

## **The Main Repressive Tasks of the National Security Institutions of the Latvian SSR**

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At the end of the World War II, the armed forces of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were deployed in Latvia as well as in other Eastern European countries.

The USSR army had liberated the countries in Eastern Europe from the Nazi regime, but, as the war ended, it served as a tool for establishing communist regimes that obeyed the Soviet Union. Unlike the other Eastern European countries, the security institutions of the USSR and their structural units, i.e., the security institutions of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) did not begin their operations in Latvia; they renewed them in 1944-1945 and continued them until August 21, 1991, when they were dismantled.

The USSR occupied Latvia on June 17, 1940. The military operations of the World War II, i.e. the arrival of the Red Army into the territory of Latvia (July 1944) and the subsequent surrender of the contingent of the German army in the Western part of Latvia – Kurzeme – did not interrupt the occupation of the Republic of Latvia. The Nazi occupation was substituted by the communist occupation.

Already since 1944, the repressive institutions of the USSR and the LSSR secured the second communist occupation in Latvia districts occupied by the Red Army. After May 8, 1945, they extended their operations in the whole territory of Latvia.

In order to provide successful operation of the security institutions, in 1941-1944 the repressive institutions of the USSR created a legal base for use in the territories recaptured from the German army. The repressive institutions of the Latvian SSR started to prepare for operations in Latvia in January 1943 – before the Tehran conference of the allied states. An operational group of the State Security National Draft Board (NKGB) of the Latvian SSR was formed in Moscow district for recruiting employees to work in Latvia.

Along with the operational groups of the Latvian Communist (Bolshevik) party (LC(B)P), which were the representatives of both the executive and the Soviet power, an operational group of the NKGB of the Latvian SSR was sent to Latvia in July 1944. The employees of the group started to create a security draft board. The operational groups of the security institutions became the core for the district sections of the repressive institutions of the Latvian SSR. In July 1944, 878 security institution employees were sent from the USSR to work in the districts of the Latvian SSR.<sup>1</sup>

In those Eastern European countries where statehood had been still maintained, the local security institutions fulfilled the orders and instructions of both local governing party and the USSR security advisors. However, the security institutions in the Latvian SSR were

directly subordinated both to the branch of the USSR Communist Party (CPSU) – the Latvian Communist Party (LCP) - and to the management of the USSR security institutions in Moscow. The functioning of the totalitarian regime in Latvia was ensured by the security institutions of the Latvian SSR along with the command in Moscow.

On December 29, 1944, the Political office of the Soviet Union's Communist (Bolshevik) party (VKP(B)) founded the Latvian office of the Central Committee (CC) of the Soviet Union's Communist (Bolshevik) party. The office controlled the Latvian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (LC(B)P) and the executive power of the Latvian SSR – the National Board of Commissioners (SNK) not only for the purposes of strengthening the power of the party and the soviet power, but also for the purposes of "destroying and ideological extermination of the bourgeois-national underground and its armed gangs, ... as well as economical restriction of kulaks." The Latvian office of the Central Committee of the VKP(B) accepted the draft resolutions of the Central Committee of the LC(B)P and the SNK of the Latvian SSR.<sup>2</sup> Aleksandrs Babkins, a member of the office, monitored the operations of the NKGB (National Board of Commissioners for State Security) of the Latvian SSR and the National Board of Commissioners for Internal Affairs (known as the NKVD) in person.<sup>3</sup> It was only as late as in March 24, 1947, when the Political office of the VKP(B) came to a conclusion that the tasks assigned to the offices of VKP(B) in the Baltic states can be performed by the local communist parties, including the LC(B)P. For this reason, the offices of VKP(B) in the Baltic states were closed down.<sup>4</sup>

Model political operations and massive, systemic extermination of people were not characteristic for the Stalin rule in the Soviet Union which followed World War II. However, the centralization of the repressive system (merging of security and interior systems) and the total control of the people reached its peak alongside with the conservative totalitarian regime. From 1944 to 1956, the operations of the state security institutions in Latvia were mostly related to the implementation of repressive measures and control of the inhabitants.

