

# THE PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN GERMAN-OCCUPIED ESTONIA, 1941-1944

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## **Abstract:**

*This paper aims to explain why certain elements were present in the expectations of the Estonian people and how, in the end, Estonians perceived the activities of German administration. On the basis of the analysis it is evident that a few central elements were distinguishable. The expectations consisted of several universal elements while others derived their roots from local and time-specific conditions and the history of Estonian-German relations. Similarly, there were remarkable divergences as to how different levels and parts of administration were perceived by the local population. For instance, the highest German representative in Estonia, Generalkommissar Karl-Siegmund Litzmann was seen in a different light than the rest of the administration and different hopes were placed on him. The course of war also brought along changes in opinion and mood of the Estonians.*

*The source material of this study mainly consists of the surveillance reports of the German Security Police and other relevant documents of the German occupation administration, including those of the Estonian Self-Administration. Revealing examples of both good and bad governance exist in the original material.*

## **Rezumat:**

*Lucrarea urmărește să explice de ce au existat anumite elemente în așteptările poporului estonian și cum au perceput estonienii, în cele din urmă, activitățile administrației germane. Pe baza analizei efectuate devine evident că s-au distins câteva trăsături centrale. Așteptările au integrat mai multe teme universale, în timp*

ce altele și-au derivat rădăcinile din condițiile locale și specifice momentului dat și istoriei relațiilor estoniano-germane. În mod similar, au existat divergențe importante în ceea ce privește modul în care diferite niveluri și aspecte ale administrației au fost percepute de populația locală. De exemplu, cel mai înalt reprezentant german din Estonia, Generalkommissar Karl-Siegmund Litzmann, a fost văzut într-o lumină diferită de restul administrației și s-au pus speranțe diferite în el. Cursul războiului a adus, de asemenea, schimbări în opinia și starea de spirit a estonienilor.

Materialul sursă al acestui studiu constă, în principal, din rapoartele de supraveghere ale Poliției de Securitate germane și din alte documente relevante ale administrației de ocupație germane, inclusiv ale Autoguvernerii Estoniene. Exemple elocvente de bună și rea guvernare coexistă în documentele de arhivă.

**Keywords:** Estonia, German occupation, World War II, governance, ethnic relations, images

## Introduction

It can be argued that if any governance wants to succeed and be perceived as a “good governance” it must follow certain universal principles. Here the most essential concepts are “leadership” and “strategic communication”. As a starting point, during the Second World War the Estonians expected the same kind of behavior, exercise of power and governance from the Germans as people in general would. Recent studies on leadership have shown that in spite of their cultural background, people very much appreciate the same features in their leaders. “Exceptional leadership” and its components are usually referred to with the term deep leadership (or transformational leadership). The four cornerstones of deep leadership are building trust between the leader and subordinates, an inspirational way to motivate, intellectual stimulation and an individual approach to subordinates.<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1990s, strategic communication has seen increased interest in the areas of research and practical use. Areas in which strategic communication have been applied include foreign and domestic affairs

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Vesa Nissinen, *Deep Leadership* (Helsinki: Talentum, 2006); S. Asiya Z. Kazmi & Tommi Kinnunen, “Deep Leadership Coaching Effectiveness, in a Corporate Scenario, Constitutes Proactive Leadership Solution for Optimal Team Formation”, in *European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.31 No.2 (2012), pp. 166-189; I. Kotlyar & L. Karakowsky, “Leading Conflict? Linkages Between Leader Behaviors and Group Conflict”, in *Small Group Research*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2006), 377-403; B. M. Bass et. al., ed., *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994).

(policy), military affairs, economics, communication and management. The term "strategic communication" has been in broad use through the last two decades particularly within the Anglo-American language area, and from there it has spread throughout the world. There has been some amount of debate among scholars as to what "strategic communication" means exactly. Based on this debate it is clear that no one, accepted definition of strategic communication exists. However, when the core content of strategic communication is examined, it is apparent that there is a fairly large consensus among different researchers regarding the basic elements of the concept. D. M. Murphy, for example, has summarized the thought in one sentence: "Strategic communication is, at its essence, the orchestration of actions, words, and images to create cognitive information effects".<sup>2</sup> Consistent interpretations are given from several other researchers.<sup>3</sup>

A more practical approach is to use the short program of the United States Department of Defence, prepared in 2008, as a point of reference to identify the occurrence of strategic communication in cases earlier than those in recent history. In this context, the program is not interpreted as the "sole legitimate" descriptor, but it is only one possible program of principles. However, it contains a wealth of issues raised by researchers and those defining strategic communication, and this is why it is well-suited as a descriptive point of comparison, or a theoretical starting point. In the

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<sup>2</sup> D. M. Murphy, "In Search of the Art and Science of Strategic Communication", in *Parameters. US Army War College Quarterly*. Winter 2009-10 (2010), p. 108. URL: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/dime/getDoc.cfm?fileID=275>, accessed at 14.11.2013.

