

Conciliation or Disappointment? Baltic German Reactions to Estonian and Latvian Recognition

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to examine the perspective(s) of a small, but influential minority, the Baltic Germans, to the de jure recognition of the Estonian and Latvian nation-states by the United States of America in 1922. It outlines the Baltic Germans' plans of how to govern the region after the Russian Revolution of 1917; the outcomes of the establishment of the national republics of Estonia and Latvia in relation to the German communities; and, the representation of de jure recognition by the US in the Baltic German press.

Keywords: Baltic Germans; history of ethnic minorities; regional history; Baltic history; Estonia; Latvia

INTRODUCTION

In the Baltic Commission's session of the Paris Peace Conference on 22nd May 1919, the Italian delegate, Marquis Pietro Tomasi Della Torretta, proposed to give an audience to a representative of the ethnic minorities, including the Baltic Germans, in order to see their standpoint of the

region's future. The British delegate, Sir Esmé Howard, replied that the Baltic Germans' stance was already known. They were, according to him, mediators between Germany and Russia which made the Baltic Germans the most dangerous element.¹ About two years later the Entente countries gave full recognition to the newly established republics of Estonia and Latvia, which was an eagerly awaited event among the native peoples of these states. Still, there were several national minority groups – some politically and economically influential – who were not convinced that either a democratic republic or a nation state would be the best way to govern the region. The most influential ethnic groups who had different prospects for the territory were Russians (the biggest minority group: in Estonia 8.2% and in Latvia 7.8% of the population in 1920), and the Baltic Germans. Russians' political views varied from supporters of tsarist autocracy to advocates of Bolshevism.² The Germans (circa 18,000 in Estonia, making 1.7% of the population in 1922, and over 71,000 in Latvia, making 3.8% of the population in 1925) formed a heterogeneous ethnic group, represented at all social levels, and holding various political interests.³ From the outbreak of the First World War, the old Baltic German political elite gradually lost their positions in the region's governance, eventually becoming a national minority with special rights.

Egon Knopp, a liberal politician from Liepāja, described the Baltic Germans as having a rigid class society: “To the first class belonged the nobility, to the second – literati and patricians (wealthy merchants, factory owners, capitalists), to the third – merchants, to the fourth – independent craftsmen and to the fifth – dispossessed manual workers.”⁴ The nobility lost most of their expansive estates as a result of land reforms and were largely dispossessed of their initial profession and source of livelihood: agriculture. According to the Baltic German journalist Axel de Vries, the upheavals at the beginning of twentieth century affected German merchants and industry the least, while craftsmen faced

- 1 E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süünd. Loodus, Tartu, 1936, 524–526; A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau: Die Baltisch-deutsche Führungsschicht und die Mächte in den Jahren 1918/1919. – Von den baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten 1918–1920. Hrsg. von J. v. Hehn, H. V. Rimscha, H. Weiss. J. G. Herder-Institut, Marburg, Lahn, 1977, 210.
- 2 D. Henning. Der ethnische Wandel in Estland und Lettland: Von den deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Russlands zu den baltischen Sowjetrepubliken unter Stalin. – Baltische Seminare, 2005, 11, 8–9; K. Brüggemann. Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des „Einen und unteilbaren Rußland“. Der Petrograder Front des Russischen Bürgerkriegs 1918–1920. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2002, 125–134.
- 3 Eesti 1920–1930. Arvuline ülevaade. Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, Tallinn, 1931, 8, 13; P. Eberhardt. Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe: History, Data, and Analysis. M. E. Sharpe, New York, London, 2003, 36.
- 4 E. Knopp. Das deutsche-baltische Erbübel. – Rigasche Rundschau no 35, 13.2.1922.

significant decline in Estonia.⁵ In Latvia, as the German journalist and politician Fritz Stricker observed, Baltic Germans suffered comparatively more than the rest of the population because of the damages to the country's industry and trade caused by the war.⁶

Democratic republicanism was not the system of government the former leaders of the Baltic Germans would have preferred, since it all but guaranteed the loss of their privileged position in society. This article presents the perspective(s) of the Baltic German minority on the establishment of the Estonian and Latvian nation states. It will explain why the British delegate Sir Howard regarded Baltic Germans as the most dangerous element in the region's future. Moreover, it outlines how Baltic Germans initially adapted to the newly established republics, and how the land reforms became political tools in the hands of the Baltic German émigrés. Finally, this article will also examine Baltic Germans' reactions to recognition by the United States in the press. While the focus is on Estonia, many parallels are drawn with Latvia.

Baltic Germans' reactions to de jure recognition of the Baltic states have not been analysed in depth, although the intentions of the *Ritterschaften* to preserve their leading political positions has been examined already by interwar authors.⁷ A thorough compendium about the establishment of the Baltic nation-states was printed in the 1970s in Germany.⁸ In the compendium, Arved von Taube makes an excursion in his article about the relationships of American delegates Warwick Greene and John A. Gade with Baltic German leaders, noting the influence of the latter on the US stance towards the future of the Baltic states.⁹ Another German historian, Karsten Brüggemann, has pointed out that there was a transition of power inside the Baltic German leadership in Estonia, from the traditional nobility to the middle-class literati, industrialists, and merchants. This facilitated Baltic Germans' acceptance of their status as a minority, and led to cooperation with Estonian political leaders. Nevertheless, the integration of the German minority into the newly founded nation state was rather controversial.¹⁰

5 A. de Vries. *Das Deutschtum in Estland*. – Taschenbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums. Berlin, 1928, 21, 11.

6 F. Stricker. *Estland*. – Die politischen Parteien der Staaten des Erdballs. Hrsg. von Dr. Stricker. Regensbergische Buchhandlung, Münster, 1924, 92.

7 See: E. Laaman. *Eesti iseseisvuse süüd, passim*.

8 Von den baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten 1918–1920. Hrsg. von J. v. Hehn, H. V. Rimscha, H. Weiss. J. G. Herder-Institut, Marburg/Lahn, 1977.

9 A. v. Taube. *Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau: Die Baltisch-Deutsche Führungsschicht und die Mächte in den Jahren 1918/1919*. – Von den baltischen Provinzen, 234–236.

10 K. Brüggemann. *Von der führenden Schicht zur nationalen Minderheit: Zur Klärung der Rolle der estländischen deutschen Minderheit bei der Begründung der Republik Estland 1918–1919*. – Nordost-Archiv: Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte, 1995, 4, 2, 453–479, specifically 463–464, 478.

