



Bad Baltic Takes @BadBalticTakes

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Let's talk about why the Baltic nations are not 'former Soviet states'.



Rewind!

In the 19th century - while under Russian Tsarist rule - Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians embraced national awakening movements asserting their rights to use their language, practise their culture, and rule themselves with greater autonomy.



This culminated in their declarations of independence as republics in 1918, amidst a window of opportunity during the chaotic aftermath of WW1 and the collapse of the Russian Tsarist empire.

Russia's new Red Army attempted to crush the fledgling republics, but failed.

Ok, we're skipping over lots of complexities here.

Like, Lithuania had previous experience of statehood so its awakening was more of a revival. And Estonia & Latvia had to fight its Baltic German landowners too.

But let's continue.



As a result of these Baltic wars of independence, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia all gained recognition under international law as independent states with territorial sovereignty in perpetuity.

Yes, Russia too!

Russia was isolated after the Bolshevik Revolution and badly wanted international recognition for its new post-Tsarist state. Peace agreements were not just about Russia recognising the Baltics. Estonia was actually the first country to recognise Russia in its post-Tsarist form.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania succeeded as independent states with economic development on par with Finland - which was also considered a Baltic state back then before it got redefined as Nordic. That pace of development would have continued across the Baltics were it not for...

Soviet Russia reneged on its international legal agreements and signed the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 with a secret clause to crush sovereign states between them and usher in another age of empires, which initiated WW2.

After increasing pressure on the Baltics to accept Soviet bases, in 1940 the Red Army marched in, overthrew Baltic governments, and staged fake elections for puppet administrations, which then “requested” membership of the Soviet Union. Mass Soviet repression followed.

The two totalitarian powers remained aligned for the next two years of the war - until they fell out and waged a devastating conflict across the occupied nations, both persecuting and illegally conscripting locals like here in the Baltics.

The end result after this devastation was the Soviet Union retaining its brutal and illegal occupation of the Baltics - as originally agreed with the Nazis - for another half century.

This, according to some, is what the Baltic states should be grateful for as ‘liberation’.

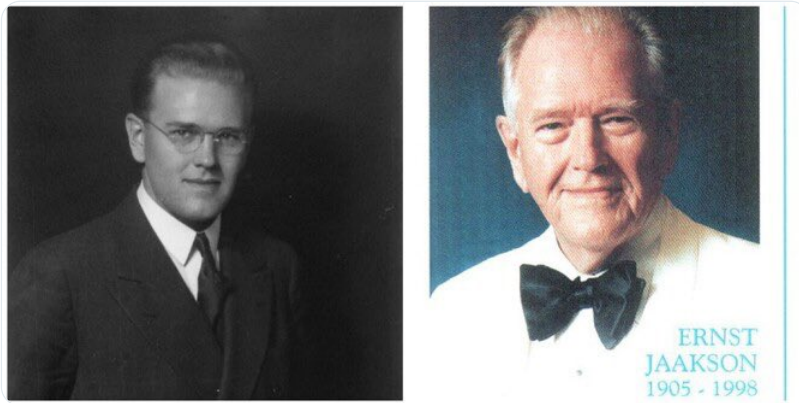
But the independent Republics of the Baltic nations still existed - in international law, in the minds of those occupied, and even in state buildings where state employees continued showing up for work.



While Baltic governments were about to be crushed, they transferred some powers to their diplomats abroad and instructed them to maintain their legations (a kind of embassy) for the republics in the temporary absence of governments in occupied territory.

And the orders were followed.

Take Ernst Jaakson, for example. He was an Estonian diplomat posted to the US before the occupation and he remained in post for half a century until the Estonian government returned in 1991 and promoted him to Ambassador!



Fun side fact: Jaakson handed over to [@EerikNKross](#) - the only transfer between an appointee of the pre and post occupation governments, which is pretty incredible considering the timespan and difficulties. He then handed over to [@IlvesToomas](#).