<sup>3</sup> C. Bockstette, "Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication Management Techniques" in *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Occasional Paper Series*. No. 20. December 2008, p. 9. URL: <http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/en/component/content/article/43-cat-pubs-occ-papers/633-art-pubs-occ-papers-20.html?directory=19>, accessed at 14.11.2013; K. Hallahan, D. Holtzhausen, B. Van Ruler, D. Verčič, K. Siramesh, "Defining strategic communication, in *International Journal of Strategic Communication*. Vol. 1. Issue 1, 2007, pp. 3-7, 17; R. Halloran, "Strategic Communication", in *Parameters. US Army War College Quarterly*. Autumn 2007, pp. 5-6. URL: <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/07autumn/halloran.htm>, accessed at 18.1.2013; J. Mahoney, "Horizons in Strategic Communication: Theorising a Paradigm Shift", in *International Journal of Strategic Communication*. Vol. 5. Issue 3 (2011), pp. 143-146; E. Pashentsev, "The Strategic Communication of Russia in Latin America and its interpretation in the USA", in *Государственное управление. Электронный вестник*. Выпуск № 33. Август 2012 г, accessed at 13.11.2013; C. Paul, "Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations", in *Rand Corporation Occasional Paper*. (2009) URL: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP250.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP250.html), accessed at 14.11.2013.

“Principles of Strategic Communication” compiled by the U.S. Department of Defence the concept and the principles of applying it are condensed into nine main categories:

(1) Leadership-Driven. Leaders must lead communication process; (2) Credible. Perception of truthfulness and respect; (3) Understanding. Deep comprehension of others; (4) Dialogue. Multi-faceted exchange of ideas; (5) Pervasive. Every action sends a message; (6) Unity of Effort. Integrated and coordinated; (7) Results-Based. Tied to desired endstate; (8) Responsive. Right audience, message, time, and place; (9) Continuous. Analysis, planning, execution, assessment.<sup>4</sup>

This article examines the governance of Germany during the occupation of Estonia in 1941–1944. At the same time it examines the “deep leadership” and “strategic communication” of German authorities. It is clear that during this time, the terms did not exist, but research questions are not anachronistic when one remembers that the same thing can be and has been expressed in different ways. In Germany and elsewhere during World War II, the term mainly in use was propaganda. The goals and means of propaganda closely resembled and resemble those of strategic communication, although there are differences that can be found, relating mostly to the difference of the historical situation and the more thorough knowledge of today in relation to the mechanisms and possibilities of human communication. Strategic communication is also understood as a more comprehensive function than how propaganda was understood.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this does not conflict with the fact that decades ago, agencies of propaganda operated quite similarly according to principles of strategic communication that were outlined later.

In addition to theoretical contemplation, this study also analyses the main points of what taking these principles into consideration meant in practice in Estonia during World War II. Estonia was occupied by Germany from the summer of 1941 to autumn of 1944, during which time surveillance of individual’s sentiments and propaganda work were coordinated by

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<sup>4</sup> United States of America, Department of Defence. *Principles of Strategic Communication*. August 2008, p. 4. URL: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/dime/getDoc.cfm?fileID=142>, accessed at 18.1.2013.

<sup>5</sup> Garth S. Jowett & Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), pp. 1–7; Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1–15.

Germany's Security Police.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the German ruling power had to cooperate with the Estonian Self-Administration (*Eesti Omaavalitsus*), created as a local ancillary organisation for the occupying administration, posed its own challenge. The viewpoints and goals of the Estonian functionaries did not always coincide seamlessly with those of the Germans. The same problem applied to ordinary Estonians' opinions and hopes, which were often contradictory to the views of the Germans.<sup>7</sup> Thus, getting the Estonians to support the war objectives of the Germans required carefully deliberated propaganda work and utilisation of the principles of strategic communication.

In the summer of 1942, Dr. Martin Sandberger, the head of the German Security Police in Estonia, compiled an extensive report on matters within his own field. The material was acquired during the first year of occupation, between July 1941 and June 1942, but the report also included a detailed evaluation of matters on which the German occupation administration should concentrate attention in the future in order to retain and strengthen the willingness of Estonians to cooperate.<sup>8</sup> This report is a key document for the analysis of Security Police opinions concerning the condition of "strategic communication" and its developmental needs. In other surviving archival material from the Security Police, for the years 1941-1944, the same concerns often arise, though in a simpler form. The most essential part of the prevailing material (bi-monthly, monthly and annual reports) has been published as a source collection.<sup>9</sup> A comprehensive report from the summer of 1944 is otherwise similar to that from the summer of 1942 but makes fewer recommendations for further action.<sup>10</sup>

### **Governance executed by the German administration**

The general gratitude of Estonians towards Germany, as Germany had liberated Estonia from Soviet occupation, explains the positive attitude

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<sup>6</sup> Tiit Noormets, "Saateks", in *Eesti Julgeolekupolitsei aruanded 1941-1944* (Tallinn: Riigiarhiiv, 2002), pp. 11-15.

