

Konstantin Päts

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Konstantin Päts



1st [President of the Republic of Estonia](#)

In office

24 April 1938 – 21 June 1940

Prime Minister [Kaarel Eenpalu](#)

[Jüri Uluots](#)

[Johannes Vares](#)¹

Succeeded by [Jüri Uluots](#)

as Prime Minister in duties of the President in Exile

[Lennart Meri](#)

as President after restoration of independence

[Johannes Vares](#)

as Prime Minister in duties of the President

under [USSR](#) occupation

Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Estonia²

In office

24 February 1918 – 8 May 1919

Preceded by *none*

Succeeded by [Otto August Strandmann](#)
as Prime Minister

2nd State Elder of Estonia

In office

25 January 1921 – 21 November 1922

Preceded by [Ants Piip](#)

Succeeded by [Juhan Kukk](#)

4th State Elder of Estonia

In office

2 August 1923 – 26 March 1924

Preceded by [Juhan Kukk](#)

Succeeded by [Friedrich Karl Akel](#)

11th State Elder of Estonia

In office

12 February 1931 – 19 February 1932

Preceded by [Otto August Strandmann](#)

Succeeded by [Jaan Teemant](#)

14th State Elder of Estonia

In office

1 November 1932 – 18 May 1933

Preceded by [Karl August Einbund](#)

Succeeded by [Jaan Tõnisson](#)

16th State Elder of Estonia

In office

21 October 1933 – 24 January 1934

Preceded by [Jaan Tõnisson](#)

Succeeded by himself as [Prime Minister in duties of the State Elder](#)

Prime Minister in duties of the State Elder of Estonia

In office

24 January 1934 – 3 September 1937

Preceded by himself as [State Elder](#)

Succeeded by himself as [President-Regent](#)

President-Regent of Estonia

In office

3 September 1937 – 9 May 1938

Preceded by himself as [Prime Minister in duties of the State Elder](#)

Succeeded by himself as [President](#)

<div>Kaarel Eenpalu</div> <div>as Prime Minister</div>	
Personal details	
Born	23 February 1874 <div>Tahkuranna Parish, Governorate of Livonia, Russian Empire</div>
Died	18 January 1956 (aged 81) <div>Kalinin Oblast, Russian SFSR, USSR</div>
Nationality	Estonian
Political party	Country People's Union (1917–1920) Farmers' Assemblies (1920–1932) Union of Settlers and Smallholders (1932–1935) Patriotic League (1935–1940)
Spouse(s)	Wilhelma ("Helma") Ida Emilie Päts
Alma mater	University of Tartu
Profession	Lawyer, newspaper editor, politician, businessman
Religion	Eastern Orthodox Church
<p>1 – Vares was the Prime Minister under USSR occupation.</p> <p>2 – Päts was the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Provisional Government from 24 February 1918 to 12 November 1918.</p>	

Konstantin Päts VR¹ I/1 and III/1 (23 February 1905^[o.s.] 11 February) 1874^[u] – 18 January 1956) was the most influential politician of [interwar Estonia](#). He was one of the first [Estonians](#) to become active in politics and started an almost 40-year political rivalry with [Jaan Tõnisson](#), first through journalism with his newspaper *Teataja*, later through politics. He was condemned to death during the [1905 Revolution](#), but managed to flee first to [Switzerland](#), then to [Finland](#), where he continued his literary work. He returned to Estonia, but had to spend time in prison in 1910–1911.

In 1917, Pääs headed the Provincial Government of the [Autonomous Governorate of Estonia](#), but was forced to go underground after the [October Revolution](#). On 19 February 1918, Pääs became one of the three members of the [Estonian Salvation Committee](#), that issued the [Estonian Declaration of Independence](#) on 24 February. Konstantin Pääs headed the [Estonian Provisional Government](#) (1918–1919), although being imprisoned during the [German Occupation](#). In the Provisional Government, Pääs also served as [Minister of Internal Affairs](#) (1918) and [Minister of War](#) (1918–1919), that left him organizing Estonian troops for the [War of Independence](#).

