

To Go or Not to Go?

Baltic German Resettlement 1939-1940

During the Second World war the Baltic states lost not only a big part of their population; two of the ethnic groups living there before were destroyed entirely. Vast majority of Jews were killed during the Holocaust. The Baltic German minority ceased to exist in Estonia and Latvia after Nazi Germany called them to resettle to the territory of the German Reich. Legally each individual had a right to choose, but in the circumstances of 1939 the options were very limited. This unit offers a variety of sources to provide an insight into the complicated choice of the Baltic Germans.

Teaching ideas

We offer to use a simulation as an introduction, then look for arguments in personal accounts of the contemporaries and to conclude with several lifestories in a documentary. Teachers can adjust these proposals to the actual situation in their classrooms or only analyse some of the historical sources in their lessons.

Introduction: Simulation

Provide each student with a role description and background information (prepared for printing in the attachment). There are 10 roles prepared; recurrence of a role in your classroom will allow you to compare the decisions of your students and to discuss the importance of historical circumstances versus personal decision.

1) Ask your students to read the hand-out and to **construct their roles** in two minutes

- Give a name to your character
- Add at least 2 features to the description
- Try to imagine his/her view on life

2) **Meet & greet** – ask your students to walk around the room, shake hands and introduce yourself shortly to your partner. Let this go on for some minutes in order to help your students to get into their roles.

3) Inform your students that they are in September 1, 1939. The war has just started in Poland. **How does it make you feel?** According to your role – share your feelings with your neighbour.

4) Give your students an article from *Rigasche Rundschau* that refers to Hitlers' speech from 6.10.1939. Ask them to discuss in groups of four: **what are your thoughts, fears, hopes** according to your role?

5) Give your students the statement of Latvian Telegraph agency and invite them to decide: **would you resettle to Germany?** Ask them demonstrate their decision by standing in of the opposite sides of the room.

Construct the role

Meet & greet

Talk to neighbour

Discuss in a group

Vote with feet



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6) Ask each group to collect as many reasons/arguments for their position as possible.

Why would people to leave/not to leave? Students can start with a round of their own motivations and then think broader and more general.

7) Ask each group to shortly present their lists and collect their points on a blackboard. Invite the class to compare the lists and to **discuss**:

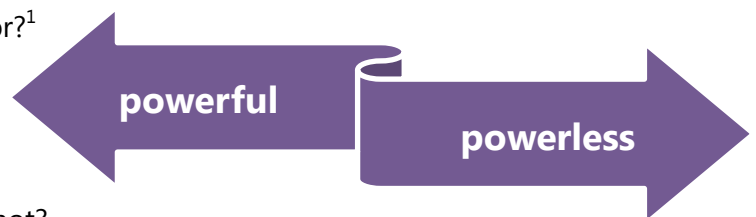
- How similar and how different are the motivations of both sides?
- In what extent are these motivations based on facts and in what extent of hopes and fears?

Source analysis

Divide your class into small groups and provide them with excerpts of Hitler's speech to the German Reichstag and personal accounts of the Baltic Germans.

Invite each group to explore the sources and discuss:

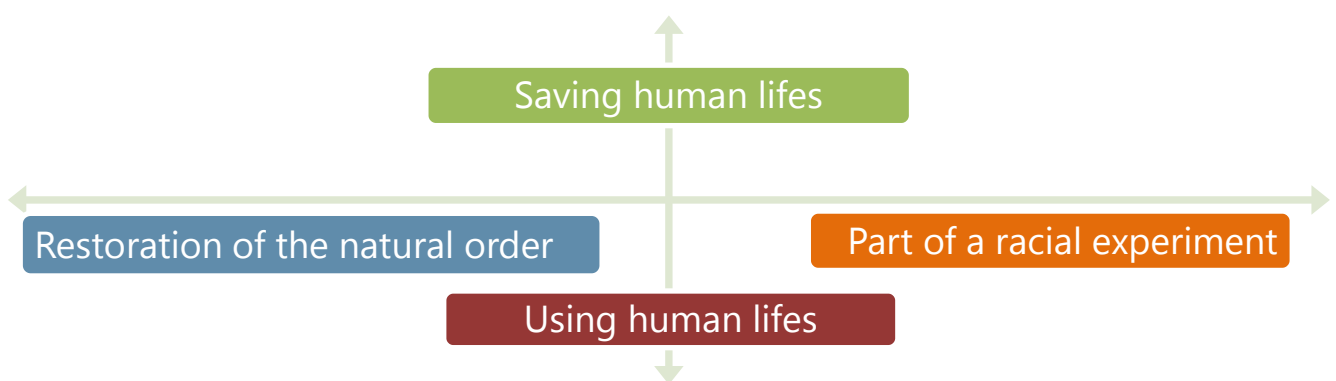
- How powerful is the position of the author?¹
- What factors did influence the decision making of contemporaries?
- Is it possible to guess from the argumentation if the author did leave or not?
- What reasons for resettlement did Hitler announce?



To start a class discussion, first ask your students to position each of the authors on the scale of influence; then discuss the questions with the class.

Reflection

Ask your students for their personal opinion about the resettlement. Provide each student with a copy of historians' opinions and a fragment from Paul Schiemans' article. Ask each student to position their opinion in relation to the two axes and to justify it in a written essay.



¹ Did s/he have a power to influence everybody, a group of people, own life, not even own life?