<sup>7</sup> Kristo Nurmis, *Das fein geschliffene Glas. Saksa okupatsiooni aegne propaganda organisatsioon Eestis 1941-1944*. Magistritöö (unpublished M.A. thesis), (Tartu: Tartu Ülikool, 2011), pp. 128-131.

<sup>8</sup> The original document has been published in the source collection: Tiit Noormets, ed., *Eesti Julgeolekupolitsei aruanded* [Reports of the Security Police in Estonia] 1941-1944 (hereafter cited as EJA), (Tallinn: Riigiarhiiv, 2002), pp. 21-86.

<sup>9</sup> EJA, pp. 87-288.

<sup>10</sup> EJA, pp. 289-363.

of Estonians towards the German exercise of power and governance. The fact that Estonia lived with a military regime (*Militärverwaltung*) until 5 December 1941 further explains why this attitude remained quite positive for a relatively long time. As long as Estonia was a zone of the front, it was likely that Estonians would be prepared to accept exceptional circumstances and the related strict regulations and governance from the quarters of the German occupation administration. It was probably thought that temporary difficulties, for example having no share in the governance must just be withstood, as on the front and in rear areas, it could not be expected that things would be organized as they were under a peace-time model.<sup>11</sup>

According to reports, financial and economic problems, especially food and goods shortages, undermined people's attitudes already during the fall of 1941, but dissatisfaction was not directly oriented towards the German administration but in its quality there was a more common annoyance with the exceptional circumstances and the scarcity and breakdown of normal life which these brought with them.<sup>12</sup> However, towards the end of the year the Estonians still awaited more eagerly a transition to civilian rule, which it was believed would bring significantly more possibility for Estonians to decide on the affairs of their own country.<sup>13</sup> The transition from a military to civilian administration occurred on 5 December 1941, and by March 1942 Germany organized a detailed division of labor between the German occupation administration and the Estonian Self-Administration.<sup>14</sup>

During the period from the summer of 1941 until the winter of 1941–1942, it appears that Estonians largely accepted the German governance, at least as a temporary organization, and tried to cooperate with the new rulers. According to reports, Estonians generally accommodated the demands of German military and civilian authorities and wanted to obey them.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October–December 1941, Eesti Riigiarhiiv [Estonian National Archives] (hereafter cited as ERA) R-59-1-84, l. 73, 115, 122, 178, 231.

12 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October–December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 1, 6-9, 11-13, 48-49, 142, 156-157, 188-193.

13 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October–December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 183; Political Police report (All Estonia), December 1941, ERA R-64-1-821, l. 3-6.

14 Nurmis 2011, pp. 18, 27; Indrek Paavle, "Estonian Self-Administration in 1941–1944", in Toomas Hiio et. al., ed., *Estonia 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (Tallinn, 2006), pp. 542-545.

15 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October–December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 26-27, 72-73, 142, 156-157, 188-192, 221-222, 240, 270, 289-

Estonians particularly accommodated German soldiers with positivity and showed them help, friendship and understanding in practical matters.<sup>16</sup> On a general level the Estonians desired a German victory over the Soviet Union and saw that the future of Estonia after the war would be tied inevitably to Germany in one way or another. They were also quite convinced of a future German victory on the Eastern Front.<sup>17</sup>

German propagandists had moderately favorable conditions in which to operate in Estonia in 1941. From the German point of view the war was going well and until December it seemed possible that Germany would indeed succeed in defeating the Soviet Union before the end of the year. The military prowess shown by Germany and the dominance it had achieved in Europe gave Germany an authority that improved the delivery of German strategic communication among its target audience. Propagandists had enough work explaining military operations during the autumn without that they would have had to make information much more propagandistic. In other words, the reality spoke for itself and Estonians seemed to be largely convinced of Germany's military superiority as well as of Germany's ability to win the major war underway. As one important factor, this undoubtedly built trust between the leaders and subordinates and thus met the first criterion of deep leadership.

In the press, the German invasion of Estonia was also easy to present as the liberation of Estonia from Soviet domination. From the very beginning the Estonians felt that they had been liberated,<sup>18</sup> and all the propagandists had to do was keep this idea afloat. The primary method selected was a regular reminder of this through different media channels (especially radio and the press) and by instilling gratitude in the minds of Estonians. It appears that gratitude was particularly strong towards German soldiers, and

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290; Political Police report (All Estonia), December 1941, ERA R-64-1-821, l. 3-5; report of the public mood in the occupied areas of the USSR, 1 August 1941, document published in Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938-1942* (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 371.

16 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October-December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 12, 22, 26-27, 32, 121, 169, 176, 188-191, 202, 207, 286-287, 301.

