well.

To refuse the Soviet proposal in the present grave situation would mean to knowingly send the entire Estonian people to death. We do not possess adequate means to resist the enormously superior forces of the enemy and we have been left alone, without any assistance from anywhere. We do not think that we have antagonized our friends through any intentional fault committed by us.

Thus we are compelled against our will to advise the Kremlin that we have decided to accept its proposal in principle. Under duress we are forced to enter into negotiations with the Soviets, trying but to win a possible softening of the harsh terms put to us. This means also that we must take the unwanted burden of signing the pact. Delays would bring no better results. On the contrary, they could worsen our situation. The Soviet pressure, evident every day through the violations of our territorial waters and airspace is an ominous sign of the hostile intentions of the Soviet government.

Finally, the President suggested some amendments to the Soviet draft to serve as Estonian counter-proposals. Toward the end of the meeting a message arrived from the German Minister in Tallinn, Frohwein, in answer to the government's request that he contact Berlin to ascertain the prospects for German diplomatic assistance in a possible Estonian-Soviet dispute. After having communicated with his government, the German Minister now sent the following statement: "The Estonian government knows what it has to do. But in case it wants to listen to Berlin's advice, the pact demanded by the Soviet Union should be concluded, the sooner, the better. There lies the only salvation for Estonia."

The government meeting came to an end at 17 hours.

In fulfillment of its decision to enter into negotiations with the Soviets, the Estonian government appointed two delegates to assist the Foreign Minister in Moscow. They were Professor of International Law at the Tartu University, Ants Piip, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, member of the Estonian delegation at the Estonian-Soviet peace conference in 1920; and the Professor of Estonian Legal History of the Tartu University, Jüri Uluots, an authority in constitutional questions. Both professors were members of the Estonian Parliament, Uluots being its President.

The Manchester Guardian wrote on October 9, 1939:

*Scenes between Selter and Stalin that must have served as overture to the signing of the Soviet pact can be compared with Dr. Hacha's audience with Hitler or with the Hitler-Schuschnigg meeting*

at Berchtesgaden.

*When Selter was leaving Tallinn on his second journey to Moscow, he was accompanied by two experts of international law. "That is entirely superfluous," remarked an Estonian diplomat, "from now on there does not exist any international law. If we Estonians could have had a couple of hundred tanks, it would have been easier for us to argue with the Russians."*

The Estonian delegation, made up of Selter, Rei, Uluots and, Piip, arrived in Moscow by plane on Wednesday, September 27, at 4 P.M. It was met at the airport with the full ceremony required by protocol. The Soviets had just completed the elaborate reception they gave to the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, who had arrived to sign one more treaty and one more secret protocol with the USSR. The Soviets were still engaged in unfurling the Estonian flags to replace the Swastika at the airport as the Estonian plane rolled to a stop near the stand erected for the Soviet reception officials.

It was the intention of the Estonian delegation to start with negotiations on the following day. But Molotov's secretary informed the Estonians of Molotov's wish to begin discussions that same evening. Despite fatigue, the delegation went to the Kremlin at the appointed hour where it was conducted to Molotov's office. As at the previous talks, the Soviet side was represented by Molotov and Mikoyan. After an exchange of formalities, Molotov took his place at the end of the conference table and asked the others to be seated. He lost no time in putting the blunt question: "Well, what have you to say? What answer do you bring?" On the following pages we continue quoting the minutes of the conference.

## MINUTES

On September 27, at 6 P.M., Foreign Minister Selter arrived back in Moscow for the purpose of continuing the negotiations with the government of the Soviet Union on behalf of the Estonian President and Government. Together with the Foreign Minister arrived: Minister Rei, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Uluots and a member of the Chamber of Deputies Piip. Upon arrival at the Estonian Legation, the Kremlin was notified that, because the Estonian representatives felt tired from the journey, they would like the negotiations to begin if possible not before tomorrow.

But sometime thereafter came a telephone call from the Kremlin, informing that Chairman Molotov requested urgently the Estonian Minister to come to his office in the Kremlin the same evening at 9 o'clock in order to continue the negotiations. The Soviet government stated the message, could not find it possible to delay the talks by any postponement. The Foreign Minister, after consulting his colleagues, accepted the invitation. Although the invitation mentioned but the Foreign Minister, he decided, in view of the fact that the Estonian government had delegated for the negotiations also Professor Uluots and Professor Piip, these gentlemen should also go with him.

The fact that the invitation from the Kremlin did not mention these gentlemen could not necessarily imply any importance, since the Kremlin could have intended the invitation just in a manner that the Estonian Foreign Minister himself would decide with whom he would come to the negotiations. Rei, as the resident Estonian Minister in Moscow, had the right, on the Foreign Minister's wish, to participate in the negotiations, without this right requiring any special mentioning.

On September 27, at ~ P.M., Selter, Rei, Uluots and Piip arrived at the Kremlin where they were awaited on the part of the Soviet Union by Molotov and Mikoyan. Selter in introducing Uluots and Piip advised that the Estonian government had decided to ask these leading members of the Parliament to participate in the negotiations. There were no objections on the part of Molotov. The negotiations began and developed as follows:



**Molotov:** Well, what answer do you bring?

**Selter:** The Estonian government and Parliament, having weighed with great care the demand of the Soviet government as well as the draft of a mutual assistance pact presented by you, have authorized me to state that the Estonian government does not object in principle to the demand of the Soviet government. The Estonian government agrees to enter into negotiations on the basis of the draft-proposal presented to it, but announces that it wants to make some amendments in that draft. We reserve the right, to submit these amendments in writing. For drawing them up we need time until tomorrow. At the same time the Estonian government expresses, the opinion that in the interests of progress of the negotiations it would be desirable that they should take place in a more peaceful atmosphere. This atmosphere is presently being alarmed by violations of Estonian territorial right committed by Soviet naval vessels and warplanes, against which I have already protested to the Soviet Minister in Tallinn.

**Molotov:** As to the violation of the territorial right of Estonia, mentioned by you, I am not able to say anything at present. We shall clarify the matter and give a reply later. The consent of the Estonian government to continue the negotiations delights the Soviet government. But unfortunately, we have bad news. A short time ago the Soviet government received a report, which will also appear in tomorrow's press, that in the region of the Gulf of Narva the Soviet steamship Metallist had been torpedoed and sunk by an unidentified submarine. Many seamen of the Metallist crew perished. (Molotov read a telegram by TASS and stated that the periscopes of two unidentified submarines had been sighted in the same area a day before.)

These facts have so fundamentally changed the general picture that the Soviet government cannot any longer limit itself to the proposals which I presented to you at our last meeting. The Soviet government has instructed me to present to you a supplement to these proposals, and namely: Estonia is to give to the Soviet Union the right to keep in various places in Estonia for the duration of the present European war up to 35,000 of infantry, cavalry and air force, in order to prevent Estonia and the Soviet Union to be drawn into war, as well as to protect the internal order in Estonia.