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Overview of roles

<p>You were born in November 1918 in an ethnically mixed (mother Latvian, father German) middle class family in Riga. You went to a German grammar school as your parents believed it would provide a better education, but most of your friends are Latvian. Your best friend is of Russian origin and you are in love with his sister. Love is in the air!</p>	<p>You were born in 1888 in a German family of rich land-owners. Your father took part in the punitive expeditions of 1907, and you lost a lot of your lands during the land-reform of 1920s. Your wife is a teacher of German literature; your parents have passed away and are buried in their manor, just like your ancestors.</p>
<p>You were born in 1860 in a patriarchal German family in a small rural town of Goldingen, and you still live in this town. Your family has lived here for centuries, you feel very connected to this place. Being a widow it is very important for you to take good care of the grave of your husband. One of your three children also rests here.</p>	<p>You were born in 1905 in a rather poor, but noble German family. Belonging to Baltic Germans is an important part of your identity. You work as a teacher of German literature, and your wife is a teacher of music in girls' gymnasium. You would be glad to have a career growth but your chances in the small country Latvia are very limited.</p>
<p>You were born in 1903 in Riga in a family of noblemen. For your family it was very difficult to accept the changes that WWI brought into your life: dissolution of the Russian empire, establishment of the new, national state of Latvia, the loss of privileges of the noble class. You are an active member in an organization called "Bewegung", and you lead one of its groups of youngsters.</p>	<p>You were born in 1884 in a rather poor family. Among your ancestors there are several German families, but also some Poles and Latvians; ethnicity is not an important factor to you. Your wife also comes from an ethnically mixed family. One of her great-grandfathers was Jewish. You are not politically active and usually try to obey the authorities and law.</p>
<p>You were born in 1901 in Riga. You never felt belonging to local community, actually in your view there is no community – every ethnic group communicates mainly among themselves. Your mother is German, father Latvian and German was your first language. You were a teacher in a Jewish secondary school, but you lost your job after the education reform of the authoritarian regime. You are unemployed at the moment.</p>	<p>You were born in 1902 in a Latvian family in Riga (well, ok, you have some German ancestors as well, but until now you have seen yourself as a Latvian). You happened to be in Riga in 1919 during the terror² of communist government of Pēteris Stučka. Although you come from a family social democrats and experienced WWI as a teenager, seeing civilians killed on streets became a life-changing moment for you. Your main fear is to live under communism.</p>
<p>You were born in 1891 in Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire. Your father had a law degree and was a high rank civil servant in the Czar's administration. Your German family comes from Courland. You went to university in Vienna, after WWI you were a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Latvia and the editor of the main German – language newspaper. You are a well-known fighter for (ethnic) minority rights; you were one of the authors of minority law of the Republic of Latvia, and an expert in the League of Nations. You truly believe in democracy and are very critical about both Nazism and Communism.</p>	
<p>You were born in 1884 in a wealthy German family in Riga. You managed to gain a significant capital during the Great War and now own a factory and several workshops. You are involved in politics only as far as it influences your business; so far it's been great.</p>	

² Communist leader P. Stučka in 1919 released a decree that replaced court with revolutionary war tribunal or so called *troika*. In one month 1000 persons were sentenced to death and killed.



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Nazi-Soviet population transfers

A series of population transfers of tens of thousands of ethnic Germans and ethnic Russians took place between 1939 and 1941 in an agreement according to the German-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Conception

One of Adolf Hitler's main goals during his rule was to unite all German-speaking peoples into one territory. There were hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans living outside the borders of Germany, mostly in Central and Eastern Europe with the largest numbers being the Germans from Russia. Most of these groups of Germans had lived outside Germany for hundreds of years, after emigrating eastwards between the 12th to 18th centuries.

Hitler planned to move these people westwards into Nazi Germany. However, Hitler also believed that the 1937 borders and territories of Nazi Germany, i.e. before the "Anschluss" (annexation) of Austria and the Sudetenland, were quite inadequate to accommodate this large increase in population. At this time the propaganda for more Lebensraum or "living space" greatly increased.

Legal basis

With the largest number of ethnic Germans living in Russia, Hitler knew that he could not resettle all these people without the full cooperation of Stalin and the Soviet Union.

In late August 1939 a pact of non-aggression with the Soviet Union was signed; this became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Issues agreed upon in the pact was the partition of territories in Central and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence and the reciprocal transfer of ethnic German and Russian people's to each other's countries. These secret agreements were not made public at the time.

Hitler's plan was to invade the western part of Poland (having assigned the eastern part to the Soviet Union in the pact) and then force all non-German peoples (mostly Polish citizens) out of their homes and either use them for forced labour or move them to the General Government area. Once these territories were "free" of non-Germans, the population transfers could begin and ethnic Germans would be settled in the same homes that until a few weeks earlier had Polish citizens living in them.

Implementation

The planned transfers were announced to the ethnic Germans, and general knowledge, only in October 1939. The Nazis set out to encourage the departure of "Germans from outside

Number of Relocated Ethnic Germans 1939-1944

Territories of Poland annexed by the Soviet Union	124,000
Chelm & Narew in Poland	42,000
Baltic States	127,000
Soviet Union	370,000
Romania	212,000
Yugoslavia	35,000
<i>Reichsdeutsche</i> west of Oder-Neisse	560,000
Germans from Oder-Neisse region	410,000
Total	1,880,000



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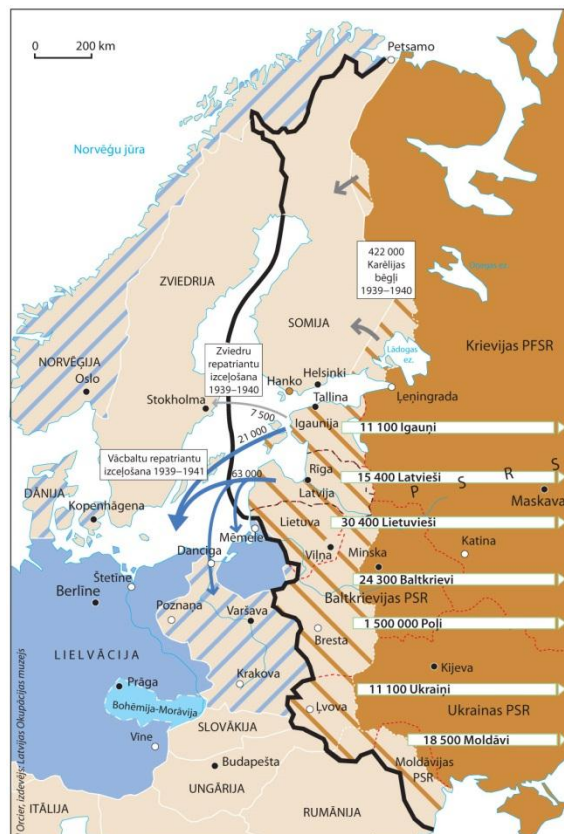


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Germany", known as *Volksdeutsche*, from the Baltic States by the use of propaganda. This included using scare tactics about the Soviet Union, and led to tens of thousands leaving. Those who left were not referred to as "refugees", but were rather described as "answering the call of the Führer". To encourage support of this program, German propaganda films depicted the Baltic Germans as deeply persecuted in their native lands.