17 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October-December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 1, 19-20, 26-28, 50-53, 115, 121, 123, 156, 214, 217, 289, 301; Political Police report (All Estonia), December 1941, ERA R-64-1-821, l. 3-5.

18 Report of the public mood in the occupied areas of the USSR, 1 August 1941, document published in Krausnick and Wilhelm 1981, p. 371; report of Sonderkommando 1 a, August 1941, document published *ibid.*, p. 372.

also had a lasting quality after the first few months of war.<sup>19</sup> As one of the objectives of German propaganda was to create a positive image of Germans for Estonians on the part of the military and soldiers this goal succeeded well. It is also psychologically understandable that the gratitude of Estonians was focused precisely on soldiers, as in practice they had driven out the Soviet troops from Estonia, even at the danger of their own lives and health. Clear political and other social nuances and differences of opinion were also not related to military “liberation” as to other areas of life. Almost all Estonians agreed that the downfall of the Soviet regime was a positive thing, but there was no prevailing consensus on how things were to be organized afterwards.<sup>20</sup>

Estonians perceived cooperation with Germany above all as soldierly comradeship, a struggle against a common enemy, instead of an actual ideological alliance. German propagandists did not have to teach Estonians the idea of soldierly comradeship, but rather they attempted to prevent the spread of the idea among Estonians. For Germany, it was more advantageous to emphasize the sovereign role of the German forces in liberating Estonia, as in this way it was easier to instill gratitude towards Germany in the minds of Estonians and rationalize why in return Estonians had to accept German dominance in Estonia. Estonians for their part regarded the matter as one in which they themselves had played a significant role in the expulsion of Soviet troops from the country since Estonian partisans had fought on the German side. On the basis of this, Estonians expected that they would be treated as equal allies and partners.<sup>21</sup>

When analyzing the differences appearing among Estonians as to how German governance was seen in 1941, the most obvious divergence appears between the highly educated and the so-called public at large. Numerous reports on public opinion indicate that from the start, the educated class was the most critical towards Germany. Thoughts of restoring Estonian independence or at least of large-scale autonomy existed precisely

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19 Weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October-December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 12, 22, 26-7, 72, 157, 176, 188-191, 202, 221, 225, 231, 266, 283, 286-287, 301.

20 Report of Sonderkommando 1 a, August 1941, document published in Krausnick and Wilhelm 1981, pp. 371-2; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, pp. 21-30.

21 Annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, pp. 45-46. See also Nurmis 2011, pp. 30-31.

among the political and cultural elite. The same group was also more strongly in favor of an alliance with Finland and more generally sought to develop solutions by which Germany's grip on Estonia would not become too binding.<sup>22</sup> It is plausible that the right to national self-determination possessed the most importance to the elites of state and culture of the independent period. The idea of nationality itself was originally a movement of the educated that gained its strongest supporters from the educated classes, even during the interwar period. The educated classes were also more used to reflecting on social issues than the general public, and to seeking different solutions to them from a variety of theoretical perspectives.<sup>23</sup>

The educated classes were also better qualified to identify propaganda and evaluate it more critically. This is why any propaganda efforts had poorer than average outcomes among the elite than among the general public. Germany's strategic communication, for example that of the "united fate" of Germany and Estonia and of Germany's future victory, was more successful among these recipients in the summer and early fall of 1941, when the successes of German forces on the Eastern Front were more influential and impressive. In this respect, it was estimated that the common people were almost unanimously in support of the aforementioned position.<sup>24</sup> At that point, military setbacks and the abuses of the German governance had not yet significantly interfered with the efforts of German propagandists, but in these efforts it was easy to rely on the current strategic situation of the military.

The turning point towards a more clearly critical attitude towards the German governance can be considered the winter of 1941-1942. When the transition to a civilian administration did not bring any desired changes with it, disappointment began to take over from gratitude and a sincere desire to cooperate with the German occupation administration. By the fall of 1942,

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22 Report of Sonderkommando 1 a, August 1941, document published in Krausnick and Wilhelm 1981, pp. 371-372; reports of the public mood in the occupied areas of the USSR, 26 September 1941, 30 September 1941, documents published *ibid.*, pp. 374-375; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 - June 1942, EJA, p. 23. Nurmis 2011, p. 49.

23 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 131-146.

24 Report of the public mood in the occupied areas of the USSR, 30 September 1941, document published in Krausnick and Wilhelm 1981, p. 375; weekly reports from the agents of the Political Police in the Narva region, October-December 1941, ERA R-59-1-84, l. 1, 20, 50-51, 115, 156, 217; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 - June 1942, EJA, pp. 21-27.

the Estonian view of the German governance had developed into a division with two sides. On one hand, the archival material shows that the basic attitude of Estonians remained positive. There was belief in a German victory in the world war and it was hoped for, particularly on the Eastern Front. A respectful and friendly attitude towards German soldiers remained steadfast. In addition, the Estonians remained respectful towards Germany and its highest administration.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, by the summer of 1942 the Estonians had already witnessed how a portion of the German civil authorities seemed to be greedy, incompetent and disdainful towards Estonians.<sup>26</sup> It appears that in spite of this, roughly until the fall of 1942, Estonians still hoped that the situation would be corrected. A large number of Estonians believed or wanted to believe that the abuses of the German governance were temporary. It was perceived that as Germany's best had been recruited into the armed forces, in a sense, weaker individuals remained for the needs of the civil administration. The fact that trust was maintained in Germany and the highest governance reveals an attitude according to which the cause of the problems was not regarded as the German governance itself, as a structural or principle model of power. The problem was regarded more as a consequence of inferior individuals gaining access to administrative machinery, in which case the issue was about the exception, not the rule.