A debate over the Baltic German nobles' activity in the early years of the independence of Estonia occurred between the Estonian historian Aleksander Loit and the literary scholar Jaan Undusk. The latter argued that the renowned philosopher Hermann von Keyserling was in many ways an outsider of the Baltic German nobility: German nationalism was foreign to him, he understood that the Baltic Germans' cooperation with ethnic majorities was essential, since nothing more than the status of an ethnic minority could hope to be obtained. As such, Keyserling had proposed an idea for a neutral supranational Baltic state, however, this was given the cold shoulder by both Estonian and Baltic German leaders. Loit, on the other hand, demonstrated the intensive activity of the *Ritterschaften* against Estonians' attempts to establish a democratic republic, and later against the radical land reform. Loit claimed that even though Keyserling sought cooperation with Estonians, he was utterly critical of the Estonian republic, as were other members of the *Ritterschaften*.¹¹

An in-depth study on the connections between the land reform of 1919, which disestablished the Baltic German rural elite, and international diplomacy was written by an Estonian historian in exile, Imre Lipping. He exemplified how internal policies, such as land reform, became an object in international affairs. Moreover, Lipping made a clear distinction between the actions of the Baltic German communities in exile, and those in Estonia. The latter were more interested in obtaining a favourable minority protection law rather than representing the interests of the landless nobility.¹² Overall, the Baltic Germans' political views in interwar Estonia and Latvia have been studied by German and also by British scholars.¹³

One of the aims of this article is to show the diversity of standpoints inside the German community concerning the establishment of Estonian and Latvian republics. Baltic (German) historiography is still largely characterised by the dominating perspective of the nobility and less attention has been given to other social groups. The *Ritterschaften* did

- 11 J. Undusk. *Eesti kui Belgia*. Viimne baltlane Hermann Keyserling. – *Tuna*, 2003, 2, 48–71, specifically 52–53, 58; A. Loit. *Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad ja tegevus Eesti iseseisvumisel 1918–1920*. – *Tuna*, 2006, 4, 50–74.
- 12 I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia and the Disestablishment of the Baltic German Rural Elite 1919–1939*. University of Maryland, Michigan, 1980, 336, 341.
- 13 See: M. Garleff. *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen: Die parlamentarische Tätigkeit der deutschbaltischen Parteien in Lettland und Estland*. Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv, Bonn, Bad Godesberg, 1976; *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-estnischen Verhältnisses*. Hrsg. von B. Meissner, D. A. Loeber, C. Hasselblatt. *Bibliotheca Baltica*, Hamburg, 1996; J. Hiden, M. Housden. *Neighbours or enemies? Germans, the Baltic and Beyond*. Rodopi, Amsterdam, New York, 2008.

not represent the whole German community between 1917 and 1918, when political parties were established in Latvia and Estonia. Furthermore, there were different voices inside the former nobility, some of them calling for closer cooperation with the majority groups.

THE BALTIC DUCHY, A SUPRANATIONAL BALTIC STATE, OR NATIONAL REPUBLICS?

As Baltic Germans comprised a heterogeneous group, among them prospects for governance of the region were very different. The Estonian historian Magnus Ilmjärv has summarised the alternatives that Baltic Germans entertained: a future in a restored non-Bolshevik Russian empire; a Baltic state incorporated into Germany (East Prussia) or Sweden; or, an independent Baltic state (*Baltischer Gesamtstaat*).¹⁴ These possible alternatives will be introduced in order to explain the Baltic Germans' stance on the establishment of Estonian and Latvian republics, and identify common features with American views on the future of the Baltic region.

On 30th November, the *Estländische Ritterschaft* and, on 17th December 1917, the *Livländische Ritterschaft* declared their independence from Russia, requesting the protection of the German Emperor, and the immediate occupation of the region by German troops.¹⁵ After Germany had occupied Estonia and Livonia, preparations began to permanently compound these territories to Germany as the United Baltic Duchy (*Vereinigt Baltisches Herzogtum*). The Baltic Duchy, hereditary in character, was meant to unite all former Baltic provinces, linked dynastically with the Prussian royal family, and act as a bulwark between Germany and Russia. The Baltic German nobility preferred this plan as it could be utilised to preserve both their leading position and German culture within the region.¹⁶ According to their vision, the Baltic area should have belonged to Germany's sphere of influence and

14 By Baltic state it was meant the Baltic provinces united into one independent state. M. Ilmjärv. *Balti-küsimus Pariisi rahukonverentsi eel ja ajal 1918–1920*. – *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2019, 25, 110.

15 E. Dellingshausen. *Im Dienste der Heimat! Erinnerungen des Freiherrn Eduard von Dellingshausen ehem. Ritterschaftshauptmanns von Estland*. Ausland und Heimat Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1930, 318.

16 M. Ilmjärv. *Balti-küsimus*, 108. See: T. Karjahärm. *Iseseisvuse väljakuulutamine, Saksa okupatsioon, Vabadussõja algus*. – *Eesti ajalugu V. Pärisorjuse kaotamisest Vabadussõjani*. Toim. S. Vahtre, T. Karjahärm, T. Rosenberg, Ilmamaa, Tartu, 2010, 426–427, 434–435.

protection, however, such a Baltic state could maintain its autonomy.¹⁷ In other words, a greater influence of the German *Reichstag* on Baltic affairs was not desired among the Baltic Germans.¹⁸ Eventually, the outbreak of the revolution in Germany in late 1918 ended the plans of the reactionary Baltic Germans.

However, there were other plans to unite the whole Baltic region into a *gesamtbaltischer Staat*.¹⁹ One was the idea of Keyserling: to create a neutral and multinational Baltic state, according to the example of Belgium. Keyserling represented a group of Baltic nobility who sought compromise with the Estonians and Latvians. Even though Keyserling had supporters, he was an exception in the *Ritterschaft*, especially because of his views on Germany's "war guilt."²⁰ He fiercely supported the Baltic identity's uniqueness and expressed his reluctance to support pan-Germanism. Still, he did not believe in the independent nation-states of Estonia and Latvia. Keyserling even actively expressed his doubts and fears in the English- and German-language press which caused great mistrust among Estonians.²¹ In 1919, in the pages of *The Westminster Gazette*, Keyserling published his idea of a supranational Baltic state. First, he explained why the "Letts" and the "Esthonians" were not able to rule themselves: "their leaders are no doubt intelligent, instructed, and well-meaning, though over-radical in their ideas [...] but there are few of them; the educated class is numerically too small for them to rely upon it." Besides, he claimed, the elite depends entirely on the masses, who "listen to those who offer most" and that "a temperate Bolshevism is [...] the only system that [...] appeals to the enormous majority of the Letts and Esthonians." According to Keyserling, the situation in Latvia was even worse, concluding that "the inhabitants of the Baltic

17 J. Undusk. Eesti kui Belgia, 52; A. Loit. Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad, 57.

18 E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süünd, 211.

19 German national politician Max Hildebert Boehm of Baltic origin proposed shortly before the revolution in Germany a political solution: a unified Baltic state where authority of all three nations, e.g., Germans, Estonians, and Latvians could be well balanced. Estonians and Latvians kept at a distance from Boehm's idea as it served the interests of German annexation politics. See: U. Prehn. Max Hildebert Boehm: Radikales Ordnungsdenken vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis in die Bundesrepublik. Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2013, 108–109; A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 113–115. Another German socialist, August Winnig, German High Commissioner in the Baltikum, had a plan for an autonomous state which would include Livonia, Kurland, Lithuania, along with East and West Prussia. This state would need support from Germany, but be otherwise independent from its policy. See: R. Schattkowsky. Separatism in the Eastern Provinces of the German Reich at the End of the First World War. – *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1994, 29, 2, 308.

20 According to J. Undusk, H. Keyserling was authorised to represent the *Estländische Ritterschaft* in international affairs and had the support of O. v. Lilienfeld, the leader of this organisation. See: J. Undusk. Eesti kui Belgia, 57.

