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THE RESETTLEMENT OF THE GERMANS FROM THE BALTIC STATES IN 1939/1941

The resettlements carried out during World War II and after its conclusion have recently aroused much interest. There are many deliberations in the press, frequently not based on facts but only on their authors' conjectures. In this situation it is worthwhile recalling the facts, and showing the real course of sometimes quite surprising events. The scope of the problem is very wide. Here I would only like to present my modest contributory study. I discuss the resettlement of the Germans from the Baltic states carried out in the autumn of 1939 and at the beginning of 1941.

The issue is of great significance, since this was the first action of resettlement which preceded a virtual avalanche of others. The role of Hitler as the originator of these operations is very clear.

The Baltic Germans, a relatively small group — their numbers did not reach a hundred thousand — were the élite of the German national groups living in Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe. In contrast to the Germans of Volhynia, Bessarabia or Bukovina — the majority of whom were peasant colonists — they generally belonged to the aristocracy, intelligentsia and wealthy bourgeoisie.

Since the 13th century they had been very closely linked to this area, conscious of their historical role not only in the Baltic countries but also in Russia as a whole. Despite the land reform carried out in Estonia and Latvia, they were still very wealthy people and owners with a rich cultural inheritance.

In the 1930s some of the Baltic Germans, especially young people, embraced Hitlerism, taking over the general pan-German slogans. Yet the rest looked down on the Nazi upstarts, and remained in proud isolation. Some of them bound themselves

more and more to the newly created states, finding employment in their administration, judicature, army, as professionals as well as businessmen.

The Baltic people — for this is the way they were called in short — till the very last moment did not think of leaving. At any rate, in contrast to the Germans from Tyrol, there were no designs to resettle them before the war. Still in the summer of 1939 they led a life full of ease. They tried to strengthen and stabilize their position in their places of residence. With this intention in mind the German National Community addressed the Latvian authorities requesting a broadly-conceived autonomy, a greater share of the Germans in the state administration, a right to use the German language everywhere and damages for their landed property confiscated during the land reform¹.

The outbreak of the war, the Third Reich's aggression against Poland, did not make much impression on the Baltic Germans. However, the attack on Poland by the Soviet Union was quite another thing. As we know, as early as September 19, the Soviet government raised sharp objections to Estonia, following the escape of the Polish submarine "Orzeł" from Tallin. Soviet ships deployed their blockade of Estonia's coast, thus violating its sovereignty.

On September 21 the members of the German Community visited the German envoy to Latvia, Ulrich von Kotze, to declare that the Germans were in such a fright that "massive escapes could be expected"².

Meanwhile the Kremlin took other actions in order to manifest, in accordance with the pact of 23 August 1939, the extent of its sphere of interest. These operations were first focussed on Estonia, but it was clear that they would also affect Latvia. The Estonian minister of foreign affairs Kaarel Selter, who came to Moscow on September 24, faced Molotov's demands for creating Soviet land, air and naval bases in the territory of Estonia, and for giving a reply by September 27. To intimidate Estonia, the troops of the Red Army started concentrating near its border.

¹ A. Topij, *Mniejszość niemiecka na Łotwie i w Estonii 1918–1939/41 (The German Minority in Latvia and Estonia 1918–1939/41)*, Bydgoszcz 1998, pp. 325–327.

² D. Loeber, *Diktierte Option. Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939–1941. Dokumentation*, Neumünster 1972, *Introduction*, pp. (26–27).

This impressed not only the Estonians but also the local Germans. The leader of the Lettish adherents of Hitler, Erhard Kroeger, who at that time stayed in Zoppot, in his talk with Himmler expressed his great concern for the fate of his compatriots as well as a fear they might fall into the Soviet hands. At the same time he reminded him of the behaviour of the Bolsheviks twenty years earlier, who carried out a massacre of the Germans in Riga. When Himmler suggested that the Bolsheviks might have changed their methods since then, Kroeger answered that this was possible, but should not be tested in practice on the Baltic Germans.

On September 27 Kroeger was received by Reinhard Heydrich, who told him that according to intelligence the encroachment by the Red Army could be expected "at any hour" not only on Estonia but also on Latvia. Everybody was so frightened that the SS officer Werner Best, who attended this talk, suggested that the Germans in Estonia and Latvia should be immediately granted German citizenship, which would protect them. This was accepted as a good idea. Feverish search for indispensable passport forms started. Some were found, but only in Dresden³.

Precisely at that time Hitler must have made a decision to take the Germans away from Estonia and Latvia. The secretary of state at Auswärtiges Amt, Ernst Weizsäcker, passed this information to Ribbentrop, who was just on a visit to Moscow, adding that this issue should become the subject of separate talks with the Soviet government⁴.

