CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTED ESTONIAN EVENTS, 1986-1988

(Compiled by Mari-Ann Kelam and Heiki Ahonen)

1986

Growing alarm in Estonia about the dangers of phosphorite mining and other ecological disasters. This serves to unite the Estonian people, also giving them a sense of strength. Estonian Writers' Union conference saw much discussion of non-literary themes.

1987

February. A sizeable group of political prisoners is released from the Gulag, among them several Estonians. Second general meeting of representatives from all Estonian Heritage clubs is held in Tallinn; the general ideology of this cultural-political-social movement is worked out.

April. Third general meeting of the Estonian Heritage clubs is held. It is at this meeting that the name "Estonian Heritage Society" (Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts "EMS") is chosen by a vote of 289 - 0 over an official proposal containing the word "socialist."

May 1. Tartu University student demonstration against new Moscow-mandated phosphorite mining project in environmentally stressed Northeastern Estonia. Some University officials, who later become prominent in the Popular Front (Rahvarinne, RR), try to take away the students' signs. Newspapers strictly forbidden to write about the event, but the Tartu University weekly prints captionless photos showing the students holding placards denouncing the mining project.

August 15. MRP-AEG (Estonian Group for Full Publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) forms and announces demonstration for 23rd of August in Tallinn. Former political prisoner and MRP-AEG representative, Tiit Madisson, deals openly with local authorities.

August 23. 3,000 to 7,000 people gather in Tallinn's City Hall Square, march to the "Linda" statue where they leave flowers and wreaths, and then continue on for speeches in Hirve Park (Deer Park). This is the first open, non-official political demonstration by thousands of people since the Soviet occupation of Estonia. Petition drive to erect a monument to the victims of Stalin is begun. Demonstration is followed by a massive slander campaign (in "true Stalinist fashion") in the official media against the organizers.

September 1. Jüri Mikk begins 2 month hunger strike to protest media slander campaign.

September 1-4. MRP-AEG Info-Bulletin first issued.

September 5. Planned Estonian Heritage Society meeting in Tarvastu blocked by the authorities. Human rights activists (Lagle Parek, Mati Kiirend) also detained and called in for questioning.

September 12. Tiit Madisson and his family are expelled from Estonia.
September 26. Four Estonian economists present "IME" (Isemajandav Eesti) - a somewhat utopic plan for Estonian economic autonomy. This comes under severe criticism from the authorities; discussion of this topic is banned from the media in the late fall and early winter.

September 27. 139 Estonians in the Word of Life (Elu Sõna) sect sign "Charter 87," condemning Soviet anti-semitism and warlike policies toward Israel, and asking to emigrate. Word of Life believers carry out a number of demonstrations and other political activities over the next year.

September 30. Jüri Mikk, in midst of hunger strike, carries placard to Red Square, demanding publication of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Sign is immediately torn up and he is sent back to Estonia.

October 21. Over 3,000 people congregate at the War of Independence cemetery in Võru (pop. 15,000). For the first time, the Estonian blue, black and white tricolor is not ripped down by the authorities.

October 31. Jüri Mikk ends hunger strike.

November 7. 2,000 to 3,000 people congregate at the War of Independence cemetery in Pärnu. Later, part of the group marches to the City Hall with demands and questions.

December 6. First Estonian Greens demonstration at the gingko tree in Tallinn. About 150 people gather to protest official plans to cut down some trees in the center of town. They are prevented from planting trees by a militia blockade. Heiki Ahonen is warned that continuing his activities may end his early release from imprisonment.

December 12. Estonian Heritage Society (EMS) officially founded in Tallinn. Earlier attempt to do so at Tartu University thwarted by authorities and fearful University administration. In 1988, EMS begins to publish "Sõnumid."

December 13-14. Activists (Lagle Parek, Eve Pärnaste) are warned about their activities, detained and called in for questioning, preventing their attending an unofficial human rights conference in Moscow.

December 24. Activists (Jüri Mikk, Lagle Parek) given official warning to cease human rights activities or face imprisonment.

1988

January 10. Activists’ meeting in Pärnu-Jaagupi thwarted by authorities.

January 20. Proposal made and signed by 14 individuals to found Estonian National Independence Party (Eesti Rahvuslik, Sõltumatuse Partei, ERSP). No Estonian newspaper publishes it, so it is taken to Moscow, where the proposal is announced at a press conference January 30.

January 29. Heiki Ahonen and his aunt, Lagle Parek, attacked and beaten by unknown assailants.

February 1. Ahonen arrested for refusing to report for reserve training; threatened with being sent to clean up in Chernobyl.

February 2. Demonstration in Tartu on 68th anniversary of Peace Treaty of Tartu in which in 1920 USSR renounced "voluntarily and forever" its sovereign rights over Estonia. Security forces with dogs
and riot gear violently disperse the crowds; dozens are injured and arrested. In Tallinn, Sivert Zoldin
arrested for distributing fliers about Estonian Independence Day rally.

