

# Estonian Anti-Semitism in the Early 1920s

by  
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Despite the dearth of research on Estonian attitudes towards Jews we know that there was no large-scale violent anti-Semitism in Estonia in the interwar period. On the contrary, in 1925 the Estonian government passed a Law of Cultural Autonomy of the Minorities, which was extraordinary, perhaps even unique, from an international perspective. The law granted to all minorities, which consisted of at least 3,000 persons – including the Jews, whose number was approximately 4,500, or 0.4 per cent of the entire population in Estonia – the right to take care of their cultural affairs independently. Cultural autonomy of the Estonian Jews indeed existed from 1926-1940. In recognition, the Jewish National Fund awarded its Golden Certificate of Honour to Estonia in 1927.<sup>1</sup>

Can we then accept the contention of Emanuel Nodel who has written that “no anti-Jewish sentiments or anti-Semitic movements developed [in the 1920s]. The Estonian Jews struggled together with the rest of the population against economic hardships without being discriminated against in political or economic fields”?<sup>2</sup> Or what do we make of the presumption of Tõnu Parming that the Estonian-Jewish relations were fairly good, even if he realistically admits that no thorough study exists on this subject.<sup>3</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn likewise reached a relatively positive assessment, writing that “the masters of the independent state of Estonia, like the ruling classes of the other two Baltic republics, were not particularly anti-Semitic and were also inclined to bestow autonomy upon the national minorities”.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows the contention of Nodel will be shown to be seriously misleading, and Parming and Mendelsohn closer to the truth. If we compare Estonia with most East-Central European countries in the interwar period we can say that anti-Semitism was relatively mild both among elite circles and within the broader public. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the attitude of most political parties and particularly that of the Estonian media towards the Jews was unresponsive and prejudiced in the early 1920s. All the anti-Jewish stereotypes that were known elsewhere in Europe existed and were com-

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<sup>1</sup> TÕNU PARMING: The Jewish Community and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918-1940, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 10 (1979), pp. 241-262, see pp. 246-247, 254; EMANUEL NODEL: Life and Death of the Estonian Jewry, in: *Baltic History*, ed. by ARVIDS ZIEDONIS, JR., et al., Columbus 1974, pp. 227-236, see pp. 232-234.

<sup>2</sup> NODEL (cf. footnote 1), p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> PARMING (cf. footnote 1), pp. 253-257.

<sup>4</sup> EZRA MENDELSON: The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars, Bloomington 1983, p. 254.

monly expressed in Estonia. In some cases, the Jews were even oppressed in the legislation of Estonia. In addition, radical anti-Jewish organisations operated in Estonia. Yet the powerful in Estonia did not tolerate violent anti-Semitism or serious, active agitation against the Jews, nor did anti-Semitic agitation generate any remarkable resonance among the greater public. These theses are based on the systematic study of the archives of the Estonian political parties, the archives of the parliament and the ministries and on a careful study of the leading Estonian newspapers in 1918-1925.

### The Awakening of Anti-Semitism in 1919-1920

During the first months of independence (from November 1918 to Summer 1919) the attention of the Estonian Provisional Government as well as of the parties and the newspapers was riveted to the most serious problems of the moment: the struggle against the Bolshevik armies, which were attacking from Soviet Russia, the maintenance of order on the home front, and getting over a serious shortage of food. Then, in the summer of 1919 the war against the German *Landeswehr* temporarily took the centre of attention.<sup>5</sup> After this the situation in the country began slowly to calm, and societal debate grew more diverse as Estonians found more time to deliberate questions other than their survival. Among these many new voices, from late 1919 one could hear ever more proponents of anti-Semitism among the Estonian public and in the activities of administrative bodies. The scale was still minor but the matter was clearly perceptible.

Jews were associated in the eyes of Estonians with two unpopular phenomena: Russian Bolshevism and economic profiteering. These stereotypes were set forth in several articles and cartoons in the political and the independent Estonian press.<sup>6</sup> In its crudest form, this propaganda equated communists and Baltic German barons with "traitors of the fatherland", who were indifferent to the independence of Estonia, "if only they had opportu-

<sup>5</sup> KARI ALENIUS: Under the Conflicting Pressures of the Ideals of the Era and the Burdens of History. Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918-1925, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 35 (2004), pp. 32-49, see pp. 33-37.

<sup>6</sup> A.: Kiri Tartust [A Letter From Tartu], in: *Päewaleht*, 31.5.1919; Piir kinni [Close the Border], in: *Rajalane*, 30.8.1919; MARIA LEPP: Ääremärkused IV. Eesti Wabariigi kodanikkudest ja nende isamaa-armastusest [Marginal Notes IV. About the Citizens of the Republic of Estonia and Their Patriotism], in: *Waba Maa*, 18.10.1919; JAAK TIIBUS: Haimke Josselowitsh Rosensteini kiri Tiibuse Jaagule Jaagu järelsõnaga Jaan Waglarauale [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsh Rosenstein to Jaak Tiibus With a Postscript of Jaak to Jaan Waglaraud], in: *Päewaleht*, 1.11.1919; Tshinownik, parun, enamlane, sakslane, lätlane, wenelane ja Landeswehr ja kõik ehk palju tööd enne kui kodu puhtaks saab [Russian Office-Holder, Baron, Bolshevik, German, Latvian, Russian and Landeswehr and Everybody, Or a Good Deal of Work Before the Home Will Be Clean], in: *Päewaleht*, 11.11.1919; Haimke Josselowitsch Rosensteini kiri Tiibuse Jaagule [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch Rosenstein to Jaak Tiibus], in: *Päewaleht*, 13.12.1919.

nities to speculate".<sup>7</sup> This was the opinion of a writer in *Waba Maa*, the organ of the centre-leftist Work Party.

Increasing Jewish emigration from Russia to Estonia seemed an additional problem for the Estonian authorities. An indication of this perception is that Oskar Kallas, the Estonian ambassador in Finland, assembled data on the Jews in Finland and the Finnish legislation on the question. This material was sent to the Foreign Ministry of Estonia, and then to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to be used as a foundation of the preparation of Estonia's own legislation. The attitude of Kallas was expressed in his cover letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which he described Finnish legislation as exemplary, since "injustice is not done to the Jews in Finland, but they [the Jews] are also not allowed to live too much at the expense of the rest of the population".<sup>8</sup>

Linking the Jews to the Bolsheviks was common in the international politics of that time. Such views may well have been imported to Estonia. In the rhetoric of various parties in European political life Jewishness and Bolshevism were portrayed as stateless and negatively cosmopolitan, and for that reason the two groups were easy to connect with each other. This stereotype was additionally supported by the fact that there really were many Jews in the leadership of the Russian Bolsheviks, such as Leon Trotsky (Leon Bronstein), the commander in chief of the Red Army, or other politicians, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Sverdlov. In the end, the linking of the Jews to the revolutionary radical left was a political variation of the traditional European anti-Semitism. It seems that these "new" ideas were spread to Estonia approximately at the same time as, for instance, to Finland.<sup>9</sup>

There might have been some reasons for associating the Jews with profiteering, but it is difficult to establish blame 80 years after the fact. In any case, it is a fact that slightly more than 50 per cent of the Estonian Jews were tradesmen (including their families). Jews also owned 10 per cent of wholesale business in Estonia, although they constituted only 0.4 per cent of the entire population.<sup>10</sup> Thus, all kind of economic activities could easily be associated with the Jews. In addition, Jewish tradesmen often differed

<sup>7</sup> LEPP (cf. footnote 6). See also TIIBUS (cf. footnote 6).