Such talks indeed took place and on September 28 a German-Soviet Pact on Friendship and Borders was eventually signed, with a secret appendix. The government of the USSR obliged itself in it not to interfere with the German citizens and persons of German descent who lived in its sphere of interests, if they wanted to be resettled in Germany⁵.

Furthermore, the Soviet side assured that it did not intend to invade, annex or Bolshevize the states found in its sphere of interests⁶.

³ D. Loeber, as above, doc. 314, pp. 647-654.

⁴ *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, Baden-Baden 1961, Series D, Vol. VIII (henceforward *ADAP*), p. 125.

⁵ *Dokumenty Vneshney Politiki* (henceforward *DWP*), Moskva 1992, Year 1939, part 2, doc. 641, p. 135.

⁶ A note of the German government to the government of the USSR of 21 June 1941, *Monatshefte für Auswärtige Politik*, Yearbook 8, pp. 552-553.

Nevertheless the German authorities did not change their decision. The leaders of the Baltic Germans, temporarily staying in Germany, were confidentially informed of the decision of resettlement, the "urgency and irrevocability" of which were strongly emphasized.

In the next days the agitation seemed to subside. On September 30 the leader of the Germans in Estonia, Baron Wilhelm Wrangell, sent to Berlin the text of the announcement handed to the local Germans, which said: "there is no immediate danger". "It is the duty of every German to stay in his place and by his example to help stifle the rising panic"⁷.

Anxiety arose anew because of the news, coming this time from Latvia, that Vilhelms Munters, the foreign minister of Latvia, had been called to Moscow. Talks with him started on October 2. Demands were placed on the Latvians, as an ultimatum, to allow the introduction of the bases of the Red Army to their territory. The term given was very short. A respective treaty was signed on 5 October 1939⁸.

The Germans who were watching this situation started composing scenarios of the possible development of events. For example the head of the Department of Cultural Policy of the Foreign Office Fritz von Twardowski wrote on October 3 about a possibility of provoking revolutionary upheavals by the Soviets in order to accomplish a communist coup in Estonia and Latvia. He proposed a gradual withdrawal of the Germans, so that their property would not be lost⁹.

On October 4 envoy Kotze sent an alarming telegram. He wrote that in connection with the Soviet demands the lives of 60 thousand Volksdeutsche and three thousand Reichdeutsche "were in an immediate danger". He asked for the details of the earlier promised assistance and for ensuring an adequate number of berths on the ships.

The general tension and sense of danger on the part of the Germans ran so high that on October 5 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed the Command of the Navy requesting the direction of ships to the ports of Riga, Lepaya, Ventspils and Reval (Tallin). The Navy agreed, saying that the liners bound for Riga

⁷ D. Loeber, as above, p. 42.

⁸ DWP, as above, doc. 661, pp. 161-164.

⁹ D. Loeber, as above, doc. 50, pp. 54-55.

and Lepaya would be accompanied by torpedo-boats. The ships were to carry shock-troops¹⁰. It seemed that an armed confrontation might ensue between the new allies, since for several days Soviet ships had been patrolling the coast of the Baltic states.

Eventually, the Kriegsmarine ships did not put out to sea. However, the liners did, setting a course for Riga and Tallin. The German envoys were informed of this operation. Envoy Kotze in his note prepared on October 5 discovered a contradiction between the order to avoid panic and the news that the ships were putting out. He thought this was not necessary, and tried to convince his superiors in Berlin to this effect. Also Hans Frohwein, the German envoy to Tallin, was against too urgent operations which might arouse even greater panic¹¹.

Nevertheless the Foreign Office took a relentless stand. The same day Weizsäcker emphasized that having considered the situation, the leadership of the Reich felt bound to extend special protection over the Baltic Germans¹².

The next day the situation cleared up at least in the sense that the decision to resettle the Germans had already been taken. On October 6 Hitler made his famous speech with his "offer of peace". It contained a passage saying that "the chippings of the German nation" settled in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe would be withdrawn to the Reich in order to avoid further clashes and conflicts¹³. It was clear he meant in the first place the Baltic Germans.

The same day Weizsäcker instructed envoys Kotze and Frohwein how they should act. A new thesis emerged that the action of resettlement was not the result of the agreements signed by Estonia and Latvia with the USSR, hence, let us add, of the introduction of the Soviet troops to those countries, but of the Reich's intention to utilize "the valuable German forces" in the area of the Reich. Therefore the action of resettlement should be continued with full intensity¹⁴. Another letter explained that the resettlement of the Germans was voluntary, although they should be persuaded to leave¹⁵.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, doc. 56, pp. 58-59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, as above, p. 170.

¹² ADAP, as above, p. 170.

¹³ *Dokumente des Deutschen Politik*, vol. 7, part 1, Berlin 1940, pp. 346-347.

