

# **‘Ethnicity is not a Physiological Moment’: German Minority Elite’s Constructivist Perceptions of Ethnicity in Interwar Estonia**

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## **Abstract**

The emergence of nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century created the need to manage ethnic diversity and handle issues of drawing boundaries between communities. This resulted in minority activism, aimed at protecting the interests of minorities and ensuring their survival. This article focuses on the latter aspect and shows how the research on country-level minority activism helps better understand majority-minority relations and their impact on the society by analysing the example of interwar Estonia. The German minority elite’s perceptions of ethnicity are discussed, based on the sources reflecting the inclusion policy of the German Cultural Self-Government, the autonomous institutional body of the German minority in Estonia. The article discusses the constructivist rhetoric of the German minority elite and explains the genesis and background of such rhetoric. It shows that first, German elite’s constructivist perceptions had historical roots; second, the elite needed to be pragmatically open rather than primordially protectionist for their dwindling community to survive; and third, the German minority had no reason for protectionism stemming from the fear of the malicious infiltration of members of other ethnic groups. Since such an open inclusion policy turned out to be relatively successful, it can be concluded that the German minority that formed the ruling elite in Estonia in earlier centuries, continued to be attractive, and this, in turn, caused significant social tensions, making the Estonians, being now politically dominant and in the numerical majority, doubt their own survival chances. The results of this article also highlight the relevance of instrumentalisation of ethnic ambiguities in forming minority activism and boundary-making between majority and minorities.

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## Introduction

Individual ethnic belonging<sup>1</sup> in the context of rising nationalism, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, has been a popular subject of interest to historians. Much attention from researchers have deserved intense public discussions at the time about the nature of ethnicity and the criteria of how to formally determine individuals' belonging to certain ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> It follows from these studies that the functioning of society was closely related to the logic of boundary making between communities. This nuance, in turn, suggests the persistent importance of research on community boundaries.

The fall of empires as an aftermath of the First World War brought the issue of individual ethnic belonging more sharply to the fore. New 'nationalising states', to borrow the phrase coined by Rogers Brubaker,<sup>3</sup> were far from being mono-ethnic, which created the persistent need to manage ethnic diversity.<sup>4</sup> As a result, on the one hand, the situation gave rise to international minority activism. Numerous authors have thus researched the Congress of European Nationalities, the institutional body of international minority activism in Europe, emphasising among other issues the goal of minorities to preserve their identity.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, as several studies have discussed, domestic political aspirations of ethnic minorities shaped the societies in interwar Europe. Yet, these studies do not pay significant attention to the survival strategies of minorities within a state.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of the latter aspect, however, would help better understand the minority activism in terms of complex domestic majority-minority relationship, boundary-making between the communities and the broader societal impact of the former two nuances.

Survival strategies as part of minority activism are well illustrated by the case of interwar Estonia, declared independent in 1918. As a result of this crucial change, the Germans, the former ruling elite, got pushed into the role of a small and dwindling ethnic minority.<sup>7</sup> Numerous studies have touched on the issue of the German minority in Estonia, primarily focusing on their role in the establishment and implementation of cultural autonomy, a novel and internationally widely praised form of non-territorial autonomy.<sup>8</sup> However, in recent years, some studies have focused on the issues of identity. The authors of these studies discuss the 'Baltic German' perceptions of belonging and conclude that the group of people they loosely connect under the umbrella term 'Baltic Germans' tended to have an ambiguous, fluid or flexible sense of belonging.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, the authors draw attention to the importance of addressing individual sense of belonging in the research of ethnic relations and thus introduce a necessary change of direction in research. Yet, even these studies do not take the highly complex conceptual framework of ethnicity perceptions into deep consideration and thus have little explanatory power in terms of what was going on with ethnic relations in Baltic societies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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It is often neglected that the individual and collective perceptions of ethnicity stem from the cognitive processes and are influenced by the inclination of individuals to essentialise the reality surrounding them, that is, to assume that objects and phenomena have intrinsic features. Consequently, humans incline to intuitively consider the belonging of themselves or others to a certain ethnic group<sup>10</sup> as their inherent characteristic stemming from descent.<sup>11</sup> However, in social interaction, particularly in formal communication, these intuitions may not always be manifested. Instead, being influenced by various external factors, people may categorise themselves and others for instrumental purposes in a way that contradicts the intuitively essentialist thinking. In doing so, they may deploy in their everyday life arguments similar to such constructivist views that have come to dominate the social sciences and humanities in recent decades. Constructivism as such is thus not a particularly new way of thinking or at least a rhetorical device. Therefore, drawing on it when analysing the rhetorical arguments of historical actors can be a useful analytical strategy.

This article demonstrates how important it is to take these aspects into account in empirical research on historical majority-minority relations. The article argues that in order to understand the societal impact of relations between the Estonian majority and German minority in today's Estonian area, it is necessary to pay attention to the German minority elite's<sup>12</sup> rhetoric regarding the nature of ethnicity. Focusing on the period of Estonian independence, the era which marked the drastic change for the German minority, the article shows that the link between their survival strategies and perceptions of ethnicity was crucially important to the interwar Estonia's majority-minority relations and understanding this complex of issues requires going beyond common references to ambiguity and fluidity.<sup>13</sup> For this, the rhetoric and arguments of the German minority elite are discussed based on the internal documents of the German Cultural Self-Government and the statements of the leaders of the German minority.

## **The Early Genesis of the German Minority Elite's Perceptions of Ethnicity**

In summer 1925, the secretary of the recently founded Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the German Cultural Self-Government in Estonia Eduard von Nottbeck wrote a letter to a certain Baron Toll, a nobleman residing in Saaremaa, the biggest island in Estonia. The letter touched upon some practical issues regarding the ethnic belonging of prospective members of the electoral rolls, which was to be compiled rapidly for the elections of the first Cultural Council of the German Cultural Self-Government scheduled for the autumn of the same year. Notably, in this short one-page letter, Nottbeck argued that 'nationality' (*Nationalität*) and 'ancestry' (*Abstammung*) are two different things. He added to this statement: 'Our German National Secretary is undoubtedly of Estonian origin, but no one doubts that he is a good German.'<sup>14</sup>