**Selter:** Because this proposal is new and is presented for the first time, the Estonian government, of course, has not been able to take its position in respect to such wishes of the Soviet government. But without needing to consult my government about them, I can reply to you that this new proposal is unacceptable to Estonia. By form and substance the measures indicated in this proposal would mean a military occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union, to which neither the Estonian people nor the government could agree under any circumstances. I find that our negotiations will become very difficult, if we do not confine ourselves to the limits, which both sides themselves so far had drawn for their position.

**Molotov:** If at the last meeting you would have agreed to continue immediately the negotiations, we would have reached an agreement on the basis proposed to you then. But you preferred to procrastinate. In the meantime, you see, events have taken place, and new developments also raise new problems. The new developments show that the security of the Soviet Union requires more than we had talked about at our last meeting.

**Selter:** The reproach as if the Estonian government would have procrastinated is without foundation. I was here on the 24th of this month. I flew to Tallinn on the morning of the 25th to inform my President, government and Parliament. I am back here as early as today, the 27th. To give you an answer in a quicker time than that in such an important matter would have been absolutely impossible, especially considering the fact that Estonia is a parliamentary state. Therefore, whatever

events there may have occurred in the meantime, not caused by us, cannot give the Soviet government the least right or justification to present new demands.

**Uluots:** I, as Chairman of the Estonian Chamber of Deputies, can emphasize that the time during which the Estonian Parliament convened in order to receive information from the government and to take a stand with regard to the Soviet proposals submitted by the government was exceptionally short and can be explained only by the fact that the Parliament was aware of the great seriousness of the question and also of the necessity to solve the problem speedily. Therefore it would be wrong to present new demands on the ground of allegations as if the Estonian government were guilty of a delay and also on the ground that in the meantime new circumstances have arisen. I support the position taken by Minister Selter, also I join him in the fear that in the case the new proposal made now by the Soviet government should stand, it would be difficult to find any basis for the negotiations.

**Molotov:** The government of the Soviet Union insists upon this proposal. If you wish, Stalin himself can tell you that, as well as explain the proposal. Do you want to talk to him?

**Selter:** Yes, we do.

**Molotov:** (into the telephone) Comrade Stalin, come here. Mr. Selter and the other Estonian gentlemen are here with me. He and his associates argue against our new proposal. They call it occupation and other dreadful names. Come and help me to persuade them of the necessity of our proposal.

Professor Piip writes in his diary:

*"In about 3 minutes Stalin enters the room with firm steps, clad in his garment of the well-known cut. He quickly shakes the hands of the Estonians, sits down at the place previously taken by Molotov, who changes over to another seat at the side of the table opposite to us. Stalin gives permission to smoke.<sup>12</sup> Selter introduces me to Stalin, mentions good-humoredly that my name, Piip, means "tobacco pipe" in Russian and that I took part in the Estonian-Soviet peace conference. Stalin remarks: "That's good. Let us' light the peace pipe again at this table. Or, maybe you prefer Russian cigarettes?" Molotov informs Stalin in greater detail of our arguments against the new Soviet proposals. Stalin cuts him short by saying impatiently: "What is there to argue about. Our proposal stands and that must be understood".*

We continue now with the official minutes:

**Selter:** The proposal which Molotov presented to us today is without foundation and unacceptable to Estonia. As far as the motives of the proposal are concerned, I have already pointed out that the Soviet government presented to us the last time a written proposal which was supposed to solve the requirements and wishes expressed by Molotov. The Estonian government and Parliament discussed these proposals within the shortest time to enable me to be back here as early as on the third day to announce our preparedness to continue the negotiations. In the meantime nothing happened that could have been brought in dependence on the Estonian government and could have changed the situation.

The motive—torpedoing of the s/s Metallist—advanced by Molotov is not very convincing. We do not know the details about this event. We hear only from the news read by Molotov that the event is supposed to have taken place "near the Gulf of Narva", consequently outside the territorial waters of Estonia. What and whose submarine torpedoed the s/s Metallist is not known. Where did this

submarine come from and was it the same that fled Tallinn? I think it was not.

From the TASS report it appears that on the previous day the periscopes of two submarines were supposed to have been sighted in that vicinity. Consequently, at least one of the submarines seen in the Gulf of Finland could not have had escaped from Tallinn and, in the meantime it has been established that she put on land in Gotland the two Estonian guards she took forcibly along. This fact serves as a proof that the submarine took course to the West, in entirely opposite direction from the place where the s/s Metallist allegedly was sunk.

It cannot be conceived how this submarine could have torpedoed the Metallist. From all these facts it can be seen that Molotov's new proposal is not founded by anything. This proposal, as I already stated, would both in form and substance mean a military occupation of Estonia, to which the Estonian government cannot agree under any circumstances.

**Molotov:** The events of the last days show that the Soviet Union completely lacks security. It must be assumed that in the Gulf of Finland there is somewhere a place where foreign submarines can be based and supplied with fuel. Right at the gates of Leningrad Soviet ships must suffer from torpedoing and being sunk. Soviet seamen are made to die. It is possible that the attack did not come from the boat that escaped from Tallinn. Possibly there are in the Baltic Sea some submarines of third countries—say Britain—but the fact remains a fact that the Soviet Union lacks security at sea and the Estonian government is not able alone to guarantee that security. If Soviet military forces would be stationed in Estonia, then one could be sure that nobody would risk to undertake attack similar to those which have taken place.

**Selter:** Assuming that the facts given by you are correct, nevertheless, there is no proof nor, can it be proved that Estonia has been guilty for the events of the last days. Without such a guilt no punishment can be imposed upon Estonia.

**Mikoyan:** The Soviet proposal is not a punishment.

**Selter:** Your new proposal would mean a military occupation, because in accordance with it a foreign army of 35,000 men would be brought to Estonian territory and this foreign army would be stationed "in various places in Estonia" to protect the internal order in Estonia, i.e. it would engage itself with interfering in the international affairs of Estonia. In conjunction with that, all assurances about the preservation of Estonia's sovereignty, the form of government and the economy would be only a dead letter. The military occupation of an independent country, based on your motives, cannot be regarded anything else but punishment, in the present case a groundless and unjust punishment. Molotov stated that "evidently foreign submarines are being refueled in the Gulf of Finland". This is only a presumption, besides it has not been verified yet. Modern submarines are capable of carrying fuel for at least 6 weeks operational requirements. As you know, only 4 weeks have passed since the beginning of the war.

**Uluots:** It is true also from the legal point of view that Molotov's proposal would mean a military occupation which the Estonian government could not accept. The Estonian government informed the Parliament of your previous proposal and I would like to emphasize once more that the Parliament gave its decision very quickly. The Soviet government must take into consideration that Estonia is a parliamentary state, where the government cannot make decisions in, such matters without Parliament. The Estonian Parliament decided that we can enter into negotiations on the basis of the proposals submitted by the Soviet government 3 days ago. Your new proposal changes the picture to such a great extent that we would have no legal basis for the continuation of the present negotiations.