¹⁴ ADAP, as above, p. 181.

¹⁵ D. Loeber, doc. 69, p. 76.

Persuasion could not be used, however, since the whole action was kept secret. The captains of the ships did not learn their destination before they reached the open sea. Much surprise was caused when on October 7–8 the German ships appeared all of a sudden at the entrances to the harbours of Riga, Tallin, and Lepaya.

Envoy Frohwein did not inform the Estonian authorities of the decision of resettlement until October 7. Minister Selter “was shocked” at this information. The next day Baron Wrangell in his talk with the President of Estonia, Konstantin Päts, explained that the Germans were forced to make this move, since they “could not give up our armless compatriots to the Bolsheviks”¹⁶. These words certainly could not calm down the President, deeply concerned for the fate of Estonia.

The behaviour of the Germans, who first kept the action secret and then rapidly and feverishly speeded it up, favoured the outbreak of panic not only among the Germans, but also Estonians and Latvians. The local authorities tried to prevent it. The Soviet side was also interested in retaining peace. The Soviet propaganda publicly declared that they had made voluntary and equitable agreements with Estonia and Latvia, followed by Lithuania, which did not infringe their sovereignty and did not affect the free and independent functioning of the Baltic States. The panic caused by the resettlement might seriously thwart the propaganda designs of the Kremlin and present the behaviour of the USSR in a bad light.

The Soviet envoy to Latvia, I. S. Zotov, reported that according to the news that had reached him the country was enveloped by the atmosphere of terror. “The Germans tell the Latvians that they also should leave”. A question was asked why Hitler did not withhold the repatriation for two or three weeks. Alfreds Berzin, the Chairman of the Lettish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, stricken with terror told Zotov about the panic that arose in connection with the departure of the Germans. In his opinion the Germans developed fierce agitation against the pact of mutual aid. Saying this, Berzin grasped his forehead and cried out: “What’s going on is horrible. The Germans are conducting their campaign all over Latvia. The way they assail the Latvians is unbearable”. The envoy inferred that Hitler by recalling the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, doc. 310, pp. 640–641.

Germans from the Baltic region was consciously conducting an anti-Soviet activity¹⁷.

Reports of this kind pushed the Soviet government to decide on a *démarche* towards their German ally. On 11 October 1939 the deputy commissioner for foreign affairs, Vladimir Potemkin, in his talk to the German Ambassador Werner von Schulenburg drew attention to "the groundless panic in Estonia and Latvia among the Germans who prepare to escape abroad on a massive scale". One might get the impression that "The Germans see the Soviet-Baltic agreements as a catastrophe. Such a stand", Potemkin emphasized, "fuels the foreign press that is hostile towards the USSR and starts vociferating that the Soviet Union instead of peace and order is in fact only bringing conflagration and disturbance to Central Europe and the Baltic States"¹⁸.

The Germans took umbrage and in their note of October 14 repudiated all the Soviet charges. They blamed "the products of English propaganda, which tries to spoil the relations between the Germans and the USSR"¹⁹.

What strikes us in the German behaviour with respect to resettlement is the factor of haste. After October 6 Berlin put unceasing pressure on the German activists. It seemed that every day mattered, although as a result there was a lot of confusion. One might say that apart from the real fear of unexpected behaviour on the Soviet part, one might detect in the German behaviour a distinct method of fanning the atmosphere of urgency. The authorities in Berlin assumed it would produce favourable results. The intimidated and continually pressed people developed a massive neurosis of escape, which left no room for reflection or protest.

We learn about the way the Germans were informed of their prompt departure from the account by Wolfgang Wachtsmuth, the superintendent of German schools in Latvia. He writes that right after coming back from Berlin, the leader of the German National Community in Latvia, Alfred Intelmann, called a meeting of its presiding officers. To the utmost surprise of the present, he told them of "the plan of resettlement", which should start without delay, since the troop-ships had already put out. Asked

¹⁷ *Polpredy soobshchayut... Sbornik dokumentov ob otnosheniyakh SSSR s Latviej, Litvoj i Estonijey 1939-1940*, Moskva 1990, doc. 90, p. 118.

¹⁸ DWP, as above, doc. 675, pp. 176-177.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 620, note 241.

about the reason for such a prompt decision, Intelmann refused to answer, saying he had an order from Berlin to keep it secret. Everybody understood there was a threat of an immediate encroachment by the Bolsheviks. Those present were faced with the task of informing the members of the Community and persuading them of the necessity to leave, without disclosing the real reason for this action²⁰. In particular, they were told to deny that this departure would mean escaping from the Bolsheviks.

On 9 October 1939 the "Rigasche Rundschau" newspaper published an appeal by Intelmann and Kroeger urging the Germans to follow the call of the Führer, and leave for the places they would be directed to. They were told they would be settled in close groups "in the eastern German areas recovered by the Reich"²¹.

