

# THE ETHNIC ASPECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT

---

---

*Yuri Stupin*

## THE ESTONIAN DIASPORA IN SOUTH-WEST RUSSIA IN THE 1920—30S: MIGRATION RESULTS

*This article analyses the spatial features of the settling of Russian Estonians in the North-west region at the “zenith” of diaspora on the basis of 1920, 1926, and 1939 censuses. The author identifies the principal settling areas and points out the geographical preconditions for the rapid decline of the diaspora.*

**Key words:** Russian Estonians, North West of Russia, ethnic settling.



The mass migration of Estonians beyond the autochthonous settlement areas, which dates back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in the formation of a large Estonian diaspora in Russia. As early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 10% of Estonians lived beyond the autochthonous area. Estonian colonies were being established almost throughout Russia — even in the Far East. However, the centre of Estonian settlement developed in the immediate vicinity of their ethnic homeland — in Northwest Russia<sup>1</sup>. In 1926, 87,000 Estonians resided there — almost a half of their total number within the then USSR (155,000 people) [3].

The collapse of the Russian Empire as a result of the revolution of 1917, the establishment of the Soviet rule and the formation of the independent Republic of Estonia (1918) led to the cessation of Estonian migration to Russia. By then, the Estonian diaspora in Russia had reached its maximum size. The analysis of the features of territorial distribution of Estonian ethnos within the area of the most compact settlement at this time is the subject of this article.

It is worth mentioning that the literature available today mostly considers the history of Estonian migration to Russia and its regions [5; 6; 8; 9; 12; 13]. There have also been attempts to compile general reference data on Estonian colonies established in the Russian Empire by Estonian migrants [10; 11]. However, little attention has been paid to the aspect of distribution of the Estonian diaspora in Russia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Until the late 1930s, the Northwest region lay within the administrative borders of the Leningrad region (excluding the southern districts of the today's Pskov region, which since 1929 belonged to the Western region, and since 1935 the Kalinin region).

The main source of the present study was the data of the All-Union census (AUC) of 1926. Of course, at first sight, the most promising approach would be to use the data of another census, which took place in 1920. According to Article IV of the Treaty of Tartu of 1920 between the RSFSR and Estonia, the "persons of Estonian origin", who lived in Russia and were of age, were granted the right to opt for Estonian citizenship within a year since the conclusion of the treaty (later, the option period was prolonged) [7]. Approximately 37 thousand Russian Estonians exercised this right [6]. Thus, as a result of option, the size of Estonian diaspora diminished by 20%. However, most optants left Russia after the AUC of 1920 (it took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August — just in 7 months after the Treaty of Tartu had been signed). Consequently, this AUC reflects the condition of Estonian diaspora in Russia at the moment, when it was much larger than during the AUC of 1926. It is the AUC of 1920 that most fully reflected the results of Estonian immigration to Russia.

On the other hand, the data of AUC of 1926 are more diversified and informative, than those of the AUC of 1920. The latter was carried out during the Civil war, which led to a considerable underestimation of population (although, in Northwest Russia it was less pronounced than, for instance, on eastern and southern periphery of Russia). The published materials of the AUC of 1920 are scarce; they often contradict each other, unlike those of the next AUC. The available to researchers results of the 1920 census provide materials for a study into the ethnic composition of the population of Northwest only at the level of volosts [4], while the data of 1926 at the level of settlements<sup>2</sup>. It is also important that the published results of the AUC of 1926 were presented at the level of administrative districts (introduced after the establishment of the Leningrad region in 1927) rather than only volosts, uyezds, and guberniyas, which had existed prior to the administrative reform. It gives us an opportunity to compare its data with those of later censuses. Thus, I relied, first of all, on the materials of the AUC of 1926 and used the census of 1920 only as an auxiliary source.