**Stalin:** Our new proposal is not intended to serve as a punishment. It is a measure of prevention. We do not know who helped the Polish submarine to escape from Tallinn. We, of course, are not guilty of that. Also we believe, that the Estonian government, too, is free of the guilt, but evidently there are certain international forces nestling in Estonia who are engaged in such matters. Also they have influence with the masses of the Estonian people. You have General Laidoner who hates us. But he is a good general, brave general, a clever man of the old Russian school. He has great influence with your people. If you sign a treaty with us, some people will find such an act insufficient. Others will say, the government sold the country. Out of such a controversy troubles and diversions may follow. Such kind of danger must be prevented. It is for this purpose that a strong unit of the Red Army must be placed in Estonia. Then nobody would dare to undertake any troublemaking.

**Selter:** If you, Mr. Stalin, are declaring sincerely that you do not believe the Estonian government to be guilty of the escape of the Polish submarine, such declaration represents word of authority that we accept with great pleasure. But I cannot agree with your assertion that some international forces exist in Estonia which could exert influence to the extent you are afraid of.

**Piip:** There is no reason for your worries, Mr. Stalin, about the internal order in Estonia. You need not fear any diversions, if our decision to accept the Soviet mutual assistance pact has once been made known to the people.

**Stalin:** People are good everywhere. But among the people there are bad men, who engage themselves in aims and matters that are unpopular with the people and that are harmful to the people. A few days ago there was an accident with a military train near Odessa. The people around Odessa are pro-Soviet. And yet, you see, there was someone who organized the train accident. Also in Estonia there are all kind of men among the people. Thousands of spies have been sent to the Soviet Union across Estonia, whom we have caught and many of whom we have shot with pure hearts bleeding.

**Selter:** We hope that we can reach an agreement that would not hurt the feelings of the Estonian people. We also hope that our people will receive the agreement with calm. In such a case no excesses need to be feared.

**Stalin:** But I must say the present situation in the Gulf of Finland was forced upon the peoples of the Soviet Union, who have been made to put up with it so far.

**Piip:** I personally participated in negotiating the Estonian-Soviet peace treaty. I must say it was a treaty that secured a just and lasting peace.

**Rei:** There has never been an opinion in Estonia that the peace negotiated in Tartu had been enforced on the Soviet Union. Credibly, this mutually negotiated peace conformed also to the vital interests of the Soviet Union. If now the existing foundations of our relations are to be changed in the proposed way to the detriment of Estonia then our good relations would suffer and no benefit would derive from such an outcome also to the Soviet Union. The friendly feelings of the Estonian people would drop.

**Stalin:** The placing of Red Army units into Estonia as stipulated in today's proposal is absolutely necessary. Otherwise the Soviet naval and air bases cannot be considered secure in the present time of war. This is a temporary war-time measure only. As soon as the war comes to an end we will take back all the troops mentioned in our proposal of today.

**Selter:** We would have understood if you desired to send to your naval bases small garrisons with the task of defending the bases from the direction of the sea. Such garrisons could have been brought in correspondence with the requirements of defense of the military installations situated at your bases as well as measured in proportion to the population of Estonia and Estonian armed forces. But at present you even have not chosen yet the locations for your bases and there is nothing of military nature you need to defend, if you do not mean the Estonian territory itself, for the defense of which one does not require the measures you are proposing.

The proposal made by you last time foresaw a military collaboration in case of an attack, if the attack was to take place against the territory of Estonia. If we sign this proposed assistance pact, all necessity of defending the Estonian territory from the point, of view of the Soviet Union would be met satisfactorily. If one day your bases will be built as contemplated in the proposal you made at our previous meeting, you need not fear any attacks against them from the interior of Estonia. The Estonian government, with the forces at its disposal, would see to it with sufficient vigilance.

For all these reasons, speaking about all conceivable possibilities laying outside an attack, there could be talks only about garrisons at certain bases, whose strength should be agreed upon, as well as about the necessity to fix their strength by a special agreement for the duration of the present European war. This is the only basis on which we can continue our talks.

**Stalin:** We agree to amend our proposals in accordance with the positions formulated by you.

**Molotov:** (makes a brief resumé of Selter's and Stalin's positions).

**Selter:** Speaking now about the strength of the military forces needed for the defense of your naval bases, we find 35,000 men far too many for the purpose of the said defense. Such a big army is unnecessary, burdensome, and can cause only difficulties and misunderstandings. This number proposed by you we cannot accept.

**Stalin:** I cannot reduce this number. Who knows, Estonia may have an army of 150,000. No, 35,000 Red Army men is the minimum.

**Selter:** Even in the War of Liberation, the only war we had, Estonia could not mobilize 150,000 men. Now, in peace time when we have no mobilization, there can be no talk about a number of 150,000.

**Stalin:** But you have already mobilized against us. Haven't you?

**Selter:** No. We have considered our relations with the Soviet Union not needing mobilization.

**Rei:** (confirms this on his part).

**Stalin:** Well, how big then is your army now?

**Selter:** I have no data about that, but anyway 35,000 of alien troops is proportionally too big a number to bear.

**Stalin:** All right. Let us reduce this number to 25,000 men,

**Selter:** Even this number is too big. Mr. Stalin, you are considered a great man, don't you see this is too much.

**Stalin:** What great man am I...All are swearing at me. My word of honor, I cannot make it for less (Chestnoye slovo, menshe ne mogu).

At that the talks came to a stalemate. The Estonian delegation proposed a recess with a view to inform its government. Molotov promised to arrange for telephone connection with Tallinn. The meeting came to an end at 22 hours. The next meeting was scheduled to take place on September 28, at 16 hours. When saying good-bye Stalin remarked: "I used to have many Estonians working in my archives. Estonians are tough people, good workers. I remember, at the time when I was Commissar of Nationalities, in the Commissariat there was an Estonian girl-secretary. Wonderful worker. But Anvelt cheated me and swindled badly."

The talks took place in the private office of Molotov. When Selter and his party walked out into the waiting room, Ribbentrop with his delegation was standing there. Selter shook hands with Ribbentrop, Gauss and others. Rei exchanged courtesies with Count Schulenburg, German Ambassador in Moscow.