The fact that food and goods shortages continued raised growing discontent during 1942. This was related to growing dissatisfaction with production standards, in other words requirements that were set for all production plants from individual houses to factories and all of the persons working in them. These requirements were considered too much, especially when at the same time the basic material needs of the population could not be satisfactorily met. Defects were also seen in the allocation of scarce resources, in which complete fairness had not been guaranteed, according to the perception of the common people.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 – October 1942, EJA, 114–115, 119, 128, 135, 180, 193, 199, 206–207, 212–213.

<sup>26</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 – October 1942, EJA, 149, 157, 174, 184; Annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, 21, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 – October 1942, EJA, 95, 101–107, 110, 113, 117, 120–126, 147–158, 163–168, 175–176, 186, 201–205.

The second transition point mentioned earlier in the article regarding Estonian attitudes towards the German governance is located a little later in the fall of 1942, more specifically, in October–November. The main explanatory factor was the reversal of Germany's fortunes in the war. Until then, the mood of Estonians had remained good in spite of the sorrows of everyday life, wartime shortages and burdensome requirements, and the uncertainty of the future. As long as the war went well for Germany and its allies, there remained a belief among Estonians that after the temporary difficulties of wartime there would be a better time of peace. The relative prosperity of prewar times would be restored and Estonia would be given a place in “the new Europe”, a place in which the unusually large (for example, in comparison to Latvia and Lithuania) contribution of Estonia towards victory would be recognized.

Until now, Germany's victorious warfare and particularly the liberation of Estonia from Soviet occupation had, in the minds of Estonians, legitimized the German governance in a certain way. As a result, some of the perceived grievances in governance could be forgiven, or at least attempts could be made to understand them. This basic situation changed throughout the fall of 1942. Reports on the public mood provide a relatively uniform assertion that by December 1942 at the latest, Estonians had made a clear strategic re-evaluation. By the end of the year, the situation was such that the Estonians still hoped for a German victory over the Soviet Union, but the earlier certainty of a victory had changed to hope, accompanied by fear of a possible return to a Soviet regime. At the same time, the belief in a German victory in the world war had been seriously shaken: most were convinced that in the end, the Allies would win the war, in which case the status of Estonia would be difficult to predict. There was a belief that the Allies could not, and perhaps did not even wish to block the ambitions of the Soviet Union in the Baltic region, if Germany was not able to first completely defeat the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the obvious change to all in the power relations of the world war quickly eroded the authority of the German governance. If Germany was not able to protect Estonia from Soviet terror, then what good was Germany to the Estonians? The previously observed abuses of power by the occupation administration, to which had been turned a partial blind eye, rose

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<sup>28</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), October 1942 – December 1942, EJA, 187, 215–219, 237–238, 245, 261–262.

into people's minds and became a topic of conversation with a whole new intensity.<sup>29</sup> As early as the end of 1942, Estonians began to generally equate Germany's governance with the Soviet Union; no significant differences were seen between them. These feelings deepened further during 1943.<sup>30</sup> In spite of deep disappointment, the vast majority of Estonians still remained of the view that if they were to choose one of two evils, Germany or the Soviet Union, the scale would tip towards Germany. Although Estonia's future under German subordination was seen as uncertain and overall, the German governance gave rise to continuing resentment, it was feared that a new Soviet occupation would lead to the destruction of the entire nation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the decision to continue to fight alongside Germany was made, even though the relationship was no longer based on a feeling of alliance inspired by common goals.

On the basis of the reports it is apparent that during the summer of 1944, the interest of Estonians was focused first and foremost on the events of the war and on their direct consequences for Estonia. The German withdrawal on all fronts had caused deep disappointment and fear of the future. The main concern was the feared withdrawal of German troops from Estonia, and another comparable one was fear that the Soviet forces would reach the Gulf of Riga. As a consequence of this, Estonia would be encircled, and even possibilities for a small-scale evacuation of the population would disappear. It seems that in a small portion of the population, the situation brought about the will to go to battle, while the majority leaned in the direction of apathy or panic.<sup>32</sup> In any case, in such circumstances, questions about the different forms that the German occupation administration's governance took had become a minor side-issue. During the summer of 1944, the large majority of the population was indifferent to the theoretical problems relating to governance, which again can be considered psychologically credible. If one's own as well as the existence of the whole

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<sup>29</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), October 1942 – December 1942, EJA, 186–190, 201–202, 215–220, 236–240, 245–247, 261–263.