<sup>8</sup> Eesti Riigiarhiiv (ERA, Estonian State Archives), Oskar Kallas to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24.7.1919, F. 14, I, 51, p. 319.

<sup>9</sup> EERO KUPARINEN: Aleksandriasta Auschwitziin. Antisemitismin pitkä historia [From Alexandria to Auschwitz. The Long History of Anti-Semitism], Jyväskylä 1999, pp. 235-236, 239-240, 247, 253, 271-273; ALBERT S. LINDEMANN: Anti-Semitism Before the Holocaust, Harlow 2000, pp. 79-82; RAYMOND PEARSON: National Minorities in Eastern Europe 1848-1945, London 1983, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> R. KADAJA: Vähemusrahvused Eestis [The Minorities in Estonia], in: Tähiseid II. Eestluse aastaraamat [Signs II. The Yearbook of Estonianness], Tartu 1936, pp. 40-52; UNO KAUR: Wirtschaftsstruktur und Wirtschaftspolitik des Freistaates Estland 1918-1940, in: Commentationes Balticae. Jahrbuch des baltischen Forschungsinstituts 8/9 (1960/1961), 3, Bonn 1962, pp. 1-174, see pp. 21-24.

considerably from the others because of their traditional clothes, because of their limited knowledge of the Estonian language, and because of their physical appearance. Especially the defective knowledge of the Estonian language was sneered at in *Päewaleht*, the largest Estonian daily. At the same time, suspected Jewish zeal for speculation was portrayed in a sarcastic way in the causeries of *Päewaleht*, for instance, as follows in November 1919: "Ein Jew is a peesful perzon who wantz to live and letz otherz live, too. You know that ein Jew doez not cheat, and if he haz a pozibility to do biznez, he is content with ein very tiny little profit."<sup>11</sup>

It is a common belief that all persons or groups living on trade, no matter whether they are Jews or others, have lived at the expense of the rest of the population and have tried to attain to unreasonable profits. This negative stereotype has undoubtedly been confirmed under conditions of shortage and high prices. The newly independent Estonia conformed well to this description. The prejudice many Estonians had towards tradesmen in general was likely to be directed particularly towards the Jewish tradesmen because they visibly differed from the others. Most Estonian Jews were also newcomers, a fact that was unfavourable for them, because all the negative feelings the Estonians had in the stressful conditions of the early 1920s were more likely to be vented on foreigners than on their ethnic countrymen. Some Estonians found it easier to blame "aliens" for the food shortage and the fall of the standard of living than to analyse the situation more deeply and to consider what was the role of the majority ethnicity (nearly 90 per cent of the population) in the process. In this case, too, the Estonian image of the Jews as greedy profiteers was stimulated by the already existing European stereotype.<sup>12</sup>

Irrespective of whether the Jews really differed from other tradesmen in Estonia from the point of view of their economic activities it is evident that, on average, more suspicion fell on the Jews. In practise this caused at least mild discrimination and the rise of anti-Semitic opinion in the Estonian public. Already in summer 1919, Jewish organisations officially expressed their concern, although they did not find the situation really serious.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> "Juud on iks rahulig inimene, kis tahap ise elada ja lasep elama ka teisi. Teil teap, juud ei peta ja kui tema saap teha iks weikene geseft, lepip tema pisigese kasuga." TIIBUS (cf. footnote 6); see also Haimke Josselowitsch Rosensteini kiri Tiibuse Jaagule [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch Rosenstein to Jaak Tiibus], in: *Päewaleht*, 13.12.1919; KUPARINEN (cf. footnote 9), p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> KUPARINEN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 77-81, 148, 190-194, 248; LINDEMANN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 66, 77-79.

<sup>13</sup> ERA, Jewish National Council to the Presidency of the Estonian National Assembly, 3.6.1919, F. 15, 2, 1020, p. 61; KOPL JOKTON: Juutide ajalooost Eestis [About the History of the Jews in Estonia], Tartu 1992 [manuscript originates from 1926], pp. 36, 40-41.

Portraying the Jews as supporters of the Bolsheviks<sup>14</sup> was, in principle, in conflict with the stereotype according to which the Jews were greedy capitalists. Yet this was not problematic for those who created negative stereotypes about Jews. A miscellaneous collection of negative qualities could be linked to the Jews with no apparent internal logic. The majority of the anti-Semitic writings published in the Estonian newspapers were, in any case, causeries and cartoons, and it is not to be expected that this kind of material should appeal to reason in the first place. On the contrary, exaggeration and a surprising combination of the components of the image were well-suited to provoke the desired reaction: amusement and the strengthening of anti-Jewish prejudice among the readers.

The Estonian image of the Jews resembled, to some extent, the common psychological image of an enemy. In the eyes of the Estonians, the Jews were an explicitly alien group, whose dissimilarity with the Estonians was pointed out in many ways. At the same time, identifying and amplifying linguistic, cultural and "racial" differences were parts of the reconstruction of Estonian national identity and self-image, things that are typical for "young" nations. The awakening of anti-Semitism by the end of 1919 is also partly to be explained by the Estonian weariness of the war and the frustration caused by the continuous social and economic problems. Comparison with the rest of Europe shows that anti-Semitic actions and attitudes were particularly common under such conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Both in the political and in the independent press the number of anti-Semitic writings continued to increase after the end of the Independence War of Estonia in early 1920. In 1920-1922 the number of such writings was roughly twenty each year, compared to approximately a dozen in 1919. Pro-

<sup>14</sup> Iseseiswate kosjasõit [The Match-Making of the Independent Socialists], in: *Waba Maa*, 20.1.1921; Kommunistline kuu ja kuutõbised [The Communist Moon and the Sleep-Walkers], in: *Waba Maa*, 16.3.1921; M. LINNESAAR: Jerusalemma müürid ja Siioni kants [The Walls of Jerusalem and the Stronghold of Sion] (VII), in: *Kaja*, 19.8.1921; Weespordi kaabakad [The Scoundrels of Water Sports], in: *Päewaleht*, 19.11.1921; Kommunistide ja isesotside paleused [The Ideals of the Communists and the Independent Socialists], in: *Päewaleht*, 18.6.1922; Kommuna aastapäewal Tallinnas [At the Anniversary of the Commune in Tallinn], in: *Postimees*, 24.11.1921, 18.7.1922.