Families were transported by ship from the Baltic States and by train from other territories. The German government arranged the transfer of their furniture and personal belongings. All immovable property was sold, with the money being collected by the German government and not given back to the families. This was an intentional act designed to destroy all links with the areas these people had been living in. The value of the real estate left behind was to be compensated in cash and Polish property in occupied Poland.

They were kept in camps for racial evaluation, to prevent contamination of the native German population. There they were divided into groups: A, *Altreich*, who were to be settled in German and allowed neither farms nor business (to allow for closer watch), S *Sonderfall*, who were used as forced labour, and O *Ost-Falle*, the best classification, to be settled in the 'Eastern Wall' — the occupied regions to protect German from the East—and allowed independence. This last group, after spending some time in refugee camps in Germany, were eventually resettled in Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany and in Zamosc County, as decided by *Generalplan Ost*. The deportation orders required that enough Poles be removed to provide for every settler—that, for instance, if twenty German "master bakers" were sent, twenty Polish bakeries had to have their owners removed. The settlers were often given Polish homes where the families had been evicted so quickly



Forced migration in Eastern Europe 1939-1941

that half-eaten meals were on tables and small children had clearly been taken from unmade beds. Members of *Hitler Youth* and the *League of German Girls* were assigned the task of overseeing such evictions to ensure that the Poles left behind most of their belongings for the use of the settlers. Once they were settled, the process of Germanization was begun.

In 1940 Germans were evacuated from territories occupied by the Soviet Union, notably Bessarabia and the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia, all of which traditionally had large German minorities. However the majority of the Baltic Germans had already been resettled in late 1939, prior to the occupation of Estonia and Latvia by the Soviet Union in June 1940. In most cases they were given farms taken from 110,000 Poles who were expelled from the area.



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Baltic Germans: background information

German tradesman began to arrive in the Baltic region in the latter half of the 12th century. They were followed by Christian missionaries and crusaders, mostly from Northern Germany. By the end of 13th century the Germans became the ruling class in the territory of what is now Latvia and Estonia. Germans, especially tradesmen, also settled in Stockholm, Vyborg, Turku, Vilnius and Kaunas, but their influence in these areas was not as great as in Livonia.

After the liquidation of the Livonian Order's state and the bishoprics during the rule of the Polish Empire, the Swedish Empire and the Russian Empire in the region (Estland, Livland and Courland) the German nobility and the citizens of towns (*Bürger*) preserved their leading role in political, legal and economic affairs. The Germans established educational and cultural centres, which served as to promote the feeling of community. By the 1840s the community became known as the 'Balts' and, later, the 'Baltic Germans' (*Deutschbalten*). Initially the word 'Balts' was applied to the aristocracy of the three Baltic provinces, but by the 1850s the word was instead used to describe Baltic Germans as opposed to indigenous Latvians and Estonians. In the 1850s and 1860s, during a process that became known as the Estonian and Latvian national awakening, relation between the locals and the Baltic Germans became tense.

During the revolution of 1905-1907 Baltic German nobles took part in punitive expeditions and offered their allegiance to Russian Czar Nicholas II. This only served to worsen relations with the indigenous population.

After the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty at the conclusion of World War I in 1918, the German military were still present in Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Estonia, and the Baltic Germans tried to establish a unified Baltic State. They did not succeed. Relations between the Baltic Germans and the newly independent governments of Latvia and Estonia were not amicable. The Baltic German organisations of the nobles were shut down and all titles of nobility were repealed. The massive landholdings of the German nobility were confiscated, and the land was redistributed to local farmers.

During the first period of Latvian and Estonian independence (1918-1940), the leaders of the Baltic German community passed to the middle classes that preserved their economic power. As a minority the Baltic Germans made a significant contribution toward the country's economic and cultural life. After signing of the secret protocols of Molotov – Ribbentrop pact in 1939, the Baltic Germans were moved from the Russian sphere of influence to Greater Germany.



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Excerpts of Adolf Hitler's speech to the German Reichstag in Berlin, on Friday 6th October 1939

English translation of entire speech: <http://www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/speeches/1939-10-06.html>

Months ago I stated in the Reichstag that the conclusion of the German-Russian non-aggression pact marked the turning point in the whole German foreign policy. The new pact of friendship and mutual interest (from 28th September 1939) signed between Germany and the Soviet Union will insure not only peace but a constant satisfactory co-operation for both States.

Germany and Russia together will relieve one of the most acute danger spots in Europe of its threatening character and will, each in her own sphere, contribute to the welfare of the peoples living there, thus aiding to European peace in general. [...] Germany and the Soviet Union have therefore clearly defined the boundaries of their own spheres of interest with the intention of being singly responsible for law and order and preventing everything which might cause injury to the other partner.

The aims and tasks which emerge from the collapse of the Polish State are, insofar as the German sphere of interest is concerned, roughly as follows:

1. Demarcation of the boundary for the Reich, which will do justice to historical, ethnographical and economic facts.
2. Pacification of the whole territory by restoring a tolerable measure of peace and order.
3. Absolute guarantees of security not only as far as Reich territory is concerned but for the entire sphere of interest.
4. Re-establishment and reorganization of economic life and of trade and transport, involving development of culture and civilization.
5. As the most important task, however, to establish a new order of ethnographic conditions, that is to say, resettlement of nationalities in such a manner that the process ultimately results in the obtaining of better dividing lines than is the case at present. In this sense, however, it is not a case of the problem being restricted to this particular sphere, but of a task with far wider implications for the east and south of Europe are to a large extent filled with splinters of the German nationality, whose existence they cannot maintain. In their very existence lie the reason and cause for continual international disturbances. In this age of the principle of nationalities and of racial ideals, it is utopian to believe that members of a highly developed people can be assimilated without trouble. It is therefore essential for a far-sighted ordering of the life of Europe that a resettlement

should be undertaken here so as to remove at least part of the material for European conflict. [...]

Two problems are ripe for discussion today. First, the settlement of the problems arising from the disintegration of Poland and, second, the problem of eliminating those international difficulties which endanger the political and economic existence of the nations. [...]