Professor Piip notes in his diary:

*Our first meeting with Stalin and Molotov' ended at 10PM.. Having returned to our Legation, we began to compile the text of information we wanted to send to our government. We were afraid to transmit it by telephone. We thought our communication could be listened to at the telephone exchange in Tallinn. The news would spread like fire and create perturbation even panic. That would have caused disaster in the extraordinarily difficult times facing Estonia. We decided to send a coded message briefing on the negotiations by telegraph and, because the coding would take some time, to give Tallinn an advance notice that a telegram would be on its way soon. Knowing that hours would pass before a reply would arrive, we spent the time in discussing our precarious situation. We spoke about the brazenly provocative flights of the Soviet aircraft over Estonia, of the Soviet army and navy concentrations against us, absence of any outside help. Impossibility to carry out any mobilization, the grim outlook that resistance would bring about a mass murder of the Estonian people. Our hope was that a way could be found to save our country from doom. What would happen to our persons here in Moscow we didn't care. Our decision was to fight to the utmost the new proposal of the Soviets and to make our own stand in the event the government should fail to send us an answer on time. Despite fatigue we began to work on our counterproposals. About 3 in the night we departed from each other to meet again at 8 in the morning. But nobody could sleep. Thoughts about the fate of Estonia kept us awake.*

We return to the minutes of the conference:

Upon return to the Legation at 10 P.M. the Foreign Minister asked the members of the delegation to remain together and proposed not to take a rest. Although the next meeting was scheduled for the next day at 4 P.M., it was possible that the Kremlin would ask to hold the meeting earlier, as this was occasionally customary here. If we wanted to appear at the meeting with elaborate propositions, we had to start working at once, in order to be ready by the morning. There were no objections to this suggestion of the Foreign Minister.

In the deliberations among the delegates the following questions arose, and the following conclusions were arrived at. The deliberations as well as the decisions proceeded in complete harmony, without dissenting opinions in any questions.

First of all, considering that the government had given consent for negotiations and conclusion of an assistance pact. specifically on the basis of the draft previously presented by the Soviet government,



the question arose whether the new demand of the Soviet government has not changed the situation to the extent that the negotiations should be broken off and the delegation return home.

The delegation found that 1) From the utterances of the Soviet representatives Stalin, Molotov, and Mikoyan it was unmistakably clear that the Soviet government is set to proceed decisively and pressingly towards the objectives it hoped to attain through the pact. All members of the delegation received the common impression. from the talks in the Kremlin that Estonia would have little hope for either discontinuing the negotiations without signing a pact, or taking a firm' stand 'on her-minimum counter-proposals, without having to fear the actual carrying-out of the warnings made by Stalin and Molotov. 2)' Stalin and Molotov apparently had. finally agreed with Foreign Minister Selter's contention that there could be talk only of Soviet garrisons in the locations of the bases, but not all over the country, as Stalin and Molotov had demanded in the beginning. 3) Stalin and Molotov had also finally concurred with Foreign Minister Selter that the duty of such garrisons could under no circumstances be anything else but the "defending the external security of the bases" and not "keeping the internal order in Estonia". 4) The questions of garrisons of the bases would have arisen anyway within the framework of the previous proposal of the Soviet government, in the course of specification and implementation of the proposed agreement. This first Soviet draft already provided that "Estonia guarantees to the Soviet Union the right to have bases in Estonian ports". Naturally, a base would include not only arms and 'other military equipment, but also military personnel, therefore, already on the ground. of the first proposal received from Molotov, the. question of the strength of the Soviet military forces to be placed in Estonia would have arisen.

In view of these considerations Selter together with the delegation did not find the situation changed to such an extent that he should, upon his own initiative, return to Tallinn or ask his government for permission to return. Considering the high number of garrison troops demanded by Stalin, as well as .the' other terms of the new proposal, even in their above-mentioned somewhat lighter interpretation, it was found that a noticeable worsening of the situation had taken place, wherefore the negotiations should not be continued without a very pressing need. As to this circumstance of need, no one but the government could decide upon. For this reason, on Foreign Minister Selter's suggestion, it was decided in addition to informing the government on the' state of negotiation to ask for new instructions.

Following Selter's suggestion, the firm 'position was taken' that, if in the coming deliberations the Soviet Union should persist in the demand that Soviet troops must be placed over the entire territory of Estonia and would have the duty to guard the internal order in Estonia, then the negotiations will.be broken off, because, as Selter stated, he would not give his signature to such an occupation agreement.

Selter took a telephone connection with Tallinn. He was informed that flights of Soviet warplanes' over Estonia have been increasing, both in frequency and in strength of formations. Estonia has been refraining from counter-actions 'in her defense. Selter informed 'Tallinn that a new Soviet proposal is being discussed, that a coded telegram on this matter is following' and that he asks for instructions from the government After the telephone talk, the delegation proceeded" with the technical work,. i.e. the drafting of our counter-proposals for the event the government would not want to break off the negotiations.

### **The Preamble of the Estonian Draft**

Selter presented the preamble of the planned agreement with the Soviets which had been drafted in the Foreign Ministry. This the delegation approved unanimously.

## Article I

Discussing Article. I, the delegation took note that the Cabinet and the Committees of Parliament for Defense and for Foreign Affairs had expressed readiness to conclude the assistance pact, pursuant to the demand of the Soviet Union. Analyzing the question of mutual assistance expressed in this Article: its extent, its effect upon the status of Estonia, and also the possibilities for its non-acceptance, the delegation found that it was precisely the kind of a mutual assistance pact upon which Molotov had put emphasis in the first place. By concluding such a pact the questions of bases would be rendered simpler and kept in a state of development which in a certain way could appear understandable between allies.

On the other hand—even if it would be possible to avoid the assistance pact, for which there seemed to be no prospects— i.e. in the event of acceptance of the proposal of bases, without the assistance pact, it would be questionable whether the essential problems that sooner or later would be caused through the existence of bases, established without a mutual assistance pact, would raise fewer troubles for Estonia. Having established military bases in Estonia, the Soviet Union would be interested in their protection. Then it could be contended on the Soviet part that we ourselves would not be able to put up adequate defense against a powerful enemy invading Estonia and attacking the Soviet bases. It would be questionable, although possible, whether in case of war between Soviet Russia and an attacking third power then status of neutrality of Estonia could protect the country, whether such a “neutrality with bases” would be respected.

For these reasons the necessity would presumably arise for the Soviet Union, upon outbreak of war, to put her bases in a tactical and operative contact with her main forces. For this contact she would roost likely demand from Estonia the right of passage ‘for her troops’ and she would draw us into war anyway, in spite of the absence of a mutual assistance pact. Such a ‘perspective would already in time of peace have an untoward effect upon the relations of Estonia ‘with’ the ‘Soviet Union and with other countries, also on the international status of Estonia in general.

The Soviet Union expects definitely to obtain a mutual pact in their desired manner. Together with the pact also bases are demanded, to speak about bases without a pact is evidently not possible. All these questions have to be kept in mind when weighing the importance of this Article. The question follows—are we forced to agree in principle to the assistance pact, although the detriments and dangers connected therewith are known? The delegation found that in the given situation the necessity of acceptance in principle of the mutual assistance pact and also of Article I of the Soviet draft is inevitable, because of the heaviest pressure coming from the Soviet Union.

