

Liepaja – the capital of Latvia

During the Latvian War of Liberation (1918-1920), from January 6, 1919 to July 7, 1919 Liepaja hosted the Latvian Provisional Government. Therefore, Liepaja became an actual new capital of the Republic of Latvia. This period was one of the most severe and complicated over the entire period of the existence of the Latvian Provisional Government.

Formation of the State

During the World War I (1914-1918), Liepaja was the only city in Latvia that was affected neither by arrival of countless refugees nor by evacuation of production. Liepaja was the first Latvian city to receive the news about the November Revolution in Germany. As early as on November 5, the German Sailors' Council was created in the city.

The end of the war gave an opportunity to proclaim independence of the Latvian State on November 18, 1918. By then, a local council of workers' deputies had already been created in Liepaja controlled by the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP). Supported by the social democrats (including the founders of the Republic of Latvia), on November 24, 1918, a vast celebration and manifestation devoted to the formation of an independent state took place in Liepaja. The LSDSP's relations with the Provisional Government lead by Kārlis Ulmanis worsened



Image 1

at the end of December when the Government decided to assign citizenship to a German soldier who fought against the Bolsheviks. The LSDSP opposed to the Government and withdrew from the People's Council of Latvia (LTP).

Image 1

Withdrawal of the Latvian Separate Battalion from Jelgava.

Second week of January 1919.

Collection of the Latvian War Museum.

Image 2

Representatives of Kārlis Ulmanis First Cabinet of Ministers in Liepaja in 1919.

1 row on the left:

1. Spricis Paegle, Minister of Trade and Industry;
2. Miķelis Valters, Minister of Interior;
3. Kārlis Ulmanis, President of Ministers;
4. Teodors Hermanovskis, Minister of Communication and Labour;
5. Kārlis Kasparsons, Minister of Education.

2 row on the left:

1. Jānis Blumbergs, Minister of Public Charity;
2. Eduards Strautnieks, Minister of Justice;
3. Dāvids Rudzītis, Director of State Chancellery;
4. Jānis Zālītis, Minister of Defence;
5. Kārlis Puriņš, Minister of Finance.

Liepaja, 1919

Author: Juris Bokums.

Latvian State Archive of Cinematographic Documents

The Government moves to Liepaja

On January 3, 1919, troops of the Latvian riflemen from the Russian Red Army invaded Riga. A day before, the Provisional Government had left the capital of Latvia and moved to Jelgava and then further on to Liepaja, having arrived in the morning of January 6. The receipt of the Government was unexpectedly hostile, German policemen who were on duty made an attempt to arrest the ministers. However, thanks to active efforts of Jānis Zālītis, the Minister of Defence and presence of a well-equipped student's company, the Germans had to step back.

While being in Liepaja, the Provisional Government conducted several meetings where the opportunities to defend the city were discussed. A newly formed Bolsheviks' Army of Soviet Latvia rapidly moved to the West, defeating one city after another. In these circumstances, the Government decided to defend Liepaja as far as possible and to send the most of the Ministers abroad to look for support. By mid-January, Liepaja was left by the most of the members of the Government, members of the LTP, officials and senior officers. Three ministers continued to work in the city: the Minister of Interior Miķelis Valters, Minister of Defence Zālītis and Minister of Communication Teodors Hermanovskis.

Government Resumes its Work

By the end of February, members of the Latvian Provisional Government returned to Liepaja. On March 2, K. Ulmanis arrived, and the comprehensive work of the Government resumed as the President of Ministers was back. Simultaneously, anti-Bolshevik forces opened an offensive Kurzeme front. On March 18, the Bolsheviks were forced to leave



Image 2

Jelgava with the front line moved to the banks of the Lielupe river. The Provisional Government made great efforts to gain control over freed regions. The most important step at that point was the commencement of the agrarian reform, promising to share the land owned by the state among landless farmers and soldiers. Mobilisation took place that allowed to supplement the Latvian war forces considerably. All those steps raised fears among some Baltic German landlords and

leaders of the German military forces. K. Ulmanis's Government continued strengthening, and its support among the population was growing. After the Latvian national armed forces units had consolidated, the German army had to be moved to Germany. This was one of the main reasons why the Commander-in-Chief of the German forces, General Rüdiger von der Goltz postponed invasion of Riga until May.