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The German National Secretary was an official for mediating the communication between the German minority and the state authorities and this position was filled by Johannes Beermann. His father, a teacher and church building master, was indeed known as an Estonian. One of the sisters of Johannes Beermann has even gone down in history with sewing the first flag for the Estonian Students' Society which later became the Estonian national flag.<sup>15</sup> These nuances did not prevent Johannes Beermann from self-identifying as a German and being active as one of the top officials of the German minority in the Estonian Republic. Clearly, the German elite also had nothing against treating him as 'own' as evidenced by the letter of Nottbeck. It was neither strange nor unusual. Beermann's family of origin was probably almost fully German-speaking as was their closest circle of acquaintances which was common in the upper circles of society in the Estonian area in the 19th century.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Beermann was unable to obtain his higher education in Estonian, a situation inevitably faced by ambitious youth at the times before the Estonian independence that also contributed to a turn in their ethnic self-identification.<sup>17</sup>

Beermann's life course reflects the widespread assimilation of Estonians into Germans caused by social mobility, a common trend in the Estonian area for several centuries. Initially, Germans emerged in Estonia (and in Latvia) after the Baltic crusades in the 13th century and the German-speaking nobility formed the ruling elite in the area from the beginning.<sup>18</sup> Since the Middle Ages, the social strata were clearly distinguished by linguistic and cultural differences so that they acquired a significance in terms of legal issues and organisation of society.<sup>19</sup> Social advancement was possible, but this led to the inevitable 'Germanisation', becoming a 'German'. In everyday terms, this meant the acquisition of the German language, its constant daily use in official and personal communication and integration into a new cultural environment with different manners and traditions compared to the previous environment of the advanced person.<sup>20</sup> Ambitious men with the origins in the Estonian peasantry often married women of German communities as a result of which their children grew up almost entirely in a German-speaking environment, which applies to the Beermann's case as well.<sup>21</sup>

The German elite in Estonia did not denounce such an assimilation. While it is widely believed that due to rigid social boundaries, the German-speaking nobility was not ready to accept individuals from lower social strata as 'own', this view appears to be rather simplistic and misleading. The misconception seems to be largely based on associating the sense of community with the membership of knightships, the ruling noble corporations, that of course did and could not accept people from lower social strata (in the Estonian area mainly 'Estonian' peasants) from a legal point of view in the first place.<sup>22</sup> When, however, socially advanced individuals with peasant ancestors reached the position to be matriculated into the knightship or merely acquired a prestigious profession like doctor or clergyman, usually neither they nor anyone else had a reason to consider them 'Estonian' anymore. This was true until at least the second half of the 19th century, when the rise of Estonian nationalism somewhat changed the situation.<sup>23</sup>

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These developments show that perceptions of communities and of belonging to these communities were complex and not unequivocally linked to clear legal boundaries between the nobility and lower social strata.

The fact that Germans had always been numerically a clear minority in Estonian area and their survival as a distinct community crucially depended on immigration and assimilation also contributed to the formation of open and inclusive perceptions of ethnicity. The community was formed and increased over the centuries not due to the natural increase but rather by a 'melting pot', which merged immigrants from various countries and socially advanced individuals with the origins in local peasantry. Consequently, there were always numerous newcomers with a variety of backgrounds and their second and third generation descendants among the German-speaking nobles, clergy, literati and professionals in various fields of life.<sup>24</sup> Facilitated by the uniting voluntary associations, this diverse group of people formed an organic part of the German-speaking community, regardless of belonging to different estates.<sup>25</sup> Against this background, there may have been a rather weak limit to such an inclusivity, for example the willingness of individuals to actually participate in community life, instead of just using the benefits of the ostensible belonging to the community.<sup>26</sup>

The 'melting pot' of making 'Baltic Germans' later shaped the inclusion policy of the German minority elite in independent Estonia in a twofold manner. On the one hand, the leaders of the German minority were well aware of the fact that it is beneficial for them not to be strictly primordial in their evaluations of who is 'own' and who is a 'stranger'. On the other hand, they also recognised that there already were only few 'pure' Germans in the primordial sense in Estonia, if at all. Due to the developments in the 1920s, particularly regarding the implementation of cultural autonomy, these considerations became increasingly relevant.

## **Cultural Autonomy and the Entrenchment of German minority elite's Constructivist Perceptions**

In 1921, the preparations for adopting a law on cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities in Estonia began. This law was finally passed many years later, in February 1925, after several rewrites and intense discussions in the Estonian parliament *Riigikogu*. While already underlying laws of Estonian statehood, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, promised ethnocultural autonomy for ethnic minorities, these were largely the German minority politicians' stubborn efforts that contributed to the fulfilment of this right. As later years demonstrated, the autonomy was not even widely used because in addition to Germans, only Jews took the opportunity and were able to establish their own cultural self-government.<sup>27</sup>

Estonian politicians, in turn, did not want to leave the German minority elite too much freedom in recruiting members to their future cultural self-government, suspecting the

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continuing 'Germanisation' of Estonians. The view that 'Estonians' were turned into 'Germans' and that this was a major social problem threatening the existence of Estonians began to develop and spread during the rise of Estonian nationalism in the second half of the 19th century. Back then, the emerging Estonian political elite denounced the 'Germanisation' and such denouncing views were increasingly widely spread in the Estonian-language newspapers, literature and other publications. There was no significant change in the public opinion after Estonia became an independent state despite the fact that Estonians were numerically in the overwhelming majority (almost 90 per cent of the population according to the census data) and from now on also politically dominant.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the prevailing sentiments among Estonian politicians and public, the Autonomy Law was designed in such a way that inclusion in the national register of a cultural self-government had to be voluntary, but first electoral rolls, which, according to the law, formed the basis for national registers, had to be prepared by local municipalities based on the information in their possession.<sup>29</sup> The aim of such a controversial legislation was to prevent the 'agitation' of the German elite in recruiting members to their cultural self-government, apparently from the belief that if they are left out of the compilation of their electoral rolls, they simply will not have the opportunity to 'agitate'.<sup>30</sup> The Estonian politicians indeed had reason to suspect 'agitation' since the German minority elite was interested in as many as possible members in their cultural self-government, preferably motivated and active since the law required that in order for the cultural council elections to be successful, at least 50% of those in the electoral rolls must vote in the elections.<sup>31</sup> Thus, as later developments showed, an 'agitation' could in fact not be prevented with legislation; during the preparation of the law, however, the politicians either did not have this foresight or they merely tried to do at least something, however much they also realised its uselessness.