<sup>30</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), October 1942 – December 1943, EJA, pp. 199–202, 237–238, 246, 269–270; report of the head of the Security Police (Estonian section), June 1944, EJA, pp. 289–295.

<sup>31</sup> Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), February 1943 – December 1943, EJA, pp. 267–268, 277–279; report of the head of the Security Police (Estonian section), June 1944, EJA, p. 306.

<sup>32</sup> Report of the head of the Security Police (Estonian section), June 1944, EJA, p. 306–309.

community is threatened, other issues are naturally pushed aside when all resources are concentrated in the struggle for survival.

As regards Estonian perceptions, the distinction between the Baltic Germans and Germans in general is a specific matter that can be shortly discussed. In reports on public opinion beginning especially from the fall of 1942 it was apparent that the Estonians feared that the Baltic Germans would come back to Estonia and take power into their hands again. The social leadership of Baltic Germans had been defeated immediately after Estonia became independent, and in the years 1939-1940 almost all Baltic Germans had emigrated to the Warthegau district in occupied Western Poland or other parts of Germany. Not very many returned to Estonia during the war in the service of the German occupation administration, but even individual cases attracted attention and worried Estonians. It is also apparent that the mode of operation of the German occupation administration brought to mind the governance and attitudes of the Baltic Germans for Estonians. Towards the end of the war the attitude that Germany's Germans had been inept and arrogant like the Baltic Germans and had not taken into account the interests of Estonians became common among Estonians.<sup>33</sup>

This can be regarded as a remarkable failure of strategic communication from the German perspective, as in the situation of 1941 the Estonians clearly expected that officials coming from Germany would be different: they would relate to Estonians more as equals and in a more friendly way than the Baltic Germans had traditionally done. For reasons that were understandable, in German strategic communication, Germans of the Reich (*Reichsdeutsche*) could not be confronted with Baltic Germans, thus fishing for favor for the German occupation administration, which consisted almost entirely of Germans from the Reich. However, in practice, the apparent shortcomings of the German governance created sentiments that fought against the interests of Germany. The almost self-evident goal was to win the trust of Estonians and to present a positive image of Germany and Germans<sup>34</sup> but the results were rather weak – the image of Germany and the German governance in Estonia was in 1944 more negative than it had been in the summer of 1941.

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33 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), September 1942 – December 1943, EJA, pp. 166-167, 173, 252-253, 258-259, 262-266, 272-274, 279-282.

34 Annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, pp. 29-30.

### **Governance executed by the Estonian Self-Administration**

As mentioned above, the transition from a military to civilian administration occurred on 5 December 1941, and by March 1942 Germany organized a detailed division of labor between the German occupation administration and the Estonian Self-Administration (*Eesti Omaavalitsus*).<sup>35</sup> Ordinary people waited for the Self-Administration to become a real wielder of power, which would operate as a near equal in cooperation with Germany. In February 1942 (also in 1943), before Estonia's Independence Day (February 24) there were even rumors of a return of Estonian independence or at least autonomy under a German protectorship,<sup>36</sup> but here as in previous hopes, the Estonians were disappointed. Behind the scenes the Estonian Self-Administration only had the role of enforcing the regulations of the German occupation administration. However, Estonian larger public were not aware of these realities in the beginning.

Governance executed by the Estonian Self-Administration meant, in practice, that the Self-Administration seemed to have an independent role. As commonly experienced by ordinary Estonians it was exactly their "own" national administrative body that gave the orders and guidelines concerning everyday life. Consequently, *Eesti Omaavalitsus* also bore the responsibility for successes and failures of governance in the eyes of Estonians. As Germany invaded the area the situation of all three Baltic countries was otherwise identical (the same Soviet occupation with the same defects), but reports on the public mood show that among Estonians, Germany and Germans were regarded in a more positive light after the invasion. The Estonians also more actively participated in various collection campaigns in support of the war effort, and in relation to the population, from the summer of 1941 onwards there were the largest numbers of Estonian volunteers serving in the German forces.<sup>37</sup>

As such, even in reality, the portion of Estonians was greater than that of the Latvians and Lithuanians fighting on the German side. It may also

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35 Nurmis 2011, pp. 18, 27; Paavle 2006, pp. 542-5.

36 Monthly report of the Political Police (All Estonia), February 1943, EJA, pp. 267-8. See also Argo Kuusik, "Public Sentiments", in Hiio 2006, p. 614.