21 *Ibid.*, 50–51.

provinces cannot be left entirely to themselves.”²² Thus, he advocated for “another solution: to make of the Baltic provinces – Kurland, Livonia, and Esthonia – together an independent supernational [sic] State, an equivalent to Belgium.” Keyserling thought that, just as Belgium “is the link between the French and German world,” the Baltic state “could become the link between the Teutonic and Slavonic worlds.” Foreseeing “a new Baltic nationality, a synthesis of Esthonian, Lettisch, German, and Russian elements” he suggested that only a neutral “supernational State” would solve the national problem since most of the upper classes were German, and only a small part of the majorities were educated. Keyserling envisaged, at least in the beginning, a more important role for Germans, because “having ruled supreme for 700 years” they were “politically by far the most experienced and the most able.” Still, the end-goal was a state where the “ruling class would not be national, but supernational, it would be composed of all the most prominent men among Germans, Esthonians, and Letts.”²³

Another Baltic German nobleman who dreamed of a unified Baltic state, Heinrich von Stryk, was a member of the Livländische Ritterschaft. With the help of Swedish military volunteers and the *Landeswehr*, he planned to establish a Baltic state modelled upon Switzerland and its system of cantons. This unified Baltic state had to act as a “bulwark against the threatening Bolsheviks’ invasion.” Unlike Keyserling, who aimed for neutrality, Stryk searched for a protectorate under one of the Western powers (for example Sweden or Great Britain). Still, Stryk’s plan did not find the support of many Baltic German leaders.²⁴ When his plan of a coup d’état against Kārlis Ulmanis’ government became public, Stryk lost his credibility in the eyes of the Baltic German leadership and Western diplomats.²⁵

22 H. A. Keyserling. The Baltic problem. – The Westminster Gazette, 18 June 1919.

23 Ibid.

24 Stryk’s plan was rejected by Otto v. Lilienfeld, the leader of the Estländische Ritterschaft (A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 170–172, 181, 229–231.), Johannes Meyer, the Baltic German delegate in the Estonian Constituent Assembly (Asutav Kogu), and Major-General Rüdiger von der Goltz, the head of the German army group Landeswehr in Latvia. The Landeswehr, headed by von der Goltz, participated in the overthrow of Kārlis Ulmanis’ government in Latvia and helped to install the puppet-government of Andrievs Niedra, favoured by the Baltic Germans. Von der Goltz, with the Landeswehr, aimed to conquer the whole of Latvia, but they were stopped by Estonian troops. See: E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süüd, 663; R. v. der Goltz. Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum. K.F. Koehler, Leipzig, 1920, 167–168.

25 According to von der Goltz, Stryk had spoken about his plans to an American delegate, who most likely reported it to the Latvians. See: R. v. d. Goltz. Meine Seindung, 168; E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süüd, 539–541; A. Loit. Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad, 55.

At the end of April 1919, representatives of the Estländische Ritterschaft attempted to seek the protection of the future League of Nations for a Baltic state in order to rescue their properties and secure the rights of national minorities.²⁶ With these claims they approached the US representative of the military mission in the Baltic provinces of Russia, Gade, who had a friendly stance towards the Baltic Germans.²⁷ In a French-language *Mémoire* sent to Gade by the Estländische Ritterschaft, there was a reference to Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and a request that the League of Nations should undertake the protection of the Baltic state. It also included a proposition for land reform.²⁸ From Gade's thorough report on Estonia from 3rd May 1919 one could read that "the Baltic Barons propose a new government based upon the Baltic states being temporarily protected by the League of Nations, and when order is re-established in Russia, becoming a member of a new Russian Federation." Gade affirmed that the recognition of Estonia by the US would be "for the present [...] an unwise step." He claimed that through a union between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania their independence would be better secured, and the common state "could gain in size and resources." Furthermore, he asserted that "a protectorate by the League of Nations would be very acceptable."²⁹ According to Lipping, the chief of the American military mission, Lieutenant Colonel Greene "was no friend of small nations," since "he could not see how the new governments could survive between Germany and Russia. For him the solution lay in the formation of a unitary state under Entente tutelage. In this, his views converged with those of the Baltic German elite."³⁰ Even though the *Mémoire* remained unanswered it demonstrates how extensively the Baltic German nobility tried to influence American (and other foreign) delegates.³¹

26 At the same time the Constituent Assembly (Asutav Kogu), where the Socialists were dominating, met in Estonia for the first time. One of the most important tasks of the Constituent Assembly was to reaffirm the Estonian Declaration of Independence, but the German delegates did not join. See: E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süünd, 507.

27 Even though both American representatives of the military mission in the Baltic provinces, Warwick Greene and John A. Gade, had good relationships with the local Baltic Germans, they also sympathised with Estonians and Latvians. See: A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 235–236. Gade was the Commissioner of the United States for the Baltic Provinces of Russia, situated mostly in Tallinn, and Greene was Chief of the American mission to the Baltic Provinces, situated mostly in Latvia. For more about their activities see: E. Jékabsons. Die Tätigkeit der amerikanischen Mission in Lettland unter der Leitung von Warwick Greene: Liepāja, April bis Mai 1919. – Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte, 2014, 9, 150–176.

28 A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 204–207.

29 Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, vol. 12. Ed. by J. V. Fuller. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1947, document 58.

30 I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 155.

31 A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 208.

The most conservative wing of the Baltic German nobility, who in majority had emigrated to Germany, conducted so-called Russian-oriented politics. Pro-Russian Baltic Germans influence was closely connected to the success of the Whites in the Russian Civil War.³² Moreover, they had some common interests with US President Wilson. Even though Wilson pursued a policy of self-determination, he hoped for a restored non-Bolshevik Russia, and believed that such a Russian state should have the right to decide its own destiny.³³ In the Baltic Commission, formed by the Peace Conference, in June 1919 Alexander v. Meyendorff, a former member of the Russian State Duma, representing the national minorities, claimed that most of the Balts do not wish to disunite from Russia and do not believe that the independence of Baltic states could last.³⁴ The Baltic Commission foresaw three autonomous Baltic states within a future Russian federation, but not one unified Baltic state which was the proposal of the Baltic German Ritterschaften. Eventually, events in Võnnu/Cēsis/Wenden in June 1919 and the non-success of the Whites in the Russian Civil War reversed all the efforts of Meyendorff and reactionary Baltic Germans.³⁵ On 24th June 1919, the Baltic Commission recommended following the politics that diminished German domination in the Baltic provinces.³⁶ Furthermore, the new head of the Allied Military Mission, Hubert Gough, “used any power [he] had, [...] to turn the Germans out of the country and send them back to their own.”³⁷

Despite most of the Baltic German nobility being against the Estonian and Latvian republics, not all Baltic Germans shared this dim view. Many Germans among the middle-class and intelligentsia expressed their solidarity with the Estonian nation, for example, the lawyer Max Bock who had represented the German minority already

32 A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 204.

33 E. Medijainen. Economic Aspects of the *de jure* Recognition of the Baltic States in 1922. – Baltic Journal of Political Science, 2012, 1, 26.