The resettlement was supported by a very energetic propaganda. Appeals to leave were made at innumerable meetings, through the press and leaflets. People were visited at home and persuaded, or even forced to leave, which was thought to be a very effective method.

Let me present the content of this propaganda. In the first place people were left with no alternative: it was do it or die. Those who stayed on would be excluded from the German nation for ever. Those who refused to leave were presented as the enemies of Germany. They became politically suspect.

At the same time the authorities tried to threaten the people. Not with the spectre of Bolshevism, however. This was passed over in silence, although the fear of it hid in everybody's subconscious. What was brought to the fore was the allegedly unbearable situation that would emerge in the depopulated Baltic States. E.g. the Germans from Latvia were persuaded of the terrible situation that developed in Estonia. A leaflet was circulated saying that it was not enough for the Germans in Estonia to allege their state loyalty. "The German element is definitely exterminated". Appeals were also made not to believe "in the assistance and protestations of one's acquaintances" from among the local population.

The leading motive of all this propaganda was to show the new and challenging task posed by the Führer to the Baltic Germans. The leader of the German National Community in

²⁰ D. Loeber, as above, *Introduction* pp. (51-52).

²¹ J. Sobczak, *Hitlerowskie przesiedlenia ludności niemieckiej w dobie II wojny światowej (The Nazi Resettlements of the German Population During the Second World War)*, Poznań 1966, p. 157.

Estonia, Hellmuth Weiss, made an appeal where one might read: "Following the call of the German nation and its Führer, our group as the first one in the great action of the transplantation of German people from the East and Southern-East of Europe, will accomplish a new task on the eastern national border of the Great-German Reich. We are determined to follow that call and to do our most to contribute to the accomplishment of the task we have been set". What the Germans left behind was summed up by Weiss in one sentence: "It will not be easy to part with our homeland where our roots are so deep". And he advised to concentrate all attention on the tasks of the future²³.

Hans-Jochen Kubitz, a plenipotentiary who came straight from Germany, spoke in the same vein. He emphasized that "The Baltic Germans are transported from a projecting outpost to the main line of the national battle (...). The city of Gotenhafen (Gdynia) will supply space for 120 thousand people and will be a transitory station for gathering the transplanted people and directing them further on (...). It is the purpose of the German resettlement policy in the newly-recovered East, to strike our roots in this land, which should become German to the extent that it will never be lost"²⁴.

Thus the main task was clear. To settle the land "newly-recovered" by Germany, and to make it productive. Its outlines were, however, still hazy. Many people did not understand what area was awaiting the German people. On October 26 envoy Frohwein sent a telegram from Tallin saying that the transplanted people were seriously disturbed by not knowing the place of their settlement. He also asked for a more precise definition where the Germans from Estonia would be settled²⁵.

As if to meet this request half way, the German press in Estonia and Latvia tried to write, although not in very concrete terms, about this "land of settlement". Apart from articles, it carried many illustrations. It also presented many photos of territories to be settled, with neat houses and manors. The photos also presented the trees: "Our native birches, growing also in our new homeland"²⁶.

²² D. Loeber, as above, doc. 138, p. 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, doc. 128, p. 162.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, doc. 102, pp. 115–116.

²⁵ D. Loeber, *Introduction*, p. (43).

²⁶ A. Topij, as above, p. 402.

Only people were not shown. According to the German propaganda the country was empty, and awaiting the newcomers.

Is it possible that the Germans leaving the Baltic states did not know that the places they were offered for settlement were in Poland, the inhabitants of which recently started to be brutally removed from their own country? It was certainly well-known! Of course, only to those who wanted to know. Characteristic information about it can be found in the report by a Soviet envoy to Tallin, Konstantin Nikitin, made on 6 December 1939. While giving account of his meetings with various Estonian activists, he also mentioned a talk with the well-known barrister Mihkel Pung and his wife. The Pungs told him that "in Poland the Germans 'propose' to the Poles 'to move out' of their estates and homes within fifteen minutes. They allow them to take only what the family can carry, and often it was so that they did not allow them even to take their children's toys"²⁷.

The envoy did not express his opinion on the information, but thought the fact worth recording. This shows, however, that the situation that developed in the Polish territories annexed to the Reich was known in Estonia, and perhaps also in Latvia. Even the details of the expulsion carried out by the invaders were no secret. The Germans who still stayed in Estonia and Latvia could not be ignorant of these facts, either.

While analysing the considerations that made the Germans decide to leave, we may assume that one of them was the above-mentioned panic and fear of the Bolsheviks, most evident in the first days of October. This was accompanied by a massive rush, a psychosis of escape, and fear of being left alone. The sources, and especially the memoirs of the Baltic Germans show, on the other hand, that the desire to accomplish the mission designated by Hitler played a minor role. Apart from avowed adherents of Hitler, the majority of those who were leaving did not bother about it at all. The promises of a good, wealthy life in the place of settlement were quite another thing.