During the [1920s and early 1930s](#), Pääs led the most right-wing party of the major political parties of the time – [Farmers' Assemblies](#), that eventually merged with the [Union of Settlers and Smallholders](#) in 1932. Pääs was the [speaker of the Riigikogu](#) (1922–1923) and served five times as [State Elder](#) (1921–1922, 1923–1924, 1931–1932, 1932–1933 and 1933–1934). During his last term in 1934, he organized a *coup d'etat* to neutralise the [right-wing populist Vaps Movement](#). He was supported by the army and the [parliament](#). During the authoritarian regime ("[Era of Silence](#)"), many reforms were made and the economy grew. Pääs ruled as [Prime Minister in duties of the State Elder](#) (1934–1937) and [President-Regent](#) (1937–1938) until a [new constitution](#) was adopted in 1938, after which Pääs became the first [President of Estonia](#). During his presidency, the [Soviet Union occupied Estonia](#) in 1940. As President, he was forced to sign decrees for over a month, until he was finally arrested and deported to Russia, where he died in 1956.

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[Early life](#)[\[edit\]](#)



Konstantin Päts with his family. From left: brother Nikolai, sister Marianna, father Jakob, brother Voldemar, mother Olga, brother Peeter and Konstantin.

Konstantin Päts was born on 23 February ^{[[o.s.](#) 11 February]} 1874 in [Tahkuranna Parish, Estonia](#) (then in [Pärnu District](#) of the [Governorate of Livonia](#) of the [Russian Empire](#)). According to locals, Konstantin was born in a barn of a roadside farm, since his mother couldn't reach a doctor in time.^[2] He was baptized in the Tahkuranna Orthodox Church.^[3]

The father of Konstantin, Jakob (Jaagup) Päts (1842-1909), was a housebuilder from [Heimtali, Viljandi County](#), but was forced to move after getting into conflict with local nobility. His mother, Olga Päts (*née* Tumanova; 1847-1914), was from a mixed Estonian-Russian family and therefore Konstantin's father converted from [Lutheranism](#) to [Eastern Orthodox Christianity](#). Konstantin, his older brother, two younger brothers and his younger sister were all brought up in strong Orthodox traditions.

Konstantin started his education in the Orthodox parish school of [Tahkuranna](#).^[2] After one year, the family moved to [Raeküla](#) borough near [Pärnu](#), where Konstantin attended the [Russian language](#) Orthodox parish school. Later he attended the [Riga](#) Clerical Seminar in 1887–1892, but after deciding not to become a priest, he left for the high school in Pärnu.^[4]

From 1894 to 1898 he attended the Faculty of Law of [Tartu University](#), that he graduated as [cand. jur.](#) After graduation, Päts served in the [Russian 96th Infantry Regiment of Omsk](#) in [Pskov](#) and was promoted an [ensign](#).^[4] After rejecting an academic career in Tartu, he moved to [Tallinn](#) in 1900, to start a political career.

Career^{[[edit](#)]}

Journalism^{[[edit](#)]}

In Tallinn, Konstantin Päts started his career as an assistant at the advocacy of [Jaan Poska](#), but the job wasn't satisfactory for Päts.^[5] In [Tartu](#), [Jaan Tõnisson](#) had already founded his nationalist newspaper [Postimees](#) in 1891, Päts was planning to found his own in Tallinn. The first inspiration came from writers [Eduard Vilde](#) and [Anton Hansen Tammsaare](#), who couldn't get a licence from the [Ministry of Internal Affairs](#) because of their [social democratic](#) views. Instead they used Päts as an unknown lawyer with an affiliation in the [Orthodox Church](#).^[6]

Päts was considered by the authorities to establish a newspaper that was loyal to the Empire and would "unite all Orthodox Estonians", however in reality his newspaper had a radical political content. The first issue of the [Teataja](#) ("The Gazette") came out on 23 October ^{[[o.s.](#) 10 October]} 1901, starting a rivalry not only between *Postimees* and *Teataja*, but also between Jaan Tõnisson and Konstantin Päts for the leading national figures. Instead of the ideological and nationalist *Postimees*, *Teataja* emphasized the importance of economic activity. The work was made difficult by strong government censorship.^[6]

Early political career^{[[edit](#)]}

Päts's first political goal was to take power in the towns, where [Baltic Germans](#) still controlled the municipal governments. Päts served as a municipal adviser in Tallinn from 1904^[4] and together with Jaan Poska, he organized an electoral block between Estonians and liberal Russians, that managed to win at the 1904 Tallinn municipal elections. Päts became a member of the city council and in April 1905, he became the deputy mayor, meaning he headed the city council.^[2] His

active work at the town government left him little time for his newspaper. A group of revolutionaries, led by [Hans Pöögelmann](#), had taken control in *Teataja*'s staff and published anti-government articles and called people for a revolution.^[6]