34 Here the Balts refer only to the Baltic Germans. It is most likely that Meyendorff did not have the full approval of the Baltic Germans from Estonia. See: A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 217. Meyendorff was not the only person who claimed to represent the majority of the Baltic Germans. Keyserling wrote in his article in *The Westminster Gazette* that nearly all the Balts, to whatever nationality they belong, do not wish that the Baltic provinces return to Russia (see footnote 24). Also, Stryk rejected speculations that Baltic Germans wanted the Baltic lands to be united with Germany/Prussia and affirmed that this view is common among the greater number of the Baltic Germans. See: A. Loit. Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad, 59. E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süünd, 526; A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 215, 231–233.

35 Military conflicts in June 1919 between the Estonian troops and the Landeswehr, consisted of the Baltic Germans in Latvia and German volunteers.

36 A. v. Taube. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau, 210–218.

37 Gough refers to the voluntary German troops, the so-called *Freikorps*. See: H. Gough. Soldiering on: Being the Memoirs of General Sir Hubert Gough. R. Speller, New York, 1957, 198.

in the Provincial Assembly (*Maanõukogu*) in November 1918.³⁸ In the Estonian Provisional Government (*Ajutine Valitsus*), which resumed its work at the same time (providing three ministerial posts for the three largest national minorities), Germans assigned another lawyer, Hermann Koch, to represent them.³⁹ Moreover, Bock, now the German delegate in the Constituent Assembly (*Asutav Kogu*), declared in August 1919 that their party will sign the Estonian Declaration of Independence (after they had not signed in May 1919).⁴⁰ It was not only politically that some Baltic Germans cooperated with Estonians, but also militarily. The Baltic Battalion (*Balten Regiment*) was formed from the local German volunteers based on an agreement with the Estonian Provisional Government at the end of 1918. Although it took orders from the Estonian commander-in-chief, Johan Laidoner, and fought against the Red Army with dedication, their conviction to fight for the Estonian republic is more than doubtful. Only later, their role as “*Visitenkarte der Deutschbalten für den Eintritt in die Republik Estland*” has been highlighted in Baltic German historiography.⁴¹ Unlike the Baltic Battalion, the German army unit (*Landeswehr*) consisted mostly of local Baltic Germans who fought both against the Bolsheviks and Ulmanis’ government with an aim to invade the whole Latvia. In this regard, the Baltic Germans in Estonia and Latvia had chosen very different strategies of how to retain their positions in the future of the land.⁴²

Most of the Baltic German nobility supported such plans of governance which sought to preserve their large estates and leading positions in society. None of these prospects conceived of a democratic solution for the region. As the historian Gert von Pistohlkors (himself of Baltic German origin) has summarised: “The great majority of Baltic Germans had aimed at establishing a German protectorate or even a Baltic duchy, dominated by Germans, not only at the cost of Bolshevism but in opposition to any democratic solution for the region.”⁴³ Seeking support

38 A. Loit. Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad, 73; Maanõukogu protokoll nr 61, 21st November 1918, 291.

39 E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süünd, 372.

40 Asutava Kogu protokoll nr 53(26), 29th August 1919, 1137–1139. Max Bock and Hermann Koch, neither of them among the nobility, represented the Germans in Estonia from the end of 1918, demonstrating the change of power inside the Baltic German community. See: K. Brüggemann. Von der führenden Schicht, 463.

41 K. Brüggemann. Von der führenden Schicht, 464.

42 I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 86–88.

43 G. v. Pistohlkors. Inversion of Ethnic Group Status in the Baltic Region: Governments and Rural Ethnic Conflicts in Russia’s Baltic Provinces and in the Independent States of Estonia and Latvia, 1850–1940. – Roots of Rural Ethnic Mobilisation: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850–1940. Vol. 7. Ed. by D. Howell, G. v. Pistohlkors, E. Wiehandt. New York University Press, Dartmouth, 1993, 197.

from the Western powers and the Russian Whites, they found an ally in the US representatives of the military mission to the Baltic provinces who had a rather affirmative attitude towards the Baltic Germans. Even though the slogan associated with Wilson was self-determination, he hoped for a restored non-Bolshevik Russia and was reluctant to recognise Estonia and Latvia. Eventually, the efforts of the reactionary Baltic German nobility failed with Germans becoming an ethnic minority in independent Estonia and Latvia. The Baltic Germans who were willing to cooperate with the national majorities established new organisations in order to both better conduct themselves in democratic society, and represent the interests of the whole German community.

ADAPTING TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICS

The traditional institutions of the Baltic German nobility were replaced by organisations that fit to democratic societies. Despite all the differences of opinions among the German community in Estonia, only one political party – the *Deutsch-Baltische Partei in Estland* – represented them. Established in December 1918, the party belonged to the right wing of the political spectrum and had three delegates in the Constituent Assembly. In 1924, Stricker distinguished four main groupings inside the party: 1) the dispossessed nobility who were German nationalists and often in opposition to the Estonian state, representing the most conservative wing of Baltic Germandom; 2) representatives of large industry and wholesale trade who were willing to cooperate with the Estonians; 3) the old and established intelligentsia; and, 4) a liberal wing.⁴⁴

Among the former nobility were also people who sought compromises with the Estonians and were loyal to the new state. For example, the German delegate in the Constituent Assembly and in

44 1) The nobility was led by barons Eduard von Bodisco, Carl von Schilling, and Axel von Maydell; 2) the leaders were industrialist Martin Luther, and bank director Claus Scheel; 3) members were i.e., lawyer Gerhard Kress, Woldemar Kentmann, Axel de Vries, the editor in chief of *Revaler Bote*; and, 4) members were i.e., Heinrich Pantenius, a headmaster from Dorpat/Tartu, M.D., August Spindler, and journalist Siegmund Klau. According to Stricker the two latter groups conducted active and state friendly politics which were hostile to (Bolshevik) Russia and promoted cultural pan-Germanism. Also, Werner Hasselblatt and Ewalt Ammende belonged to the two latter groups. Party chairmen C. Mickwitz, A. Spindler, H. Koch, G. Kress and A. de Vries were all from intelligentsia, which indicates that the nobility no longer held the leading position in the German community. See also: F. Stricker. *Estland*, 100–101; M. Garleff. *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen*, 18; BBLD – Baltisches biographisches Lexicon digital (2012-). <<https://bbld.de/GND1213381010>>, accessed on 16th June 2022.

the first Estonian Parliament (*Riigikogu*), Georg von Stackelberg, was criticised by his compeers because of his aspirations to find a compromise between various national interests.⁴⁵ The aforementioned Keyserling warned already in 1917 against traditionalism and Germanomania which could lead to the Baltic Germans' loss of hegemony. According to him, liberal views would be the most fruitful and the Baltic Germans should avoid opposition to the Estonians.⁴⁶ Representing various economic interests and political views, the party managed to put German national interests ahead of ideological differences.⁴⁷ This is demonstrated also by the first chairman of the party, who was favoured among different social groups, the journalist Christoph Mickwitz.⁴⁸

