

Estland! Du stehst auf der Schwelle zu einer hoffnungsvollen Zukunft, in der du frei und unabhängig dein Schicksal bestimmen und lenken kannst! Beginne, dein Heim aufzubauen, in dem Ordnung und Recht regieren, um ein wertvolles Mitglied in der Familie der Kulturvölker zu sein! Alle Söhne und Töchter der Heimat, vereinigt euch wie ein Mann in der heiligen Arbeit des Aufbaus der Heimat! Das Blut und der Schweiß unserer Vorfahren, die für dieses Land geflossen sind, fordern dies, unsere Nachkommen verpflichten uns dazu.

Möge Gott über Dich wachen
Und reich segnen
Was immer Du auch tust
Mein teures Vaterland!⁸³

Es lebe die unabhängige estnische Republik!
Es lebe der Frieden der Völker!
Der Ältestenrat des *Eesti Maapäev*.

In Tallinn, am 21. Februar 1918.

SUMMARY

The birth of the Estonian Independence Manifesto

This article is about the preparation, declaration and publication of one of the most important founding documents of the Estonian state. Until the end of January 1918 the national leaders thought that independence would be proclaimed by the Constituent Assembly. The suspension of the Constituent Assembly election by the Bolsheviks on 27 January 1918 forced them to look for other possibilities to declare independence. The commission for the preparation of the manifesto and the Committee of National Salvation consisting of three members were set up in the Estonian Intellectuals' Club in Tallinn on 18-19 February. The Club had become the centre of national liberation forces. Formally they acted on behalf of the Provincial Council, a local government institution established after the February Revolution. Juhan Kukk was entrusted with writing the text

⁸³ Im estnischen Original: „Su üle jumal valvaku / Ja võtku rohkest õnnista / Mis iial ette võtad sa / Mu kallis isamaa!“

of the manifesto. The completed text was supplemented and amended in the Intellectuals' Club on 20 and 21 February. The manifesto was based on documents that had been published earlier: the Socialist Revolutionaries' memorandum "The Labour Republic of Estonia", the explanation of the Provincial Council regarding "The Independent National State of Estonia" and the note of the foreign delegation. It was therefore a collective document.

The possibilities for proclaim the document first seemed to be non-existent. Neither the Bolsheviks controlling inland Estonia nor German troops approaching from the south and west were interested in Estonia's independence. The opportunity to use the interregnum that could probably arise after Bolsheviks leave and before Germans arrive was negligible. Therefore the members of the Committee of National Salvation tried to go to Haapsalu on 21 February in order to proclaim the manifesto under the protection of the 1st Estonian regiment based there. Unfortunately, the Germans occupied Haapsalu before the Committee arrived there. An attempt to go to Tartu also failed. For the first time they managed to proclaim the independence manifesto officially on the evening of 23 February in Pärnu, then on 24 February in Viljandi, on 25 February in Tallinn and Paide and on 26 February in Rakvere. The news spread from the cities to the countryside.

Five typewritten copies of the manifesto were made on 21 February in Tallinn. The printing of the manifesto first seemed to be impossible because printing houses had been nationalised by the Bolsheviks and were under their strict control. Still, there was a chance to print the manifesto in Pärnu on 23 February and in Tallinn and Paide on 24 February. A total of 40,000 copies were printed. The text that was printed in Tallinn is slightly different from the Pärnu and Paide version: apparently somebody from the Committee of National Salvation edited it further, but the differences are not particularly important.