What then are the aims of the Reich Government as regards the adjustment of conditions within the territory to the west of the German-Soviet line of demarcation which has been recognized as Germany's sphere of influence?

First, the creation of a Reich frontier, which, as has already been emphasized, shall be in accordance with existing historical, ethnographical and economic conditions.

Second, the disposition of the entire living space according to the various nationalities; that is to say, the solution of the problems affecting the minorities which concern not only this area but nearly all the States in the Southwest of Europe.

Third, in this connection: An attempt to reach a solution and settlement of the Jewish problem.

Fourth, reconstruction of transport facilities and economic life in the interest of all those living in this area.

Fifth, a guarantee for the security of this entire territory and sixth, formation of a Polish State so constituted and governed as to prevent its becoming once again either a hotbed of anti-German activity or a center of intrigue against Germany and Russia. [...]



Bundesarchiv - Bild 183-E11354
Foto: o. Ang. | 6. Oktober 1939

Rigasche Rundschau

Verlagsadresse: 22, St. Petri-Str. 22, Riga, Lettland.
Einzelnummer: 12 Sant.
Abonnement: 120 Sant pro Quartal, 360 Sant pro Halbjahr, 720 Sant pro Jahr. Auslandsendungen sind zu bezahlen.

Erscheint werktäglich 2 Uhr nachm.

Preis der Einzelnummer:

in Litva 12
in Lettland 12
in Estland 12

Schreibweise: Die Adressen sind in lateinischer Schrift anzugeben.
Bezugspreis: Der Bezugspreis ist in Litva, Lettland und Estland zu zahlen.

№ 230

Riga, Montag, den 9. Oktober 1939

72. Jahrgang

Deutsche Volksgenossen!

Gemäß der Reichstagsrede des deutschen Führers vom 6. dieses Monats hat das Deutsche Reich eine Rückfödelung der außerhalb seiner Grenzen anässigen deutschen Volksgruppen vorzunehmen. Mit dieser gewolligen Maßnahme wurde ein Befriedigungswerk in Angriff genommen, das eine Quelle zahlloser Konfliktstoffe mit anderen Staaten endgültig beseitigen wird.

Im Zuge der großen Rückfödelungsmaßnahmen wird auch unsere Volksgruppe ihren Heimatraum verlassen. Sie blickt mit Stolz auf ein diehundertföhriges Aufbauwerk in diesem Lande zurück. Dem großen Gesamtwerk aber ist ihr nunmehr eine neue Aufgabe gestellt. Geschlossen beieinander fiedelnd, werden wir am Wiederaufbau und der Befriedigung des vom Reich zugesprochenen deutschen Osttraums wirken.

Die Umsiedlungsaktion wird in engstem Einbernehmen zwischen der Lettischen Regierung und der Deutschen Reichsregierung durchgeföhrt. Die Volksgruppenföhrung hebt ihre Pflicht darin, auf Annehaltung einer vorbildlichen Disziplin in der Abwicklung zu achten.

Volksgenossen! Jeder föhlt, was es bedeutet, von einem Dreiecksföhrerhund deutscher Aufbauarbeit in diesem Lande Abschied zu nehmen. Aber unsere Blicke sind in stolzer Erwartung dem neuen geschichtlichen Aufsteg zugewandt. Und wir wollen aus der großen Stunde gewachsen zeigen.

Der Pröfident der Deutschen Volksgemeinschaft: **A. Intelmann**
Der Landesleiter: **Erhard Kroeger**

Der Staatspröfident besuchte gestern den Gottesdienst in Bebröe

Staatspröfident Kārlis Ulmanis besuchte am Sonntag den Erntedankgottesdienst in der Kirche von Bebröe, wo Baher St. Regina die Predigt hielt. Das überfüllte Gotteshaus war mit



Grünwert und Kefren geschmückt. Der Gottesdienst war dem Dankfest angeschlossen.

Vom Tage

Die estnische Regierung hat von der deutschen Reichsregierung eine Mitteilung erhalten, bezugföge die Absicht einer Repatriierung aller Ostdeutschen Erlaubs befehlt. Die estnische Regierung hat ihre genehmigliche Zustimmung bereits gegeben.

Wie verlautet, sehen auch die Ostdeutschen Lituanen ihrer Repatriierung entgegen. Eine weitföhrige Verhandlungsabordnung hat sich zur Festsetzung der litauisch-sowjetrussischen Verhandlungen nach Moskau begeben.

Die finnische Regierung hat ihren Stockholmer Gesandten zwecks wichtiger Verhandlungen nach Moskau entsandt.

Sowohl Ungarn, als auch Rumänien haben mit einer Einheerung ihre militärischen Sicherungsmaßnahmen begonnen. Wie jetzt bekannt wird, ist Schweden hierbei die Vermittlerrolle zugefallen.

Rigasche Rundschau was the biggest interwar period newspaper in German. It was first published in 1894, when Riga was one of the cities in Russian Empire. The newspaper was closed when most of its readers left the country, the last issue was printed on December 13, 1939.

Call to the German people in Latvia

9th October 1939

Fellow Germans!

According to the speech of the German Führer to the Reichstag on the 6th of this month, the German Reich has planned for a repatriation of German ethnic groups based outside its borders. With this tremendous action, the Reich is undertaking a measure of appeasement that will permanently abolish countless seeds for conflict with other states.

During the large repatriation action our group of Germans will also abandon its homeland. It proudly looks back at the several hundred year-long construction of this country. From now on, however, it has been given a new task from the nation as a whole. Settling united side by side, will we work on the reconstruction and the settlement of the German eastern area regained by the Reich.

The resettlement action will be implemented in

closest understanding between the Latvian government and the government of the German Reich. The leadership of the German people's group sees as its obligation to pay attention to the obtaining of exemplary discipline in the execution of the resettlement.

Fellow Germans! Every one of us feels what it means to say farewell to a three-quarter millennium long rebuilding of this country. But we now turn in proud anticipation towards our new historical mission. And we want show that we rise to the challenge of this great hour.