In Latvia, the political organisation of local Germans was very different, primarily because their number was almost four-times greater, and the situation in Estonia enabled political movements to consolidate much earlier.⁴⁹ The Germans had six delegates in the Latvian Constituent Assembly, headed by Paul Schiemann. Baltic German parties in Latvia represented different political views prevalent among the Germans from conservative to liberal/democratic, consisting of 1) the German People's Party (*Deutsch-Baltische Volkspartei*), a conservative party formed in 1920; 2) the Reform Party (*Deutsch-Baltische Reform-Partei*), a moderate party established in 1920; 3) the Progressive Party (*Deutsch-Baltische Fortschrittliche Partei*), a liberal party started in November 1918; 4) the Democratic Party (*Deutsch-Baltische Demokratische Partei*), created already in April 1917; and, 5) the Liepāja Unification Party (*Libauer Einigungspartei*), founded in 1920.⁵⁰

45 M. Garleff. Die Parteioorganisation der baltischen Deutschen, 49–50.

46 E. Laaman. Eesti iseseisvuse süüd, 217; J. Undusk. Eesti kui Belgia, 53.

47 M. Garleff. Deutschbaltische Politik, 17–18.

48 M. Garleff. Die Parteioorganisation, 48.

49 Over 62,000 people, making 3.2% of the population in 1935. D. Henning. Der ethnische Wandel in Estland und Lettland, 9; G. v. Pistohlkors. Inversion of Ethnic Group Status in the Baltic Region, 201; M. Garleff. Deutschbaltische Politik, 14.

50 The Latvian Constituent Assembly first met on 1st May 1920. 1) the chairmen of German People's Party were Arthur E. Reusner and Wilhelm v. Fircks; 2) until 1932, the Reform Party was led by Edwin Magnus and represented predominantly middle-class interests; 3) the Progressive Party leaders were Eduard v. Rosenberg, Wilhelm Schreiner and Bernhard Fröhlich; 4) The presidents of the Democratic Party were Johannes von Eckardt and Paul Schiemann; and, 5) the Liepāja Unification Party was led by the aforementioned Egon Knopp. See: V. Uexküll-Güldenband, Lettland. – Die politischen Parteien der Staaten des Erdballs, 94; M. Garleff. Deutschbaltische Politik, 29–43; BBLD – Baltisches biographisches Lexicon digital (2012–). <<https://bbld.de/GND1213381010>>, accessed on 16th June 2022.

LAND REFORM AND DE JURE RECOGNITION

Even though the Baltic German nobility's hopes to develop a political order to their own taste in the Baltic area had been frustrated, they continued to exert pressure on the Entente powers in order to prevent the passage of the land reform legislation. Radical land reform was the main economic instrument to undermine the dominance of the German nobility as the estates had been the backbone of their social position.⁵¹ Land reform was not only an internal political question, but also a serious issue in foreign relations, perpetuated primarily by the Baltic German émigrés.⁵² Lipping has commented that, in the domestic legislature, the Baltic Germans could be outvoted, but in the area of foreign relations they could draw upon their expertise and connections to frustrate domestic legislation. Not surprisingly, the land reform legislation was to become a diplomatic problem.⁵³

The land question was heatedly discussed in the Constituent Assembly in summer 1919. Leftist parties demanded rapid and radical reform without any payment for the expropriated land, besides the parcels that would have been given for long-term rent. More moderate parties insisted that the reform should be implemented gradually and over a longer period (for fear that a rapid implementation of the reform would cause chaos in the economy), the former owners would have fair compensation, and the land would be sold as private property. Nevertheless, all parties (including the Baltic German Party) were convinced of the necessity of the reform.⁵⁴ During the debates about the land reform, representatives of the Allies sent a letter to the Estonian Provisional Government. The text contained three points that most concerned them: 1) "No security or protection to foreign property or realty owners," 2) "Confiscation of private-owned property or realty," and 3) "Without full and just compensation in conformity with the principles and practices of Allied democratic Governments, whose aid and support the Estonians are seeking."⁵⁵

51 G. v. Pistohlkors. *Inversion of Ethnic Group Status*, 200.

52 A. Loit. *Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad*, 65. Around 20,000 Baltic Germans from both Estonia and Latvia took refuge in Germany, but the number of refugees did not exceed 20% of the Baltic German community. See: I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia*, 87.

53 I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia*, 126.

54 A. Mägi. *Asutav Kogu maareformi otsustamas*. – *Tulimuld*, 1959, 4, 304–308; 1960, 1, 20–25.

55 The letter was signed by Gough, Bosanquet, and Dawley. Greene's deputy in Tallinn, Ernest J. Dawley, sent this letter as an acknowledgment to the American mission in Paris

Meanwhile, in the aforementioned report from May 1919, the US representative Gade had written that the Baltic barons wish “Esthonia not be recognized until some guarantee be given that the owners of the large estates be permitted to retain their homes with some parcel of ground however small, and also receive compensation for such land as is appropriated.”⁵⁶ Greene understood the necessity of the land reform, but wanted to accomplish the project over years, or even decades, and “without injuring the legal rights of property or land.” Greene’s deputy in Tallinn, Ernest J. Dawley, concluded with the dilemma in his report from 22nd June 1919 as follows:

If we sympathize with the Balts against the Esthonians and Letts we are sympathizing with a small reactionary landholding minority against national and democratic movements. If, on the other hand, we encourage Letts and Esthonians to exterminate the Balts [...] or countenance an arbitrary confiscation of the lands of Balts [...], we encourage the tyranny of a majority and the destruction of the most intelligent, experienced, and capable classes in the respective countries.⁵⁷

The American delegates in the Baltic states were by all means fierce defenders of the inviolability of private property.

While the Western powers’ stance on the Estonian land reform was related to the principle of the inviolability of private property (even though they understood the necessity of restructuring Estonian agriculture), they demanded that the owners of the expropriated estates would be given just compensation. Estonian politicians were well aware of the difficult situation: there was an urgent need to parcel the large estates, but *de jure* recognition from Entente powers was still outstanding, and Estonians needed the Entente’s approval for the land reform. Nevertheless, the Allied governments did not show much enthusiasm in intervening with Estonia’s domestic issues; they were more interested in securing the best possible compensation for their citizens (the manors were expropriated not only from the Baltic Germans and a few Estonians, but also from foreign citizens).⁵⁸

and received the answer that his “participation in this letter [is] not understood [...], in view of fact that the sole function of American Baltic Commission is to observe and report on economic, political and military situations.” Thus, the American representative in Tallinn obviously exceeded the limits of his duties. See: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, vol. 12, document 73*; the letter can be also found in *Kirjavahetus ministeeriumidega rahvusvaheliste konventsioonide ja kokkulepete kohta välisriikidega, 28th July 1919. Rahvusarhiiv (National Archives of Estonia, RA), Tallinn, 31-1-43, 71–72.*

56 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, vol. 12, document 58.*

57 *Ibid.*, 1919, vol. 12, document 65.