During the [1905 Revolution](#), Päts was already an activist on self-government reform, where he supported [national autonomy](#) in the [Baltic governorates](#).^[7] In the escalation of the revolution, his newspaper was closed and its staff members arrested. Päts found out about this in advance and managed to escape to [Switzerland](#), only to find out that he had been condemned to death in the Russian Empire.^[2]



Ensign officer Konstantin Päts in 1917

In 1906 he moved to [Helsinki](#), Finland, where he continued his literary and journalist career. Much of his work was published anonymously in Estonia. He also advised local municipalities on land reform questions. In 1908, Päts moved to [Ollila](#), which was located at the Russian border near [Saint Petersburg](#). There he became one of the editors for the Estonian newspaper *Peterburi Teataja* ("The St Petersburg Gazette") in 1908, although he resided still in Finland. In Ollila, he was reunited with his family, with whom he had parted when he escaped to Switzerland in 1905.^[2]

After his wife had gotten seriously ill, Päts found out that he was no longer condemned to death in the Russian Empire. He moved back to Estonia in 1909, to face only minor charges. From February 1910, he served time in [Kresty Prison](#) in Saint Petersburg, while his wife died of [tuberculosis](#) in Switzerland, where Päts had sent her for treatment. During his imprisonment, he was able to study foreign languages and write articles, to be published in newspapers.^[2] Päts was released on 25 March 1911. The governor of the [Governorate of Estonia](#) complained about Päts's activity in Estonia in 1905 and pleaded for the government not to let him return^[8] and he was banned from living in the Governorates of Estonia and [Livonia](#) for six years. However, strong connections with Jaan Poska helped him return to Estonia, where he founded another newspaper, *Tallinna Teataja* ("The Tallinn Gazette").^[2]

From February 1916, Päts served as an officer in Tallinn and in July 1917, he was elected as Chairman of the Supreme Committee of Estonian Soldiers, where he actively worked to form Estonian units in the [Imperial Army](#). During the war, he also organized the cooperation between Estonians and liberal [Baltic German](#) estate owners.^[2]

Autonomy and German Occupation^[edit]



Members of the [Estonian Salvation Committee](#) in 1918: Konstantin Päts, [Jüri Vilms](#) and [Konstantin Konik](#).



Konstantin Päts was one of the authors of the [Estonian Declaration of Independence](#).

In 1917, when [German](#) forces were advancing on Estonia, Päts was able to avoid the mobilization. Since the control after the [February Revolution](#) was in the hands of the [Russian Provisional Government](#), Estonians were pursuing for an autonomy within the Russian Empire. In local debates on whether to form one or two autonomous governorates in Estonia, Konstantin Päts, who supported a single autonomous governorate, took yet another victory from Jaan Tõnisson, who supported two autonomous governorates. After Estonian mass protests in Petrograd, the Provisional Government formed the [autonomous Governorate of Estonia](#) on 12 April [O.S. 30 March] 1917.

The [Estonian Provincial Assembly](#) (Maapäev) was elected, Päts joined and became one of the leading figures of the [Estonian Country People's Union](#), which took 13 of the 55 seats. Left- and right-wing politicians gained an equal number of seats in the Provincial Assembly, which made it difficult to appoint a speaker for the assembly. [Jaan Tõnisson](#) of the centre-right nominated the candidacy of Konstantin Päts, who however lost with only one vote to the almost unknown Artur Vallner. At first, Päts chose not to join any of the [parliamentary groups](#), but eventually joined the most right-wing Democratic group.^[9] Päts replaced [Jaan Raamot](#) as Chairman of the Provincial Government on 25 October [O.S. 12 October] 1917.^[10] During the [October Revolution](#), Bolsheviks took control in Estonia and the Provincial Assembly was disbanded. After failing to give over official documents, Päts was arrested three times, until he finally went underground.^[2]

Since Bolshevik power in Estonia was relatively weak, the Council of Elders of the Maapäev declared on 28 November [O.S. 15 November] 1917, that the assembly was the only legally elected and constituted authority in Estonia. Since even the Council of Elders was too big to work

underground, the three-membered [Estonian Salvation Committee](#) was formed on 19 February 1918 and Konstantin Päts became one of its members.