Image 3

Return of the Provisional Government of Latvia to Liepaja.

June 27, 1919.

Unknown author

Collection of the Latvian War Museum

Crisis

On April 3, 1919, General Goltz used force to liquidate the German Soldiers' Council in Liepaja whom he considered to be his greatest enemy. His new goal was liquidation of the Latvian Provisional Government. As early as on April 13, in Liepaja, clashes between German and Latvian units began. General Goltz withdrew a powerful Landeswehr unit - the Shock Troop lead by the German Officer Manteuffel from the front to Liepaja. With participation of those forces, on April 16, a coup d'état took place in Liepaja. Members of the Government were partly arrested, while K. Ulmanis managed to find a refuge in the premises of the UK Ministry. On May 1, K. Ulmanis moved to a steamer Saratov where the Government worked until the end of June protected by the British fleet.

Republic on Water

As the Latvian Provisional Government worked on a steamer Saratov, Liepaja was overtaken by the security council of the Fatherland Front's armed forces that were unable to form a government for almost a month. General Jānis Balodis refused to participate in the military directory, while Liepaja District Prosecutor Oskars Borkovskis's cabinet proved to be incapable. Only on May 10, the pro-German leader was replaced by a preacher and writer Andrievs Niedra.

On May 12, 1919, the LTP's meeting took place in Liepaja. The LSDSP were back as its members. The LTP fully supported K. Ulmanis's Government and condemned the coup d'état. J. Balodis confirmed his support to the Government several times. Even General Goltz was forced to officially condemn the coup



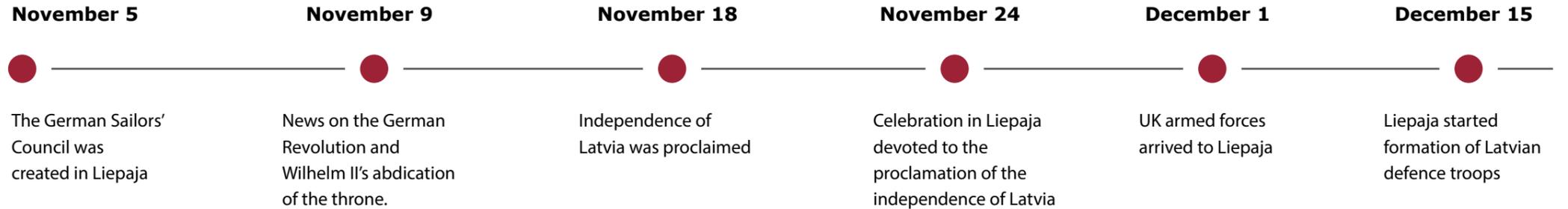
Image 3

d'état of April 16. However, the Government could not land until the end of the Battle of Cesis, in which the Landeswehr and Iron Division were completely defeated. On June 26, Head of the Entente in the Baltic States, General Hubert de la Poer Gough announced that K. Ulmanis's Government resumed its work immediately. The Liepaja was left by the German embassy, German armed forces and

police. On June 27, at 6:00PM, the Provisional Government descended from a steamer Saratov in a festive atmosphere. On July 8, the Government returned to freed Riga.