**February 24.** 10 to 15 thousand people gather in Tallinn at the monument to the writer, A. H.
Tammsaare, to commemorate Estonian Independence Day (1918) despite the atmosphere of fear
generated by weeks of warnings and propaganda against this demonstration. Authorities use busses
equipped with loudspeakers and sirens to drown out speeches by the people. Other demonstrations
and gatherings held in several other Estonian towns and cities.

**March 5.** Ahonen and mother, Eva, deported from Estonia. Several other activists and Word of Life
believers are expelled from Estonia on Israeli visas throughout the year. Most end up in Sweden.

**March 5.** A dozen Pentecostals demonstrate in Kohtla-Järve, demanding right to emigrate. Unusual,
since population of Kohtla-Järve is almost 100% Russian and crime rate there is the highest in
Estonia.

**March 9.** Jehovah’s Witness, Taavi Kuusk, arrested for refusing to serve in Red Army. Previous

**March 11.** Mati Kiirend, Endel Ratas, and Tiina Hallik forcibly removed from train by militia, and
unknown men in plainclothes, preventing their attendance at human rights seminar in Moscow.

**March 25.** People ,gather in Tallinn to commemorate mass deportations of Estonians (at least
80,000 farmers and their families were sent to Siberia) in 1949. Loudspeakers broadcasting music
are used by the authorities to interfere; people are asked to disperse and to attend an official
memorial concert instead.

**March 31.** Conscientious objector and believer, Aarne Heide, born 1969, is tried for "draft evasion".
Member of Word of Life.

**April 1 - 2.** Cultural Unions conference. Dramatic speeches, "naming names" about Estonia's many
problems and their cause. Idea of Popular Front is first mentioned here.

**April.** Festive Heritage Days in Tartu. Blue, black and white motifs prominent. NBC films and shows
scenes of this event in their segment on Estonia on the Nightly News.

**April 28.** Estonian Green Movement (Eesti Roheline Liikumine - ERL) officially founded. Politically
oriented movement, dealing with ecological problems, russification, in-migration of non-Estonians.
Membership grows quickly to 6,000.

**May 1.** Many unofficial (“Where is the seat of Estonian government - in Moscow or in Tallinn?”)
placards appear in the official May Day Parade. Afterwards a Greens meeting is held, followed by a
memorial service for Jüri Kukk (died in Gulag, March 27, 1981).

**May 18.** Estonian Lawyers’ Association approves radical demands in spirit of
perestroika and glasnost.

**June 4.** Independent Youth Forum I held in Tallinn. Dozens of youth organizations have developed
throughout Estonia; 500 delegates attend. Information center established which soon begins to
publish "Heinakuu" ("July"). "Heinakuu" is a chronicle of events, activities, various incidents of
harassment and interference by authorities, clashes between Estonians and Russians and
developments in other Soviet Republics as well as pro-independence speeches, unpublished articles, etc.

**June 5-11.** Historic "Old Town" Tallinn Days see the mass open display of the Estonian tri-color, 70,000 people stay up all night singing and waving flags in the Song Festival Amphitheatre.

**June 10-11.** "National Democratic Movement of the Peoples of the USSR" (Lvov Group) is formed in Lvov, Ukraine. (Lagle Parek, Jüri Adams are present.) Lvov group letter sent to President Reagan on June 12.

**June 14.** Memorial services for mass deportations by Soviets (10,000 Estonians shipped in boxcars to Siberia) of 1941 in Tallinn and Tartu. Lvov group demonstration near Kremlin - 15 are detained.

**June 16.** Estonian Communist Party First Secretary Karl Vaino replaced by Vaino Väljas, former Soviet ambassador to Nicaragua and onetime Gorbachev roommate. Popular Front's publication, "Teataja," first issued.

**June 17.** 150,000 people gather in Tallinn to send off delegates to Party Conference in Moscow.

**June 23.** Restoration of Võru's monument to War of Independence celebrated publicly by thousands.

**July 1-13.** Picketing and collecting of signatures for release of political prisoners Mart Niklus, Enn Tarto and Sivert Zoldin in front of Estonian court house by ERSP and EMS and others.

**July 13.** Mart Niklus, released from Perm 35, arrives in Estonia to emotional welcome by thousands; shown on Estonian TV.

**July.** Aarne Heide arrested and imprisoned in Patarei. Increased harassment of believers associated with Word of Life.

**July 30.** Sivert Zoldin freed.

**August 1.** Picketing resumes for release of Tarto and Zoldin.

**August 8.** Lehti Metsaalt ends 10-day hunger strike protesting confiscation of Estonian flags in Moscow June 14.

**August 10-12.** Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact first officially published discussed in Estonian press (Noorte Hääl, Rahva Hääl); also broadcast over Estonian radio.

**August 16.** "Interrinne" (later, "International Movement"), Russian chauvinist organization founded in opposition to Popular Front.

