

CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTED ESTONIAN EVENTS, 1989

(compiled by Mari-Ann Kelam and Heiki Ahonen)

December 28, 1988- January 4, 1989. ESTO '88 (5th quadrennial World Estonian Festival) in Melbourne, Australia. For the first time, performers from Soviet-occupied Estonia are able to participate, but Soviet authorities deny exit visas to Estonian National Independence Party representatives.

January 11. Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP) telegram sent to European Parliament asking support for restoration of independence.

January 12. Official Estonian census 1,573,300, showing a 10-year population increase of 107,500. Over half (55,000) of this increase is due to immigration.

January 18. After heated debate and numerous amendments, the Estonian Supreme Soviet passes the long-awaited compromise legislation making Estonian the sole official language in the republic, relegating Russian to second place.

January 21. Independent Info Center and ERSP's organize discussion on the topic: "What we should to achieve independence." Over 500 participants fill Tartu University lecture hall. Simultaneous discussion of language question organized in the main auditorium by others.

January 21. ERSP joins EMS (Estonian Heritage Society) in urging boycott by Estonians of Soviet elections.

February 2. Rally in Tartu marking Estonian-Soviet Peace Treaty of 1920 attended by 3 to 4 thousand.

February 3. ERSP and EMS-sponsored ceremonies attract standing-room only audience to Estonia Theater in Tallinn.

February. Tallinn Committee for Cooperation is founded to ensure good communication among all local pro-independence political organizations. Popular Front's district organizations join the Committee.

February 24. Estonian Independence Day celebrated openly and formally in Tallinn and other cities for the first time since the Soviet occupation. In a move to increase their own popularity and exploiting the inevitable, Estonian Soviet functionaries and Popular Front leaders replace the Soviet Estonian flag with the Estonian Republic's long-banned blue, black and white flag on Toompea Hill, the traditional seat of Estonian government. This move is strongly criticized by pro-independence movements for whom the Estonian tri-color, symbolizing the free Estonian Republic, has always meant resistance to Soviet rule.

Submitting to pressure from the Communist Party's Central Committee, the Popular Front leadership had cancelled at the last minute a mass rally planned in cooperation with all pro-independence groups. The latter proceed with their plans in Town Hall Square. At the Estonia Concert Hall, the

Estonian Heritage Society, the Estonian National Independence Party, and the Estonian Christian Union announce plans to convene a Congress of Estonia, based upon registered legal citizens of the Estonian Republic.

March. Estonian Women's Union is re-established after fifty years. The Union aims to mobilize women in support of progressive independence movements.

March 5. "Interfront" passes resolution asking for transfer of northeastern Estonia to the Russian Federation. Calls for general strike in that region on March 15.

March 8. Estonian Women's Union organizes march through Tallinn protesting against the Soviet Army. Demonstrators cite brutal treatment of Baltic conscripts, environmental destruction, by the military. Demands made that Soviet occupation troops "go home." In Tartu, demonstrators encircle Soviet air base on outskirts of city, demanding its closing and the restoration of Estonian ethnographic museum facilities.

March 9. Residents in Tallinn commemorate the day Estonia's capital was largely destroyed by Soviet bombers in 1944. In the evening, candles are placed on window sills, along sidewalks and on steps throughout the city.

March 11. Historic marker to Jüri Vilms, one of the fathers and martyrs of Estonian independence, unveiled near Pilistvere.

March 14. Interfront protest rally organized by Russian factory managers. 40,000 gather during working hours near Tallinn's civic center, demanding removal of the Estonian blue, black and white from Pikk Hermann and repeal of the Estonian language law. Calls are also heard for the northeastern part of Estonia (dominated by Russian immigrants) to be joined to the Russian Federation. Other Interfront activists came from Moscow, Leningrad and elsewhere.

March 18. Popular Front's 100-member Council meets in Paide and condemns Interfront for its extremist, divisive tactics. They declare tentative support for Citizens' Committees as an alternative in case IME and other Popular Front initiatives fail. Participants draft a letter to Czechoslovakian officials asking them to release Czechoslovakian dissident-poet Vaclav Havel from prison.

March 21. 6000 people meet in Tallinn Civic Hall to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of mass deportations.

March 25. People gather throughout Estonia to commemorate the mass deportations in 1949. Markers are placed at the train stations from which thousands of Estonians were deported to the Soviet Union. The activities were organized jointly by pro-independence movements and local Popular Front support groups.