The analysis of census results helps identify the main features of the distribution of Estonians on the territory of the Northwest RSFSR. First of all, one should mention that the immigration of Estonians was of predominantly agricultural nature. According to the AUC of 1926, only 26% of the Estonians of the Leningrad region (LR) resided in urban settlements. It is the main difference between the Estonians and other Baltic peoples, who also settled within the Northwest region. For example, among the Latvians living in the LR in 1926, 49% resided in the city or towns. Among the Lithuanians, the percentage of urban population is even higher (89%). Of course, the level of urbanisation of the Estonians and the Russians differed significantly. In the 1920s, there were a few urban settlements with a considerable share of Estonian population. These are, first of all, *Yamburg*, where, in the 1920s, Lithuanians accounted for 30.1% of population (symbolically, in 1922, this

---

<sup>2</sup> For unpublished census materials and summary spreadsheets see: Saint-Petersburg branch of the archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Fund 135. Inventory 3.

town was renamed after the Estonian V. Kingissepp, and *Gdov* (10.4% of Estonians in 1920) [4]. By 1926, the share of the ethnos considered had diminished significantly in these towns: in Kingissepp — down to 19.6%, in *Gdov* — down to 9.5%. As Viktor Maamägi stressed, the Estonians residing in towns were more active in opting for Estonian citizenship than those residing in rural areas [6], which affected the dynamics of percentage of Estonians among urban population. According to the AUC of 1926, a good example is the settlement of *Strugi Krasnye* (which was rather arbitrarily included by the organisers of the 1926 census into the category of urban-type settlements<sup>3</sup>), where the percentage of Estonians reached 14.0%. Approximately 2/3 of the total size of urban Estonian population, according to both censuses, resided in Petrograd/Leningrad (1926, the city was home to 10% of the total of Estonian diaspora in the USSR).

The general information on the ethnic structure of the population of administrative districts with a high percentage (more than 5%) of Estonians according to the 1926 census are presented in the table.

**The number and percentage of Estonians in the districts of their primary settlement (according to the AUC of 1926)**

District	Total population	Estonians	
		Absolute	%
<b>Southern areas</b>			
Lyady district	23354	4597	19,7
Polna district	18917	3489	18,4
Strugi Krasnye district	38942	5912	15,2
Novoselsky district	27943	3234	11,6
Gdov district	34181	2881	8,4
Seryodka district	28092	1886	6,7
Plyussa	28679	1703	5,9
Rudno	22086	1182	5,4
Luga district (excluding the town of Luga)	48972	2541	5,2
<b>Northern area</b>			
Moloskovitsy district	19776	4090	20,7
Volosovo district	28250	4537	16,1
Kingissepp district	22019	3255	14,8
Oranienbaum district	43171	2211	5,1

*Comment.* The table presents the data on the districts where the share of Estonians in the total population size is higher than 5% (in decreasing order).

Source: [2].

<sup>3</sup> In 1925, this settlement was included into the category of dacha communities, which, until 1982, were not considered as urban-type settlements. However, during the analysis of 1926 census results, its population was accounted as urban. The status of an industrial community and, hence, a full-blown urban-type settlement was granted to *Strugi Krasnye* only in 1958.

The analysis of district results of the 1926 AUC helps distinguish two types of administrative districts of the LR with the highest percentage of Estonians in the total population size. The first one (let us call this district the southern area) covers the territory from Lake Peipus to the east, approximately to the Leningrad-Pskov railway. Most Estonian settlements are situated in the western part of the area. The northern border of the area is rather vague; however, it almost coincides with the contemporary border between the Leningrad and Pskov regions. The highest percentage of Estonians was recorded by the census in three adjacent administrative districts of the region — the Lyady, Polna, and Strugi Krasnye ones.

The second area of compact Estonian settlement (the northern one) is situated further north and stretches along the Tosno-Tallin railroad. In certain places, it diverges substantially to the north. Most Estonians resided here in two districts — the Volosovo and Moloskovitsy ones.

The analysis of the data presented in the table lets us speak of a low degree of territorial concentration of Estonian diaspora. Although 41.5 thousand Estonians resides in the districts listed, they did not account even for a half of their total number in the Northwest region. From the remainder of 45.6 thousand people, around one third was concentrated in Leningrad, while the others were dispersed over the whole western and southern part of the region. Small groups of Estonians were settled throughout the LR, only in the eastern part, the Estonian population was almost non-existent. So, only 474 Estonians resided in the Cherepovets district and only 70 in the Lodeynoye Pole district.