Chronology:

1918



1919

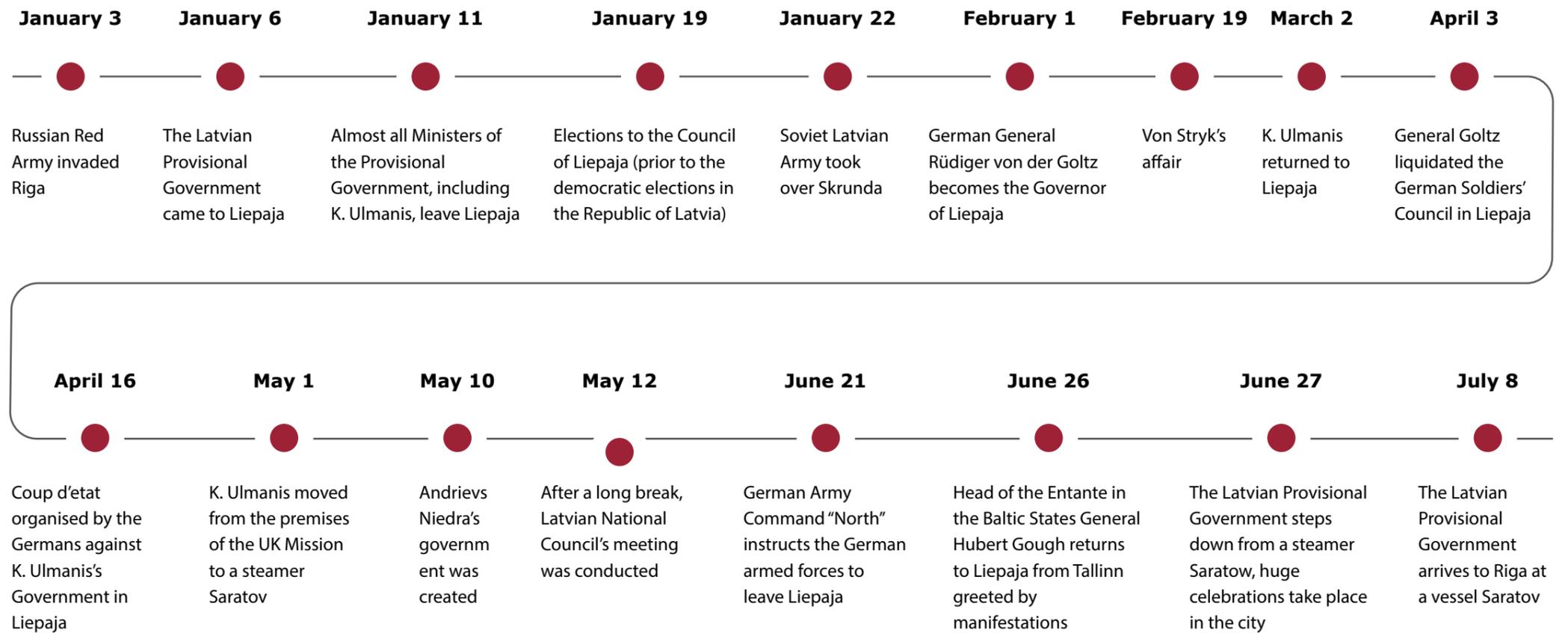


Image 4

Building in Liepāja, Lielā iela 6, where the temporary government of Latvia worked.

the 30th of the 20th century

Unknown author

Collection of the Museum of Liepaja

On the eve of the Centenary of the Latvian State, the State Chancellery prepares series of information materials about formation of the Latvian State and its founders. The goal of information materials is to strengthen the understanding of statehood, history of Latvia and national values as well as bright personalities that affected historical processes and made a considerable contribution in formation and development of the Latvian state, particularly, in the work of its Government.

We would like to thank Dr. hist. Jānis Šiliņš for his participation in the preparation of a fact sheet "Liepaja - the capital of Latvia".



Image 4

Image 5

Meeting the President of Ministers of the Latvian Provisional Government Kārlis Ulmanis (in the centre) in Riga.

Riga, July 8, 1919.

Unknown author

Latvian State Archive of Cinematographic Documents

Please find information about the origins of our state, its path towards independence and Latvia's centenary events at:

LV100.lv
www.mk.gov.lv/simtgade



Image 5