March 26. Election held for deputies to the new parliament in Moscow, the Peoples' Congress. The Estonian National Independence Party calls for a boycott of the elections. Popular Front candidates, many of them Communists, win a majority of the contested seats in Estonia because they are portrayed as a more acceptable Estonian alternative to Russian Interfront candidates.

March 27. Eighth anniversary of death of prisoner of conscience Jüri Kukk in Gulag commemorated. Demands are made to return his remains to Estonia.

March 27. Official time in Estonia is changed from the Moscow Time Zone to the East European Time Zone. This is viewed as a symbolic step towards the restoration of Estonia's former status as an independent nation.

April 9. Soviet forces crack down on peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi, Georgia. All major political groups in Estonia, except Interfront, condemn the massacre.

April. Estonians, after some hesitancy, begin registering with the Citizens' Committees in increasing numbers.

April. First edition of "ERSP Teataja (Herald)", the newspaper of the Estonian National Independence Party, is published.

April. The Chernobyl Committee is established by Estonians who had been sent to clean up at the site of the nuclear accident in Ukraine. The Committee seeks assistance for victims suffering from effects of radiation.

April. Sentiments against the Soviet Army growing. Estonian Women's Union, Greens and others organize picketing in front of commissariats (Soviet military offices) in Tallinn, Tartu, Võm, Parnu. Demonstrators demand that Estonian recruits serve in Estonia. Pro-democracy groups send an eight-point memorandum concerning military issues to Moscow. Students boycott military instruction classes at Tartu University.

April 15 -16. Third meeting of Independent Youth Forum takes place in Tartu. The main issue discussed is the Soviet military in Estonia.

April 16. Demonstrators stage an anti-military funeral procession through the streets of Tartu. Students carry coffins symbolizing the "death of militarism."

April 30 - May 1. Fourth meeting of the "National Democratic Movements of Captive Nations in the Soviet Union" held in Loodi near Viljandi. National colors of ten nations are represented, including those of Trans-Caucasus. Participants send a declaration to the CSCE about Soviet genocidal policies. Estonians introduce their Citizens' Committee project as a means of resolving national problems.

May. Founding Congress of the Estonian Green Party (a splinter group of the much larger Green Movement) takes place in Rapla.

May 10. Mother's Day is celebrated officially in Estonia for the first time in 49 years of Soviet occupation.

May 13 - 14. Baltic Assembly (Popular Fronts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) assembles in Tallinn. They issue joint declarations on economic independence and the rights of the Baltic States and appeal to the members of the CSCE, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, etc., saying, "the free, democratically expressed will of the Baltic Nations must be decisive in the determination of their fates."

May 18 - 19. Estonian Supreme Soviet passes economic autonomy laws (IME), which need the approval of Moscow.

May 20. In Paali, Võrumaa, first Estonian monument erected to the Forest Brothers (anti-Soviet partisans active from 1941-52).

May 26. Figures published in ERSP "Teataja" indicate that 42 Citizens' Committees have been established since March.

May 31. Latvian Popular Front declares support for setting up Citizens' Committees in Latvia. Officially, Estonian Popular Front is still cautious about supporting Citizens' Committees.

June. Preceding any Soviet publication, "Looming," a monthly magazine of the Estonian Writers' Union, publishes first excerpt of Solzhenitsyn's **The Gulag Archipelago Vol.III**. The same translation had already appeared in the unofficial MRP-AEG Bulletin No. 21.

June 12. Lagle Parek, former prisoner of conscience and founding member of Estonian National Independence Party, begins month of lobbying in U.S. and Canada. First well known dissident and pro-independence activist able to exit from and return to Estonia.

June 14. National day of mourning; church memorial services commemorate mass deportation of thousands of Estonians to Siberia in 1941. For the first time, Soviet authorities in Estonia mark this date.

June 8 - 16. The first World Estonian Youth Days takes place in Tallinn and other Estonian cities, attracting participation by several hundred Estonians living abroad.

June 17. Pro-independence organizations mark the 49th anniversary of the beginning of Soviet occupation. Demonstrators march past the KGB headquarters in Tallinn, where former political prisoner Erik Udam reads the Soviet decree. The rally continues in Town Hall Square.