58 I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia*, 121, 143, 152.

Eventually, the Land Act, passed on 10th October 1919, expropriated almost all of the manorial estates which had belonged predominantly to the Baltic German nobility, but the compensation question was left open.⁵⁹ Still, German landowners had the right to retain up to 50 hectares of land (though, participants in the War of Independence, including members of the Baltic Battalion, were given priority). Thus, less than 4% of the former property found its way back to the old proprietor. Also, in Latvia large manorial estates were expropriated, however, the Latvian state did not provide any compensation. Finally, more than half of the members of the Baltic German nobility left Estonia and Latvia, mostly to Germany.⁶⁰

While opponents of the reform could not prevent the passing of the Agrarian Law, they undertook an active propaganda campaign (particularly by members of the Baltic German émigrés) in order to obtain compensation for the expropriated estates.⁶¹ Alfred v. Schilling, who was one of the representatives of the Baltic German émigré former landowners, sent on 20th November 1919 a note to Wilson concerning the expropriation of the manorial estates from the Baltic Germans. He emphasised the need to guarantee the existence and property of the national minorities, especially in Estonia where the Baltic German ethnic group has been ruined by the expropriation of their estates. Wilson was requested in the interests of the “bourgeoisie of the entire world” to insist on a revocation of the Agrarian Law, or at least on a just compensation for all expropriated property.⁶² Another Baltic German propagandist named Alphons Heyking, a former Russian diplomat in London, represented the Baltic Germans at the League of Nations. He led an active propaganda campaign against the Estonian and Latvian states in order to achieve the restitution of the expropriated estates or “sufficient” compensation for them.⁶³ Heyking introduced his demands to the Secretariat of the League for the first time in February 1921; the

59 According to the Land Act, not only the land, but also the inventory of the large estates was expropriated. The state paid for the expropriated inventory compensation based on the market prices of 1914. See: T. Pool. *Maauendus Eestis ja selle tulemusi. S.n.*, Tallinn, 1936.

60 G. v. Pistohlkors. *Inversion of Ethnic Group Status, 198–199.*

61 The author of this paper has written about the Baltic Germans' reactions on the land reform in greater detail in H. Lepplaan. “Mein Haus, mein Land, mein Erb und Eigen”: *Deutsche Reaktionen auf das estnische Agrargesetz 1919. – Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte*, 2012, 7, 141–167.

62 A. Loit. *Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad*, 65–66; I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia*, 162.

63 In an English pamphlet from 1922 Heyking claimed that “the Agrarian Reform has been used as a weapon against the minorities” and the only reason their property has been expropriated is “that the owner is not a Lett or Est.” See: A. Heyking. *The Main Issues Confronting the Minorities of Latvia and Eesti*. P. S. King, London, 1922, 33, 36.

Baltic Germans presented altogether four petitions during the period of 1925–1927, all left unanswered.⁶⁴

The aforementioned Keyserling, the former owner of Raikküla manor, wrote an English-language pamphlet (under the pseudonym Robert Baltenius) about the Balts in the history of Estonia.⁶⁵ In his writing, published in 1922, he criticised the Land Law of 1919, claiming that it is even false to call it “expropriation,” since according to European legal conceptions an expropriation involves compensation, “here, however, was not a penny of compensation paid for the confiscated land.” Because he had been personally concerned with this issue, he affirmed emotionally that this law “practically amount[ed] to plain robbery” and because of it “the owners of the estates lose their entire fortunes, their homes, and the possibility of supporting themselves.” Keyserling correctly pointed out that “the Agrarian Reform was meant to ‘break the backbone of the Balto-Saxons’.” Referring to the Baltic Battalion he blamed the Estonian state for “treating in such a brutal manner a class of its own citizens, who even sacrificed so many of their sons in the struggle for the creation of the state”, and overlooked the role of the Landeswehr conflict in affecting the extension and speed of the land reform.⁶⁶ To conclude his pamphlet, Keyserling emphasised that the Balts have raised “protests against this brutal law [...] and they continue to do so although the law is already being put into practice. They demand that their rights of private ownership, guaranteed by the constitution of the Esthonian Republic, [...] be respected.” According to Keyserling, the Baltic Germans based their claims on the League of Nations, whose member Estonia was from 1921, since it carried out “the principle of the equality of nations” and has “afforded special protection to the rights of the racial minorities.”⁶⁷ Although Keyserling remained an opponent of the Land Law, he did not boycott Estonia, nor was he embittered by the failure of his mission.⁶⁸ Eventually, in 1926, the Estonian state agreed to pay compensation to the extent of about 3% of the nominal value of the expropriated property, which obviously did not satisfy the former estate owners. The compensation law was implemented considering the moral necessity and international pressure, mainly from the League of

64 The minorities were not an independent part in the League of Nations’ system of petitions, the Secretary-General first decided whether the petitions against the states were to be discussed in the General Assembly. See: V. Made. *Küüalisena maailmapoliitikas: Eesti ja Rahvasteliit 1919–1946*. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 1999, 145–172.

65 R. Baltenius. *The Balts in the History of Esthonia*. Baltischer Verlag und Ostbuchhandlung, Berlin, 1922; J. Undusk. *Eesti kui Belgia*, 68.

66 R. Baltenius. *The Balts in the History of Esthonia*, 11–12.

67 *Ibid.*, 12.

68 I. Lipping. *Land Reform Legislation in Estonia*, 165.

Nations, and individual lawsuits. The Baltic German deputies in the Estonian parliament claimed that the bill still discriminated against the German minority.⁶⁹

Even though the Baltic German Party consisted of different groupings, the German community was often led and represented in the legislative assemblies by relatively moderate non-noble persons who were more interested in securing cultural autonomy than in preventing land reform. Still, in parliamentary work, the differences were overcome and the party represented the whole community. Baltic German deputies actively contributed to the elaboration of the minorities protection law which was to grant national minorities cultural autonomy.⁷⁰ The minority rights had already been fixed in the *Manifesto to All Peoples of Estonia* from 1918, and in the Constitution of 1920 which stipulated that nobody was to suffer disadvantage because of their ethnic origin. Furthermore, the constitution actively invited the pursuit of cultural autonomy. This was especially important to the Germans who became less numerous and increasingly urbanised, but still scattered all over the country. When the law on cultural autonomy for national minorities was proclaimed on 5th February 1925, it served as a successful example in Europe. Compared with Estonia, minority rights in Latvia did not secure the same legal protection. It was only in 1928 that the Baltic Germans achieved a central minority institution: the Baltic German Ethnic Union (*Deutschbaltische Volksgemeinschaft*). The Baltic German representatives from Estonia and Latvia, even became leading members of the European Nationalities Congress (1925–1938).⁷¹ Estonian politicians were well aware that the generous cultural autonomy law would weaken the Baltic Germans' arguments that the Land Law was directed against a national minority.⁷²

Although the Baltic German estate owners could not prevent the agrarian laws being passed in Estonia and Latvia, they succeeded in taking the agrarian legislation to the international forum, and ultimately in softening the impact of the laws.⁷³ The Baltic barons abroad continued

69 The Compensation Committee, on the other hand, stated that the Land Act would not discriminate against an ethnic minority, since 57 of 617 former manor lords were ethnic Estonians. See: G. v. Pistohlkors. Inversion of Ethnic Group Status, 199; I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 195–208.

70 I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 100–101, 125.

71 Ammende and Hasselblatt from Estonia, and Schiemann from Latvia. G. v. Pistohlkors. Inversion of Ethnic Group Status, 201–202. For more details about the role of the Baltic Germans in the European Nationalities Congress, see: D. J. Smith, M. Germane, M. Housden. "Forgotten Europeans": Transnational Minority Activism in the Age of European Integration. – Nations and Nationalism, 2019, 25, 2, 523–543.