**August 21.** Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP) officially founded in Pilistvere.

**August 23.** ERSP and eight other independent organizations rally in Hirve Park, march to join Popular Front's historical discussion of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in the Linnahall.

**August 25.** Greens Forum special political meeting, where resolutions are passed demanding the resignation of high Soviet Estonian officials because of their acts "inimical" to the Estonian people.

www.singingrevolution.com
September 11. Over 300,000 gather in the songfest amphitheatre for dramatic speeches and patriotic songs. Calls for Estonian independence are greeted with ovations from the crowd.

September 15. Popular Front of Saaremaa holds memorial ceremony for victims of Stalinist terror in 1941. The event was announced in the local newspaper, Voice of the Islands.

September 17. ERSP Memorandum to the United Nations, detailing most Estonian problems under Soviet rule.

September 23. Commemoration of Enn Tarto’s 50th birthday, Tallinn City Hall Square.

September 27. Another chapter of the Estonian Christian Union formed in Paide.

September 30. Independent Info Center working meeting, Tallinn.

October 1 & 2. 3000 delegates formally establish the Popular Front (Rahvarinne, RR) in Tallinn's Linnahall. Niklus, named as official delegate, attends wearing Gulag camp uniform.

October 2-8. Estonian Greens elected to Friends of the Earth as "first independent Soviet association to join an international environmental organization."

October 7. Beach clean-up, aimed at removal of barbed wire and other trash, organized by Virumaa independent youth club, in Võsu.

October 8. Re-dedication of marker at President Konstantin Päts' birthplace in Tahkuranna, near Pärnu, followed by torchlight protest march in Pärnu.

October 17. Enn Tarto returns to Estonia from Perm 35; greeted by Niklus and welcoming crowds. Courthouse picketing ends.

October 23. Estonians returning national blue, black and white flags to M. Kiirend's home attacked and beaten by three Russians in Tallinn. No relief obtained from the authorities, even though flag now protected by law.

End of October. Soviet constitutional changes publicized. Debate and Opposition grows in Estonia. Popular Front telegram sent October 29 to M. Gorbachev asking that he rescind the proposed changes and provide more time for discussion.

October 29-30. Pärnu's dismantled (in 1940) monument to War of Independence discovered by EMS (Heritage Society) excavations in cemetery.

November 2. First monument to victims of Stalinism erected in Pilistvere.

November 6. ERSP appeals again to UN, asking for peace-keeping forces.

November 7. Anti-Soviet, pro-independence placards seen in Estonia on anniversary of Bolshevik Revolution, including, "Communism is the last stage of delirium."

November 8. Soviets deny permission for CSCE Congressional delegation to visit Estonia on November 19.
November. Days of prayer announced in Estonia; all churches to remain open 24 hours a day in anticipation of vote in the "parliament." 900,000 signatures collected on petition opposing Soviet constitutional changes.

November 11. Former KGB boss Victor Chebrikov sent to Estonia; meets primarily with non-Estonian factory workers and International Front.

November 14. Estonian Heritage Society proposes that certain Estonian cultural and historic dates be made national holidays. Specifically, Estonian independence day (Feb. 24), Victory/Veterans' Day (June 23), St. John's Day (June 24), and Christmas.


November 19-20. First conference of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian independence movements in Riga. 3 resolutions passed.

November 27. Oil shale fire in the mine "Estonia", burning out of control since November 3, revealed.

November 28. Conference and religious service to commemorate beginning of Estonian War of Independence organized in Tallinn by the Academic War History Society. Many EMS members participate.

November 30. Three ERSP activists return from Georgia where they were to attend the formal establishment of the Georgian National Democratic Party, which was postponed due to a hunger strike intended to pressure the delegates to the Party Conference. ERSP reports seeing on-going daily mass gatherings of Georgians in front of the parliament building numbering in the thousands.

December 1. List of Word of Life members who wish to emigrate has grown to nearly 400.

December 7. Estonian Supreme Soviet votes 165-87 to reject November 26 Kremlin decree annulling Estonia's right to veto laws made in Moscow.

December 13. Tartu authorities present letter demanding glass-covered ERSP information stand's removal. Letter is displayed until the stand is dismantled and all information and photos removed by unknown individuals on the night of December 15.

December 24-25. Estonians celebrate Christmas openly and as a religious holiday for the first time since the Soviet occupation.

December 26. Aarne Heide appeal denied by the Estonian Supreme Soviet. At the last minute, Estonian TV is not permitted to air an interview with Heli Susi regarding her meetings with Solzhenitsyn in Estonia.

December 28 - January 4. 5th World Estonian Festival in Melbourne, Australia. Some Estonians from Estonia (singers, dancers, and a quasi-official delegation) attend for the first time. However, ERSP members denied permission to travel by Estonian Foreign Ministry.
December 30. ERSP information stand at Cafe Pegasus, Tallinn, is destroyed during the night. Stand was first set up Nov. 14.