June 20. Estonian authorities register the charters of the Estonian Green Movement and the Rural Union (an organization representing agricultural managers and collective farm directors).

June 22. Estonian Ministry of Education permits reestablishment of Scouting in Estonia, banned since September 19, 1940.

June 22 - 29. "The Christian League" holds its national convention. After extensive debate, the League decides to establish itself as a pro-independence political party, the Christian Democratic Union.

June 23 - 25. As part of Independence Week, Heritage Society runs "armored" train through southern Estonia to the Latvian border, recreating Estonian campaign against German Landeswehr during War of Independence, 1919.

June 25. Destroyed by the Soviets in 1940, the monument to the President of Independent Estonia, Konstantin Päts, is dedicated in Tahkuranna in front of tens of thousands of people.

June 29. After having attended the 1st World Estonian Youth Days, Jüri Estam, an Estonian-American and Radio Free Europe journalist, is detained at customs on his way out of Estonia. He is roughed up and thoroughly searched; personal items are confiscated. Organizers of the Youth Days and the Estonian media criticize this Soviet action.

June 30 - July 1. International history conference on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact organized by the Estonian Academy of Sciences and Estonian lawyers' groups is held in Tallinn, attracting participants from Eastern and Western Europe.

July 1 - 2. Russian sections of Estonian Popular Front hold conference in Narva, concluding that the Estonian people have the right to self-determination, that events in Estonia are democratic and in support of *perestroika*, and that the Estonian people have the right freely to choose their own form of government.

July 8. Popular Front Council's conference in Põlva decides to carry out a petition campaign asking that the 1940 decision to join the Soviet Union be nullified. In spite of pressure from the grassroots to endorse the Citizens' Committees, the top leaders of the Popular Front, especially E. Savisaar, are still opposed.

July 15. First meeting of Baltic Council (Estonian and Latvian Popular Fronts and Lithuanian Sajudis).

July 16. Message sent to U.S. President, Congress, and the American people by the Estonian National Independence Party, the Latvian National Independence Movement, and the Lithuanian Freedom League.

July 21. Communist Party marks the 49th anniversary of the Estonian SSR; Popular Front leadership participates.

July 21. 15,000 participate in Interfront rally at the Civic Center intended to pressure Soviet Estonian authorities to withdraw draft of local election law (which included residency requirement), to repeal language law, to renew Russian dominance in Estonian affairs.

July 23. "Strike Movement" is begun in several enterprises which employ mainly Russian personnel, including the Soviet armaments factory Dvigatel. Plant managers and Communist Party functionaries order workers to strike.

July 23. European Parliament's Baltic Intergroup's Declaration on the Hitler-Stalin Pact's 50th anniversary.

July 24. Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet fails to pass new election law which would have prevented immigrants with less than two years residency in Estonia from voting; the question is postponed.

July 28. "Strikes" are discontinued when Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet, led by Arnold Rüütel on assignment from the Estonian Communist Party's Central Committee, begins discussions with the strikers.

July. Aarne Heide, conscientious objector on religious grounds (member of "Word of Life"), freed after serving nearly one year in prison for refusing to serve in Red Army.

End of July. Moscow agrees in principle to economic autonomy (IME) for Estonia and Lithuania, to begin January 1. Some observers interpret Moscow's decision as a countermeasure to the burgeoning Citizens' Committees movement in Estonia and Latvia.

August 6. Protests in Estonia against forcible incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union in 1940.

August 7. Latvian Popular Front expresses support for Latvian Citizen's Committees.

August 8. Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet passes new local election law, without residency requirements.

August 8-9. "Strikes" begin anew. In reality, factory managers are directed by Moscow to lock out workers. Bus traffic in Tallinn is affected; Estonian bus drivers come from other parts of Estonia to help out. All appears calm on the surface, but people are tense.

August 10. In response to strikes, Estonian SSR passes "Measures to Guarantee Lawfulness and Law and Order in the Republic."

August 13. Decisions of the Popular Front Council: Necessary to employ only the existing political structures (this condemns both the Interfront and the Citizens' Committees), criticism of "Vaba Maa" (the Popular Front's own newsletter), a Popular Front Congress should be held in November, and Edgar Savisaar should resign from Popular Front leadership because he accepted official position as head of Planning Committee.