<sup>15</sup> FRED HAHN: The Jews Among the Nations in Bohemia and Moravia, in: *Religion and Nationalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. by DENNIS J. DUNN, Boulder 1987, pp. 41-62, see p. 48; PAWEŁ KORZEC: The Minority Problem of Poland, 1918-1939, in: *Ethnic Groups and Language Rights. Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940*, vol. 3, ed. by SERGIJ VILFAN et al., Dartmouth 1993, pp. 199-219, see p. 201; ISMO NURMI: Slovakia – a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity. Manifestations of the National Identity of the Slovaks 1918-1920, Helsinki 1999, pp. 18-19, 37-42; AIVARS STRANGA: Jews and Latvians during the Struggle for Latvia's Independence, 1918-1920, in: "Muille maille vierahille..." Kalervo Hovi ja yleinen historia, Turku 2002, pp. 149-167, see pp. 152-157.



Jewish writings were not published in any newspaper, and neutral writings were also relatively rare, amounting to fewer than ten.

The organs of the major government parties (*Postimees* of the Estonian People's Party, and *Waba Maa* of the Work Party), as well as the independent dailies *Päewaleht* and *Rajalane* were representatives of a clearly anti-Semitic press. Their negative image of the Jews consisted of the above-mentioned stereotypes: Bolsheviks and profiteers. In addition to the assessment that the Jews were living at the expense of the Estonians, these newspapers suspected the loyalty of the Jewish population toward Estonia.<sup>16</sup> In fact, it was difficult to find more serious charges than this kind of "social and national immorality". In the newly independent Estonia, the most current challenges were the protection of independence and the stabilisation of internal economic and societal life. Thus, although anti-Semitic opinions were usually expressed in cartoons and causeries in a comic and apparently genial way, the matter was serious. It can be said that part of the Estonian public projected its worst fears onto the Jews, who thus served as collective scapegoats for the feeling of oppression.

The independent press was slightly more anti-Semitic than the political press, with *Päewaleht*, the largest Estonian daily, as an exemplary case. In 1920 an anti-Jewish causerie, usually with a cartoon, was published in *Päewaleht* at an average of once a month. In these writings and pictures, fun was made of the appearance of the Jews and their supposed ways of life.<sup>17</sup> The most ardent anti-Semitic series of writings was published in *Rajalane* in 1920. In this series, a writer under the pseudonym of "V.V." repeated the internationally known legends of the conspiracy of Jewish economic and political elites in all countries, the objective of which was Jewish world power. The writer claimed that political power in Soviet Russia was now in Jewish hands, and in the Baltic countries the Jews were preparing a conspiracy to attain economic supremacy in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The writer called the Jews "eternal parasites" and claimed, that "as a result of

<sup>16</sup> Abram Haimkewitsh Perlsteini teine kiri 'Postimehe' toimetusele [The Second Letter of Abram Haimkewitsh Perlstein to the Editorial Board of *Postimees*], in: *Postimees*, 4.8.1920; -we: Meie sotsiaaldemokraadid ja juudid [Our Social Democrats and the Jews], in: *Postimees*, 30.10.1920; Poliitiline kestaajamine [A Political Scale], in: *Waba Maa*, 6.11.1920; Ääremärkused Nõukogude riigist [Marginal Notes from the Soviet State], in: *Waba Maa*, 16.11.1920; Haimke Josselowitschi kiri rahwasaadiku Jaan Waglarauale [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch to the MP Jaan Waglaraud], in: *Päewaleht*, 22.5.1920; Haimke Josselowitsch Goldsteini kiri Tiibuse Jaagule [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch Goldstein to Jaak Tiibus], in: *Päewaleht*, 16.10.1920; V.V.: Enamluse ja juudi problem [The Problem of Communism and Jewishness], in: *Rajalane* 8.9., 9.9., 10.9.1920.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Haimke Josselowitsh Goldsteini kiri Tiibuse Jaagule [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch Goldstein to Jaak Tiibus], in: *Päewaleht*, 25.8.1920; Haimke Josselowitsch Goldsteini kiri näituse toimkonnale [The Letter of Haimke Josselowitsch Goldstein to the Exhibition Committee], in: *Päewaleht*, 19.9.1920.

the Jewish victory such dark times were ahead for the European civilisation that they would surpass all nightmares".<sup>18</sup> This series of writings, which used the heaviest weapons of European anti-Semitism, lacked, in fact, only the outspoken demand of what should be done to solve the problem. Otherwise it can be described as purely racist incitement to ethnic hatred.

The series of writings, which was published in *Rajalane*, may have been an individual outburst of hatred towards the Jews without any larger support in Estonian society. In any case, it is a fact that the tone of the mainstream in the Estonian public was anti-Semitic. Independent press is, if compared with the political press, freer in publishing of material written by occasional contributors. That is why the prejudices of both the elite and of the larger public may have found their simplest expressions in the independent press. The editors of the political press are normally more bound up with diverse ideological and power political interests, which steer the writing towards more analytic commentaries. If the Estonian political press sometimes indeed courted the voters' favour with populist writings, glaring anti-Semitism was not a favourite subject. Evidently, the editors did not find it effective to achieve success among the reading public. This moderation gives grounds to conclude that Estonian anti-Semitism was, in the end, relatively mild. On the other hand, anti-Semitism seems to have been fairly common.

Not a single Estonian party or newspaper spoke in favour of the Jews; instead, all leading newspapers allowed the publication of anti-Semitic material. It is hardly a coincidence that *Waba Maa* of the Work Party was the most anti-Semitic of the political press. The representatives of the party were known for their harsh comments in minority questions as well as in other political debates. For those interested in spreading anti-Semitism, it is difficult to evaluate, which method – "humour" or the publishing of writings based on "facts" – was more effective. The threshold for "humoristic" writings and cartoons was undoubtedly lower, because "humour" softened the message. On the other hand, this kind of material may well have attained its goal due to its visual character and covert indoctrination, all the more so if the "humour" seemed to address the current needs of the public. In sum, it seems that this kind of emotional, ironic and folksy anti-Semitism was the most common in Estonia in the early 1920s. Intellectual, premeditated anti-Semitism was rarer yet not exceptional.

### Deportation of the Jews or Fighting the Depression?

All the governments of interwar Estonia, regardless of their political composition, controlled relatively tightly the activities of the country's foreign residents. Political or other kinds of unreliability could lead to deportation. In addition, there were shortages of almost all goods of daily consumption in the

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<sup>18</sup> V.V. (cf. footnote 16).

early 1920s.<sup>19</sup> Under these circumstances, opinions are easily turned against the foreigners, who, in principle, compete with permanent residents for economic goods. And indeed it was shortages of housing and food that the government of Jaan Tõnisson appealed to in February 1920 when it launched a campaign to diminish the number of foreign residents in Estonia. The official aim of the campaign was to expel all foreign residents who had come to Estonia after January 1 1915. The ex-soldiers of the Russian North-West Army and Russian civilians who had retreated to Estonia with the Army were not taken into account, because there were separate agreements regulating their sojourn. Also the persons who had come to Estonia with permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the summer of 1919 were not taken into account.<sup>20</sup> The Jews constituted a considerable portion of the remainder, and soon the entire campaign adopted an anti-Jewish shade.