Subsequent government regulations on the compilation and management of electoral rolls and national registers were also based on the aim of limiting the future German Cultural Self-Government's ability to recruit members. First, in April 1925, a Regulation on Compiling of Electoral Rolls for the First Cultural Council Elections of the German Minority was issued, according to which persons who wanted to be included in the electoral rolls and whose 'documents of legitimation' showed that they were not Germans, had to apply for a change of the corresponding record in their documents.<sup>32</sup> These 'documents of legitimation' were official personal identity documents (in Estonian *isikutunnistus*, in German *Personalausweis*), passport-like documents of personal identification for domestic use that contained an ethnicity record and thus appeared to be fundamental when the need to determine someone's ethnic belonging arose. The Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers issued in the summer of 1925 continued in the same vein. According to this regulation, after a self-government was formally established, one had to prove his or her belonging to the respective minority in order to enter its national register.<sup>33</sup> As a valid proof of ethnicity, again, 'documents

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of legitimisation', that is, personal identity documents were to be used. It was crucial that both pieces of legislation explicitly stated that changing ethnicity in identity documents was possible. Henceforth, the German minority elite began to draw on this possibility.

Soon after the adoption of the Autonomy Law, the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the German Cultural Self-Government was created. This committee had clearly inclusive attitudes about ethnicity which are confirmed by its internal documentation and by the above-mentioned letter of Eduard von Nottbeck, the secretary of the committee. An eloquent example is the explanation letter regarding the compilation of the electoral rolls which explicitly argues that only cultural ties with one or another ethnic community are decisive in ethnicity determination but not the ancestry which the committee incidentally still seemed to recognise as a potential crucial aspect of ethnicity:

The first electoral rolls should include principally all [underlining here and below in the original] Germans entitled to vote whereas nationality should be understood not as a matter of blood but as a cultural environment (see the explanation of the Law on Cultural Self-Government of National Minorities). Principally, it does not matter whether someone is full-blood Estonian or mixed-blood Russian – he can and must be included in the German electoral roll when he considers himself to belong to the German cultural circle, internally identifies himself as a German and recognises this publicly. This public recognition can be made already earlier, for example, when he has identified himself as German during the issuing of identity documents or during the completion of the registration card by police; this recognition, however, can also be made now, about this closer under IVc.<sup>34</sup>

The author(s) of the document argued under the referred point IVc that those who self-identify as Germans but have another ethnicity in their personal identity documents, will be included in the electoral roll if they apply for a change in the document in a timely manner. These individuals had to submit an application to the local police station with documented evidence that they were Germans: a certificate of being a member of a German congregation, evidence that they studied in a German school or other similar proof.<sup>35</sup>

The formulation of this document suggests that the German elite took for granted that applications for ethnicity changes will result smoothly and without obstacles in an alteration of the identity document, give the applicant the opportunity to participate in the elections and later the right to be included in the national register of the German Cultural Self-Government. Nottbeck's letter reflects this vision as well since he expressed the hope that the issue of formal ethnicity determination he was referring to (he did not go into details) would be purely theoretical and could be resolved quickly, without even emerging in practice. Yet, as shown below, they soon encountered the opposition of the state authorities.

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## The German Cultural Self-Government in Action

Although the attractiveness of Germans as the former leading stratum of the society was still considerably high in Estonia in the interwar era, their demographic situation was worrying for the elite of the community. Recognising the importance of assimilation in maintaining their ethnic group, the elite was well aware of the opposite trend and realised that numerous people who hitherto self-identified as Germans gradually 'Estonianised' in independent Estonia. According to censuses conducted in 1922 and 1934, the percentage of Germans in Estonia was 1,7% and 1,5% respectively and the size of the ethnic group in absolute terms was 18 319 and 16 346 which means that the German community in Estonia was in slow but constant decline.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the German elite acknowledged the need for every potential new member of their cultural self-government which, after the successful elections in autumn 1925, was the most important institutional body of the community.

Konrad von zur Mühlen, the provost of the German congregations in Estonia, reflected on the survival chances of the German minority in one of his letters to the Cultural Self-Government written in 1927. He wrote that many members of the German congregations read only Estonian newspapers, adding that most of them were those who entered these congregations during their adult life, but some had been members already since baptism. Mühlen was sure that since the end of the First World War more people had gone from the German congregations to the Estonian ones, while before the war the situation was the opposite.<sup>37</sup> Expressing himself in this way, he assessed the 'Germanisation' of Estonians as natural and necessary and deemed the opposite trend regrettable and he was not the only one among the German elite who had such views. Yet, the Estonian public and the state authorities, recalling the intense 'Germanisation' in the past, considered such a perception of ethnicity as a threat for the survival chances of Estonians. The situation thus resembles a constant battle for people between the elites of the two communities.

Seemingly, the Estonian state in its legislation was rather liberal regarding individuals' ethnic belonging. The section 20 of the Estonian Constitution provided for every adult Estonian citizen's unrestricted freedom of ethnic self-identification.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in various situations where formal ethnic affiliation of individuals was necessary to be identified, the decisions of the authorities had to comply with the Constitution. Furthermore, it was acknowledged at various levels of society that ethnicity should be perceived as a matter of culture and language one is grown up with and used to.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, ethnicity had acquired an extremely high formal importance in Estonian society. In two fields particularly, it was necessary to determine individuals' ethnic belonging: first, regarding the obligatorily ethnicity-based primary education system; and second, as shown above, in terms of cultural autonomy. The identity documents with the ethnicity record should have helped to create clarity in these two fields of life.

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Yet, the much needed clarity could not be reached since it was unclear who should decide what should be written in the identity documents. Similarly, there were no clear criteria to base this decision on. Against this background, the goal of the state authorities was to maintain and increase the share of Estonians in the society and since the freedom of ethnic self-identification appeared to be an obstacle in achieving this aim, this liberal principle was selectively applied by the Ministry of Interior. The position of the ministry was expressed in a regulation of the Minister of Interior from the spring of 1921, which stipulated that the constitutional freedom of ethnic self-identification can be used only once and, accordingly, the ethnicity record in the identity document can only be changed if it was erroneous and the document was issued before the entry into force of the Constitution. The obligation to prove the error remained with the person who requested the change in the document.<sup>40</sup> In practice, the ministry did not consistently adhere to its own regulation, but proceeded from a case-based logic, apparently keeping in mind the collective interests of Estonians as the dominant ethnic group.<sup>41</sup>

In 1925, the Autonomy Law brought about an unexpected change in the ethnicity determination. In the spring of the same year, the German minority elite began an intensive information work – the dreaded ‘agitation’ – in the German-language newspapers to recruit members to their future cultural self-government. Readers were informed that only people with the ethnicity ‘German’ in their identity documents will be considered eligible to be included in the electoral rolls for the first German Cultural Council elections. Those readers having any other ethnicity in their documents were urged to change the respective record if they had the wish to take part in the elections. Contacts to get further suggestions were also given. Such calls were more than once circulated in the biggest German newspapers in Estonia, as was for example this characteristic message from *Revaler Bote*:

For Attention. On May 1, local municipalities began to compile the electoral rolls for elections to the Cultural Council of the Cultural Self-Government. Only persons with the record “German” in their identity documents will be included. Since there are still many Germans who accidentally have another nationality in their identity documents, the request is addressed to them to change their identity documents since otherwise they will not have the opportunity to take part in the elections. Information will be given on Dom, Gerichtsstr. 6, daily between 1–2 and 5–6.<sup>42</sup>

The word ‘accidentally’ in this excerpt later turned out to be a widely used rhetorical argument in several disputed cases. However, here and in other cases such wording only meant that individuals applying a change in identity document did not self-identify at any given point of time as members of this ethnic group initially indicated in their document. In this sense, the word ‘accidentally’ does not imply essentialist viewpoints of the German elite. Neither was the elite sincerely convinced that, in any relevant case, the previous ethnicity record must have been made in the document against the will of

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the owner. It seems that through such rhetoric, the German elite rather sought to adapt to the logic of the state authorities that, as opposed to themselves, were reluctant to acknowledge dynamic self-identifications. Tensions and disagreements with the state authorities and Estonian public on this issue were already in the air, and careful use of words was therefore all the more necessary.

Despite cautious public rhetoric, the Preparatory Committee fuelled the disputes with the state authorities by not confining itself to theoretical argumentations and calls in the newspapers. Instead, it took real action in supporting the prospective members of electoral rolls, when they applied to change the ethnicity in identity documents. Detailed instructions for this purpose were circulated inside of the committee to make the process as smooth as possible. Over time, the officials of the committee realised that due to the opposition from the Ministry of Interior, the changes in identity documents are not mere tedious formality. This fact and the large number of interested people contacting the committee forced the latter to improve the system on an ongoing basis and according to the difficulties arising from the communication with the ministry. Instructions were given for potential applicants of how to address the authorities and which supplementary documents to submit.<sup>43</sup> On several occasions, it was recommended to contact the National Secretary Beermann for mediation.<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of whether it was the result of the active work of the German elite or the genuine interest of individuals who lived in the German-language information space to change their formal ethnicity, the number of applications submitted to the Ministry of Interior to change the ethnicity in identity documents to 'German' – mostly by those whose initial ethnicity record was 'Estonian' – grew in 1925 approximately six times compared to the previous years, from less than hundred applications per year to six hundred.<sup>45</sup> Not all applicants were particularly interested in joining the German Cultural Self-Government, their rationale could also have been the increased awareness of the possibility of changing the ethnicity record and the desire to ensure the prospect of sending their children to prestigious German-language schools.<sup>46</sup> In any case, such a sudden increase in the number of applications had an alarming effect on the Ministry of Interior. Consequently, the number of rejections by the ministry increased, which led to several lawsuits initiated by the already acting German Cultural Self-Government soon after its establishment.

One of the circular letters sent to local cultural curatories in early 1926, only a few months after the official start of the German Cultural Self-Government, announced that the position of the Ministry of Interior was contested in the Supreme Court, and it had to depend on the court ruling how it is reasonable to further proceed with ethnicity changes.<sup>47</sup> A few more months later, the self-government could already announce its first success. The Supreme Court clearly stated that the Ministry of Interior had no right to set restrictions and to refuse approving the applications for ethnicity changes.<sup>48</sup> However, numerous similar cases occurred even after this decision, since the ministry was not keen to follow the court rulings. Notwithstanding the stubbornness of

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the Ministry of Interior, almost all lawsuits against it were successful and none of the complaints was rejected on substantive grounds, only a few on procedural reasons.

The German Cultural Self-Government mediated probably all relevant court cases (there were thirty-eight altogether) by hiring or helping to hire the lawyers and, if the applicants were not able to, paid the lawyer's fees.<sup>49</sup> Woldemar Hartmann and Walter von Stackelberg were the main lawyers, the latter representing most cases. However, it is the argumentation of Hartmann that is particularly remarkable here, as it reflects most vividly the self-government's perceptions of ethnicity and may have had a significant impact on the court rulings as well. Hartmann argued in one of the court hearings that, according to the section 20 of the Constitution, ethnicity was 'not a physiological moment' but depended on 'cultural circles' in which an individual was living. He stated that changing the formal ethnicity in identity documents was not a reckless choice but was grounded in the wish of individuals to use the benefits that were legally offered to this cultural community to which they considered themselves to belong.<sup>50</sup> Thus, he emphasised the individual freedom of subjective ethnic self-identification, even endorsed instrumental intentions of the individuals concerned, without indicating whether and to what extent the self-government considers it necessary to assess their rationale to be included in the national register.

During court hearings, reflecting internal considerations of the German Cultural Self-Government was irrelevant, yet its internal documentation also demonstrates that the inclusion policy was not highly selective. The self-government was confident and not worried about, for example, possible 'malicious infiltration' by Estonians or members of any other ethnic group. It could have been otherwise as it is likely that at least some of the leaders of the German community in Estonia were familiar with such infiltration suspicions not from the very distant past, in late imperial Austria, where, during relevant disputes, the potential infiltrators were even metaphorically labelled as 'trojan horses'.<sup>51</sup> These infiltration fears occurred in similar situations of drawing formal boundaries between ethnic groups and thus would have been easy to transfer to Estonian conditions, yet the German Cultural Self-Government did not have significant trust issues with prospective new members.

There is one fragment in the documentation of the German Cultural Self-Government suggesting that the German elite recognised the potential infiltration issue in general terms. The excerpt comes from an anonymous memorandum probably written by Werner Hasselblatt, one of the most active German politicians in interwar Estonia, sometime during 1928.<sup>52</sup> In this lengthy writing he addressed various issues regarding cultural autonomy and, in terms of national registers, among other ideas mentioned the following:

In the Regulation on National Registers, a provision should find its place which gives us the right to reject the inclusion of persons who we, according to the legal regulations, do not need to consider as being Germans; this demand only

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applies in the case when such legal regulations will be adopted without that, what is unlikely, a malicious infiltration of non-Germans would occur.<sup>53</sup>

The German Cultural Self-Government clearly did not consider this hypothetical risk as significant which can be explained by the fact that such infiltration as an opportunity to damage the self-government from within was not even minimally present in the relevant public discourses and Estonian press.<sup>54</sup> Thus, its leaders were able to focus on the above-described open and inclusive recruitment of new members instead. The possible author of the quoted memorandum Werner Hasselblatt stands especially out with his relevant statements, which, however, in the light of the current state of research on him, might appear somewhat controversial and thus deserve particular attention.