August 14. Supreme Soviet in Moscow condemns new Estonian election law and demands that it be reconsidered and rejected in October.

August 14-16. USSR Supreme Soviet commission arrives in Tallinn because of "strikes," begins discussions.

August. Tiit Madisson, former political prisoner and initiator of historic August 23, 1987 rally in Tallinn, now living in exile in Sweden, is invited to speak at August 23 rally in Tallinn, but does not receive visa to enter Estonia. Others not able to attend are Estonian American employees of RFE, Jüri Estam and Toomas Ilves.

August 19-20. 350 attend Estonian National Independence Party Congress held in Tallinn's Estonia Concert Hall. Party's program is approved; Lagle Parek elected chairman. Other directors elected: Jüri Adams, Tunne Kelam, Mati Kiirend, Kalju Oja, Eve Pärnaste, and Erik Udam. For the first time, there is relatively fair and objective official press coverage of an ERSP event.

August 20-21. Estonia representatives participate in international conference held in Riga with the theme of "The Right of Self-determination and the Equality of Peoples." Guests from U.S. and other western countries include Sen. Robert Kasten (R-WI) and William Hough, Esq.

August 22. Erkki Luik from Põlva in southern Estonia is tried for refusing to serve in the Red Army; the relatively light sentence (2 years probation and fines) is seen as a moral victory for the defendant and his supporters. Press coverage of the trial and picketing is sympathetic.

August 23. Baltic Chain formed through Baltic States; around 2 million participants link hands, spanning approximately 600 miles. Preceded by a major rally in Tallinn's Hirve Park, site of pivotal 1987 demonstration, organized by pro-independence groups.

August 26. Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee condemns recent Baltic moves in harsh "Stalinist" terms.

September. Over 100 Citizens' Committees have been formed in Estonia; 300,000 individuals have registered as citizens of the Estonian Republic (based upon legal Estonian citizenship before Soviets invaded Estonia on June 17, 1940.)

September 13 or 14. Newly restored monument to victims of Russian death squads in 1941 destroyed by unidentified vandals who arrived in Volga automobiles. Birchwood cross with placard reading "Mr. Velliste" (head of Estonian Heritage Society, which restored the monument) is left on the site.

September 16-17. Popular Front, trying to avoid a potential conflict with Interfront, abandons plans to organize another patriotic mass rally and song fest. Instead, using a number of slogans such as "Clean the fields!" and "Save the harvest!", the Popular Front encourages its supporters to go pick potatoes. Participation is poor.

September. Pro-independence leaders Tunne Kelam and Trivimi Velliste explain aims of Estonian National Independence Party, Estonian Heritage Society and Citizens Committees to U.S. and Canadian government officials and opinion-makers as well as to Estonian communities.

September 15. Interfront's demonstration in Tallinn attracts barely 50 participants.

September 19. At Christian Democratic International Assembly in Guatemala, Estonian Christian Democratic Union is granted membership.

September 28. 2,000 participate in "Geneva '49" meeting in Tallinn. Young men begin turning in draft cards based on Part III, article 51 of the Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949 which states that occupying forces cannot draft the local population.

October 5. Estonian Supreme Soviet deletes residency requirement from local election law, thereby leaving Estonian elections open to thousands of recent immigrants and temporary residents.

October 7. National meeting of over 500 representatives from Citizens' Committees in Tallinn. Declaration issued reaffirming the continued existence of the Estonian Republic which declared its independence in 1918, and calling for the registration of the citizens of that Republic so that a Congress of Estonia can be convened.

October 11. Tartu Jewish University Students Society founded as part of the Tartu Jewish Cultural Club and based on tradition of Jewish university clubs and fraternities which were active in Tartu until 1940.

October 12. Printing of 10,000 copies of New Testament begins in Tallinn using paper and binding materials donated from Finland. First official publication of any part of the Bible in Estonia since the Soviet occupation.

October 13-14. Commemoration of 250th anniversary of first publication of Estonian language Bible marked with exhibitions, lectures, conference and the unveiling of a monument to Anton Thor Helle, the translator.

October 21. Estonian Green Movement Forum in Tartu decides to recognize *de facto* the Estonia Greens Party which was founded in August 1989. Support is expressed for Geneva '49 draft resistance movement and for the Citizens' Committees.

November 2. All Souls' Day openly celebrated for only the second time since Soviet takeover.