37 Reports of the public mood in the occupied areas of the USSR, 1 August 1941, 26 September 1941, 30 September 1941, documents published in Krausnick and Wilhelm 1981, pp. 370-375; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, p. 22, 27. See also Alvin Isberg, *Zu den Bedingungen des Befreiers: Kollaboration und Freiheitsstreben in dem von Deutschland besetzten Estland 1941 bis 1944* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992), p. 45.

for a significant part explain why the Estonians had a more positive attitude towards German power than the Latvians and Lithuanians. Namely, this phenomenon can be explained by the rules of social psychology, by which a joint effort to overcome common difficulties is the most powerful factor uniting people. It more than anything else is effective in removing prejudices between groups and increasing mutual sympathy.<sup>38</sup>

At least until the fall of 1942, Estonians had the notion that the Estonian Self-Administration had quite a lot of power and possibility to at least influence economic and other issues related to the maintenance of the population. According to the reports on the public mood, in the opinion of ordinary Estonians, Estonia's Self-Administration had done its work poorly and indeed bore the main responsibility for the shortcomings observed in everyday life.<sup>39</sup> The German occupation administration was seen to be partly responsible as it held the office of higher power, but this did not yet generally lead to the conclusion that there would have been fundamental flaws in the German governance and in the occupation administration.

In reports on the public mood throughout 1943, the same grievances as before remained apparent; only the degree of criticism increased. The German governance was now seen as bearing the main responsibility for the poor situation of Estonia. The role of the Estonian Self-Administration as a mere underling was already well publicized, which certainly did not reduce the disappointment felt by the people in it. The image of the Self-Administration as an apparent user of power was then just as poor as the image of the German occupation administration as the real user of power.<sup>40</sup> As such, the perceived situation violated several principles of good governance based on successful strategic communication, above all those of credibility, conception of truthfulness and respect, comprehension of others, and real dialogue. For instance, multi-faceted exchange of ideas was clearly non-existing.

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38 Michael Argyle, *The Social Psychology of Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 38-55; Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, *Social Psychology* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1986), pp. 310-313.

39 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 - October 1942, EJA, pp. 95, 105-109, 124, 149, 175-176, 190. See also Nurmis 2011, p. 27.

40 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), February 1943 - December 1943, EJA, 266-288.

## **Governance executed by the leader of the administration: General Karl-Siegmund Litzmann**

Estonians had a particularly good impression of Estonia's Commissioner-General, *SA-Obergruppenführer* Karl-Siegmund Litzmann, who was regarded as being sympathetic towards Estonia and Estonians as a people.<sup>41</sup> In the summer of 1942 Estonians thought that there were unspecified "centers" of the German administration, either at the level of *Reichskommissariat Ostland* or in Berlin, which did not sufficiently understand or care about the conditions in Estonia. It was believed that Litzmann or some other "rational" leaders would have handled Estonia's affairs better if these 'centers' would not get involved in things.<sup>42</sup>

The reactions of Estonians described by the reports and the interpretations of the situation at the time are psychologically plausible. In crisis situations, people turn more than they normally would in their expectations to leaders who are visible, who are believed to be able to solve problems better than any faceless civil service would be able to. At the same time, mistrust is placed on the latter, and in people's opinions, the responsibility for problems easily falls on the lower-level decision-makers and executive organization.<sup>43</sup> In the case of populations of the former Russian Empire, including the Estonians and Finns, this has often been referred to as the faith in the "good Tsar".<sup>44</sup> Senior-level leaders, upon whom high expectations are placed, then have some time to show themselves worthy of these expectations. However, this time is not indefinite. In Estonia's situation of 1942, the "good Tsar" was *Generalkommissar* Litzmann, and the faith of Estonians in him remained high even when the rest of the administration was already regarded as a failure. Criticism of Litzmann began to increase only near the end of 1943.

This was reflected, for example, in the fact that Estonians valued the habit of Litzmann and a few other higher German officials to go amongst the

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41 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 – October 1942, EJA, pp. 114-115, 119, 128, 135, 180, 193, 199, 206-207, 212-213. See also Nurmis 2011, p. 33.

42 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 – October 1942, EJA, pp. 206-207, 221; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 – June 1942, EJA, p. 22.

43 Gergen and Gergen 1986, pp. 262-70, 333-6.

44 Marshall Poe, "What Did Russians Mean When They Called Themselves "Slaves of the Tsar"?", in *Slavic Review* 57 (1998), pp. 585-608.

people in different parts of Estonia. In such situations, they rubbed shoulders freely with ordinary people, listened to their opinions, and in a psychologically able manner, encouraged them further, whether their problems were related to working conditions, material well-being or broader societal issues. The fact that Litzmann generally did not promise anything that was impossible to fulfill also aroused respect, even if, in being denied, the matter was basically a disappointment. Relating things that would cause disappointment honestly was part of building trust in encounters. In the same way, Litzmann's public appearances and speeches that were published in the Estonian press were evaluated positively among the people.<sup>45</sup> Even in this respect, opinions did not begin to divide until late 1943.