In 25 administrative districts of the Leningrad region, the percentage of Estonians ranged from 1 to 5%, in 9 of them from 3 to 5%. Most districts of the latter group were concentrated in the southern part of the region, which now covers the western and south-western parts of the Tver region (the Toropets, Oktyabrsky, Leninsky and Bologoye districts). A certain increase in the percentage of Estonians was registered to the south from Leningrad — in the Trotsky district (today — the Gatchina district, 4.2%) and the mentioned in the table Oranienbaum district. It was included in the table not as a component of the "northern" group of districts of compact Estonian settlement, but rather as a satellite of Leningrad.

Another feature of the geography of Estonian settlement in the region under consideration is the absence of a large compact territory groups both in the Northwest in general and the districts of highest diaspora concentration. One could hardly come across a group of settlements, where Estonians would account for the majority of population. Even in the districts with the highest percentage of Estonian population, such settlements alternated with Russian ones. The explanation might lie in the fact that Estonian migrants, when moving to Russian guberniyas, settled on developed territories with dense agricultural population. Land plots suitable for cultivation were scarce, small and lay at a substantial distance from each other.

A vivid example of the mentioned feature of Estonian settlements is a network of basic national administrative units of the LR — *national village*

*councils*, which had existed until the late 1930s<sup>4</sup>. Then, the state was conducting a consistent policy of the so called “korenizatsiya“ (indigenisation), a manifestation of which was the active formation of a network of basic national administrative units: the authorities aimed to include most ethnical minorities residing in rural areas into the network of national village councils — “selsoviets”. Thus, in the mid-1930s (when the network formation had been almost concluded), the national village council could be considered an indicator of the presence of a relatively large (from several hundred to several thousand people) local territorial group of an ethnical minority.

This process did affect the Estonian population of the Northwest region. However, the authorities managed to establish only 20 Estonian village councils, which accounted for only one fourth of the Estonian population of the region. Among them, 4 councils were established in the districts of the northern area, 13 in those of the southern area. Moreover, three councils were created beyond the districts with the highest percentage of Estonian population — an Estonian council was formed in each of the following areas — the Tosno, Krestsy, and Lychkovo districts. In one — the Volosovo — district, there were three Estonian councils functioning simultaneously; in five districts, there were two of them; in seven districts, there was one [1]. It is worth emphasising the artificiality of most Estonian village councils — only nine of them were established by means of granting national status to an earlier formed administrative unit, all the others had to be “sewn” from the parts of several adjacent “Russian” village councils. One should stress that, although the vast majority of Estonian village councils were situated within the regions of compact diaspora settlement, some of such administrative units and, hence, large territorial groups of Estonians, developed beyond this territory.

An institution more accurately corresponding to the dispersed character of Estonian settlement in the Northwest was *national kolkhozes*, which were also being actively created in the framework of the indigenisation policy. Unlike village councils, Estonian kolkhozes were an indicator of a small — up to several hundred people — local territorial group of the ethnos under consideration. By May 1, 1934, 171 Estonian kolkhozes<sup>5</sup> were established in the LR. Most of them were concentrated in the Volosovo (34)<sup>6</sup> and Strugi Krasnye (30) districts. Five more districts were home to more than 10 kolkhozes of this type — the Gdov (17), Kingissepp (16), Krasnogvardeysk (15), Lyady, and Luga (11) districts. Despite the pronounced accumulation of kolkhozes in these seven districts (76.6% of the total number), one cannot but mention the higher — in comparison to village councils — concentration

---

<sup>4</sup> The establishment of a national village council required that the percentage of the title ethnical minority within the village council territory was not less than 66% and the total number of population not less than 300 and not more than 3,000 people [1].

<sup>5</sup> Saint Petersburg Central State Archive, Fund 7179. Inventory 23. File 148. Pages 7—9.

<sup>6</sup> By then, the Volosov district had incorporated the mentioned in table 1 Molosovitsy district (with a remarkably high percentage of Estonians in the populations), which was abolished in 1931.

of Estonian kolkhozes in the districts localised beyond the areas of the compact diaspora settlement. Kolkhozes were established in the nine of such districts; some of them were home to several institutions of the kind. So, in the Tosno district, there were seven kolkhozes. One should mention that later the number of Estonian collective farms was apparently increasing, since, in 1934, the process of agricultural collectivisation in the LR was far from over. However, the above mentioned features of localisation of such farms speak for themselves.