72 I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 195.

73 Ibid., 86.

to conduct an active campaign in order to obtain compensation for the expropriated estates, but the influence of their activity was rather limited. As Loit has concluded: “Certainly, the western Powers’ standpoints on Estonian independence and the question of land reform developed through their own interests and were not influenced by the propaganda of the Baltic German *Ritterschaften*. [...] However, one cannot deny that the appeals of the *Ritterschaften* had in international politics indirect and psychological influence.”⁷⁴ The leadership of the Baltic German exile society had remained in the hands of the former nobility, while in the new republics the political leadership of the Baltic German communities had passed into the hands of members of the middle class and intelligentsia. The new leaders of the German community were more interested in obtaining favourable minority protection than representing the interests of the dispossessed noblemen.⁷⁵

REFLECTIONS OF THE RECOGNITION BY THE US IN THE BALTIC GERMAN PRESS

That the news about the Baltic states’ recognition by the US was on the frontpage of the local Baltic German newspapers indicates its importance to the community. Two local papers – *Revaler Bote* from Reval (Tallinn), and *Rigasche Rundschau* from Riga – published the news on the same day when the meetings between the US consuls and the Baltic foreign ministers were held on 28th July 1922.⁷⁶ *Revaler Bote* stressed, on the one hand, the internal importance for Estonia, but also showed that this change in Washington’s politics in Europe, and specifically in Estonia, was closely related to the new stance of the US on Soviet Russia. This again had an inevitable influence on European politics directed towards Soviet Russia. As such, according to the newspaper, US de jure recognition of Estonia had a much broader importance. Meanwhile, *Rigasche Rundschau* stated that the US Government finally understood that the newly established states had successfully preserved political and economic stability inside their borders. The recognition by “the great America” was “the last step of Latvia’s entrance into the huge family of nations” (*der letzte Schritt des Eintritts des lettländischen Staates in die*

74 A. Loit. Baltisaksa rüütelkondade seisukohad, 73.

75 I. Lipping. Land Reform Legislation in Estonia, 304, 341.

76 Anerkennung Estlands de jure durch Amerika. – *Revaler Bote*, 28th July 1922, no. 166; Lettland von Amerika de jure anerkannt. – *Rigasche Rundschau*, 28th July 1922, no. 165.

große Völkerfamilie). It was highlighted that the principle of the US – that the unstable situation in Russia may not be used for the impairment of Russia’s territory – may not be violated, regardless of the decision to recognise the governments of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The paper expressed its hope that the new relationship with the US, which in terms of charity had been so beneficial previously, would become permanently friendly and beneficial for both parties. The frontpage of the next issue of the newspaper carried a detailed report on how the Latvian Foreign Minister, Zigfrīds A. Meierovics, expressed in his telegram the gratitude of Latvia’s government and people to the US Secretary of State, Charles E. Hughes, and how the Minister visited the American Consul in Riga, Harold B. Quarton. Quarton’s full speech on the occasion was published in the same issue.⁷⁷

Libausche Zeitung was no less positive regarding the long-awaited news about US recognition. It argued that even if “at first sight it seems that ‘de jure’ recognition, the last one in the row of the great powers, has little importance,” it was not so. “Not only the fact that America is by far the richest country in the world” and through the recognition the capital market will be opened up for the border states, but this step from the US shows that the changes in the map of eastern Europe are permanent in nature. Also, the paper explained the reasons why the US gave the recognition to the border states only one and half years after the rest of the Great Powers:

Amerika rechnete bis vor kurzem noch damit, daß das alte russische Reich in absehbarer Zeit aus dem bolschewistischen Trümmerhaufen auferstehen und Ansprüche auf seine ehemaligen Randgebiete erheben würde.

The recognition “will definitely contribute to the conviction in the world that the border states are not any more one-day-creations” (*Eintagsgebilde*).⁷⁸ In contrast, a German newspaper from Dorpat (Tartu), *Dorpater Nachrichten*, rather laconically described the recognition of Estonia:

Reval, 28. Juli. Heute teilte der Konsul der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika Mr. Charles Albrecht unserem Außenministerium offiziell mit, er sei von seiner Regierung telegraphisch verständigt worden, daß die Vereinigten Staaten Estland de jure anerkennen.

77 Zur De-jure-Anerkennung Lettlands durch Amerika. – Rigasche Rundschau, 29th July 1922, no. 166.

78 Anerkennung seitens Amerikas; Umschau – Libausche Zeitung, 29th July 1922, no. 166.

Gleichzeitig mit Estland wurden Lettland und Litauen anerkannt. Gesandter für alle drei Länder wird Mr. Young, der bisherige Vertreter Amerikas in Lettland, der seinen Wohnse[i]tz in Riga beibehält.⁷⁹

On 10th August, the frontpage of the fortnightly Baltic German newspaper in Berlin, *Baltische Blätter*, published on its frontpage about the unexpected recognition by America which was “greeted with understandable gratification” in Estonia.⁸⁰ According to the paper it was unexpected that the change in the American *Ostpolitik* could directly lead to this recognition. Another newspaper of the Baltic Germans émigré, *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, published on 13th August the full speech of Quaranton, along with the telegram of Meierovics to Hughes, without any further commentary.⁸¹

Although frontpage news both in the local and in émigré Baltic German press, no in-depth political analysis of the US recognition was included by the newspaper’ editors. This could be concluded that by the time the US recognised Estonia and Latvia as independent states, the Baltic German political elite had either adapted to the new societies, or remained abroad (although not always voluntarily) and made peace with the loss of their privileged positions in the Baltic region. The community which remained in Estonia and Latvia reoriented itself towards the democratic societies and cooperated with the majority nationalities. Their main concerns in the early 1920s were the rights of ethnic minorities and the compensation for the expropriated estates (though, the latter applied only to the nobility). The Baltic German émigré community (mainly in Germany) struggled with the newly established republics because of the radical land reform. Their propaganda activities kept the compensation question alive on the international forum. However, there were no attempts to subvert the political power in the Baltic states anymore (although, they might not have fully believed in the viability of the republics). In other words, the Baltic Germans had reconciled with the Estonian and Latvian nation-states by the time the US extended its full recognition. The de jure recognition by the Western powers also assured the German community in the Baltic states that both the political and economic situation are permanent and stable, and the nation-states belong to the family of nations. Obviously, the event of recognition had far more significance for the local German communities than for those

79 De jure Anerkennung seitens Amerikas. – Dorpater Nachrichten, 29th July 1922, no. 168.

80 Politische Uebersicht. – *Baltische Blätter* vereinigt mit den *Baltischen Nachrichten*, 10th August 1922, no. 31/32.

81 *Baltische Wochenschau*. – *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, 13th August 1922, no. 33. The newspaper was published once a week.

residing abroad. Even though the full recognition by the US was the last one in the row of Western powers, it was not less important in the eyes of the local people.