### **Werner Hasselblatt's Rhetoric about Ethnicity**

The German minority politician Werner Hasselblatt was one of the main proponents of cultural autonomy in Estonia and in the Congress of European Nationalities having several firm viewpoints on the matter. As a long-time Estonian parliamentarian, he was enormously active, taking the floor during his parliamentary terms 353 times.<sup>55</sup> Given this activity, he had several opportunities to express his views on ethnicity, yet his arguments on this subject are overshadowed by his other, partly related position: to achieve mandatory national registers that will be based on the individual ethnic affiliation. His firm position that belonging to the German national register must be mandatory for all Germans has made room for an interpretation that he must have been seeing ethnicity as an intrinsic characteristic of an individual.<sup>56</sup> Hasselblatt's several speeches and writings, however, highlight his explicitly constructivist rhetoric. Thus, there is reason to take a closer look at his statements, not least to challenge the common misconception.

In autumn 1928, Hasselblatt advocated individual freedom of choice during the discussions of the draft law on 'ethnicity changes', initiated by the Ministry of Interior due to court rulings on section 20 of the Constitution. This draft law, which had the primary aim to prevent 'Estonians' from changing their ethnicity to 'German' in their identity documents, was discussed in one of the parliament committees but never reached the plenary.<sup>57</sup> Hasselblatt as a member of this committee explained in length the complexity of ethnic belonging by arguing that while there can be various criteria to define ethnicity, only individuals themselves can decide on their belonging. According to him, each ethnic group had approximately 10% cosmopolitan people who did not want to deal with the question of ethnicity at all. He pointed out that, according to the draft law, these people would have counted as 'Estonians' and not as members of any ethnic minority which might have placed minority communities in an unequal position compared to Estonians.<sup>58</sup> It is understandable why Hasselblatt opposed this law with such arguments. Knowing him as a representative of the dwindling German minority, one can hardly imagine him presenting opposite views in these committee meetings. However, it turns out that he had reason to be consistent in expressing similar ideas.

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The above-mentioned memorandum attributed to Hasselblatt similarly complained that section 6 of the Regulation on the Maintenance of National Registers contradicts section 20 of the Constitution. Namely, the regulation required documented evidence that one indeed belongs to a particular ethnic group to be enlisted in the respective national register. The memorandum argued that this opens the door to possible malice by the state authorities and reduces individual freedom of choice.<sup>59</sup> Considering the numerous court cases, both already closed and still active at the time the memorandum was written, these accusations were not purely speculative but indeed reflected the reality. Thus, the statements in this memorandum are yet again placed against the background of the struggle with the state authorities.

But how do these above-described stances correlate with Hasselblatt's firm support for mandatory registers? It appears that these views are not as contradictory as one might think. Indeed, individuals who did not want to belong to a cultural self-government had the full right to renounce their ethnicity as expressed in the memorandum attributed to Hasselblatt: 'Exclusion at one's own will is permitted only if one confesses to belong to another nationality'.<sup>60</sup> In an article written several years later for the journal *Eesti Politsei* ('Estonian Police'), Hasselblatt elaborated this idea. He stated that a voluntary register is 'labile' and 'illogical' and then moved on to argue that cultural self-governments were established analogously to the local municipalities. Thus, the territorial tie of individuals with the municipalities should have been equated with belonging to an autonomous ethnic community. Consequently,

a citizen may withdraw from his or her obligations to the city government only when he or she leaves the territorial unit i.e., moves out. Similarly, every member of an ethno-cultural unit should be released from its obligations to it only if he or she abandons the basis of this ethnic unit i.e., when he or she changes his or her ethnicity.<sup>61</sup>

Hasselblatt's position seems to be purely pragmatic in all of the contexts he expressed such views. Particularly in this writing, right after the above-quoted statement he declared that a mandatory register is necessary to prevent the leaving of people who want to avoid taxes. He based his argumentation on the assertion that 'national discipline' of individuals was 'much too overestimated'.<sup>62</sup> The same pragmatism applies to other leaders of the German minority in Estonia, as almost identical views on national registers to those published by Hasselblatt were expressed by another German politician and parliamentarian Max Bock years earlier in the parliament when the Autonomy Law was discussed.<sup>63</sup> The pragmatic rationale behind the rhetoric of the German minority politicians such as Hasselblatt or Bock means that it is almost impossible to assess to what extent their constructivist arguments reflect a genuine worldview or whether they were used as a mere instrumental strategy developed in specific social and political conditions. In the latter case, Hasselblatt and other leading figures of the German minority could express essentialist views in other contexts and under other conditions, all

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the more so since essentialist thinking is cognitively more intuitive than such pragmatic constructivism discussed in this article.

In any case, the inclusion practices of the German Cultural Self-Government and rhetoric of its key actors and politicians, particularly those of Werner Hasselblatt, demonstrate that the shrinkage of Germans in independent Estonia was clearly perceived as the most crucial issue for their community compared to other possible considerations in inclusion policy such as the hypothetical necessity to save the purity of the ethnic group or the likelihood of infiltration of 'strangers' for malicious purposes.

## Conclusion

This article showed that the German minority elite in interwar Estonia perceived ethnicity in words and deeds remarkably inclusively. The argumentation the leading figures of the German community used in various documents and formal communication was, on the one hand, constructivist in content and, on the other hand, instrumental in purpose. In order to recruit members to their cultural self-government and thus strengthen the community, they constantly expressed the idea that ethnicity can be ambiguous and dynamic. According to this rhetoric, individual belonging to an ethnic group stemmed from a personal decision based on subjective sense of belonging and one's cultural and linguistic connections to a particular ethnic group. In this sense, ethnicity could not be neither an intrinsic characteristic of an individual nor primordially prescribed. This view was in fact not uncommon at the time, even the first Constitution of the Estonian Republic featured the same idea, despite the fact that the Ministry of Interior later implemented this principle selectively causing numerous disputes and court cases.

The rhetorical perceptions of the German minority elite were, however, additionally formed by three important factors. First, historical assimilation trends in the Estonian area favoured the development of constructivist ideas. The 'melting pot' which had ensured the persistence of German language and culture in Estonia for centuries, normalised the idea of assimilation in the heads of the leaders of the German minority. Second, since Germans were a fading ethnic group in Estonia, constructivist perceptions were practically necessary to stop this process. Thus, the German elite tried to make the most of its still preserved attractiveness. And third, although excessive openness to newcomers theoretically could have led to the threat of infiltrators seeking to harm the community from within, the German elite had no real reason to fear this. Even if a few individuals with such intentions had ended up in the national register of their cultural self-government, the risk would not have outweighed the benefits of openness.