November 8. Swedish Foreign Minister, Sten Andersson, visits Tallinn, declaring that Estonia is not an occupied country and that the sovereignty of the Baltic peoples should be expanded within the

framework of the Soviet Union. Storm of controversy erupts; however, Soviet Estonian authorities do not protest his remarks.

November 10. Militia Day. In the preceding 11 months, 17,387 crimes were committed, an increase of 69.5% over the same period last year. Militia is under-manned, under-equipped, and under-financed; Estonian Union of Work Collectives decides to help raise funds and morale.

November 10. Estonian Supreme Soviet passes [186 - yes, 40 - abstentions] new "compromise" election law requiring 10-year residency in Estonia for candidates but deleting a proposed 2-year residency requirement for the right to vote. Law viewed as unsatisfactory by Estonians.

November 11. Citizens' County Committees representatives meet in Tallinn and elect 55-member Republic of Estonia Citizens General Committee which will prepare to convene the Congress of Estonia. Tunne Kelam elected chairman.

November 11. Chairman of Council of Ministers of the ESSR, Indrek Toome, announces: "The government has never doubted the necessity for Estonian money. We cannot succeed without an independent banking and monetary system."

November 11-21. Estonian basketball team "Kalev" competes in U.S., winning 6 out of 10 games.

November 12. Estonian Supreme Soviet annuls 1940 "decision" to join USSR; passes resolution accusing the Soviet Union of "aggression, military occupation and annexation of the Estonian Republic" and declaring the vote in 1940 "illegal."

November 16-19. Estonian Greens organize international conference on the Baltic Sea. Friends of the Earth representatives attend.

November 25. Remains of Estonian dissident and martyr, Jüri Kukk, are returned to Estonia for ceremonial internment at Kursi cemetery near Tartu. (Kukk was buried in an unmarked grave in the Gulag after he died, allegedly from forced feeding, March 27, 1981.) Eulogy delivered by his friend and fellow political prisoner Mart Niklus.

November 25. General meeting of the Estonian Union of Work Collectives decides to support Citizens' Committees and the restoration of the Estonian Republic.

November 27. In an apparent response to the success of Citizens' Committees' initiatives, Moscow okays "economic autonomy" for Baltic States.

December 1. Joining widespread protests, the Baltic Popular Fronts send letter of complaint to Swedish government regarding recent statements by Foreign Minister Sten Andersson, which denied that Estonia was and is occupied by the Soviet Union.

December. 500,000 have registered as citizens of the Republic of Estonia. Elections to Congress of Estonia set for February 24. Close to one thousand young Estonian men have turned in their draft cards under the Baltic "Geneva '49" movement.

December 7. ESSR Council of Ministers announces contest to design new Estonian paper money.

December 8. Soviet Air Force jet fuel on Pärnu River deliberately ignited and burned off since no other means were available to clean up the over 300 ton spill.

December. Popular Front leadership begins to split up, forming new political parties such as the "Social Democratic Independence Party," (Veidemann, Lauristin) the "Liberal Party" (Põldroos) and the "Populist Party" (Savisaar). However, most of these founders still retain their Communist Party memberships.

December 10. Official publication *Noorte Hää!* prints article by Tiit Madisson describing his activities since returning to Estonia from the Gulag in 1986, including his continuing struggle to return to Estonia from exile in Sweden.

December 10. Local elections held in Estonia; over 9,000 candidates contest 4,209 deputy seats. According to *Sovetskaya Rossiya* more than 70% of the 1,153,338 people on the electoral rolls voted. However, a Russian boycott resulted in invalid election results in heavily Russian areas (Tallinn, Maardu) due to less than 50% participation. Additional elections have to be scheduled by January 27 to fill these seats.

December 12. Estonian Heritage Society's second anniversary formally marked by its Council. In light of increasing threat from vandalism and sabotage to Estonian culture and antiquities, EMS Council decides to begin, in cooperation with other pro-independence organizations, to reestablish the Estonian Home Guard.

December 24. Christmas Eve church services shown live on Estonian TV.

December 25. Christmas Day is restored as an official holiday.

December 29. Completing a world-wide speaking tour begun in mid-November, Tunne Kelam returns to Estonia.

December 31. Interfront supporters in Estonia celebrate New Year's according to Moscow Time Zone, at 11:00 p.m. Estonian time.