At the command of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the chief director of the Estonian police force the police commissioners in town and in the country drew up a list of the non-resident Jews (approximately 1,500 persons) by autumn 1920. In addition to the names and the addresses of the Jews, information on private wealth, profession or trade, and other relevant factors had to be added to the lists. The campaign, the lists and the non-public conclusions of the commissioners offer a fruitful possibility to analyse the attitudes of Estonian authorities towards the Jews.

The fact that special attention was given to the Jews, already tells about the suspicious basic attitude of the authorities in the Ministry of Internal Affairs towards the Jews. Among the police commissioners two different attitudes can be distinguished: one hostile and the other permissive. Approximately one third of the police commissioners fell into the former category, and two thirds were representatives of the latter category.<sup>21</sup> In other words, there were a considerable number of ardent anti-Semites among the police commissioners, but they constituted only a minority. All in all the attitudes of the police commissioners were roughly equivalent to the attitudes expressed in newspapers.

When drawing up the lists, the point of departure for the anti-Semitic police commissioners was that they recommended all Jews be expelled if there were no specific reasons to let them stay. For instance, the report of the police commissioner in Harjumaa district was distinctive:

<sup>19</sup> JÜRI ANT: *Eesti 1920. Iseseisvuse esimene rahuaasta* [Estonia 1920. The First Peace Year of Independence], Tallinn 1990, pp. 7-20.

<sup>20</sup> ERA, Ordinance of the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs, 17.2.1920, F. 1627, 1, 29, p. 22. The sojourn of the Russians in Estonia in detail, see KARSTEN BRÜGGEMANN: *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des "Einen und unteilbaren Rußland"*. Die Petrograder Front des Russischen Bürgerkriegs 1918-1920, Wiesbaden 2002 (Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa Instituts München, Reihe: Forschungen zum Ostseeraum, 6), pp. 390-404.

<sup>21</sup> ERA, Reports of the Police Commissioners, F. 1, 9, 434, without page-numbers.



"The Local police has no reliable information about the above-mentioned persons [16 Jewish families]. In any case, since they live in Nõmme, it can be assumed that they carry on all kind of dubious business and trade in Tallinn [...] It is recommendable to expel them, as foreign residents, from the country."<sup>22</sup>

It is evident that the attitude of the police commissioner in the Harjumaa district was based on the conviction that the Jews were a criminal group altogether. Consequently, it was compatible with the interests of Estonian society to expel them. No other proof than their ethnic background was needed for the deportation. The police commissioner of the Harjumaa district was perhaps the most unequivocal in this, but the police commissioners in the 1<sup>st</sup> police district of Tartu and in the districts of Tallinn largely shared his opinion. In these districts, sufficient grounds for deportation were the lack of a permanent job, or even the slightest doubt of the integrity of the means of earning one's living. More than 50 per cent of the Jews living in these districts were subjected to such an estimate.<sup>23</sup>

The police commissioners of Viljandi district and the 2<sup>nd</sup> police district of Tartu were representatives of neutral or only slightly anti-Semitic attitudes. In these districts, approximately 10 per cent of the Jews were recommended for deportation. Sufficient evidence was imposing a fine, or otherwise ascertaining convincing proof of the integrity of the means of earning one's living. For instance, some of the expelled were jobless and without permanent housing, but despite this they were visibly well-to-do; there were also persistent rumours about others being profiteers. In these two districts, few individuals were classified as deportees without judicially tenable evidence of criminal activity.<sup>24</sup>

The police commissioners of Järvamaa and the town of Valga embodied neutral to slightly positive attitudes towards the Jews. In the latter the number of non-resident Jews was relatively high, approximately 120 persons, but in the opinion of the police commissioner no one was to be expelled, because "there was no firm evidence against them". In Järvamaa, the local police commissioner spoke for a Jewish tradesman, although the person in question had been fined for minor offences several times. The grounds for this were, in the first place, humanitarian: the tradesman had a large family (spouse and six children). Second, the police commissioner was willing to allow the tradesman to stay in Estonia, "because the tradesman was purely Estonian in appearance".<sup>25</sup> This curiosity gives proof of the fact that, in some cases, "racial" viewpoints were of importance also to the Estonians when defining the line between "us" and "them". Aliens could be tolerated better, if they did not remarkably differ from the majority population. This is, as such, in accordance with the overall human tendency towards identification by

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, Report of the Police Commissioner in Harjumaa.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, Reports of the Police Commissioners in Tallinn and Tartu (1<sup>st</sup> District).

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, Reports of the Police Commissioners in Viljandi and Tartu (2<sup>nd</sup> District).

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, Reports of the Police Commissioners in Järvamaa and Valga.

similarity (or dissimilarity).<sup>26</sup> In the case of the Jews in Estonia, however, criteria based on appearance usually worked against acceptance.

To some extent, there was a correlation between the number of Jews in a district and anti-Semitic attitudes. Jews and other non-residents were considered problematic the more their share of the population increased. Visibility and the real number of crimes committed by foreigners tended then also to rise, which in turn nurtured anti-foreigner attitudes. A minor group of foreigners was not found as threatening, which is a universal phenomenon again. The correlation between the numbers and the attitudes was not absolute, though. For instance, in the scale of Estonia, the number of the Jews was relatively high in Valga, but despite this the local police commissioner had a permissive attitude towards them. Thus, it can be said that although the correlation between the two was a statistical fact, individual differences of opinion were more important in each individual case of choice.

The deportation of the Jews and other non-residents gives further evidence of the rise of anti-Semitism in Estonia from 1920 onwards. In addition, it can be said that the change in the political complexion of the Estonian government in January 1920 had some effect on the sharpening of attitudes. Precisely the leadership of the Estonian People's Party (EPP) openly distrusted the Jews and other aliens. An example of this was the closing meeting of the Estonian National Assembly in December 1920 in which Jaan Tõnisson (EPP), who had been the Prime Minister from January to October 1920, severely criticised the new government of the Work Party. Tõnisson particularly accused the new government for being too indulgent towards economic profiteering. According to him, "foreign profiteers flooded the country", but the government did nothing to prevent this; indeed, it went so far as to naturalize them. Furthermore, the Estonians "had grown insensitive to the fact that Jews who should have been behind bars long ago are being set free".<sup>27</sup>

In the language of Tõnisson, "Jew" and "profiteer" were synonyms. Also the tone of *Postimees*, the organ of the EPP, was clearly distrusting, although in some cases the newspaper strove for formal impartiality. For instance, in a leading article of October 1920 it wrote that "for sure, there are also honest people among the Jews, too". In fact, the statement implied that the majority of the Jews were dishonest. In addition, *Postimees* also claimed that there were differences between ethnic groups in this matter, a conclusion which was more than insinuated in a further article commenting specifically upon the Jews.<sup>28</sup> The editors of *Postimees* took the anti-Semitism of the reading

<sup>26</sup> KARMELE LIEBKIND: *Me ja muukalaiset – ryhmärajat ihmisten suhteissa* [We and the Aliens – Group Borders in the Relations of Men], Helsinki 1988, pp. 66, 76-77. See also: *Hard-wired for Prejudice? Experts Examine Human Response to Outsiders*, New York Times, 20 April 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the Estonian National Assembly, No. 170 (16) (20.12.1920), p. 646.