Thus, by the end of Estonian migration to the North-west of Russia, a large diaspora of the ethnos — mostly concentrated in the western part of the LR — had formed in the region. In terms of the percentage of Estonians, the leading territory was that adjacent to the eastern shore of Lake Peipus and the Tosno-Tallinn railroad. Nevertheless, on this territory within administrative districts, the percentage of Estonians was relatively modest; the territorial groups of Estonians were strictly local. This feature of spatial distribution of the diaspora made it sensitive to the destructive effects of generic assimilation and acculturation processes.

One cannot but mention that the long-term positive development of Estonian diaspora in the region was supported only by the ongoing external migration from the Baltics. The cessation of such inflow would make the chances of maintaining these positive tendencies rather slim.

As early as the pre-war period, the tendency towards rapid reduction in the number of Estonians even in the compact settlement areas became evident. So, according to the data of the AUC of 1939, the regions mentioned in the table accommodated 25.5 thousand Estonians<sup>7</sup> — almost twice as little as in 1926. Only in three districts, the percentage of Estonians was above 10% in 1939. The events of the Great Patriotic War and the ensuing mass migration of rural population to urban areas destabilised the Estonian population completely. According to the census of 2002, only 5104 Estonians resided in Saint Petersburg and three north-western districts; 44% of them concentrated in Saint Petersburg. Thus, by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Estonians became one of numerous national minorities residing in the region, being ranked 17<sup>th</sup> by the absolute number among other peoples. Taking into account the age and sex structure of Estonian diaspora, the character of its demographic development, the frequency of mixed marriages, and the spatial features of settlement, one can predict with certainty its further destruction with a likely prospect of its total elimination in the near future.

### *References*

1. Administrativno-territorial'noe ustrojstvo Leningradskoj oblasti. 1933. Leningrad.
2. Bjulleten' Leningradskogo oblastnogo otdela statistiki. 1928. №20. Aprel'-ijun'.

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the data of the Russian State Archive of Economy. Fund 1562. Inventory 336. File 1248. Pages 83—96.

3. Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1926 g. 1928. Vol. 1: Leningradsko-Karel'skij rajon: Narodnost'. Rodnoj jazyk. Vozrast. Gramotnost'. Moskow.
4. *Zolotarev, D. A.* 1928. Jetnicheskij sostav naselenija Severo-Zapadnoj oblasti i Karelii. Leningrad.
5. *Lotkin, I. V.* 2006. Pribaltijskie diaspory v Sibiri (1920—1930-e gody): aspekty jetnosocial'noj istorii. Omsk.
6. *Maamjagi, V. A.* 1990. Estoncy v SSSR, 1917—1940 gody. Moskow.
7. Mirnyj dogovor mezhdru Rossiej i Jestoniej. 1920. Moskow.
8. *Rekk-Lebedev, A.* 1989. Dal'nevostochnaja Lifljandija: Jestoncy na Ussurijskoj zemle. Tallin.
9. *Krimmi* kogumik = Krymskij sbornik: Konv. «140 a. eestlust Krimmis» ettek (09.—10.09.2001). 2002. In: *J. Viikberg* Koost. ja toim.. Tallinn: S. n.
10. *Meomuttel, J.* 1900. Eesti asunikud laialises Wene riigis: Esimene katse sõnumid kõikide Eesti asunduste üle tuua. Jurjev: Postimees.
11. *Nigol, A.* 1918. Eesti asundused ja asupaigad Wenemaal. Tartus.
12. *Vassar, A.* 1975. Uut maad otsimas: agraarne ümberasumisliikumine Eestis kuni 1863. aastani. Tallinn.
13. *Võime, L.* 1980. Tee uude ellu: Eesti asunduste ajaloost Kaukaasia Musta mere rannikul XIX saj. 2. poolest kuni 1929. Tallinn.

#### ***About author***

*Yuri Stupin*, Engineer, Faculty of Geography and Geoecology, Saint Petersburg State University.

E-mail: [stu77@ya.ru](mailto:stu77@ya.ru)