[Soviet Russian](#) forces evacuating, the Salvation Committee wanted to use the [interregnum](#) and declare Estonia's independence. On 21 February 1918, a delegation with Päts was sent to Haapsalu, that was chosen to be the site of the initial declaration, but they were forced to head back to Tallinn, since German forces had captured Haapsalu on the very same day. Attempts to reach Tartu before German occupation had also failed.^[11]

When Soviet Russian forces had finally evacuated from Tallinn and German forces were advancing, the Salvation Committee issued the [Estonian Declaration of Independence](#) on 24 February 1918 (The declaration had also been delivered to [Pärnu](#), where it was proclaimed on 23 February). Instantly the [Estonian Provisional Government](#) was formed and Konstantin Päts became the [Chairman of the Council of Ministers](#) and Minister of Internal Affairs.^[12]

On 25 February 1918, German forces captured Tallinn and arrested Konstantin Päts on 16 June 1918. He was sent to several prison camps in [Latvia](#) until he was finally placed in a camp in [Grodno](#), Poland.^[13] He was released at the end of the war on 17 November 1918.

After the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers [Jüri Vilms](#) mysteriously died in Finland, Jaan Poska led the underground republic. After Germany surrendered, Konstantin Päts's 2nd cabinet of the Provisional Government took office on 12 November 1918, making Päts the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government and the Minister of Internal Affairs.

After Päts arrived to Tallinn and the Maapäev had gathered, Päts's 3rd cabinet of the Provisional Government was formed on 27 November 1918, with Päts as Prime Minister of the Provisional Government and the Minister of War, leaving it up to him to organize national defence.

War of Independence^[edit]



Konstantin Päts gave the first traditional speech at the [Independence Day](#) parade on 24 February 1919.



Weak representation in the left-wing dominated [Constituent Assembly](#) left Konstantin Päts with little power in composing the land reform law and the [1920 constitution](#).

Päts founded the [Estonian Defence League](#) to provide defence for the advancing [Red Army](#). On 28 November 1918, Soviet Russian forces captured [Narva](#), which resulted the [Estonian War of Independence](#). During a government meeting, Konstantin Päts banged his fist on the table and refused to compromise with the Communists. This persuaded other government members to start a war against Soviet Russia. In January 1919, Estonians forced the Bolsheviks to retreat and by 24 February 1919, the entire Estonian territory was under the control of the Provisional

Government. In his speech at the 1919 Independence Day parade, he said: "We have to secure our economy so we could become less dependent from our allies. In order to avoid bankruptcy, we have to found our state on agriculture".^[12] This became the basis for the [Estonian economy](#) for the next 20 years.

In April 1919, the [Estonian Constituent Assembly](#) was elected, but the Estonian Country People's Union won only 8 of the 120 seats, leaving the majority to centre-left parties. On 9 May 1919, [Otto August Strandman](#) took over as the first Prime Minister. In the summer of 1919, Pääts opposed going into war with the Baltic German [Landeswehr](#), but as he was in opposition, the government decided to start the [Landeswehr War](#), which ended in Estonian-Latvian victory. After the war had ended on 2 February 1920, the majority left-wing Constituent Assembly adopted the radical land reform law and the [first constitution](#), which brought down a very proportional parliament, short government cabinets and no separate and stable head of state.

Democratic republic^[edit]

In September 1919, Pääts formed a new political party, the agrarian-conservative [Farmers' Assemblies](#), which was based on the Country People's Union.^[14] In [1920 elections](#), the party won 21 seats in the 100-member [Riigikogu](#) and from 25 January 1921 to 21 November 1922, Konstantin Pääts was the [State Elder](#) and led the first constitutional government cabinet. It was a centre-right coalition with three centrist parties. The cabinet fell soon after the centre-left [Estonian Labour Party](#) criticized Pääts's right-wing politics and left the coalition. After stepping down as head of government, Pääts served as [President \(speaker\) of the Riigikogu](#) from 20 November 1922 to 7 June 1923.^[15]

In [1923 elections](#), Farmers' Assemblies took 23 seats. On 2 August 1923, Pääts became State Elder for the second time. A similar centre-right coalition with three centrist parties lasted again until the Estonian Labour Party left the coalition, forcing Pääts to step down on 26 March 1924. He kept away from office politics for seven years. From 15 December 1925 to 9 December 1927, [Jaan Teemant](#) of the Farmers' Assemblies was the State Elder.