As the war ended, the Latvian SSR did not follow the Yugoslavian and Bulgarian lead. In these countries, thousands of people were assassinated without a proper court decree. However, large-scale repressive measures were still carried out in Latvia during the Stalin era, such as deportations of civilians to remote areas in the USSR (1945-1953), fight against the opponents of the regime, destruction of the national resistance movement and its armed units, unmasking of spies etc. More than 119 000 people at population 1.4 million, suffered in these activities<sup>5</sup>. As a result of the civilian deportation carried out in 1949, 42 975 people (2, 28% of the population) characterized as "kulaks" or "members of gangster and nationalist families" were deported from Latvia.<sup>6</sup>

In the same way as in the end of 1940s - beginning of 1950s "persons not belonging to class" were deported from Budapest, Bucharest, Banat, Prague, Brno and Bratislava, the deportations of citizens of German ethnicity, stateless persons and their family members (a total of 660 people) began in the biggest city of Latvia – Riga and the neighboring city – Jurmala in February 1945.<sup>7</sup> Unlikely to those deportees who were deported from the East European cities mentioned before, those from Latvia were sent to the Northern

territories of the USSR. In Liepaja, one of the biggest Latvian cities, the “cleansing” of the inhabitants was carried out before the deportation of the inhabitants in March 1949, when 940 people were subject to filtration.<sup>8</sup>

During the combat operations of the security institutions, 2407 national guerillas were executed from 1944 to 1956 without a trial<sup>9</sup>. Continuing the practice launched during the first Latvian communist occupation in 1940-1941, the security institutions and the Red Army assassinated several individuals. The troops of the NKVD of the USSR and the Ministry of the State Security (MGB) are suspected of two mass shootings of civilians between 1945 and 1947. As a result, at least 28 people were assassinated.<sup>10</sup>

In the *pro forma* independent Eastern European countries, wide-range fulmination was carried out towards “collaborators” and “fascists” (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria), “enemies of the class” (Poland) or “reactionaries” (Albania). The meaning of the term “collaboration” was widened artificially, thus clearing the place for the employees of the new regime.

In Latvia, however, inhabitants were repressed as “betrayers of the homeland”. The security institutions of the Latvian SSR used the term “betrayers of the homeland” (i.e., the USSR) when carrying out repressions both towards those individuals who had cooperated with the Nazi regime, and those who were the opponents of the regime. Unlikely to other Eastern European countries, the inhabitants of Latvia were deported, and those convicted were imprisoned in concentration camps outside of their home country.

12% of the deportees (4941 persons) died in exile - in Siberia. 183 people died on their way there. The living conditions of deportees in the special camps were not appropriate for having children. Frequently, families were split—part of the family was in the camp, the other part was back in Latvia. The proportion of women was higher among the deportees – 58, 10%.<sup>11</sup>

Although deportations were performed in accordance with the decisions of the executive power of the USSR, not only the troops of the USSR interior and employees of the USSR interior and security institutions, but also employees of the Latvian SSR state security institutions who were involved in organization and implementation of these deportations are to be held responsible for this crime.

On November 2, 1988, the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR passed a resolution “On the unlawful deportation of citizens from the territory of Latvian SSR in 1949” and thus found the violent deportations to be groundless, so they were illegal even in accordance with the USSR law. In 1989, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR vindicated all the individuals deported in 1941 and 1949.<sup>12</sup> During that time, the General Prosecutor’s Office and the Ministry of Justice of the Latvian SSR (later – of the Republic of Latvia) started to review the cases of the individuals punished or otherwise repressed in 1940s – 1950s. As a result, the victims were vindicated and the repressions towards them were found to be unlawful.<sup>13</sup>

The documents and statements of the witnesses demonstrate that the security institutions of the Latvian SSR played the major role in the destruction of the **Latvian** national resistance movement during the post-war years. It turned out that the military operations performed by the troops of the security institutions were inefficient in practice. Secret operational activities involving special agencies (warriors, which acted in undercover groups of agents who posed themselves as guerillas) were more efficient. Agents were also recruited among guerillas and those Latvians drafted in the Nazi German army, and they were operating undercover in the resistance movement. Frequently, strong narcotic substances were used to destroy the groups of national guerillas.

The promises of the soviet power to grant an amnesty to the legalized guerillas turned out to be untruthful. Quite high number of guerillas responded to this call – 2417 guerillas legalized themselves in 1945, 1002 - in 1946<sup>14</sup>. The majority of the legalized guerillas were tried or deported in 1949.

In 1953, intelligence and counter-intelligence were chosen as priorities of the security institutions of the Latvian SSR. The experience and the agency, which had demonstrated itself successfully in operations against the national secret activities, were very useful in the operational games with foreign intelligence services. Although the national resistance movement was destroyed at that time, security institutions of the Latvian SSR were reproached by Moscow that the fight against the resistance movement has been given up. During this time, there had been a change of tactics – instead of massive repressions, individual repressions were now carried out. On the grounds of the need to unmask both foreign spies and internal enemies, the new counter-intelligence tasks of security institutions of the Latvian SSR were now directed towards the creation of a comprehensive control system. One of the control mechanisms included the communication of the people within the USSR, while the other was directed towards the preclusion of unapproved communication with the outside world. It is important to note that the comprehensive control of society (gathering the information) was directly connected with the repressive activities that, according to the feedback principle, were directed against persons who possessed information or performed activities that were unacceptable to the soviet power.