As opposed to previous research arguing that individuals related to the German minority community in the Baltic states might have struggled in making sense of their belonging in a multiethnic environment,<sup>64</sup> this article demonstrated that the German minority elite in Estonia was relatively successful in its recruiting activity, achieving the remarkable surge of formal ethnicity changes in the 1920s. This indicates the ongoing

ing, despite slowly decreasing, attractiveness of the German community, regardless of whether individual considerations for joining it were emotional or instrumental. In other words, individuals had the willingness to associate themselves with Germans and their choices had a major impact on the relations between the German minority and Estonians, since the latter, despite their dominant position and numerical majority, were doubting their own survival chances. Thus, focusing merely on the ambiguity and fluidity of ethnicity in research on ethnic relations does not help understand societal tensions related to ethnic diversity and minority activism within a state. Paying attention to the instrumentalisation of ethnic ambiguities, however, might be helpful in untangling these issues.

## Endnotes

1 In this article, the words 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are preferred over 'national' and 'nation' except where direct quotations from sources are given. While acknowledging that the latter is more common in nationalism-related studies and in relevant historical sources when referring to communities, this study does not consider ethnic and national communities as intrinsically different phenomena. Thus, referring to the communities as 'ethnic' helps avoid unnecessary ideological connotations and a false impression that the boundaries between communities are determined only by nationalism.

2 See e.g. Juliette Cadiot, 'Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917)', *The Russian Review* 64/3 (2005), 440–455; Jeremy King, 'Who is Who? National Classification in Imperial Austria, 1867–1914', *The Journal of Modern History* 96/2 (2024), 291–331; Börries Kuzmany, 'Objectivising National Identity: The Introduction of National Registers in the Late Habsburg Empire', *Nations and Nationalism* 29/3 (2023), 975–991; Rok Stergar & Tamara Scheer, 'Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification', *Nationalities Papers* 46/4 (2018), 575–591.

3 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

4 To name only few relevant studies: Kari Alenius, 'The Integration of National Minorities in Finland and Estonia during the Interwar Period (1918–1939)', *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis* 38 (2019), 131–151; Kari Alenius & Saulius Kaubrys, *Balancing between National Unity and "Multiculturalism": National Minorities in Lithuania and Finland 1918–1939* (Leiden: Brill | Schöningh, 2022); Chad Bryant, 'Either German or Czech: Fixing Nationality in Bohemia and Moravia, 1939–1946', *Slavic Review* 61/4 (2002) 683–706; Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus* 126/2 (1997), 47–63; Olena Palko & Samuel Foster, 'Contested Minorities in the 'New Europe': National Identities in Interwar Eastern and Southeastern Europe', *National Identities* 23/4 (2021), 303–323; Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe 1848–1945* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).

5 E.g. Ulrike von Hirschhausen, 'From Minority Protection to Border Revisionism: The European Nationality Congress, 1925–38', in *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Martin Conway & Kiran Klaus Patel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 87–109; Martyn Housden, *On Their Own Behalf: Ewald Ammende, Europe's National Minorities and the Campaign for Cultural Autonomy 1920–1936* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2014); Xosé M. Núñez Seixas & David J. Smith, 'Internationalist Patriots? Minority Nationalists, Ethnic Minorities, and the Global Interwar Stage, 1918–39', in *Sovereignty, Nationalism, and the Quest for Homogeneity in Interwar Europe*, ed. by Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, Davide Rodogno & Mona Bieling (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 233–256; David J. Smith, Marina Germane & Martyn Housden, 'Forgotten Europeans: Transnational Minority Activism in the Age of European Integration', *Nations and Nationalism* 25/2 (2019), 523–543.

6 E.g. Mart Kuldkepp, 'The Political Choices and Outlooks of the Estonian Swedish National Minority, 1917–1920', *National Identities* 23/4 (2021), 409–431; Oskar Mulej, 'Territorial and Non-Territorial Aspects in the Autonomist Proposals of the Sudeten German Party, 1937–38', *Nationalities Papers* 50/5 (2022), 942–962; Edward D. Wynot Jr., 'The Case of German Schools in Polish Upper Silesia, 1922–1939', *The Polish Review* 19/2 (1974), 47–69.

7 Karsten Brüggemann, 'Von der führenden Schicht zur nationalen Minderheit: Zur Klärung der Rolle der estländischen deutschen Minderheit bei der Begründung der Republik Estland 1918–1919', *Nordost-Archiv* 4/2 (1995), 453–479; David Feest, 'Abgrenzung oder Assimilation. Überlegungen zum Wandel deutschbaltischer Ideologien 1918–1939 anhand der "Baltischen Monatsschrift"', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 45/4 (1996), 506–543.

8 E.g. Kari Alenius, 'Under the Conflicting Pressures of the Ideals of the Era and the Burdens of History: Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918–1925', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 35/1 (2004), 32–49; Kari Alenius, 'The Birth of Cultural Autonomy in Estonia: How, Why, and for Whom?', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38/4 (2007), 445–462; John Hiden & David J. Smith, 'Looking beyond the Nation State: A Baltic Vision for National Minorities between the Wars', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41/3 (2006), 387–399; Martyn Housden, 'Cultural Autonomy in Estonia: One of History's "Curiosities"?', in *The Baltic States and their Region*, ed. by David J. Smith (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2005), 227–249; Kaido Laurits, *Saksa Kulturomavalitsus Eesti Vabariigis 1925–1940: monograafia ja allikad* (Tallinn: Rahvusarhiiv, 2008); David J. Smith, 'Estonia: A Model for Inter-War Europe?', *Ethnopolitics* 15/1 (2016), 89–104.

9 E.g. Karsten Brüggemann & Katja Wezel, 'Nationally Indifferent or Ardent Nationalists? On the Options for Being German in Russia's Baltic Provinces, 1905–17', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20/1 (2019), 39–62; Katja Wezel, 'Introduction: German Community – German Nationality? Baltic German Perceptions of Belonging in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48/1 (2017), 1–11. See also the articles of the special issue of the *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48/1 (2017), titled 'Baltic German Perceptions of Belonging in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century'.

10 According to Rogers Brubaker, 'ethnic group' is a problematic concept because it implies that such collective entities are objective and discrete phenomena that simply exist. While this article agrees that ethnic groups should not be considered as inherently existing, it is not categorically negative about the concept because individual cognition and complex social relationships result in the actual grouping of humanity in ways usually referred to as ethnic. Thus, avoiding the relevant concept can lead to the neglect of these social processes. For more details of Brubaker's views, see Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', *European Journal of Sociology/Archives européennes de sociologie* 43/2 (2002), 163–189.