It can also be surmised that in his task, Commissioner-General Litzmann was also Germany's most effective strategic communication worker in Estonia. Hard-working footwork among the people, socializing with ordinary citizens across the country and declarations that took into account the national feelings of Estonians all created a picture in the minds of Estonians of what the German governance could be at its best. On different occasions Litzmann praised the Estonians, and considering the circumstances, showed a quite far-reaching understanding towards the aspirations of Estonians. Leadership by example is usually the best leadership, therefore Litzmann's personal efforts cannot be underestimated in considering why the desire of Estonians to assist Germany in its war efforts remained higher throughout the entire war than, for example, that of the Latvians and Lithuanians. Litzmann also clearly did not gather sympathy only as an individual, but as Germany's highest representative in Estonia, he created a positive image of Germany and of Germans as a whole.

Litzmann's success as a "strategic communication worker" was also certainly influenced by the fact that his actions appear to have been based in his real opinions. In other words, he did not have to pretend to be sympathetic towards Estonians. If Litzmann's expressed sympathy towards Estonia had only been mere tactic, it would have likely become known one way or another and weakened his credibility. In this context, it can be briefly noted that because of his views, Litzmann also ended up in difficulties with Hinrich Lohse, the *Reichskommissar* of Ostland, as well as Heinrich Himmler,

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45 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 - October 1942, EJA, pp. 114-115, 119, 128, 135, 180, 193, 199, 206-207, 212-213; annual report of the head of Sipo and SD, July 1941 - June 1942, EJA, pp. 22-23.

*Reichsführer-SS*, whose attitudes towards the Baltic nations were significantly cruder.<sup>46</sup> The internal disputes of the German occupation administration as such are not the subject of this paper, but the situation is worth noting as it helps explain Litzmann's success in his strategic communication. The rumors around Estonia of Litzmann ending up in difficulties because of his excessive sympathy towards Estonia appear to have increased his popularity among Estonians as well as the loyalty of Estonians towards Germany's occupation administration operating in Estonia.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusions

During the German occupation of Estonia (1941-1944) the German holders of power tried to overcome the opposition of the Estonians and make them loyal to German rule and willing to promote German war endeavors. To a great extent, the success or failure of this aim depended on how the German administration succeeded in fulfilling the local population's expectations of good governance and meeting their current everyday needs.

The most important common denominator for all the criticism shown towards the German governance was the feeling of inequality experienced by Estonia's residents. The Estonians hoped to be treated on an equal footing with the Germans, but in many ways, the Germans operating in Estonia were not only privileged through the exercise of power but also in material well-being, which aroused bitterness in Estonians. Secondly, the German administration was not able to guarantee the equal distribution of responsibilities and rights among Estonians, a grievance which in practice appeared as frequently as the before-mentioned fact in reports and also aroused widespread dissatisfaction.

The case again returns to the expectations that people universally impose on their leaders. The fair distribution of rights and responsibilities among subordinates is a key perspective, and the importance of the matter is emphasized in conditions in which there are few benefits to distribute and an abundance of responsibilities.<sup>48</sup> A failure to do so undermined the right to a German exercise of power and governance in the eyes of Estonians. The

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46 Seppo Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der baltischen Länder. Zum nationalsozialistischen Inhalt der deutschen Besatzungspolitik* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1973), pp. 213-214, 255-259.

47 Bi-monthly and monthly reports (from different regions of Estonia), July 1942 - December 1942, EJA, pp. 206-207, 234, 252-253.

48 Gergen and Gergen 1986, 282-292, 333-336.

other decisive factor was when, from the fall of 1942, Germany showed itself to be incapable of protecting Estonians from their greatest experienced threat – the Soviet Union and Soviet rule.

This analysis also confirms the conclusions of those researchers who have suggested that *successful* communication is inevitably based, consciously or unconsciously, on attention to strategic principles.<sup>49</sup> Strategic communication is therefore not really a matter of new approaches, independent of the old, but rather of holistic and purpose-driven design. In addition, it may be considered that successful communication is based on universal structural principles that are essentially independent of time, place, and culture. Naturally, there may be considerable variance in the practical application of these principles according to operating environment, temporal context, and target audience.<sup>50</sup>

At any case, good governance cannot exist without implementing *deep* leadership, i.e. building trust between the governmental bodies and common people, an inspirational way to motivate, intellectual stimulation and an individual approach to subordinates. Equally important from this viewpoint are the cornerstones of strategic communication: perception of truthfulness and respect, deep comprehension of others, exchange of ideas through dialogue, pervasiveness, integration and coordination of effort, commitment to a desired endstate, and in communication choosing the right audience, message, time, and place, also paying continuously sufficient attention to analysis, planning, execution, and assessment.

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<sup>49</sup> Halloran 2007, pp. 5-6; K. Kellermann, "Communication: Inherently strategic and primarily automatic", in *Communication Monographs*. Vol. 59. Issue 3. 1992, pp. 288-300.

<sup>50</sup> Halloran 2007, pp. 4-14; Murphy 2010.

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