Janusz Sobczak, a student of this problem, has voiced the opinion that this consideration was the most important. "The Hitlerite emissaries", he wrote, "deluded the small clerk with a possibility of becoming a mayor of a big town in occupied Poland. They assured the former landed magnate he would be

²⁷ *Polpredy*, as above, doc. 145, p. 196.

recompensed with a vengeance for the estate he was partly deprived of as a result of parcelling it out in the 1920s (...). They appealed to the peasant in the same way, promising he would get richer. And they persuaded all the Germans that "instead of being second-rate citizens in the present state, they would dominate the non-German population in Germany"²⁸.

The fact is that the majority of the Germans decided to leave. To accomplish this action, however, international agreements had to be concluded with Estonia and Latvia. The primary issue was that of the renouncement of the citizenship of these states, as well as the settlement of many financial problems concerning the property left behind by the Germans, and the property they could take away, etc.

It is worth noting that initially the panic-stricken German envoy to Riga did not see it was necessary or possible to sign an inter-state agreement. He thought he could simply appeal to the Germans to leave, give them passports, and they would embark. However, in practice, the Estonian and Latvian authorities proved they still had a full right to administer their countries, and made the Germans enter negotiations.

However, the positions of both sides were not equal. The German literature admits that the Baltic states were in a worse position. This was due to the political power and the economic preponderance of Germany. Let us also add, this was also the result of the recent moves of the USSR which undermined the power and limited the sovereignty of Estonia and Latvia. In these circumstances, the German negotiators succeeded in imposing the conditions which effected a far-reaching concession to the German interests²⁹.

This was most evident in the case of Estonia. On October 9 the Estonian government published a communiqué saying that it was the intention of the German side to resettle the Germans from Estonia in Germany for good. The Estonian government declared it did not object to this resettlement and took into consideration the necessity of an urgent solution of the problems this involved³⁰.

²⁸ J. Sobczak, as above, p. 292.

²⁹ D. Loeber, *Introduction*, p. (23).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, doc. 73, pp. 81-82.

Despite the Estonian readiness to sign an agreement, the German claims were so big that negotiations protracted for a few days. The Germans proposed, e.g. that the estates left behind be bought by the Estonians who would have to pay in cash, which meant that Estonia would be practically robbed. Let us add that this money would enrich the German treasury, while the resettled people would be “recompensed” with the property of the expelled Poles. At the beginning the prospects for an agreement were thin, however, the German side, pressed for time, consented to sign a clearing agreement at a later date. Thus the whole issue was put off. This allowed the signing of a “Formal record on the resettlement of the German national group from Estonia in Germany”.

This document regulated the procedure of the renouncing of Estonian citizenship, and specified the contents and quantity of luggage allowed to be taken away. There were restrictions on the foreign currency and strict control of the cultural property allowed to be taken abroad. Generally, however, the Germans from Estonia were allowed to take a lot of things. The document was ratified on the next day. The process of resettlement was put into practice³¹.

In Latvia things were a bit different. The Latvian government did not want to leave any questions unsolved or delay settling the essential problems. It strove to reach a full understanding. Considering the exorbitant claims of Germany, this was not easy. Negotiations took a long time. The ships that came to the Latvian ports had to wait almost three weeks.

The Latvians declared they would agree to the Germans' departure only if the German side proved it did not mean to ruin the Latvian economy and would agree to a reasonable form of compensation. In particular, they called into question the manner of repayment of the property of resettled people proposed by the Germans. There ensued very difficult negotiations lasting about a fortnight, and eventually, a compromise was reached. An agreement on resettlement was signed on 30 October 1939.

It regulated the issue of the renouncement of Latvian citizenship by the Germans. Consent was given to call into being a German Resettlement–Trust Society (*UTAG*), which took over the property of those who were leaving. It was to administer it

³¹J. Sobczak, as above, pp. 140–146.

and settle further financial accounts. The system of the transfer of value was also regulated. The Germans from Latvia were given a possibility of taking away considerable property. The restrictions were not big and concerned primarily the possibility of taking away foreign currency and noble metals. The Germans were allowed to take their family archives and some works of art³².

The actual departures started as early as the first half of October and embraced those persons who did not have to renounce the local citizenship, that is the citizens of the Reich and stateless persons (the holders of Nansen's passports). This was a considerable group. E.g. 1885 Reichsdeutsche and 1004 holders of Nansen's passports departed from Latvia alone in 1939³³.