The president of the German people's community:

A. Intelmann

The country manager:

Erhard Kroeger

Explanation of the Latvian Telegraph agency, circa 18th October 1939

Concerning the repatriation

Berlin, 28th October

Regarding the repatriation of the Baltic Germans it is officially declared, that it in no way is connected with the signed agreements between the Baltic States and the Soviet Russia, as it had been intended beforehand. In order to once and for all regulate the minority question in Europe; a corresponding resettlement is planned also in all other states in which German groups reside. The Baltic Germans, whose repatriation for the most part is seaborne, come to Gdynia, Bydgoszcz and Poznan, considering most of them are townsfolk. The repatriation takes place without external interference and voluntarily.

The agreement between the governments of Latvia and the German Reich regarding the individuals concerned by the repatriation, as well as the liquidation of their possessions, constitute the legal foundation of this historical event.

Published in newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau*, 18 October, 1939



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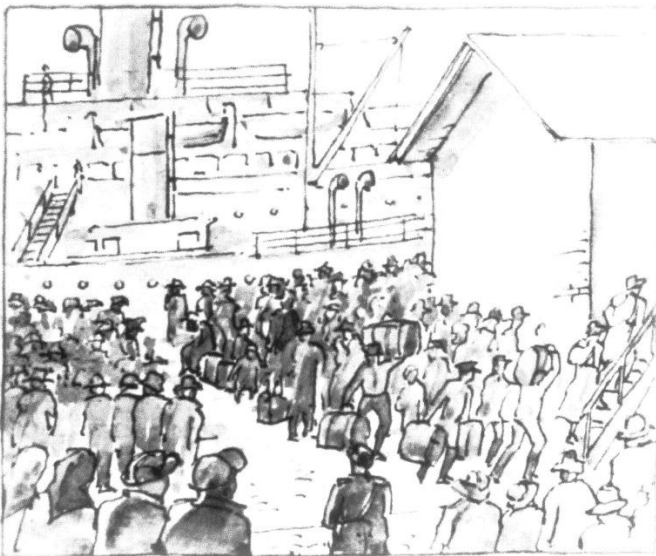
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Personal accounts

Ilse Pabst. Memories. 1989

Well, and myself? My memories are not very vivid or alert. The resettlement came over us young people (I was barely 20!) and it was perceived as a very insecure future, with little money and the feeling "to have to stay German", but how? Not to let oneself be pushed aside by the Latvian state. The people of today would say: no perspective, no future. The resettlement was a swirl that carried us along, not allowing the definitiveness of this farewell from our homeland to completely sink in.

I worked for a short period of time as a typist, setting up a register of independent merchants, craftsmen and so on, in order for them to be better integrated; then in the outer ward in which the repatriates from the countryside had to be cared for during a few days. We escorted them to the expatriation in the Schwarzhäupterhaus building, watched their children while they were there, comforted them, disbursed provisions, and helped them with the journey to the port of export. We slept little, met up with friends and family in an atmosphere of farewell, participated in hasted weddings and mass confirmations – and suddenly I was to go with Elsi Hollmann and the Plenisksos and I-don't-know-who to Poznan, in order to administrate the interests of our girl shaft there. Everything was precipitated, slightly out of breath, blurred in the memories. A hurried departure, the big, crowded, ship, fog, then the stormy weather, "the strong Tom Dill, nauseated", at the ship's rail and "as far as I'm concerned, this ship can hit a mine, I couldn't care less". And an empty dining hall, green pea soup, and out of the loudspeakers, one of our people repeating "the waves break, and so do I".³ Gallows humour.



Drawing by Otto Pirang.

In: *Die Umsiedlung: eine persönlicher Bericht von Claus von Aderkas.*



Expatriation in the main hall of Blackheads house in Riga.

In: *Die Umsiedlung: eine persönlicher Bericht von Claus von Aderkas.*

³ In German „Die Wellen brechen, ich breche auch!“ has a double meaning; the verb „brechen“ means „break“ as well as „to throw up“. It therefore says both „the waves break, and so do I“ and „the waves break, and I throw up“.

Bruno Svikle. Memories of a grandfather.

I was born in Rīga in 1921. I enjoyed a very happy childhood. My parents owned a flower shop on Valnu St, and my father had purchased some land near the suburb of Teika, where he established a nursery and grew flowers which he then sold.

The first radical changes to affect our family took place in the autumn of 1939. My family had decided to repatriate to Germany, because my mother was German. It was the first time that I had begun to understand the seriousness of life: in coming to a crossroads and having to make a life changing decision – having to decide which way to go. It was difficult for me to comprehend at the time that I would have to leave my school, my classmates, my acquaintances and, of course, all of my friends; my beloved city of Rīga and the whole Latvian environment. I couldn't even begin to imagine what I, a Latvian, was going to do in some foreign country. These issues troubled my mind constantly: to go or not to go, to escape the already evident and threatening horrors to come or to remain and take my chances?

With regard to this rapidly emerging situation I was very grateful for the sympathetic considerations of our Gymnasium Nr. 1 director Mr. J. Lapiņš. He invited me to his office and listened very carefully to all of my concerns. We spoke for a long time and considered just about all of the possible options. He promised to make every effort, in the event that I chose to remain by myself in Rīga, that I would be able to get a stipend and a room in the dormitory at least until I had completed my secondary schooling. I felt very relieved as I left his office.

The following weeks were no less stressful. Our family continued to maintain contacts with all of our relatives and closest friends and it was in this company that we all debated the issue of what to do – whether to depart or to stay. From all of these discussions we came to the general decision: those who had contacts in Germany should take advantage of these and distance themselves as much as possible from the looming Communist threat.



Luggage of ethnic Germans

in port of Riga. Photo from the collection of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation.

Bruno Svikle visiting his relatives in Latvia in 1966.

Photo in *Memories of a grandfather* by Bruno Svikle.



Alexander Friedrich Neuland. Episodes from My Life, 1999.

It was in the autumn of 1939 that the Baltic German community was encouraged to repatriate to Germany.

After my confirmation in the summer of 1937 I had completely lost touch with all things German and was living in a pure Latvian environment. My entire circle of friends was made up of Latvian girls and boys.

I had already been independent of our family home for several years. My parents were of the general opinion that, as relatively poor people, we should have nothing to fear from the Bolsheviks and for this same reason it wasn't difficult for me to choose to remain in Latvia, especially because my girlfriend had also chosen not to leave her native country.