Selter observed with respect to Article I that as a result of deliberations so far we have achieved that the Soviet side would evidently be satisfied, if the assistance obligation would be limited only to 1) an outside attack and threat of attack; 2) action, mentioned in the preceding’ point, directly against Estonia or through Latvia; 3) said action against the Soviet Union, either through Latvia or directly against her shores on the Baltic Sea (actually the Gulf of Finland) and 4) the case, if there is an attack against the Soviet bases in Estonia’. The latter naming of the bases as a separate case is necessary for the purpose of marking the special international status of the bases, as they would be in one respect Estonian territory, but at the same time an attack against them would be an attack directly upon the Soviet Union, who in such a case would have the right to demand assistance.

Upon a question from Uluots, Selter explained that the position of the Soviet government considers the assistance not to be automatic but that it would take place only on a respective request from the party which, has been attacked.

The delegation found unanimously that on these conditions Article I could be accepted.

In addition' Selter expressed his opinion that there 'should be added to the text a clause defining the aggressor as a great power.' With that we would be guarded against a possible trouble between Finland and the Soviet Union. Also, an attack upon a Soviet vessel at sea by an unknown submarine should not drag us into war. Similarly, there should be no necessity for us 'to be entangled in a war between Poland and the Soviet Union.

The members of the delegation agreed with this proposal and the text was supplemented accordingly.

## Article II

**Selter:** There should be omitted from the proposal of the Soviet Union the sentence about economic and diplomatic assistance. The part which relates to the sale of Soviet war material to Estonia on favorable terms could, for tactical reasons, be left in, for the reasons not to create doubts as if Estonia in her purchase of armaments would not at all be interested in Soviet offers, but that she wanted as before to orient herself in different available directions.

The delegation members concurred with these opinions. A corresponding wording was given to Article II.

## Article III

The first proposal of the Soviet Union mentioned "naval bases in Estonian harbors" and "air bases on the islands. Selter suggested that we on our part should strive to have the naval bases only on the islands, in the same way as the Soviet 'proposal provided the islands for air bases. Besides, not every island can come under consideration, but only Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. The locations of the naval bases and airfields must be established and their limits fixed by agreement.

This view was adopted by the delegation and the article worded accordingly. Similar action was adopted on Uluots' view that it would be advisable to note in this Article, and not elsewhere, that the land under the bases and airfields is being let for use on lease.

**Selter:** The declarative clause about the Soviet Union's right to keep strictly limited garrisons on the locations of the bases and airfields would fit best in this Article, provided .the government agrees to such a declaration: It should be added that the' parties must agree as to the 'maximum strength of garrisons. Since Stalin and Molotov categorically insist upon placing big garrisons in the bases during the present 'war,, it would seem unavoidable to deal 'with the total number of military, provided we will be directed by the government to continue the negotiations. Therefore' the following questions arise.

1) Would it not be possible to limit ourselves in the present discussions with the Soviets, only to the declarative clause mentioned in the text of Article III, whereas an agreement as to the size of the garrisons would be reached later, upon implementation of the pact?

Upon an exchange of views the delegation found that~ this could hardly be accomplished, because of the categorical stand of the Soviet representatives. It was also found that to leave the number of the Soviet military open would not be opportune to Estonia, since Stalin would not feel any longer to be limited to his today's reduction (25,000 instead of the 35,000 demanded previously) and not even to the original 35,000. It was decided, in case the government should desire at all to reach an agreement with respect to an assistance pact, to come to an agreement also in the matter of the

size of the Soviet garrisons.

2) Should the size of the garrisons be tied to the total strength of the Estonian army?

After deliberations, it was found that this would not be desirable, because by proceeding on such a basis we would pass the control of the number of our troops into the hands of the Soviet government. The determination of the Soviet garrisons by a certain fixed number has the advantage that the size of the Estonian army would not depend upon any suppositions nor would it be subject to any reporting.

3) If the Soviet government should not retreat from the demand—to place certain big garrisons in the bases in Estonia for the time of the present war and if the Estonian government should consent to this—would there be in the present discussions any talk of how big the garrisons of the bases could be when the present European war is over?

Upon an exchange of views, it was found that this is not opportune. Talks about that would create new arguments regarding questions which for Estonia might be solved easier and more advantageously in the future, since the present moment is not favorable for discussions.

Regarding Article III, Selter reminded the view of the Cabinet that the pact should state *expressis verbis* that the areas separated for the Soviet bases and airfields 'remain parts of Estonian territory.

By a concurring opinion of the delegation the wording of the Article was made out accordingly.

#### Article IV

The delegation agreed with the view of the Foreign Minister that the proposal of the Soviet Union about so-called "prohibited agreements and alliances"- is not, clear. Prohibited could be only the entry into coalitions and the conclusion of alliances against the other contracting party.

#### Article V

**Selter:** The declaration concerning non-interference in the internal affairs of the contracting parties to the pact, embodied in the draft of the additional protocol received from the Soviet government should be transferred from the additional protocol 'to the text of the pact itself.

In this declaration the following changes should be made in any event:

1) Instead of the statement that "The treaty does not impair the sovereign right of the other party" it should be said that "the implementation of the treaty must not affect the sovereign rights". The submitted text of 'the Soviet draft is but a legal definition of the treaty to be concluded which *would* not have any value by itself. We, however, require that the parties, in implementing all their rights and obligations derived from the treaty, would act in a way 'that the stated rights of the other party would not suffer. This would be the general rule guiding the treaty implementation which would be useful in the interpretation of the treaty provisions. In accordance with this rule all matters of sovereignty would be left to the independent decision of each partner..

2) Of the sovereignty rights some should be mentioned specifically, like the form of government and the economic system. 'These two specifications would cover those aspects of the sovereignty right which are of an especially great importance for us.

The delegation agreed with these positions. Upon exchange of views it was found that "social order" is one of the manifestations of "economic system" and therefore does not require separate mention.

## Additional Protocol

The delegation found that Article I of the Additional Protocol could contain the agreement as to the size of the garrisons of the bases.

**Uluots:** A provision should be taken into the additional protocol that all disputes that might arise through the implementation of the treaty as well as through, the supervision of the execution of the treaty are to be handled by a mixed committee created on a parity basis. The idea would be that this provision would not exclude from the jurisdiction of the Conciliation Committee, provided in the Estonian-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty, any questions connected with the present treaty, but that the Conciliation Committee would remain the highest authority.

The delegation agreed with the proposal and a respective text was drawn up. The writing of the draft of the treaty was concluded at 4 o'clock in the morning. About that time there arrived by telegraph instructions from the government, directing the negotiations to be continued but admonishing to do whatever possible to soften the new Soviet proposal regarding the entry of Red Army troops. The instructions authorized the delegation to conclude the agreement with the Soviets anyway' as last resort.