<sup>28</sup> A. Spk.: *Demokraatlik dogmatism kui takistus elule* [Democratic Dogmatism as an Impediment of Life], in: *Postimees*, 19.10.1920; A. Spk.: *Demokratism, juudid ja*

public for granted. And when they permitted publication of a neutral (not anti-Semitic) article concerning the Jewish cultural activities in Tartu in the newspaper in spring 1920, they found it necessary to make a public excuse, citing "the need to know the living conditions of aliens who live among the Estonians".<sup>29</sup>

It is worth mentioning that during Jaan Tõnisson's tenure as Prime Minister the Estonian government established "a special committee for the struggle against profiteering and speculation". It may not be surprising that the majority of the persons attacked by the committee were Jews.<sup>30</sup> It is, of course, possible that the committee was impartial in its work. On the other hand, if we take into consideration the common distrust towards the Jews, the committee might have been more ready to attack Jewish tradesmen than native Estonians during the campaign. At least, the despised aliens were good targets if the aim of the campaign was to eradicate economic abuses in the country by making the attacked persons warning examples. The achievements of the committee were displayed in the Estonian newspapers.<sup>31</sup>

The EPP's concern about the generality of economic abuses was undoubtedly genuine, as was their desire to find effective measures for dealing with the problem. Neither is there any doubt about the fact that some of the profiteers were actually Jewish. Since a high proportion of the Jews earned their living from trade, it almost automatically made the proportion of the Jews among the persons who were attacked due to their criminal economic activities higher than the proportion of the Jews was in the entire population of Estonia. In other words, the Jews were highly visible both in good and evil in the economic life of the country. Thus, there were certain understandable reasons for the distrust of the EPP towards the Jews. On the other hand, it is probable that the distrust also derived from Estonian nationalistic ideals; many Estonians disliked the Jews because they were distinct aliens, "the others". The EPP was ready to grant certain basic rights to the "traditional" minorities living in Estonia, but in the case of the Jews the threshold of acceptance was remarkably higher. The Jews were newcomers and above all, too alike to Estonians to be easily incorporated as members of the Estonian society.

The Work Party agreed with the policy of the EPP in the "Jewish question". Almost all material concerning the Jews and published in *Waba Maa* was anti-Semitic. For instance, in the debate around the deportation of the non-resident Jews in 1920, *Waba Maa* fully accepted the line of the Minister of

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'Sotsialdemokraat' [Democracy, the Jews and 'Sotsialdemokraat'], in: Postimees, 26.10.1920.

<sup>29</sup> C. HUNNIUS: Üks juudi mälestuspäew [A Jewish Memorial Day], in: Postimees, 26.3.1920.

<sup>30</sup> ERA, List of cases investigated by the committee, F. 4664, 1, 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Rajalane, 5.2.1920; Kaja, 8.2.1920; Wõitlus hangeldamise ja liiakasu wõtmise vastu [The Fight Against Speculation and Profiteering], in: *Waba Maa*, 12.5.1920.

Internal Affairs (Karl Einbund, EPP).<sup>32</sup> The nationality policy of the Work Party was also otherwise close to that of the EPP. Both parties were representatives of an emphatic Estonian nationalism according to which the leading position of native Estonians had to be unchallenged. Minorities were to be tolerated, but any addition to their importance or number in Estonia was considered undesirable. The minorities were also supposed to accept the fact that the needs of native Estonians were fulfilled first. If we take a look at the independent press of Estonia in 1920 it seems that these ideas had broader support in Estonia as well. For instance, *Päewaleht* openly propagated the deportation of the Jews in late 1920.<sup>33</sup>

### Friendship Toward the Jews Diminishes

Newspapers of German and Swedish citizens of Estonia did not participate in discussions about Jews. Neither group had specific reasons for sympathy or antipathy towards the Jews in Estonia. At most, their attitude may have been slightly positive, because minorities had interests in common, and cooperation between the groups was, in principle, reasonable. On the other hand, the Germans and the Swedes may have distrusted the Jews because they had little in common with them culturally, and their co-existence in Estonia dated from relatively recent times. In addition, the Germans and the Swedes had already been recognized as "local minorities" in the Estonian constitution in 1919-1920.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it would have been risky for the Germans and the Swedes to engage themselves with the Jews who did not possess such a privileged minority status.

The Russians were interested in the deportation of non-resident aliens, since most deportees had come to Estonia from Russia and had Russian citizenship. In this context, *Poslednie Izvestija*, the main organ of the Russians in Estonia (the only Russian-language daily), commented briefly on the case of the Jews. *Poslednie Izvestija* contented itself with the explanation of the Minister of Internal Affairs, according to whom the Jews were not under specific supervision or persecuted.<sup>35</sup> The main concern of the Russian daily was the fate of native Russian refugees, and it did not show any sympathy towards the Jews nor did it pay serious attention to them. It might

<sup>32</sup> -nn: Siseministri seletus väljamaalaste väljasaatmise kohta [The Commentary of the Minister of Internal Affairs on the Deportation of Foreign Residents], in: Waba Maa, 25.10.1920; Poliitiline kestaajamine [A Political Scale], in: Waba Maa, 6.11.1920; Ääremärkused Nõukogude riigist [Marginal Notes From the Soviet State], in: Waba Maa, 16.11.1920.

<sup>33</sup> -ch.: Väljamaalaste väljasaatmine ja jutud juutide tagakiusamisest [The Deportation of Foreign Residents and the Rumours About the Persecution of the Jews], in: *Päewaleht*, 25.10.1920.

<sup>34</sup> The Estonian Constitution, Minutes of the Estonian National Assembly, No. 154 (35) (31.7.1920), pp. 1501-1514.

<sup>35</sup> Hronika [Chronicle], in: *Poslednie Izvestija*, 27.10.1920.

be asked whether the long anti-Semitic traditions of Russia were reflected in such a stance, leaving little room to expect that a Russian newspaper would have spoken out in favour of the Jews, although these two minority groups also shared a number of common interests in independent Estonia.<sup>36</sup>

This conclusion is supported by the fact that, for instance, Kopl Jokton, the author of the *History of the Jews in Estonia* (the manuscript dates from 1926) claims that "white" Russians in Estonia were particularly anti-Semitic and harassed the Jews during the Estonian War of Independence. For their part, Estonia's rulers elicited a positive review by Jokton. According to him, the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs had even closed, at a request of Jewish organisations, the Russian-language periodical *Belyi Krest* (which Jokton calls a "dirty pogrom paper") that had been published and distributed in Estonia by the army of General Judenich in 1919.<sup>37</sup> Although little supplementary evidence on opinions toward Jews has been handed down from the early 1920s, a qualified conclusion can be ventured that in the eyes of Jews Russians were more hostile than Estonians. As a result, the possibilities for cooperation between Jews and Russians in Estonia were relatively poor. Moreover, there is no evidence of cooperation either, except for a couple of declarations signed by all minority groups in Estonia.