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LEPPIMINE VÕI PETTUMUS? BALTISAKSLASTE SUHTUMINE EESTI JA LÄTI RAHVUSRIIKI

Heidi Rifk

Artikli eesmärk on tutvustada ühe etnilise vähemuse – baltisakslaste – vaatenurka Eesti ja Läti rahvusriigi loomise ja lääneriikide tunnustamise temaatikas. Eestis ja Lätis oli USA *de jure* tunnustuse saamine 1922. aastal kauaoodatud sündmus, kuid rahvusriikide loomine polnud kõigile nendes riikides elanud etnilistele vähemustele meelepärane. Kaks kõige mõjukamat rahvusgruppi, kel olid selle regiooni valitsemisega seoses teistsugused plaanid, olid venelased ja sakslased. Sakslased moodustasid elanikkonnast küll marginaalse osa (sakslasi oli Eestis alla 2% ja Lätis alla 4%), kuid seni olid nad olnud ühiskonnas valitsev kiht. Sisemiselt olid baltisakslased heterogeenne kogukond, keda leidis kõigis ühiskonnakihtides ja seega esindasid nad ka eri poliitilisi huve.

Siinses käsitluses on püütud avada baltisakslaste hoiakuid Eesti ja Läti rahvusriigi loomisesse, sest neil (vähemalt mõisnikkonnal) oli sellest kõige rohkem kaotada: mängus olid nende juhtiv poliitiline positsioon, privileegid ja suured maavaldused. Suhtumine vastloodud vabariikidesse oleneski sellest, millisesse sotsiaalsesse kihti kuuluti ja kas tegemist oli emigratsioonis elavate või kohalike baltisakslastega. Seejuures võib täheldada teatud ühisjooni baltisaksa emigrantide kogukonna ja USA ametliku Baltikumi-poliitikaga, mis toetas n-ö jagamatut Venemaad ja oli väikeste rahvusriikide suhtes skeptiline.

Aastatel 1918–1919 olid baltisaksa eliidil regiooni valitsemise tuleviku kohta erinevad plaanid. Konservatiivse visiooni siht oli säilitada

suurmaavaldused ning baltisakslaste juhtiv poliitiline ja majanduslik roll ühiskonnas. Seejuures oli välistatud mitte ainult bolševistlik süsteem, vaid ka demokraatlik ühiskonnakord. Kuna baltisakslased elasid laiali üle endiste Balti kubermangude, siis soovisid nad seda piirkonda hoida ühtsena. Nii Balti hertsogiriik kui ka Hermann von Keyserlingi ja Heinrich von Stryki plaan ühtsest Balti riigist ei näinud ette Eesti ja Läti etniliste alade vahel mingit riigipiiri. Olenevalt sündmustest rindel, väljendas baltisaksa aadel lootust ühineda kas Saksa emamaa või taastatud (mittebolševistliku) Venemaaga, kusjuures pidi säilima autonoomia ja teatud sõltumatus impeeriumi keskusest.

Baltikumis asuvad USA sõjalise missiooni esindajad, kes ei tundnud küll kohalikke keeli, mõistsid suhteliselt hästi siinseid olusid (suheldes enamasti just kohalike baltisakslastega). 1919. aastal ei näinud nad kääbuslikel rahvusriikidel kahe impeeriumi, Saksamaa ja Venemaa vahel mingit tulevikku. Ameerika vaatelejate silmis oleksid Eesti, Läti ja Leedu ühtses liitriigis suutnud paremini oma iseseisvust kaitsta, ka loodava Rahvasteliidu protektoraat oleks olnud tervitatav. „Balti parunite“ plaanid olid ameeriklastele teada, kuid nad mõistsid, et baltisaksa ülemvõimu säilimine tähendanuks Saksamaa mõju suurenemist Baltikumis.

Samas leidis baltisaksa kogukonnas ka neid, kes said juba 1918. aasta lõpus aru vajadusest teha enamusrahvustega koostööd, eriti just Eestis, kus poliitilised olud olid seda varem võimaldanud. Esimestes Eesti valitsemisorganites (Maanõukogus, Ajutises Valitsuses ja Asutavas Kogus) olid esindatud ka saksa saadikud. Eesti poliitiline eliit kinnitas juba iseseisvusdeklaratsioonis, aga ka esimeses põhiseaduses, et maa valitsemises peab jääma sõnaõigus kõigile siinsetele rahvastele, ning sellest haarasid mõned baltisakslased, eesotsas Max Bocki ja Hermann Kochiga kinni. 1918. aasta lõpus loodud Baltisaksa Partei esindas kogu Eesti sakslaskonna poliitilisi ja majanduslikke huve. Partei, mille etteotsa valiti erinevates ühiskonnakihtides soositud Christoph Mickwitz, tegi Eesti riigiga tihedat koostööd, eriti kultuurautonoomia seaduse väljatöötamisel. Kuna Läti saksa kogukond oli arvuliselt mitu korda suurem, asutasid baltisakslased seal mitu poliitilist erakonda. Baltisakslaste aktiivne osalus Eesti ja Läti vabariigi poliitilises elus näitab, et suurem osa kohalikust saksa kogukonnast valis koostöö enamusrahvustega ning tagurlikul aadlil tuli kas Saksamaale (enamasti) välja rännata või muutunud oludega kohaneda.

Maareformi tulemusel n-õ murti baltisaksa mõisnikkonna selgroog ja nende suurmaavaldused võõrandati. Sellega aga ei tahtnud endised mõisnikud leppida ja pöördusid lääne suurvõimude poole, kes maaomandit pühaks pidasid. Kui Antanti riikide surveamine

radikaalse maareformi ärahoidmiseks ebaõnnestus, jätkati võitlust, et saada võõrandatud maade eest rahuldavat hüvitist. Baltisaksa aadlike lobistid püüdsid koputada ka USA presidendi Woodrow Wilsoni südametunnistusele, väites, et maaseadusega kiusatakse taga just saksa vähemusrahvust Eestis ja Lätis, kuid see aktiivne lobitöö jäi tulemuseta. Ka Eesti saksa kogukonnas juhtrolli võtnud keskklassi esindajad olid 1920-ndate alguses huvitatud pigem soodsast kultuurautonoomiast kui endise aadli huvide eest seismisest.

Kui 1922. aasta juulis teatas USA täielikust Eesti, Läti ja Leedu tunnustamisest, oli see ka kohalikes baltisaksa ajalehtedes esiküljeuudis. Seegi rahvusrühm sai kindluse, et poliitiline ja majanduslik olukord Balti riikides on püsiv ja stabiilne ning Balti riigid kuuluvad maailma rahvaste perre. Mõistagi läks sündmus korda rohkem kohalikele kui emigratsioonis elanud baltisakslastele. Kuna aga baltisaksa ajalehtede veergudel USA tunnustamist põhjalikumalt ei analüüsitud ega eriti lehe-ruumi sellele ei kulutatud, võib järeldada, et sündmusel polnud saksa kogukonna jaoks nii suurt tähtsust kui näiteks kultuurautonoomiaga seotud temaatikal. Kohalik saksa kogukond oli 1922. aastaks rohkemal või vähemal määral leppinud oma vähemusrahvuse staatusega ja püüdis endale nõuelda võimalikult soodsat seadusandlikku raamistikku.