I was in wholehearted agreement with this. Riga was also the city of my birth and so we stayed behind. It was only much later that I understood the consequences of this decision. By remaining in Latvia the direction of my future had changed.

I must also add here that, in those days, I was absolutely inexperienced in world politics and had no understanding whatsoever of any of the issues. In fact, that is the only explanation for my having made the wrong decision at that time with regard to the rest of my life. [...]



Neighbours.

A drawing by Otto Pirang in: *Die Umsiedlung: eine persönlicher Bericht von Claus von Aderkas.*

Family of Bruno and Adele Hasselblatt from Tallinn.

A photo in: *Die Umsiedlung: eine persönlicher Bericht von Claus von Aderkas.*



Claus von Aderkas. The Resettlement: a Personal Report.

I was 20 years old then — [...] suddenly, in a speech by Adolf Hitler on 6th October 1939 we heard: „However, as most important task: a new order of ethnographical conditions, i.e., a resettlement of nationalities, with the result that at the end of the development there will be clearer dividing line as is the case today. Because the East and Southeast of Europe is partially filled with non-defendable splinters of Germanness.“

As early as 8th October, the plans for resettlement were made public in the newspapers all over Latvia. In Estonia they were published on 9th October. Both the governments of Latvia and Estonia supported the plans for resettlement.

The decision to resettle had not been taken freely. It may have saved our lives, but if we look back now, the price was high. It all happened so quickly that there was no time for further, in depth considerations. There was not much time to think. Now it was matter of making arrangements for our family — I was the eldest. To call the younger siblings home from school in Mitau, to support my mother in her great concern for her sick husband in hospital in Riga, repeated trips to the hospital too.

Again and again there were new orders. First: wait for marching orders. Then, a few days later: Wait a bit longer, there were new negotiations between the countries, concerning being able to bring the essential furniture. How to pack furniture? It wasn't easy. All this kept one occupied through sleepless nights, and it was almost a relief when we finally received the — much postponed — final order. We were to leave for Lemsal early in the morning to catch the special train for the resettlers to Riga.

In the harbour the masses of German resettler luggage piled up. There was a check point here and there. The volunteers helped tirelessly — packing, carrying and helping the old and the sick. Especially the younger generation supported the *Volksgruppenführung* [ethnic group leadership] with great enthusiasm in this near impossible task, to suddenly transport such a large group of people from one part of Europe to another.

Being in the harbour meant waiting. Waiting for the custom formalities, waiting for loading, waiting for the moment of boarding finally. In the faces of the people waiting there was no trace of the enthusiasm displayed in the official propaganda. Every now and then there was relief in the faces of the people boarding; relief that the waiting, packing, and carrying heavy loads had finally come to an end.

We did not all set out together. Mother and the two sisters left Riga on the Gneisenau, father on an ambulance steamer. My brother Heino, even though still a school boy, had been called up by the *Volksgruppenleitung* to accompany the transport of horses and livestock, so he travelled several times between Riga and Gotenhafen and Riga and Swinemünde. Thus Heino was also the last one to see father alive.



Placing the ill on board.

Photo from the collection of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation.

Ingeborg Wihtol

Ingeborg Wihtol was born in 1919 as an illegitimate child of Katharina Wihtol (Katharina Hohenfelsen-Zinovsky, born Katharina Wihtol (1898-1962)). Her father supposedly fell during the Latvian Independence War (1919-1920) and her mother married Aleksandrs Cinovskis-Hohenfelsen in 1930. Nor Ingeborg, nor her mother was willing to leave Latvia in 1939; they decided to do so in 1941 after having to comply with the request to transmit their apartment to Soviet officials. In Germany Ingeborg continued her pharmacology studies, married Aleksandrs Sīlis, a Latvian refugee and became an active member of Latvian community.

PERSONENBESCHREIBUNG SIGNALEMENT	
Staatsangehörigkeit: Nationalité:	Staatenlos
Beruf: Profession:	<i>Prakt. der Pharmazie</i>
Geburtsort: Lieu de naissance:	<i>Libau</i>
Geburtstag: Date de naissance:	<i>13. April 1919</i>
Wohnsitz oder Aufenthaltsort: Domicile ou résidence:	Freiberg i. Sa.
Gestalt: Taille:	<i>mittel</i>
Gesicht: Visage:	<i>oval</i>
Farbe der Augen: Couleur des yeux:	<i>grau-braun</i>
Farbe des Haares: Couleur des cheveux:	<i>braun</i>
Besondere Kennzeichen: Signes particuliers:	<i>keine</i>
Nr. 03919 G/40	


Unterschrift des Inhabers Signature du porteur <i>Ingeborg Wihtol</i>
Nr. 03919 G/40

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION

Nationality: stateless
 Occupation: intern pharmacist
 Place of birth: Libau
 Date of birth: 13th April 1919
 Place of residence: Freiberg in Saxony

Build: medium
 Facial shape: oval
 Colour of eyes: grey-brown
 Colour of hair: brown
 Particular characteristics: none