From the point of view of the Jews it was also disquieting that anti-Semitic attitudes began to gain a foothold in the Agrarian Party in 1920. The previous year the Agrarian Party had incurred other parties' hatred in the National Assembly by posing as an advocate for the minorities. Even earlier, the Agrarian-led Estonian Provisional Government reaped criticism from other parties due to its sympathy towards the minorities.<sup>38</sup> Had the leadership of the Agrarian Party perhaps learned from these experiences and decided to steer the party closer to the supposed opinion of the voters? And did the tarnishing of Jews as profiteers inform such a decision? It is difficult to find evidence for or against. In any case, the writings in *Kaja*, the organ of the Agrarian Party, demonstrate that anti-Semitic attitudes were becoming stronger but also that there were differences of opinion on the matter among the supporters of the party.

One of the first signs of change was an article published in *Kaja* in May 1920. In the article, a writer under the pseudonym of "Eestlane" ("an Estonian") repeated the internationally known allegations of the Jews reaching for world power. The writer also claimed that economic power was edging to the hands

<sup>36</sup> KUPARINEN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 191-198; NODEL (cf. footnote 1), pp. 228-229.

<sup>37</sup> JOKTON (cf. footnote 13), pp. 40-41, 45. More evidence of the anti-Semitic attitudes of the white Russians (particularly that of *Belyi Krest*) and the outrages against the local Jewish population in Pskov is brought forward by BRÜGGEMANN (cf. footnote 20), pp. 234-235, 243-245.

<sup>38</sup> ALENIOUS (cf. footnote 5), pp. 34-35, 39.



of Jews in Estonia.<sup>39</sup> The article closely resembled those published in *Rajalane* a couple of months earlier, except that the anti-Semitic tone of the article in *Kaja* was not as angry, although the writer does refer to Jews as "rats". It is possible that both articles had the same author. In any case, it is important to note that *Kaja* was ready to publish such a piece. Its editor, however, made a public explanation for giving space for the article: he claimed that the author "strongly requested" that his work be published, and that this author "represented the greater public". Evidently, the supposed opinion of the voters was becoming more important in the eyes of these editors.

Similar episodes followed in the late 1920. In discussing the deportation of non-resident Jews *Kaja* unhesitatingly agreed with the Minister of Internal Affairs and wondered why the Social Democrats had spoken up for the Jews.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in December *Kaja* published a series of slightly anti-Semitic articles, and this time no explanations were deemed necessary. Yet another pseudonymous author treated the history and culture of the Jews in a mostly neutral way, but the closer the treatment came to contemporary matters the more negative the image of the Jews.<sup>41</sup> In the end, the stereotype of Jews as profiteers and Bolsheviks was the main offering to the readers.

The leaders of the Agrarian Party did not directly comment on the "Jewish question". As a kind of a counterweight to the increase in anti-Semitic writings in *Kaja*, however, a leading article was published in the daily in November 1920, which condemned the oppression of minorities in plain terms. According to her or him, the Estonians must not be revengeful nor abuse their leading position in the country to restrict the rights of minorities.<sup>42</sup> It is thus seen that among the leadership of the party there were different opinions on the treatment of the minorities; in particular the attitude towards the Jews was being reappraised in 1920.

In some respects, the attitude of Estonia's rulers towards the Jews closely resembled those of their counterparts in many East-Central European countries. For instance, in Poland an identical law was passed in 1920 aiming at the deportation of non-resident aliens. The justifications for the two laws were also identical, as were the ethnic groups, which, in practice, were the objects of the law. It can be concluded that particularly the government of Tõnisson represented quite a typical policy towards ethnic minorities and immigrants in Europe in the early 1920s: it was a policy that emphasised the interests of the majority population at the cost of national minorities. The

<sup>39</sup> Eestlane: Juudid Eestis, nende sõna ja tegu [The Jews in Estonia, Their Words and Deeds] (I–II), in: *Kaja*, 11.5.1920.

<sup>40</sup> Sotsid – juutide eestkostjatena [The Social Democrats – As Guardians of the Jews], in: *Kaja*, 27.10.1920.

<sup>41</sup> M.L.: Jerusalemma müürid ja Siioni kants [The Walls of Jerusalem and the Stronghold of Sion], in: *Kaja*, 23.12., 24.12., 28.12.1920.

<sup>42</sup> Kiwinenud rahwuslus [Petrified Nationalism], in: *Kaja*, 1.11.1920.

effects of this attitude were extended even to minor facts such as the use of certain linguistic terms. In the language of Tõnisson and the leaders of the nationalist right parties in Czechoslovakia and Poland, for instance, the Jews were openly called "profiteers" and "criminals".<sup>43</sup> All in all, Estonia did not remarkably differ in attitudes towards Jews from other East-Central European countries. Another question is how the situation developed during that decade. In this, Estonia indeed differed from other countries by taking steps toward greater tolerance, for example the passing of the Law of Cultural Autonomy. Nevertheless, even in this legislation one sees some wavering between suspicion and tolerance.

This ambivalence was most evident in the change of official immigration policy in 1923. According to the relatively liberal law of 1918, all non-residents living in Estonia were entitled to citizenship after five years' stay "if their living interests were bound to Estonia".<sup>44</sup> In 1923, the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to tighten the requirements for citizenship and the ordinance under which conditions foreign residents were allowed to stay in Estonia for longer periods. Free admittance of all foreign residents to Estonia, in principle, remained as before, but now there were certain exceptions. In secret (non-public) directions of the ministry, the following groups were not entitled to stay in Estonia more than a month: 1) individuals without citizenship, 2) Jews, 3) citizens of Soviet Russia, 4) individuals who were politically injurious to Estonia.<sup>45</sup>

From the point of view of ethno-politics, attention must be paid to the second article, which denied free admittance of the Jews. Exceptions could be made in case of convincing arguments. For Jews (and other groups mentioned), convincing arguments were, above all, marriage with an ethnic Estonian, or commercial activities, which were demonstrably profitable for Estonia. This new ordinance must be considered as proof of ethnic discrimination within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Evidently, worldwide stereotypes of Jews as communists and profiteers were internalised in the ministry and resulted in quite extraordinary measures: the exclusion of one ethnic group. Although Estonian authorities would of course have claimed to be prosecuting the interests of Estonian society, they realised that their policy