It is worth adding that also some number of Jewish citizens of the Reich lived in Latvia. When the Germans were not eager to take them the minister of foreign affairs of Latvia, Munters, drew to it the attention of envoy Kotze. The latter promised to settle this problem, but only the next year. He explained that the Jews would be placed in the "Lublin reservation" projected for them³⁴.

At the same time preparations for the departure of the main body of the Germans were under way. Time was short, since the first ship was to put out as early as October 18. Endeavours were made to show efficiency and good organization. There were special stations where formalities were fixed, and at the same time some matters were being settled in the places of residence.

The property of these people, certainly considerable, started to be packed, so that soon all the suitcases and even wooden boards for trunks were sold out. Things came to such a point that people paid for suitcases with furniture and wireless sets. Also the German ships brought the packing. In one case nails for the wooden trunks were brought from the Reich by air. Everybody was engaged in it. Those who could not cope on their own were helped by the German Volunteer Service, called into being for the time of evacuation.

All these dealings were largely utilized in propaganda. Thus the press enlarged on the work of the teams of physicians who prepared the sick and disabled for travel. The readers were

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 152-156.

³³ I. Feldmanis, A. Stranga, M. Virsis, *Latvijas arpolitika un starptautiskais stavoklis*, Riga 1993, p. 354.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

informed of the collections of warm clothes for the population transplanted from the countryside and directed to transitory camps. The whole action was presented as a joint effort of the Germans. It was to prove their efficiency to the external world, and to encourage further departures.

On 30 October the "Rigasche Rundschau" newspaper published a new appeal of Intelmann and Kroeger to the Germans in Latvia, which reminded them of Hitler's call for departure. The authors appealed to national feelings, the sense of duty and discipline. They warned once again that those who would break away from the German national community and stay behind, would break their links with the German nation and suffer all the consequences³⁵.

Such categorical appeals, renewed with much consistency, were not accidental. The organizers of the resettlement soon realized that not all the Germans were eager to leave. As early as October 13 the envoy to Tallin, Frohwein, reported to the headquarters with alarm that the local press and oral propaganda tried to disturb the action of resettlement. There was talk of the uncertain future of the people resettled in Germany. He also asked for a more precise presentation of what was awaiting the resettled people in their new places of residence³⁶. Information action started. As we have already mentioned, the Germans were presented an encouraging vision of peace and prosperity "in the lands regained by the Reich". This, however, did not help. People did not stop hesitating, and in the weeks that followed their doubts even increased.

Already in the middle of the resettlement action, the leadership of the German minority in Latvia had to give up their declarations of the general wish of the Germans to leave. It became evident that several thousand Germans wanted to stay on.

It seems that this was due to the abatement of the initial panic, in the wake of which almost everybody wanted to escape. Meanwhile, nothing particularly threatening happened to the Baltic countries. The installation of the bases of the Red Army was not accompanied by any upheavals or riots. The troops that arrived concentrated in designated places. This had no visible influence on the internal life in Estonia and Latvia. The Soviet

³⁵ J. Sobczak, as above, pp. 158–159.

³⁶ D. Loeber, as above, doc. 99, p. 113.

side kept assuring them that it would not infringe on their sovereignty. The authorities, administration and police that were still in power continued their work. A conviction started to prevail among the Estonians and Latvians that perhaps not all had yet been lost, and that their neutrality would let them survive the war. This was not without influence on the public feeling of a substantial body of the Germans. They were increasingly tempted by the perspective of remaining in their country of birth.

The organizers of the resettlement were aware of this change in public feeling. Hence, they strove all the more to keep up the pace of this action and not to delay the departure by even one day. They tried to persuade the people by word and deed that the action could not be reversed. "It became a matter of prestige to the Germans to achieve the highest index of departures"³⁷.

On the occasion of farewell, the people who were leaving were assured that they were going to fulfil a great historical mission. However, the neutral observers emphasized that what struck them in the first place, was that the resettlement was carried out in an unbelievable hurry.

The German authorities sent to Estonia and Latvia their best liners, everything they could summon. A separate ship was reserved for pregnant women and mothers with small children. However, they also made use of the troopship "Oldenburg", which was hardly fit for this role. It offered only a few cabins, no toilets or berths. People had to sleep on the floor³⁸.

Generally, however, the conditions of the Germans' voyage were almost "luxurious". In official statements they called their cruise "a magnificent rest". The entertainment and games provided by the organizers, as well as four meals a day, sustained a cheerful atmosphere. Although dinners consisted of one course, they tasted "excellent". This made the authors of memoirs conclude that the warnings about the bad supplies of food in Germany, heard in Estonia and Latvia, were merely "tall stories"³⁹.

Soon, in six to eight weeks, the majority of the Germans left the Baltic countries. About 13.5 thousand departed from Estonia, and 52.5 thousand from Latvia. Almost all the members of old family stocks departed from their places of birth. Among them,

³⁷ D. Loeber, *Introduction*, p. (40).