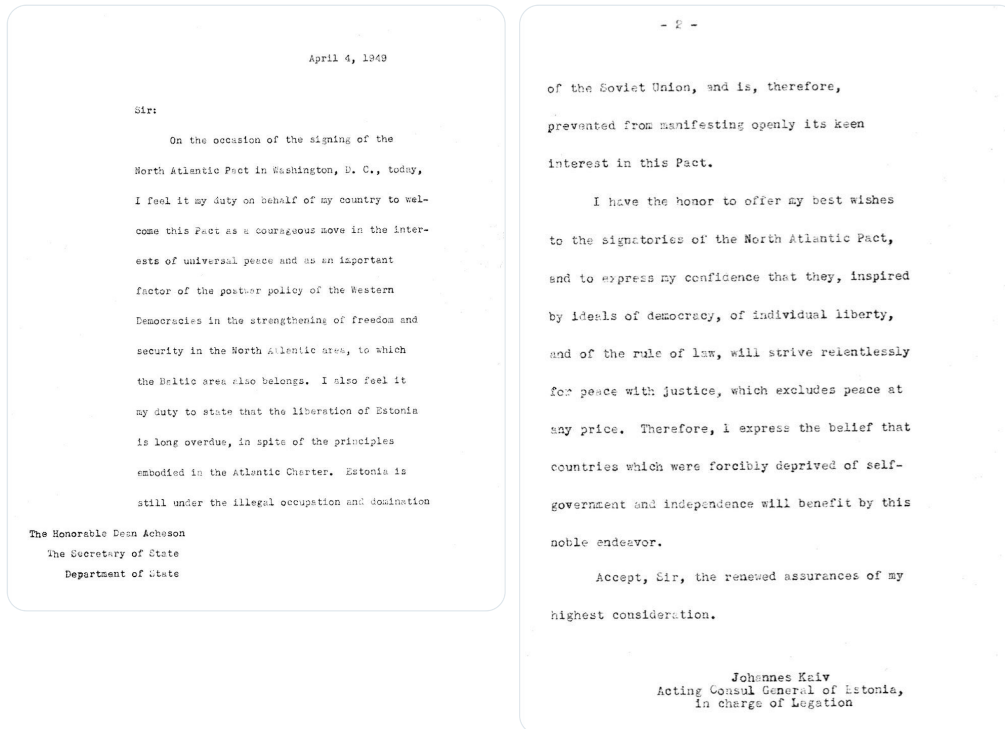
The exiled diplomats did some remarkable things, like even sending messages to the moon onboard the Apollo 11 landing - alongside other independent nations of the world.

Estonia
"The people of Estonia join those who hope and work for freedom and a better world."
Ernst Jaakson
Consul General
* * *

Latvia
"On behalf of the Latvian nation I salute the first men on the Moon and pray for their safe return."
"May their achievement contribute to world peace and restoration of freedom to all nations."
A. Dinbergs
Counselor
* * *

And, for a glimpse of what might have been without occupation, here's Estonia indicating at the founding of NATO that Estonia would have been a founding member too.

Quite a contrast to the narrative the Kremlin pushes today about NATO, again trying to undermine our agency.



These exiles were the subject of pity and ridicule for their seemingly hopeless last stand, not to mention Soviet harassment and attempts to seize the buildings as Soviet property, but they held out. And they had international law on their side.

The UN Human Rights Council, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Parliament, and many western countries, most notably the US and UK, all maintained that the Baltic nations never legally joined the Soviet Union and were illegally occupied.

Here's the difference between de facto and de jure law. De facto relates to how things are in practise, like the Baltic states not being independent within their own territory. But de jure is how things should be legally. The Baltic states maintained their de jure independence.

Then, as today, Russia seeks to portray its neighbours wanting their sovereignty as Nazis. But the Baltic re-independence movement was actually based on the rejection of both Nazis and Soviets and the consequences of their conspiracy against international law.



So the Baltic nations did not “become independent in 1991” as “former Soviet states”, as commonly described.

They actually declared their occupation a crime and formally nullified their so-called ‘membership of the Soviet Union’ as nothing more than propaganda.

They specifically chose not to create new states under international law but to re-establish their governments on the basis of legal continuity since 1918, which is the basis of all law in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania today.

But - putting all this history aside - there's another key problem with headlines about the Baltics as 'former Soviet'... Is it even relevant? In most cases, no. We generally don't describe other countries with a go-to label referencing a previous ruler or horrific past.

At its most absurd, there are articles about entrepreneurs or athletes from the Baltics that refer to their 'former Soviet' states even though they weren't even born during the occupation! A whole generation has grown up free & our modern states aren't defined by that occupation.

We don't call ourselves ex Soviet states because it's legally false - & truth still matters more than the lies of those who would drag our world back to an age of empires.

But also because there are a thousand better ways to describe our awesome, forward-looking republics.



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