<sup>43</sup> ANDRZEJ CHOJNOWSKI: Polish National Character, the Sanacja Camp, and National Democracy, in: *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. by IVO BANAC and KATHERINE VERDERY, New Haven 1995, pp. 23-38, see pp. 33-34; HAHN (cf. footnote 15), p. 48; EDWARD D. WYNOT: Polish-Jewish Relations, 1910-1939, in: *Religion and Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (cf. footnote 15), pp. 15-39, see p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Ordinance of Land Council, 26.11.1918, in: *Vähemusrahvuste kultuurielu Eesti Vabariigis 1918-1940. Dokumente ja materjale* [The Cultural Life of the Minorities in the Republic of Estonia, 1918-1940. Documents and Materials], ed. by ANNI MATSULEVITŠ, Tallinn 1993, pp. 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> ERA, Minister of Internal Affairs (Einbund) to the chief commissioner of the Estonian Police Government, 18.10.1923, F. 14, 1, 843, pp. 388-389.

was discriminatory. This is seen in the fact that the ordinance obliges the authorities to keep secret the fact that these restrictions were valid only for the Jews.<sup>46</sup> Open discrimination would have, indeed, raised provocative attention for Estonia, which had only just signed the League of Nations' treaty for the protection of minorities a month earlier.<sup>47</sup>

### The Surge of the Estonian Anti-Semites Falls Short

Ardent anti-Semites showed signs of activity from 1920 onwards in Estonia. In addition to the writings analysed above, there were rumours of the establishment of a secret anti-Semitic organisation in the summer of 1921. It is uncertain whether such an organisation existed as early as 1921, but the fact is that anti-Semitic posters were distributed in Tallinn from June of that year. These posters were signed by the pseudonymous "Patriot" and they may have been creations of one individual without any larger group of backers. Instead, it is likely that a more significant cadre of co-operators was behind the scenes when an anti-Semitic Estonian-language periodical under the title of *Juudid* (The Jews) was established in Estonia in 1922. Its contents were probably translated from anti-Semitic writings originating in Central Europe and they brought forth the well-known clichés of the Jews in general and their frustrated plans to reach for world power. In 1922-1923, at least six volumes of the periodical were published.<sup>48</sup>

It is not known who the publishers of the periodical were, or how wide its circulation. It is one additional proof of the existence of ardent anti-Semitic attitudes in Estonia, but it does not tell much about the popularity of such attitudes. If *Juudid* had wealthy supporters, then the publishing of the periodical would have been possible even if only a small number of copies actually sold. Nevertheless, there was other evidence, which showed that Estonian anti-Semites – however numerous – were now consolidating their strength and preparing for a wide attack against the Jews.

The attack began in late 1922 and continued into the spring of 1923. Anti-Semitic posters and publications, which fomented hatred against the Jews and called Estonians to boycott shops and enterprises owned by Jews, were distributed throughout Estonia. Secret reports of the Estonian security police from early 1923 tell that anti-Jewish sentiments were clearly arising in Estonia, and the Jews themselves were fearful of the new situation.<sup>49</sup> Adding

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> KARL AUN: Der völkerrechtliche Schutz nationaler Minderheiten in Estland von 1917 bis 1940, Hamburg 1951, pp. 37-46; CORNELIUS HASSELBLATT: Minderheitenpolitik in Estland. Rechtsentwicklung und Rechtswirklichkeit 1918-1995, Hamburg 1996, pp. 32-33.

<sup>48</sup> Poslednie Izvestija, 21.6.1921; Waba Maa, 9.7.1922, 30.11.1922, 19.12.1922, 1.2.1923, 24.3.1923; Päewaleht, 1.3.1923. International propaganda, see KUPARINEN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 199-203; LINDEMANN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 83-84.

<sup>49</sup> ERA, Internal reports, January-May 1923, F. 14, 1, 843, p. 65, 73, 193.

to the concern was the fact that anti-Semitic actions, including public demonstrations, were reported in Latvia at the same time.<sup>50</sup> It seems likely that Estonian and Latvian anti-Semites had mutual contacts. Therefore the similarity of the course of events in the two countries in this period was hardly a coincidence. More extensive international co-operation can also not be excluded.

The Estonian government and police force did not remain idle. In the eyes of Estonia's rulers anti-Semitic agitation had taken on dimensions that required a counter-attack in order to secure societal peace. Although minority rights were not among the favourite subjects of the government of Juhan Kukk (Work Party), it did not, nor did any other Estonian government regardless of its political colour, accept organised aggression against an ethnic minority. In addition, in the government of Kukk, the Minister of Internal Affairs was Karl Einbund whose relatively pro-minority attitudes were commonly known. The publication of *Juudid* was suppressed by the authorities, and the police tried to discover the origins of the anti-Semitic posters and to seize their distributors. Already in January 1923, the police managed to break a secret anti-Jewish organisation in Võru. All in all, the counter-attack of the authorities was successful. By mid-1923 the situation in Estonia calmed down and open anti-Semitism almost vanished – even if only temporarily – from Estonian public life.<sup>51</sup>

On the basis of the anti-Semites who were apprehended it is possible to describe in rough outline the main supporters of radical anti-Semitism in Estonia. The majority of the members in anti-Jewish organisations consisted of officers, officials and tradesmen.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the situation in Estonia resembled that of other European states. The strongest support of ultra-nationalist and anti-minority ideals came from the middle classes, that is, precisely from the three occupations just mentioned. It is not possible here to deeply analyse the social psychological factors behind this middle class support for radical anti-Semitism; nevertheless it can be stated that among the tradesmen, for instance, one remarkable factor was fear of economic rivalry.<sup>53</sup> Evidently, this fear affected the attitude of Estonian tradesmen towards local Jews as well.

### Conclusion

In 1922-1923 Estonian radical anti-Semites (like their counterparts in Latvia) explored the possibilities for disseminating more ardent anti-Jewish sentiments among the larger public. Yet on the one hand Estonia's political

<sup>50</sup> Dorpater Nachrichten, 7.4.1923, 25.4.1923.

<sup>51</sup> ERA, Internal reports, January 1923, F. 14, 1, 843, p. 65; Internal reports, June-December 1923, F. 14, 1, 843.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem; Märatsemine restoraan 'Lindenis' [An Uproar in the Restaurant Linden], in: Waba Maa, 27.11.1924.

<sup>53</sup> KUPARINEN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 218, 240, 245; LINDEMANN (cf. footnote 9), p. 62.

leaders managed to put down the agitation in its early stages, and on the other, aggressive anti-Semitism did not find a favourable reception among the greater public or in the media. On the contrary, the Estonian press became frightened of systematic and aggressive agitation against the Jews. That helps to explain why, coincident with the launching of a campaign by Estonian radical anti-Semites, the publishing of anti-Jewish causeries and cartoons sharply declined in the leading Estonian newspapers. In *Päewaleht*, for instance, where "humoristic" anti-Jewish material had traditionally been published at least once a month, no material at all of this kind was published in the first eight months in 1923. The same is true of other dailies during the first half of the year, and, in part also in subsequent months. However, "mild" and "humoristic" anti-Semitic writings did make a renewed appearance in leading newspapers from early 1924 onwards. Still, certain limits were observed, and radical anti-Semitic propaganda of the sort, which had been published up to 1923 did not appear at all in the leading Estonian press in 1924-1925.