³⁸ A. Topij, as above, pp. 414-415.

³⁹ J. Sobczak, as above, p. 288.

about 89 Stackelbergs, 75 Meydells, 56 Dehns, 55 zur Mühlens, 52 Schillings, 40 Buxhovdens, 32 Ungern-Sternbergs, 24 Renenkampfs, 20 Glasenapps and 20 Rosens left Estonia⁴⁰.

Various German associations and institutions stopped operating. For example on December 15 the Herder Institute of Riga and the Higher German School affiliated to it were dissolved. At the same time the "Rigasche Rundschau" published its last issue. This was a visible sign that the 700 year-long German presence in the east Baltic region was coming to an end.

In Estonia and Latvia the departure of the Germans initially aggravated the atmosphere of threat. Later, however, it was replaced by satisfaction. The two countries, which had recently regained their sovereignty, got rid of this troublesome national minority at its own request. The Germans had competed with Estonians and Latvians in various fields of economy, and dominated many professions. Their departure opened a wider field of activity and allowed the local population to gain better professional and business positions.

In the face of the departure of the Germans the Estonian press behaved with much restraint. For example the "Päevaleht" newspaper wrote that it had no time at the moment to criticize the local Germans or their Nazi ideology. However, the Estonian media were generally critical of the fact that the Germans were allowed to take away so much property.

In Latvia a more definite stand was taken on this issue. Some of the intelligentsia as well as the ruling circles did not hide their satisfaction at the departure of the Germans. At the session of the Chamber of Economy and Culture, President Karlis Ulmanis said, having the Germans in mind, "we will never see each other again". The traces of the age-long presence of the Germans started to be, in secrecy, effaced. Even the German inscriptions on the graves and signatures of the pictures in the churches were removed⁴².

All this was taking place at the time when a large group of the Germans were still there. Their numbers were estimated at about 7 thousand, 4 thousand of them in Latvia, and 3 thousand in Estonia. These Germans broke away from Hitler's orders and

⁴⁰ A. Topij, as above, p. 416.

⁴¹ Cit. from A. Topij, as above, pp. 417-418.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 418-419.

were stigmatized. Their supreme aim was to wait and see the end of the war in the houses where they were well-settled.

These hopes initially seemed realistic. However, in June 1940 a sudden reversal took place. The USSR, despite its previous promises, committed an act of open aggression against the Baltic States, aimed at their complete incorporation.

The Soviet authorities started to introduce a new order and dispossess the people both in the countryside and in towns. In face of the growing number of arrests, the atmosphere of threat was setting in. The Estonians and Latvians were not sure of their future. The Germans who were staying on shared these misgivings. Those who were hesitating and wanted to leave even earlier, suggested that their community should apologize to the German authorities, beg their forgiveness and permission to leave.

As can be seen from Himmler's notes, he treated these requests with much reserve. He reminded those Germans that they had already rejected the helping hand extended to them. At the most, he was willing to take into consideration a possibility of accepting mothers with their children⁴³.

At the same time the envoy to Tallin, Frohwein, repeatedly tried to obtain the acceptance of the requests voiced by those people. E.g. on 10 August 1940 he wrote that the departure of the Germans who still stayed on was becoming increasingly urgent, since they were deprived of any means of subsistence⁴⁴.

Under the pressure of these and other requests, Himmler's apparatus concerned with the issue of resettlement started taking into consideration the possibility of taking to Germany those compatriots who had stayed in the Baltic countries. A principle was adopted to divide them into the categories of "resettled people" and "refugees". The first group included those who gained this status during the first actions of resettlement and remained behind with the consent of the authorities of the Reich. The refugees were to include those who applied for departure only recently. The latter did not obtain any privileges, especially as far as material gain was concerned. They constituted an "uncertain element" and were to be directed exclusively to the territory of the Old Reich⁴⁵.

⁴³ ADAP, Series D, Vol. X, Frankfurt/M 1963, pp. 94–95.

⁴⁴ D. Loeber, as above, doc. 192, pp. 281–282.

⁴⁵ J. Sobczak, as above, p. 193.

Meanwhile, a curious phenomenon might be observed. The numbers of those who applied for departure were rapidly growing. Instead of the initially estimated 7 thousand, they surpassed more than 10 thousand in both countries taken together, and continued to show a growing tendency. It was becoming clear that many Estonians and Latvians were trying in this way to find a possibility of escaping from the Soviet Union.

The German authorities were perfectly aware of what was going on and exacerbated the rigours of this procedure. In many cases, for various reasons, they shut their eyes, allowing some Estonians and Latvians, under the pretext of having German relations, to prepare for departure.