11 In scholarly literature, this view has also been referred to as primordialism. For the origins of the term and the related discussions of the recent decades, see e.g. John Coakley, 'Primordialism in Nationalism Studies: Theory or Ideology?', *Nations and Nationalism* 24/2 (2018), 327–347; Clifford Geertz, 'The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New-York: Basic Books, 1973), 255–310; Francisco J. Gil-White, 'How Thick is Blood? The Plot Thickens...: If Ethnic Actors are Primordialists, What Remains of the Circumstantialist/Primordialist Controversy?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22/5 (1999): 789–820.

12 Minority elite in this article is defined as a group of individuals with the will, resources and institutions to speak and act on behalf of the entire community.

13 A few studies have already drawn attention to the relevance of the German minority elite's activity on the matter. See e.g. David J. Smith & John Hiden, *Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State: National Cultural Autonomy Revisited* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012); Triin Tark, 'Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung und die Änderung der Volkszugehörigkeit in Estland in den 1920er Jahren', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 70/1–2 (2022), 131–158.

14 'Unser deutscher Volkssekretär ist zweifellos estnischer Abstammung, aber deswegen wird doch keiner zweifeln, dass er guter Deutscher ist.' Tallinn, Rahvusarhiiv [RA], ERA.85.1.4: Eduard von Nottbeck to Baron Toll, 17/6/1925.

15 Einar Hiob & Rutt Tänav, *Emilie Beermann, Eesti lipp ja Põltsamaa* (Põltsamaa: Põltsamaa Muuseum, 2012).

16 Ea Jansen, *Eestlane muutuv ajas: seisuseühiskonnast kodanikuühiskonda* (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007); Lea Leppik, 'Social Mobility and Career Patterns of Estonian Intellectuals in the Russian Empire', *Historical Social Research* 33/2 (2008), 42–62; Riho Saard, *Härraskirikust rahvakirikuks: Eesti rahvusest luterliku vaimulikkonna kujunemine ja Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku sünd* (Tallinn: Argo, 2020).

17 Väino Sirk, 'Visioonidest teguriks hariduspoliitikas: eesti haridusideoloogia peasuunad ja ühiskondlik organiseerumine Esimese maailmasõjani', *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* 20/1 (2014), 74–95.

18 Kalev Katus, Allan Puur & Luule Sakkeus, 'Development of National Minorities. Republic of Estonia up to 1944', *Trames* 1/3 (1997), 221–246 (226).

19 Paul Johansen & Heinz von zur Mühlen, *Deutsch und undeutsch im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Reval* (Cologne/Vienna: Bölaun, 1973); Tiina Kala, 'Gab es eine „nationale Frage“ im mittelalterlichen Reval?', *Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte* 7 (2012), 11–34.

20 Ea Jansen, 'Die nicht-deutsche Komponente', in *Sozialgeschichte der baltischen Deutschen*, ed. by Wilfried Schlau (Cologne: Mare Balticum, 1997), 233–243.

21 Saard, *Härraskirikust rahvakirikuks*, 82; Triin Tark & Olev Liivik, 'Nationalismus und die „Wacholderdeutschen“: Das Thema des Verrats an der Nation in der estnischen Presse der Zwischenkriegszeit', *Nordost-Archiv* 26 (2017), 126–151 (130).

22 Cf. Feest, 'Abgrenzung oder Assimilation', 514–515; Pärtel Piirimäe, 'The Baltic', in *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History*, ed. by Diana Mishkova & Balázs Trencsényi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 57–78 (61).

23 A great example of this is the Faehlmann family, whose members across generations included, for instance, a doctor, a land surveyor, and two ship captains. About the family's German-speaking everyday milieu and circle of acquaintances has written the ship captain Rudolf Faehlmann in his memoirs: Rudolf Faehlmann, *Mein Leben* (Kiel, 1964).

24 See more *Sozialgeschichte der baltischen Deutschen*, ed. by Wilfried Schlau (Cologne: Mare Balticum, 1997).

25 Ea Jansen, 'Voluntary Associations in Estonia. The Model of the 19th Century', *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Humanities and Social*

Sciences, 42/2 (1993), 115–125.

26 While 'Baltic German' community building, especially in the form of association culture, has been studied (see e. g. Jörg Hackmann, 'Nachholende Nationalisierung. Das kurze Leben der Deutschen Vereine in den russländischen Ostseeprovinzen (1905-1914)', in *Vereinskultur und Zivilgesellschaft in Nordosteuropa. Regionale Spezifik und europäische Zusammenhänge. Associational Culture and Civil Society in North Eastern Europe. Regional Features and the European Context*, ed. by Jörg Hackmann (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2012), 387–418), this aspect remains under-researched and therefore, it is difficult to assess to what extent the views were changed in independent Estonia compared to previous decades.

27 About cultural autonomy in Estonia see more e.g. Alenius, 'The Birth of Cultural Autonomy'; Smith, 'Estonia: A Model'; Smith & Hiden, *Ethnic Diversity*.

28 Tark & Liivik, 'Nationalismus und die „Wacholderdeutschen“'.

29 'Law on the Cultural Autonomy of Racial Minorities in Esthonia', *League of Nations – Official Journal*, 6/1925, 788–791 (789–790).

30 'Protokoll nr. 114 (17)', in *II Riigikogu: IV istungjärg: protokollid nr. 98–114* (Tallinn: Riigikogu, 1924), column 933; 'Lisa nr. 87', in *II Riigikogu protokollide lisad: VII istungjärg* (Tallinn: Riigikogu, 1925), column 217.

31 'Law on the Cultural Autonomy', 790.

32 'Määrus Eesti Wabariigi Saksa vähemusrahvuse esimese kultuurnõukogu walimiste walijate nimekirja kokkuseadmise kohta', *Riigi Teataja*, 23/4/1925, 346–347.

33 'Rahvusnimekirjade pidamise määrus', *Riigi Teataja*, 16/6/1925, 469–470.

34 'Die ersten Wählerlisten sollen prinzipiell alle stimmberechtigten Deutschen umfassen, wobei die Nationalität nicht als Frage des Blutes, sondern der Kulturgemeinschaft aufzufassen ist (siehe Motivebericht zum Gesetz über die Kulturselbstverwaltung der völkischen Minderheiten). Im Prinzip ist es also gleichgültig, ob jemand Vollblut-Este oder Halbblut-Russe ist – er kann und muss in die deutsche Wählerliste eingetragen werden, wenn er selbst sich als zum deutschen Kulturkreis gehörig betrachtet, sich innerlich als Deutscher ansieht, und dieses öffentlich bekennt. Dieses öffentliche Bekenntnis kann schon früher erfolgt sein, z. B. wenn er bei Ausgabe des Personalausweises oder bei Eintragung in die Polizeiliche Meldekarte seine Nationalität mit deutsch bezeichnet hat; das Bekenntnis kann aber auch jetzt noch nachträglich erfolgen, worüber unter IVc näheres.' Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.2: Explanation for the compilation of the first electoral rolls, n.d.