All members of the delegation were very tired and depressed. Also they felt sick, probably from food poisoning contracted on their travel to Moscow. They had fever, particularly Professor Uluots. Around 10 o'clock in the morning a telephone call came from the Kremlin, asking the delegation to come at 1 P.M. instead of 4 o'clock as previously arranged. The meeting was resumed in the private office of Molotov, who again was assisted by Stalin and Mikoyan. The minutes we have been quoting above describe this fourth Estonian-Soviet meeting in the matter of assistance pact as follows:

On September 28, 1939, at 10 o'clock the Kremlin notified that the meeting will take place at 1 P.M. instead of 4 o'clock of the same day. At 1 P.M. there took place in the Kremlin the fourth meeting, attended by the same participants who were present at the previous meeting. The talks developed as follows:

**Selter:** We have prepared on our part a draft of the text of the treaty. I should like to present this text, reserving the right to make necessary and appropriate amendments later. Also I want to state that' until now we have not received from our government detailed instructions about your demands, wherefore we reserve for ourselves the right, upon clarification of the government's position, either to return to the fundamental questions as the case may be, or consider this draft dropped altogether. The draft is as follows:

Selter read the preamble of the draft. There was no argument.

Article I was read by Selter.

**Stalin:** This is much clearer than our previous text. But your addition to the effect that the assistance obligation is not automatic but arises upon request of the other party does not suit here. It should be deleted. '

**Selter:** This addition has been drafted on our part as a result of the previous talks. We consider it extremely important to state *expressis verbis* that the assistance obligation is not automatic. For instance, in case of a European great power attacking the Soviet Union in the manner stated in Article I, Estonia could "for reasons of convenience, remain also neutral". I think it is not impossible that in such' a case Estonian neutrality could even be rather advantageous to the Soviet Union,

reducing the strain of the conflict on the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Finland and on the entire route to Leningrad.

**Stalin:** Very correct. Estonian neutrality in such a case could prove to be useful to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, I find it preferable to express this thought elsewhere in the pact.

After Uluots, Molotov, Rei, Pup and Mikoyan had expressed their views on this question, it was decided to strike out this addition from the text of Article I, but to insert into the additional protocol a new Article (3) containing the same thought, but in a more elaborate form.

Article II was read by Selter. There was no argument.

Article III (Selter read it).

**Stalin:** This is not acceptable. We cannot agree to bases situated only on Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. We need Tallinn.

**Selter:** Tallinn we cannot give. The town is our capital. It would be impossible for a state to preserve its sovereignty right, if its capital is made to serve as a base for foreign troops.

**Stalin:** It would not be so bad. We would separate a certain district in Tallinn.

**Selter:** No, such a situation would become intolerable. It must be assumed that a base is a certain military entity which would not be in harmony with the exercising of state functions connected with the capital. The proposed separation of a district would not provide much, because the navy of the Soviet Union is too big to be squeezed into some kind of a district. In one way or another, staying stationed in Tallinn, it would alarmingly affect the necessary independent character of the town as the capital of our country. No, we cannot agree with a Soviet base in Tallinn.

Rei, Uluots and Piip added on their arguments against the use of Tallinn as a foreign naval base. Rei and Uluots pointed out the unsuitability of Tallinn, being a big commercial port, for purposes of a naval base. Pup indicated the troubles that might arise, if Soviet sailors would move around in Tallinn.

**Stalin:** We cannot do without Tallinn.. I do not deny that certain difficulties might arise, but these we will overcome. The islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are barren. There everything must be built. That takes a long time. What we need is 'ready-made port on' the mainland. The only one of this kind you have is Tallinn.

**Selter:** We cannot give you Tallinn as a base. When I was here the last time, Mr. Molotov said also that Tallinn is not absolutely necessary.

**Rei:** I remember distinctly that Mr. Molotov said that Tallinn is not necessary as a base.

**Molotov:** What I said was: perhaps it will be possible to do without Tallinn, if we find another suitable port on the mainland. But already then I said quite firmly that without a harbor base on the north coast of the mainland of Estonia the security system of the Soviet Union would not be feasible in the present circumstances. At that time I was interested in Pärnu and Paldiski.

**Stalin:** Our military men tell me that Paldiski is not built out and scarcely suits as a base now, but that Paldiski can become a base in the future.



Uluots and Pup described the history of the founding and construction of the port of Paldiski and its present condition.

**Stalin:** Paldiski is a music of the future. We need a seaport right now.

**Selter:** All that what you want to use Tallinn for could be had also, for instance, in Paldiski. Tallinn, as a naval base, does not offer anything special that would not exist in Paldiski. Under no circumstances can we give Tallinn' as a base. This is our firm stand.

**Stalin:** All right, I agree with you. But under the condition that until Paldiski will be made ready, we can enter also Tallinn to take fuel and provisions. Also our navy must have the right to stay in the roads of Tallinn as well as in the port itself, somewhere at a separated dock. You have in Tallinn the so-called new port. A place can be found there. This right can be limited to a short period, but without it we cannot do. This is our final position.

**Selter:** I shall try to clarify our position with my government before the next meeting.

**Stalin:** I want to add to the text of Article III the sentence that the leasing of the areas for the bases will be on favorable terms. Otherwise you will skin us with the rental price.

**Selter:** That is superfluous.

**Stalin:** But look here, Article II also contains the' words "at favorable prices".

**Selter:** We agree to strike out these words, too.

**Stalin:** But Article II has already been 'accepted. Therefore it is necessary to add the' same words in Article III; if you do not want it that way, we can insert the words "at an agreed price". Otherwise, honestly, you will skin our backs with your rental.

**Selter:** I agree, if you still insist on suspecting us for speculating with our territory. Have your wish—the price has to be reasonable— However, I think that because of the amount of the rental you would not abandon the idea of demanding the bases.

Selter proceeded to read the remaining articles. They caused no remarks or arguments. Then Selter made the following statement:

**Selter:** I declare that although the pact would forbid to enter into alliances aimed against the other contracting part, this restriction would not apply to previous agreements already signed, particularly to the Treaty of Defensive Alliance between Estonia and Latvia, signed November 1, 1923, which, regardless of the pact to be concluded, will remain in force.

**Stalin:** (with the support of Molotov) We are not against it. The present pact does not affect the Estonian-Latvian treaty of alliance. That treaty can remain in force. Since the present text of the pact speaks about future treaties only, there is no need for making reservations through a special clause in regard to the Estonian-Latvian treaty.

Article I of the 'additional protocol caused the following argument.

**Selter:** My government does not agree to the admission of 25,000 of your military. It finds this

number too high. I think that even for the present time of war 5,000 would be enough.

**Stalin:** 25,000 is rather too little than too much. My military' men reproached me for having reduced the number from 35,000 to 25,000 but I do not share their opinion. 35,000 was taken from the air. But 25,000 corresponds to the minimum complement of certain military units and also is adequate for carrying out the duties at the bases. Military men seem to have never enough of armed forces.