On 10 January 1941 an agreement on the resettlement of the Germans who still stayed in Estonia and Latvia, as well as Lithuania (the latter presented a separate problem), was concluded within the framework of larger agreements between the USSR and Germany. On this basis, from February 11 till April 7, 1941, 7101 people left the Estonian SSR, and 10954 people left the Latvian SSR, that is 18055 people together⁴⁶. This was quite a lot. It was especially conspicuous in the case of Estonia, where the additional resettlement amounted to more than a half of the departures of 1939.

The majority of the Baltic Germans were directed to the Polish lands annexed by the Reich. 6 thousand people were settled in Pomerania, 56 thousand in the so-called Warthegau (19 thousand of which in Poznań alone, and 8.5 thousand in Łódź). This was a typical colonization.

They were generously endowed with land by the Nazi authorities, and received landed estates covering 137 thousand ha, although they left behind only 84 thousand ha. Apart from that, they received 1750 farms covering 78 thousand ha. A researcher into this problem, Andrzej Topij, emphasizes that the newcomers achieved quite a high material standing, sometimes higher than in their old places of residence. They were offered quick promotion in their economic activity, but also in civil service. They were even privileged in this respect in comparison to the "old" citizens of the Reich, since they were not required to obtain NSDAP certificates of political loyalty⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, table 2, p. 205.

⁴⁷ A. Topij, as above, p. 422.

No wonder that many Baltic Germans were glad of the situation that they had found in their new places of residence. The German press of that period carried many statements in which they expressed their joy and satisfaction because of acquiring well-furnished flats, doctors' offices, well-stocked shops, industrial works, craftsmen's workshops and farms. The photos of the Baltic Germans were presented to the domestic and foreign journalists with a commentary, that "all this has been provided by the German fatherland to its people". No word was uttered about where this "rich property" came from, or what had happened to its previous owners⁴⁸.

Many collections of memoirs and letters were issued at that time, as well as interviews with the Baltic Germans, where they spoke of their impressions concerning the standard of living in the new places. Let us take, for example, the impressions of "housewives". They boasted without any embarrassment of the riches they had acquired. They described the beautiful, comfortable, tastefully furnished flats that they could choose from. One of them boasted of having the good luck of getting the flat of a rich merchant. She mentioned the rooms, the bathroom, well-furnished kitchen, cellar, well-stocked larder, table service, dishes, crystal, bed-linen and beds ready for use. Profuse electric lighting. Fruit and vegetables that had not yet been picked in the garden. All this made this Baltic German woman feel perfectly at home in her new place merely after three days⁴⁹. These raptures were disarmingly frank. Yet they testified to the depth of the moral downfall that embraced all these people.

It should be added, however, that not all the Germans who arrived were of the same mind or acted in this way. E.g. in November 1941 the police of Łódź and SD that invigilated the community of the German newcomers reached the conclusion that many of them were not the right people for being settled in the annexed territories, since their attitude to the Poles diverged by far from what was required by the German authorities⁵⁰.

As we have already pointed out, the resettlement of the Germans from Estonia and Latvia was a precedent that entailed other actions of this kind. It was carried out at the order coming

⁴⁸ J. Sobczak, as above.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

from above, which completely disregarded the existing circumstances. It put an end to the presence of the German minority in the Baltic countries, where they had been well-settled for ages and in the history of which they played an important role. The author of a history of Estonia, Jan Lewandowski, writes that the departure of the Germans "brought to a close a whole era in the history of Estonian lands, including almost 700 years of German domination, which also substantially contributed to the shaping of the political, social and cultural picture of Estonia"⁵¹.

In this context it is once again worthwhile citing Janusz Sobczak, who concluded his exposition as follows: "History does not know any earlier examples of such a massive migration of one ethnic group in such a short time and at the initiative of its maternal country. It was exclusively due to the initiative of the Nazi Reich that during the Second World War the German minorities were withdrawn mainly from the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe"⁵².

Such an action might be initiated and carried out only by a despotic totalitarian regime. Of much value is the statement by the German author and researcher into this problem, Dietrich Loeber, who admitted that "the resettlement of Germans from Estonia and Latvia in the years 1939–1941 appears to be one of the measures applied by imperialistic policy. It served the Nazi regime as an instrument of national and racial policy. This resettlement should be understood as an action of a state governed in a totalitarian manner"⁵³.

If we look today for the sources of the "resettlements" and "expulsions" of the German population during the Second World War and after its close, we cannot overlook the fact that all this action was initiated by the totalitarian Third Reich which implemented it with inexorable determination.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

⁵¹ J. Lewandowski, *Historia Estonii (The History of Estonia)*, Wrocław 2002, p. 215.

⁵² J. Sobczak, as above, p. 357.

⁵³ D. Loeber, as above, *Introduction*, p. (19).