In comparison to the Stalin era, in 1960s-1980s the security institutions of the Latvian SSR had to use less effort to reveal and destroy anti-soviet groups. The number of these groups had also declined in comparison to 1940s - 1950s. In 1960s – 1980s, those participants of resistance groups who, according to the soviet law, were breaking the law were spied, interrogated and indicted by the security institutions of the Latvian SSR. Basing on these charges, members of the resistance groups were imprisoned in camps in the Soviet Union.

In comparison to the Stalin era, the inhabitants of Latvia acquired more freedom of action during 1960s – 1980s. Non-violent resistance existed in Latvia, as well – people demonstrated their attitude towards the occupational power without breaking the law. The security institutions of the Latvian SSR did not allow themselves to use unlawful

repressions. Therefore, indirect repressions, such as specific preventive measures<sup>15</sup>, firing from work, expulsion from educational establishments, etc. were used to fight against the non-violent resistance. It was often carried out with the permission or by order of the LCP government and the participation of the local organization of the LCP.

The security institutions of the Latvian SSR paid special attention to open and hidden control of university students (as they were supposed to be the future employees of the soviet regime), intellectuals (artists, writers and employees of the mass media), as well as scientists. There was a comprehensive system of ideological monitoring within the universities of the Latvian SSR. Besides the agency of the State security committee (KGB) of the Latvian SSR, the employees of the university nomenclature, and officials of the communist party and the communist youth union were a part of this system. Apart from ensuring control, the security institutions of the Latvian SSR were also responsible for active moral influence of the students, which was normally carried out as a prevention measure in different stages of strictness.

From the KGB's point of view, intellectuals perceived and analyzed information very efficiently. Therefore, certain steps had to be taken to insulate intellectuals from contacts with any information and ideology that contradicted the ideological approach of the USSR. It can be defined as dosage and selection of information for intellectuals. Accordingly, the KGB controlled the environment with the help of different measures and active influence (prevention measures).<sup>16</sup>

Both verbal and physical threats were used against the rebels. The threats could be executed by applying the regulations of the Criminal Code of the Latvian SSR pertaining to “anti-soviet agitation and propaganda”, “dissemination of deliberately deceitful figments that dishonor the soviet state and the social system”<sup>17</sup>, or by creating constraints for their career, as well as creative and social activities.

It can be concluded that the security institutions of the Latvian SSR did commit certain activities against the inhabitants of Latvia during the soviet occupation, namely:

- During the Stalin era - mass repressions, such as deportations, physical elimination of individuals, and arrests;
- During the subsequent years – individual repressions, while maintaining complete control of the society.

It can be concluded that the security institutions of the Latvian SSR played a major role to maintain the soviet regime and to secure the existence of the occupational power. It should be noted that the performance of these repressions towards the inhabitants of Latvia during the soviet occupation were carried out by order and in compliance with the CPSU and LCP.

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- <sup>3</sup> - Bergmanis A. LPSR valsts drošības dienesta attīstība un loma genocīda īstenošanā Latvijā/Development of the State Security Service of the Latvian SSR and its Role in the Implementation of Genocide//Totalitārie režīmi un to represijas Latvijā 1940.- 1956. gadā./Totalitarian Regimes and Repressions in Latvia in 1940-1956. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2000.gada pētījumi. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti, vol.3., Rīga: LVIA, 2001.- 479.
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- <sup>8</sup> - Latvijas Valsts arhīvs (Latvian State Archives) 101/ 12/ 79/ 57.
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- <sup>11</sup> - Jansons R.,Zalīte I. LPSR valsts drošības dienesta izveidošana un tā galvenie represīvie uzdevumi 1944.-1956.gadā //Totalitārie režīmi un to represijas Latvijā 1940.- 1956. gadā./Totalitarian Regimes and Repressions in Latvia in 1940 -1956. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2000.gada pētījumi. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti, vol.3., Rīga: LVIA, 2001.- 454.
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- <sup>14</sup> - Slepens dienesta ziņojums/ Secret Official Report// Uz ežiņas galvu liku.2.grāmata, Rīga:LNDVA, 1995.- 73-74.
- <sup>15</sup> - Translator's note: the specific preventive measures mentioned here were normally carried out by representatives of the state security institutions (including officials, friends, colleagues, and teachers) at different places, e.g. work, universities, etc., when it was known that a certain individual might commit something that conflicts with the soviet ideology.
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