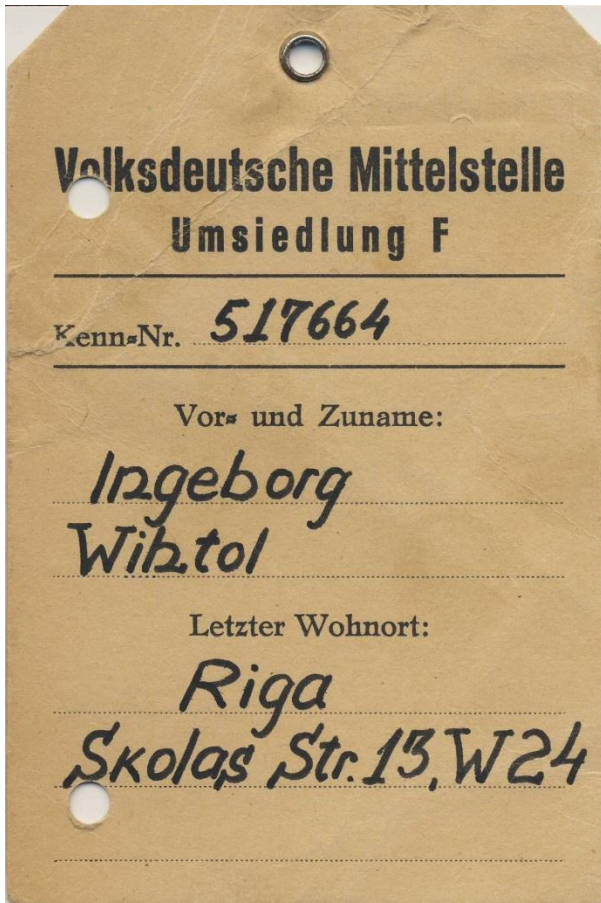
No: 039319 S/40

Image with 2 stamps:
 City Freiberg in Saxony

Signature of the holder

Ingeborg Wihtol

No: 03919 S/40



Ethnic German Transit Point
Resettlement F

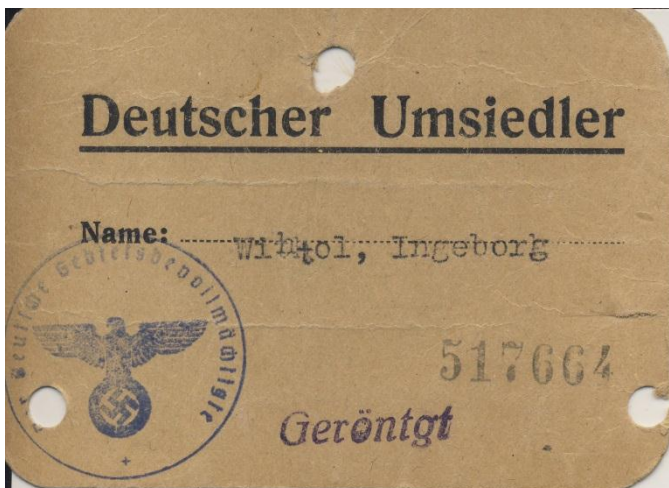
ID-No: **517664**

Name and surname:

**Ingeborg
Wihtol**

Last known address

**Riga
Skolas Str. 13, Apt. 24**



German resettler

Name: Wihtol, Ingeborg

517664

X-rayed

Stamp

"Der deutsche Gebietsbevollmächtigte"
[The German Area commissioner]



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OPINIONS OF SCHOLARS

Hiden, J., Housden, M, eds (2008). **Neighbours Or Enemies?: Germans, the Baltic and Beyond.** – p. 108 -109.

As early as 1939 the Nazi-Soviet Pact had signalled that ethnic Germans faced displacement in the East. There was every chance that if left to Soviets, as they assumed control of their newly extended sphere of influence, this would be a grim experience indeed. [..]

On the other hand, those Baltic Germans who fled their homeland at speed under Nazi auspices in a process called the *'Umsiedlung'* (resettlement) faced a less depressing future, if only in the immediate term. Viewed as part of the raw material for Himmler's demographic project to bring about the consolidation of Germandom, before Stalin took over the Baltic States these people were shipped by the German government for settlement on Polish territory now incorporated into Reich, that is to say in Warthegau.

Plavnieks, R. O. (2008). **"Wall Of Blood": The Baltic German Case Study in National Socialist Wartime Population Policy, 1939-1945.** / MA thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. – p. 71

Like most countries in Eastern Europe, the Baltic States have not come fully to terms with their experience of the Third Reich. Under Soviet rule, public discourse on the subject was delayed, deformed, and full of denial. Thus another component of the current bond or lack of bond between the Latvians and the Baltic Germans is an unexpected common cause: neither wants to truly remember. The memories have been largely repressed, for who stands to benefit from their public remembrance? The Baltic Germans obeyed the dictates of Hitler and were, in effect, complicit in their own destruction. The Latvians and Estonians did not try to stop them. The Baltic Germans by their action, and the others by their inaction, can take little pride in this episode. For better or for worse, both sides seem to have let the sleeping dog lie. They are neighbors no more.

Kangeris, K. The **"Repatriation" of the Baltic Germans after the Signing of the Pacts: A New Nazi Population Policy or the Realization of Former Plans?**

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 23, 1939 opened the doors to war. The defeat of Poland and in turn the supplementary treaties of September 28, 1939 set into motion the machinery of National Socialist racial policy. The basic idea of this racial policy was the unification of all Germans in one territory and the superiority of the German race existed from the very beginning of the National Socialist movement, but political pragmatism had dictated another course of action, that of strengthening Germandom abroad. When, at the onset of war, political and National Socialist value boundaries collapsed, the politics of the VoMi⁴ also collapsed. The basic ideas were not new, but possibilities to realize them were. Also in the case of Baltic Germans the alternative suggesting the possible evacuation to Germany was not new. The decision to "repatriate" the Baltic Germans from Estonia and Latvia was not so caused by the wish to put into effect these earlier plans but rather from the immediate political situation that the Reichsführer-SS used to further his own interests.

⁴ *The Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Main Welfare Office for Ethnic Germans), abbreviated VoMi, was an NSDAP agency founded to manage the interests of the ethnic Germans) who lived outside the borders of Nazi Germany.



OPINION OF A CONTEMPORARY

Paul Schiemann. Repatriation and Relocation – a Death Sentence for the Baltic Germans. 1940

Paul Schiemann (1876–1944) was a Baltic German journalist and politician known for his commitment to minority rights. Schiemann grew up in Estonia, was educated in Germany, fought in the Russian army during WWI, after the war he was a political journalist and politician in Latvia. During 1930s he covered German politics by writing anti-Nazi articles; during the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany, Schiemann was confined to his house. Schiemann died in Riga shortly before the Soviet Red Army took control of Latvia for the second time.

For more than 700 years the Baltic Germans had lived on the land of their own ancestors and developed a unique place and destiny in history. The uniqueness of this not particularly large community had evolved from generation to generation and developed into a way of life and of being, and of a distinctive ethical and spiritual values system that asserted its privilege.