**Selter:** Truly, 25,000 is also too much. Don't forget, our own military forces will also be there to protect the bases 'as a part of our territory if that should be necessary at alt. I think, that would not be necessary. NO one will touch these bases. You will not act wisely by bringing in too many of your 'armed forces ' and thereby lowering the interest of the Estonian people and army for the defense of their country. By that you would not be' able to achieve your professed purpose. Only a friendly and' sympathetic participation of the Estonian army in the defense could guarantee success in the fulfillment of your security aims.

**Stalin:** We respect very highly the sentiments of the Estonian army and the spirit of cooperation of the armies of' both sides. But about 25,000 is the minimum complement of an independent military unit. Besides, the proposal says: "up to 25,000 men".

**Mikoyan:** A division is 17-18,000 men. To that must be added some special offices 'and auxiliary units necessary for the organization of an independent military detachment.

**Selter:** That means that a maximum of 15,000 would be sufficient

**Stalin:** (producing his yesterday's text) This text should be suitable. In this text we can strike out the listing of the categories of military units and make those corrections, which I made here with pencil yesterday.

**Selter:** Well, I understand that as a basis we have now agreed on the new text prepared by us.

**Molotov:** Yes, your text is better and can remain as a basis.

**Stalin:** (after a short silent pause) Yes, there must not be too few of the Red Army in Estonia. You surround them and destroy them.

**Selter:** Mr. Stalin, this remark is insulting. We are negotiating a treaty of alliance, yet you speak as if we were the worst enemies, fearing all the time an attack upon each other.

**Stalin:** I did not want to insult you. But every dislocation of military forces has its sensible minimum, which cannot be reduced. We do not want to cause you unnecessary difficulties. We are going to build ourselves the billets for which we possess suitable simple projects. We are also going to construct at our own expense all communication roads that are necessary. Do not be afraid, the number of troops is not too great. It may be, the actual strength of our troops may turn out even smaller. It is the principle of the question that counts and is important. As soon as even one foreign regiment has been admitted to exist on one's territory, then from the standpoint of principle it makes no difference and it is no longer important whether or how many more' of them will come.

**Selter:** You are right. Of course, once a violation of the principle has been admitted then that is the most important matter. But it cannot be denied that the question whether 1 or 10 regiments enter one's country is also of importance. I cannot give you any other position. I want to consult once more my government. Imagine what difficulties will arise with the billeting and provisioning of an army of

the size you proposed. From that will grow mutual dissatisfaction and harassment.

The meeting ended 'at 3 P.M. The next meeting was set for 9 P.M. Leaving the conference room the Estonian delegation again met the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, together with Gauss, Count Schulenburg and other.

Having returned to the Legation, the members of the delegation started deliberations among themselves. From the directive of the government received from Tallinn it was evident that the government considered the conclusion of the agreement an unavoidable necessity. The delegation did not know all the circumstances that had been weighed by the government in preparing its directive, but it was to be assumed that grave national and international reasons of state security as well as the supreme motive to preserve the nation's life could in the meantime have become' even more pressing. The delegation members felt that it would be disastrous to break off the negotiations and that there remained but one thing to do—to bring the negotiations to conclusion. It was found that the delegation could not produce a reason understandable .to the Soviets for protracting the negotiations. Regardless of the superficially friendly tone of the negotiations, the talk of the Soviet representatives had repeatedly shown, as before, the same .stressing of urgency and warning about the dangers that would confront Estonia in case the pact would not be concluded.

The Soviet claims in the questions left open at the conference table were extremely difficult to meet. The members of the delegation were aware that, although the independence-minded Estonian people would find the enforced pact reprehensible, the preservation of the life of the nation had to be regarded as the supreme matter in this utterly desperate situation. They had to consider the fact that the future cannot promise anything to a people, whose physical existence has been wiped out through mass murder.

Considering all these factors the delegation decided unanimously: 1) To insist that Tallinn should not become a Soviet base. In order to save Tallinn, to permit the creation of a base in Paldiski. Only as the last resort, in case Paldiski would again be objected by the Soviets as an immediately operative base, to yield to a temporary stay of the Soviet navy in Tallinn for refueling and provisioning and for a short time only. 2) To insist on a reduction in the demanded number of Soviet troops. If this effort should turn out to be of no avail, to accede to the number of 25,000. 3) The conditions, concerning Tallinn and the stipulation about the strength of Soviet troops to be out into the additional protocol.

The. minutes continue the story of the fateful Soviet-Estonian conference.

On the same day, September 28, at 9 P.M. the negotiations were resumed in the Kremlin with the Soviet representatives. The participants were the same, except Stalin, who was called by Molotov.

**Selter:** We have made corrections in the text. We suggest to continue the negotiations 'by reading the amended text.

**Mototov:** We agree to this suggestion of the procedure.

Selter read the preamble of the treaty to which Molotov agreed. Then Selter read the text of Article I.

**Molotov:** Why should the assistance obligation become effective only in the case the aggressor is a "great power"? This must be effective also in case of attack by any European state.

**Selter:** It was today that we agreed it could be a great power only.

**Molotov:** I did not notice that.

**Selter:** I draw your attention to the fact that also Mr. Stalin was present at this agreement.

**Molotov:** (telephones to Stalin) No, the aggressor could be any power. Let us strike out the word “great”.

At this point Stalin entered the room and sat at the table.

**Selter:** I cannot agree with that. Would the Soviet Union need our help in case she would be attacked, say, by Sweden?

**Molotov:** No, but Sweden could attack you.

**Selter:** No worry, we can handle Sweden alone. We do not need your help for that.

**Molotov:** Stalin, look how they are. Help me, support me. What is your’ opinion?

**Stalin:** Leave the words in “great power ‘only”.

Selter read Articles II and III.

**Stalin:** I miss Tallinn in Article III. We cannot do without It.

**Selter:** It is not possible to give Tallinn as a base.

**Stalin:** The least to what we can agree is a base in Paldiski. But we should also have the right temporarily to use Tallinn for anchoring and provisioning.

The members of the delegation held a consultation among themselves. They decided unanimously to yield to Stalin. Thereafter Selter announced that the Estonian delegation is compelled to accept Stalin’s proposal. The Soviet side agreed that the stipulation about the temporary use of Tallinn should be dealt with in the additional protocol. The words “District of the town of Paldiski” were added to the text of Article III.

Extended arguments were caused by the paragraph concerning the date when the treaty should enter into force.

**Molotov:** The treaty will come to be effective immediately with its signing.

**Selter:** In accordance with the Constitutional Law of Estonia this is not possible. The treaty cannot become effective before its ratification. .

**Molotov:** How was it possible for Ribbentrop? Is your constitution different from those of other countries?

**Selter:** Yes, to answer your question as you put it. I know definitely that the Estonian Constitution does not permit me to accept your formula.

After prolonged arguments, in which Selter, Molotov, Stalin, Uluots, Rei, Piip and Mikoyan spoke repeatedly, the’ Soviet side undertook to honor the requirement of the Estonian constitution.