35 RA, ERA.85.1.2: Explanation, n.d.

36 1922 a. *üdrahvalugemise andmed. Vihk 1, Rahva demograafiline koosseis ja korteriolud Eestis* (Tallinn: Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, 1924), 31; *Rahvastiku koostis ja korteriolud: I. III 1934 rahvaloenduse andmed. Vihk II* (Tallinn: Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, 1935), 47.

37 Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.1719: Konrad von zur Mühlen to the Office of Culture of the German Cultural Self-Government, 21/9/1927.

38 *The Constitution of the Esthonian Republic. (Passed by the Constituent Assembly on the 15th of June 1920)* (Tallinn: Constituent Assembly, 1924), 4.

39 Eugen Maddison, 'Meie rahvusvähemused', *Vaba Maa*, 11/8/1925, 2.

40 'Siseministri määrus isikutunnistuste paranduste kohta', *Riigi Teataja*, 5/4/1921, 137.

41 Tark, 'Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung'.

42 'Zur Beachtung. Am 1. Mai haben die Selbstverwaltungen mit der Zusammenstellung der Listen zu den Wahlen in den Kulturrat der Kulturselbstverwaltung begonnen. In diese Listen werden nur Personen mit dem Vermerk 'sakslane' im Personalausweis ausgenommen. Da es noch viele Deutsche gibt, bei denen versehentlich eine andere Nationalität im Personalausweis angegeben ist, so sei an sie die Aufforderung gerichtet, ihren Personalausweis ändern zu lassen, da sie sonst keine Möglichkeit haben, sich an den Wahlen zu beteiligen. Auskünfte werden erteilt: auf dem Dom, Gerichtsstr. 6, täglich von 1–2 und von 5–6.' 'Revaler Chronik', *Revaler Bote*, 11/5/1925, 4.

43 Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: Eduard von Nottbeck to an applicant, 10/6/1925; Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: Information from August Spindler, n. d.; Tallinn, RA,

ERA.85.1.4: August Spindler to Böthlingk, 6/6/1925; Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: Preparatory Committee to an applicant, 18/5/1925.

44 Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: August Spindler to an applicant, 17/6/1925; Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: Eduard von Nottbeck to an applicant, 17/6/1925; Tallinn, RA,

ERA.85.1.4: Eduard von Nottbeck to Krüger, n. d.; Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.4: Eduard von Nottbeck to an applicant, 8/5/1925. See also Smith & Hiden, *Ethnic*

*Diversity*, 48.

45 *Valitsusastutiste tegevus 1918–1934* (Tallinn: Riigikantselei, 1934), 215.

46 Tark, 'Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung', 146.

47 Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.161: Circular letter to cultural curatories, 4/2/1926.

48 Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.161: Circular letter to cultural curatories, 6/5/1926.

49 Tartu, RA, EAA.3245.1.369: Oswald Hartge to Stackelberg, 17/5/1930; Tartu, RA, EAA.3245.1.369: Roderich Greinert to Stackelberg, 27/3/1930; Tartu, RA,

- EAA.3245.1.369: Walter von Stackelberg to German Cultural Government, 4/9/1929.
- 50 Tallinn, RA, ERA.1356.2.602: Minutes of the hearing of the Supreme Court, 2/12/1927.
- 51 King, 'Who is Who'; Kuzmany, 'Objectivising National Identity'.
- 52 Laurits, *Saksa Kulturomavalitsus*, 362.
- 53 'In die Nationalregisterverordnung sollte eine Bestimmung Aufnahme finden, welche uns das Recht gibt, die Aufnahme von Personen in das Nationalregister abzulehnen, die nach Massgabe der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen von uns nicht als Deutsche angesehen zu werden brauchen; diese Forderung gilt nur für den Fall, dass solche gesetzlichen Bestimmungen geschaffen werden, ohne dass sich, was unwahrscheinlich ist, ein böswilliger Zudrang Nichtdeutscher zeigen sollte.' Tallinn, RA, ERA.85.1.350: Memorandum on the organisation of the German Cultural Self-Government, n.d.
- 54 About public discourses on relations between Estonians and Germans see Tark & Liivik, 'Nationalism und die „Wacholderdeutschen“'.
- 55 Raimo Raag, 'The Multilingual Parliament: Language Choice by Non-Estonian Members of Parliament in Parliamentary Debates in Estonia 1919–1934', in *The Ethnic Dimension in Politics and Culture in the Baltic Countries 1920–1945*, ed. by Baiba Metzāle-Kangere (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2004), 92–120 (102).
- 56 See e.g. Jörg Hackmann, 'The Dilemma of Dual Loyalty. Werner Hasselblatt and the Rise and Failure of Baltic German Minority Politics in the Inter-War Period', *Studies on National Movements* 7/1 (2021), 1–27 (10).
- 57 Tark, 'Die deutsche Kulturselbstverwaltung', 150–151.
- 58 Tallinn, RA, ERA.80.3.824: Minutes of the subcommittee of the general committee of *Riigikogu*, 16/11/1928, 5/12/1928.
- 59 RA, ERA.85.1.350: Memorandum, n.d.
- 60 'Ein Ausscheiden auf eigenen Wunsch nur im Falle des Bekenntnisses zu einer anderen Nationalität zulässig ist.' RA, ERA.85.1.350: Memorandum, n.d.
- 61 'Oma kohustusist linnavalitsuse vastu võib kodanik ainult loobuda, kui tema territoriaalse aluse jätab maha, s. o. kolib ära. Niisamuti peaks iga rahvuskultuurilise ühenduse liige oma kohustusist selle vastu ainult siis vabanema, kui tema rahvuslise ühenduse aluse jätab maha, s. o. muudab oma rahvuse.' Werner Hasselblatt, 'Saksa vähemusrahvuse kulturomavalitsus', *Eesti Politsei* 4 (1931), 255–259 (259).
- 62 Hasselblatt, 'Saksa vähemusrahvuse kulturomavalitsus', 259.
- 63 'Protokoll nr. 216 (32)', in *I Riigikogu: IX istungjärg: protokollid nr. 185–221* (Tallinn: Riigikogu, 1923).
- 64 This argument is particularly dominant in the special issue of the *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48/1 (2017). For details, see the introduction of this special issue: Wezel, 'Introduction'.