There were only some 80,000 who regarded themselves as true Baltic Germans, of a particular identity – and who were either recognised or rejected – but they were a people of culture. By percentage, there was an unusually high degree of middle class achievement among individuals. As it was revealed during the last months of 1939 [...] the capital base of these Baltic people was not insignificant. They had their fair share of farming properties and a notable presence was evident in the public sector and state administration. Their political standing, which had evolved from an inner sense of social responsibility, has remained consistent even during difficult times. Despite all of the internal nationalistic conflicts between the Baltic Germans on the one side and the Latvians and Estonians on the other side (which is unchanged), there has remained a sense of mutually shared destiny, which has grown into a natural communion.

As an outcome of this artificially induced panic and misinterpreted sense of nationalism and an accompanying psychosis, all of the previous sense of communion has suddenly been abandoned. Of the estimated 80,000 people some two thirds have now emigrated. What will become of them? Any hopes that these people, having now been transplanted, will be able to save anything of their unique culture, i.e. of the true values within, are fading with each and every day. This is because in their new accommodations they are deliberately being further dispersed and separated from each other. The true purpose that awaits them is, of course, to squeeze the local Polish inhabitants from their birthplace. This is in the most crass contradiction of the very ideals for which they had themselves been striving for from generation to generation. This high-values believing people must now seemingly become unwitting henchmen for disruption. Some imaginative thinkers have been debating the question of whether the German people might discover a healing balm within their “Baltic Essence”. Or maybe, some will hope that this fantasy might turn into [...] a deliberate assignment?

And what of those who have remained behind? Having lost all of their economic influence, all of their property and with the majority of their youth now abandoned ... they await a different challenge – to desperately preserve their primal cultural identity [...] to spite the destructive resistance of the German Reich. While they are still alive, they will of course maintain their uniqueness.

But how long will they survive?



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During the first period of Latvian and Estonian independence (1918-1940), the leaders of the Baltic German community passed to the middle classes that preserved their economic power. As a minority the Baltic Germans made a significant contribution toward the country's economic and cultural life. After signing of the secret protocols of Molotov – Ribbentrop pact in 1939, the Baltic Germans were moved from the Russian sphere of influence to Greater Germany.

Your role

You were born in November 1918 in an ethnically mixed (mother Latvian, father German) middle class family in Riga. You went to a German grammar school as your parents believed it would provide a better education, but most of your friends are Latvian. Your best friend is of Russian origin and you are in love with his sister. Love is in the air!



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Your role

You were born in 1860 in a patriarchal German family in a small rural town of Goldingen, and you still live in this town. Your family has lived here for centuries, you feel very connected to this place. Being a widow it is very important for you to take good care of the grave of your husband. One of your three children also rests here.



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Your role

You were born in 1891 in Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire. Your father had a law degree and was a high rank civil servant in the Czar's administration. Your German family comes from Courland. You went to university in Vienna, after WWI you were a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Latvia and the editor of the main German – language newspaper. You are a well-known fighter for (ethnic) minority rights; you were one of the authors of minority law of the Republic of Latvia, and an expert in the League of Nations. You truly believe in democracy and are very critical about both Nazism and Communism.



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Your role

You were born in 1888 in a German family of rich land-owners. Your father took part in the punitive expeditions of 1907, and you lost a lot of your lands during the land-reform of 1920s. Your wife is a teacher of German literature; your parents have passed away and are buried in their manor, just like your ancestors.



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Your role

You were born in 1905 in a rather poor, but noble German family. Belonging to Baltic Germans is an important part of your identity. You work as a teacher of German literature, and your wife is a teacher of music in girls' gymnasium. You would be glad to have a career growth but your chances in the small country Latvia are very limited.



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Your role

You were born in 1903 in Riga in a family of noblemen. For your family it was very difficult to accept the changes that WWI brought into your life: dissolution of the Russian empire, establishment of the new, national state of Latvia, the loss of privileges of the noble class. You are an active member in an organization called "*Bewegung*", and you lead one of its groups of youngsters.



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After the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty at the conclusion of World War I in 1918, the German military were still present in Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Estonia, and the Baltic Germans tried to establish a unified Baltic State. They did not succeed. Relations between the Baltic Germans and the newly independent governments of Latvia and Estonia were not amicable. The Baltic German organisations of the nobles were shut down and all titles of nobility were repealed. The massive landholdings of the German nobility were confiscated, and the land was redistributed to local farmers.

During the first period of Latvian and Estonian independence (1918-1940), the leaders of the Baltic German community passed to the middle classes that preserved their economic power. As a minority the Baltic Germans made a significant contribution toward the country's economic and cultural life. After signing of the secret protocols of Molotov – Ribbentrop pact in 1939, the Baltic Germans were moved from the Russian sphere of influence to Greater Germany.

Your role

You were born in 1884 in a rather poor family. Among your ancestors there are several German families, but also some Poles and Latvians; ethnicity is not an important factor to you. Your wife also comes from an ethnically mixed family. One of her great-grandfathers was Jewish. You are not politically active and usually try to obey the authorities and law.



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Baltic Germans : background information

German tradesman began to arrive in the Baltic region in the latter half of the 12th century. They were followed by Christian missionaries and crusaders, mostly from Northern Germany. By the end of 13th century the Germans became the ruling class in the territory of what is now Latvia and Estonia. Germans, especially tradesmen, also settled in Stockholm, Vyborg, Turku, Vilnius and Kaunas, but their influence in these areas was not as great as in Livonia.

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Your role

You were born in 1901 in Riga. You never felt belonging to local community, actually in your view there is no community – every ethnic group communicates mainly among themselves. Your mother is German, father Latvian and German was your first language. You were a teacher in a Jewish secondary school, but you lost your job after the education reform of the authoritarian regime. You are unemployed at the moment.



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Your role

You were born in 1902 in a Latvian family in Riga (well, ok, you have some German ancestors as well, but until now you have seen yourself as a Latvian). You happened to be in Riga in 1919 during the terror⁵ of communist government of Pēteris Stučka. Although you come from a family social democrats and experienced WWI as a teenager, seeing civilians killed on streets became a life-changing moment for you. Your main fear is to live under communism.

⁵ Communist leader P. Stučka in 1919 released a decree that replaced court with revolutionary war tribunal or so called *troika*. In one month 1000 persons were sentenced to death and killed.

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Your role

You were born in 1884 in a wealthy German family in Riga. You managed to gain a significant capital during the Great War and now own a factory and several workshops. You are involved in politics only as far as it influences your business; so far it's been great.



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