**Stalin:** All right, the treaty becomes effective after 3 days.

**Selter:** No, after 10 days. 3 days is too short a time.

**Stalin:** After 4 days.

**Selter:** Under 7 days it is not possible.

**Stalin:** All right, you win. After 5 days.

**Selter:** Today is Thursday. Tomorrow I return home. Saturday I give my report on the treaty. Then comes Sunday. Sunday I want to spend with my wife and son. I think my colleagues want that, too, on their own behalf. Then there would remain only 2 days for calling a meeting of the parliamentary organs for the ratification of the treaty. That is not enough.

**Stalin:** How old is your son?

**Selter:** Not yet 4 years.

**Stalin:** For the sake of your wife and son we will add one more day. Let it be then 6 days.

To that the Estonian delegation agreed. Other parts' of the text did not raise any arguments. But Article I of the additional protocol revived the previous arguments about the number of the, Soviet troops.

**Selter:** We insist on a maximum of 10,000 men.

**Stalin:** (supported by Molotov) We regard the maximum of 25,000 as absolutely necessary for safeguarding the security of the Soviet Union. We' have decided to safeguard the security of the Soviet Union in one way or another. For this reason the measures we provided in this pact are absolutely necessary. To these measures belong also the garrisons of our troops in Estonia totaling 25,000. Do not force us to look for other possibilities 'for the security of the Soviet Union. Do not be afraid of these garrisons. We assure you again as we did before, that the Soviet Union does not want in any way to harm either the Estonian sovereignty, government, economic system, or the internal life of Estonia, or her foreign policy. We do not want to act the way Germany did in Czechoslovakia. Consequently, the Soviet troops will refrain from everything that is not in harmony with these promises. You keep your army of the size you desire. Besides, the measures provided in this Article are temporary, i.e. they will last only as long as the present European war is going on.

Again the delegation took time off for an interim consultation. Its unanimous decision was to yield to the demand of garrisoning 25,000 Soviet troops.

**Selter:** Although we remain of the opinion that the number of 25,000 Soviet troops is too big and purposeless, we have but to be ready to accept this proposal.

Article II of the additional protocol caused the following argument.

**Stalin:** The text prepared by you contains the idea that our ships can come to Tallinn "for a temporary stay". Since in the beginning of the Article it is already stated "Temporarily, until completion of Paldiski..." why then is it necessary to state below again "for a temporary stay"? Furthermore, the

meaning of this would be ambiguous.

After some arguments between Selter, Stalin and Molotov and a consultation of the members of the Estonian delegation among themselves, it was agreed to eliminate the word “temporary”.

**Selter:** We agree to strike the word “temporary”. The time during which your navy could enter under this Article should be limited to 1 year...

**Stalin:** 1 year is not enough. Make it 3 years.

The ensuing arguments resulted in the agreement that the period should be “not over 2 years”. The other parts of the additional protocol did not raise any arguments. Upon conclusion of the negotiations Molotov gave the texts of the agreement and the additional protocol to be typed.

**Stalin:** (turning to Selter) The agreement has been achieved. I can tell you that the Estonian government acted well and wisely in the interests of the Estonian people by concluding the agreement with the Soviet Union. It could have happened to you what happened to Poland. Poland was a great country. Yet, where is Poland now? Where is Moscicki, Rydz-Smigly, Beck? Yes, I am telling you frankly—you acted well and in the interests of your people,

**Selter:** This is also the opinion of my government, my colleagues and myself. There remains one more matter for me to touch upon. In the last days your warplanes have been repeatedly violating Estonian borders and flying over Estonian territory. So far, we have been abstaining from shooting at them. But I lodged protests with your Minister in Tallinn and with Mr. Molotov. These flights are inappropriate, especially now, during the time of our negotiations. We know that you have plenty of planes, many more than those that have been flying: over Estonia in demonstration. We know that the Soviet Union is strong. What is the purpose of overdoing the demonstration of your power?

**Stalin:** Well, these were young inexperienced airmen. They make errors. They are not attentive enough to their orders. But we can make an end to that. That will not happen again.

While waiting for the typing of the agreement, Stalin invited all those present to have supper. One end of the conference table was set with edibles and drinks. Stalin invited everybody to be seated and asked how is in Estonian “long live Estonia”. Having been told the Estonian words he combined them for proposing a toast for the health of President Konstantin Päts. Upon Selter’s proposal a toast was drunk to Stalin.

The agreement was signed at 12 midnight.  
The meeting lasted until 1 o’clock at night.

Professor Piip’s diary reads:

*Knowing the weakness of the Caucasians with regard to their native wines we took to the courtesy of praising the quality of the drinks served. Stalin immediately gave an order at the table to send every member of our delegation 20 bottles. After the signing of the agreement that took place exactly at midnight, Stalin invited all our members for vacations to Caucasia. We declined, politely. Having heard of our intention to leave for Tallinn the same morning, he said: “ No, you stay here tomorrow. We want to give you a reception. What time in the afternoon would suit you, 4-5-6? You can take along the personnel of your Legation.” Again we declined. We left about 1 o’clock in the night. Back at home, talks among ourselves lasted until 3. Talking about the outcome of the negotiations we found that there was no other way out. Though we had been drawn into the orbit of Soviet Russia,*



*our people were saved from massacre. The future alone will show.*

The agreement signed at midnight by Molotov and Selter was given the title “Mutual Assistance Pact Between Estonia and the USSR” and the date of September 28, 1939.

The ratification of the treaty for Estonia was done by the President alone, because the Soviet government had demanded that the treaty should not go to the Parliament. The exchange of the ratification documents was protocolled with the date of October 4, 1939. Thus the desire of the Soviet government became signed, sealed and delivered.

**Bolshevik**, the official organ of the Communist Party, stated on the occasion of the signing of the Soviet-Estonian Assistance Pact:

*Aggression and the desire to oppress smaller nations are alien to the spirit of the USSR. The Soviet people are interested in lasting peace and in fraternal collaboration with other people. Such collaboration can be realized only, if it is based on mutual trust and the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Because it respects the sovereignty of other states, the Soviet Union does not interfere in their internal affairs.*

**Pravda** of October 6, 1939, wrote:

*At the basis of the mutual assistance pact (with Estonia) lay irremovable principles of the treaties of peace and non-aggression. The contracting parties affirm once more their unshaken desire to recognize the sovereign rights of each state as well as their firm desire not to interfere in the home affairs of another country.*

On the same date **Izvestia** declared that “the Soviet Union has never used her advantage as a great and powerful country against small countries”.

On November 7, 1939, the Soviet Minister in Tallinn, Nikitin, declared at a festive gathering for the celebration of the Soviet Independence Day (October Revolution) at the Estonian Opera House in Tallinn (the first public celebration of it ever held in Estonia): “I guarantee under solemn oath that the Soviet Union will always respect the sovereignty and independence of Estonia in every respect.”