It can be concluded that on average Estonians did not like Jews, but they also considered programmatic and openly racist aggression against them too extreme. Neither Estonia's political parties nor its newspapers wanted actively to speak out for the Jews, but, on the other hand, they did not want to support the radical anti-Semites, either. The "moderate" anti-Semites among the Estonian elite dared to express their anti-Semitic opinions only after it had become evident that the aggressive agitation had subsided. The period of careful and reticent waiting lasted approximately a year, evidence that the situation was considered relatively serious in early 1923.

It was an after-effect of the campaign of the radical anti-Semites that in the spring of 1924 Estonian leaders openly evinced sympathy towards the country's Jewish minority. When a Jewish secondary school was inaugurated in Tallinn in February 1924 a highly prestigious group of Estonian politicians participated in the opening ceremony: among the dignitaries were Konstantin Päts, the Prime Minister and the state elder; Aleksander Veiderman, the Minister of Education, and Anton Uesson, Mayor of Tallinn.<sup>54</sup> This delegation was undoubtedly a symbolic measure of support, because an opening of a secondary school in Estonia did not normally merit the attention of dignitaries of that level.

As the situation calmed, the relationship between the Estonians and the Jews was largely restored. From late 1923, Estonians publicly expressed their opinions on Jews in the traditional ways known from the pre-1923 period.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> GURSKII: Otkritie evrejskoj gimnazii [The Inauguration of the Jewish Secondary School], in: *Poslednie Izvestija*, 5.2.1924.

<sup>55</sup> *Laul sest äralennanust* [A Song About the One Who Took Oneself Off], in: *Päewaleht*, 17.9.1923; *Päewaleht*, 14.7.1924; *Wähemusrahwuste parlamendid* [The Parliaments of the Minorities], in: *Postimees*, 7.12.1923; *Rahwuswahelised õnnelikud Eestis* [International Fortune-Hunters in Estonia], in: *Waba Maa*, 23.11.1923; *Kes laskis juudid Eestisse?* [Who Let the Jews in to Estonia?], in: *Waba Maa*, 21.6.1924; *Kui palju juu-*



The publishing of "humoristic" anti-Semitic material in the leading Estonian press was also as regular in 1924-1925 as it had been in 1919-1922. In *Päewaleht*, for instance, approximately one anti-Semitic cartoon or causerie per month was published from mid-1924 to the first half of 1925.<sup>56</sup> Thus, in the long run, the campaign of the radical anti-Semites left almost no traces in the ethno-political atmosphere in Estonia. It did not raise or diminish anti-Semitism among the Estonian public. I would conclude that the Estonian stereotypic image of the Jews was so established by the early 1920s that the events in 1923 did not manage to shake it in either direction. This finding accords well with theoretical understandings of (national) images being reluctant to change.<sup>57</sup>

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tisid Eestisse on tulnud [How Many Jews Have Come to Estonia], in: *Kaja*, 24.9.1924; Lugu ühe peatusloaga [The Story About a Permission to Stay], in: *Kaja*, 27.10.1924.

<sup>56</sup> *Päewaleht*, 31.10.1924, 1.11.1924, 2.11.1924, 3.11.1924; Kas Teil tõesti ei teadis ... [Do You Really Not Know ...], in: *Päewaleht*, 30.1.1925.

<sup>57</sup> KENNETH E. BOULDING: *The Image. Knowledge in Life and Society*, New York 1959, pp. 5, 8; OLAVI K. FÄLT: Introduction, in: *Looking at the Other. Historical Study of Images in Theory and Practice*, ed. by KARI ALENIOUS et al., Oulu 2002, pp. 7-12, see pp. 8-11; MELVIN SMALL: *Historians Look at Public Opinion*, in: *Public Opinion and Historians. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by IDEM, Detroit 1970, pp. 13-32, see p. 22.

## Zusammenfassung

### *Antisemitismus in Estland in den frühen 1920er Jahren*

Im Vergleich zu den meisten anderen ostmitteleuropäischen Staaten war der Antisemitismus in Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit eher schwach ausgeprägt, und zwar sowohl in der politischen Elite als auch in der breiten Öffentlichkeit. Dennoch läßt sich feststellen, daß die Haltung der meisten politischen Parteien und vor allem der Medien in Estland gegenüber den Juden während der frühen 1920er Jahre teilnahmslos und vorurteilsbeladen war. Alle antijüdischen Stereotype, die man im übrigen Europa kannte, waren auch in Estland weit verbreitet, teilweise wurde die jüdische Bevölkerung von der Gesetzgebung sogar unterdrückt. Darüber hinaus existierten in Estland radikale antijüdische Organisationen. Andererseits wurden gewalttätiger Antisemitismus oder die offene, aktive Hetze gegen Juden von der estnischen Regierung nicht toleriert, und antijüdische Agitation fand in der breiten Öffentlichkeit auch keine starke Resonanz.

Für die jüdische Bevölkerung wirkte sich besonders nachteilig aus, daß sie von den Esten mit zwei unerwünschten Erscheinungen assoziiert wurde: dem Bolschewismus und ökonomischer Profitgier. Diese Stereotype wurden in Artikeln, Essays und Karikaturen sowohl der politischen als auch der unabhängigen Presse Estlands verbreitet, die teilweise so weit ging, die Juden ebenso wie die Kommunisten und die deutschbaltischen „Barone“ als „Vaterlandsverräter“ zu diffamieren, die gegenüber der Unabhängigkeit gleichgültig seien, „solange sie nur die Möglichkeit zur Spekulation“ hätten.

Das Bild, welches die Esten von den Juden hatten, ähnelte aus psychologischer Sicht in gewissem Grad einem allgemeinen Feindbild. In den Augen der Esten stellte die jüdische Bevölkerung eindeutig eine fremde Gruppe dar, deren Andersartigkeit immer wieder betont wurde, denn die Suche nach sprachlichen, kulturellen und „rassischen“ Unterschieden war Teil der im allgemeinen für „junge“ Nationen typischen Bemühungen, eine estnische nationale Identität zu rekonstruieren. Das Aufkommen von Antisemitismus in Estland gegen Ende des Jahres 1919 kann teilweise auch durch die Kriegsmüdigkeit und die anhaltenden sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Probleme erklärt werden.

Die verbreitete Haltung in Estland gegenüber den Juden war, daß man sie nicht gerade mochte, einen programmatischen Rassismus und offene Aggression aber als zu weit gehend ablehnte. Weder die politischen Parteien noch die führende Presse mochten sich aktiv für die Juden einsetzen, doch umgekehrt wollten sie auch die radikalen Antisemiten nicht unterstützen.