

SUMMARY

*Fighting the Forest Brethren. The Baltic Question in the Kremlin at the End of 1944*

At the end of 1944 a large-scale Sovietization process took place on the territory of the Baltic States that were reconquered by the Red Army. In the early stages of this process the Kremlin paid close attention to the use of means directed against the guerrilla movement. The Kremlin was interested in the quick crushing of the armed resistance in the Baltic for reasons pertaining to both foreign as well as domestic policy: without suppressing the resistance the Soviet regime could not exert full control over these territories, the conquest could not be considered final. It was also necessary to demonstrate to the world the monolithism of the empire in order to reject the possible accusations of the West. For this reason, in order to suppress any armed resistance, corresponding institutions were at once established (departments combating banditism which were part of the People's Commissariats for Internal Affairs), arrests and "purges" were organised (including also the joint operations of the People's Commissariats for Internal Affairs and for State Security). Moscow did not trust the local cadre and placed numerous security staff from Moscow, Leningrad and from other internal regions of the Soviet Union under the command of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian People's Commissariats for Internal Affairs and State Security. The entire process was coordinated by the highest leaders of Moscow's organs of internal affairs and state security – People's Commissars and their primary deputies (Vsevolod Merkulov, People's Commissar of State Security of the USSR, and Ivan Serov, Deputy Commissar of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). This was the only sphere of Sovietization in the Baltic area where Moscow employed this type of high level "counselling". After the so-called process was set into motion, Moscow's local representatives in the matters of state security were security deputies inaugurated as part of the Soviet Buros created in 1944. Until 1947 when these Buros were dissolved, the People's Commissars/Ministers of Internal Affairs and State Security were in essence subordinate to Moscow's security deputies and the Commissars had to bring their actions into line with them. After 1947, Moscow's direct control somewhat diminished also in the questions of state security. The process against the guerrilla movement that begun during the final months of 1944 was also important because at that time the main directions of the activities of Soviet power to suppress the resistance movement on different levels – primarily the commitment to large-scale repressions – were set for a long time. In the crushing of the armed resistance the main method of this course of action was carrying out the so-called military-Chekist operations. The use of these types of

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unified methods by the organs of internal affairs and state security was characteristic of suppressing the armed resistance movements in the Baltic area, the western Ukraine and western Belarus. The brutal opposition continued in the Baltic area until Stalin's death.