In [1926 elections](#), Farmers' Assemblies took again 23 seats and Jaan Teemant continued as State Elder. Already in 1927, Pääts criticized members of the Riigikogu, saying that they have been causing the instability of government coalitions, rather than ideological differences.^[16] At the 6th Congress of Farmers' Assemblies in 1929, the party was in opposition to [August Rei](#)'s leftist government and Pääts, among others, demanded changes in the constitution, a smaller parliament, a separate presidential office and fight against corruption.^[17]

In [1929 elections](#), Farmers' Assemblies took 24 seats and Pääts served his third term as State Elder from 12 February 1931 to 19 February 1932. It was an ideologically wide coalition with the [Estonian Socialist Workers' Party](#) and the centre-right [Estonian People's Party](#). On 26 January 1932, Farmers' Assemblies and the left wing-agrarian [Settlers' Party](#) merged to form the [Union of Settlers and Smallholders](#), only to be followed by the formation of the [National Centre Party](#) by four centrist parties. Pääts's cabinet resigned, making Jaan Teemant the new State Elder.^[18]

In [1932 elections](#) the newly formed Union of Settlers and Smallholders won 42 seats in Riigikogu and one of the party's leaders, [Karl August Einbund](#), became the State Elder. On 3 October 1932, the coalition between the Union of Settlers and Smallholders and National Centre Party broke up, with the latter wanting to [devalue](#) the [Estonian kroon](#) during the [Great Depression](#). A month-long government crisis started. Since there were only three major parties in the Riigikogu, the third being the Estonian Socialist Workers' Party, no functioning coalition could be found until special authority was given to Konstantin Pääts to form a [grand coalition](#) between all three major parties. His cabinet took office on 1 November 1932. On 25 November 1932, Pääts's government was given more powers by the disunited Riigikogu to deal with the economic crisis. His government was forced to resign on 18 May 1933, after the National Centre Party, still favouring devaluation, left the coalition and the Union of Settlers and Smallholders had lost many of its members to the reactivated Settlers' party.^[19]

Konstantin Pääts was relatively successful in internal politics. After adopting the constitution, his party was in all the government cabinets, except for [Friedrich Karl Akel](#)'s and August Rei's

cabinets and Jaan Tõnisson's fourth cabinet. This makes it 4,017 days (89%) in the government (of 4,497 between 1921–1933). Päts was himself the State Elder four times, a total of 1,476 days (33%). Interestingly, he never filled any other position in the government besides the head of government (except for the additional minister positions in the Provisional Government).

Päts served as the chairman of the Farmers' Assemblies party only unofficially and he was considered to be a bad partyman and often formed the opposition within the party. Therefore he seldom took part of their official meetings. Only in 1933, he was made honorary chairman of the party.^[20]

Membership in the parliament:

- 1917–1919 [Estonian Provincial Assembly](#) (Maapäev)
- 1919–1920 [Estonian Constituent Assembly](#)
- 1920–1923 [I Riigikogu](#)
- 1923–1926 [II Riigikogu](#)
- 1926–1929 [III Riigikogu](#)
- 1929–1932 [IV Riigikogu](#)
- 1932-1934/1937 [V Riigikogu](#)

[\[show\]](#)

Government cabinets of Konstantin Päts

Lack of government stability led to several new constitution proposals, but only the third proposal by the right-wing populist [Vaps Movement](#) was accepted in a [referendum](#) on 14 and 16 October 1933. Päts was elected on 21 October 1933 to head the non-aligned transitional government to the [second constitution](#). Until 24 January 1934, he served as State Elder, but after the new constitution came into force, he became Prime Minister. The new constitution was a drift from democracy, giving a lot of power to the president (still named "State Elder") and leaving the Riigikogu only an advisory role.^[21]

Both Päts and his recent predecessor [Jaan Tõnisson](#) tried to control the Vaps Movement, that was seen by democratic parties as a local [National Socialist](#) party that had to be kept away from power.^[22] In August 1933, State Elder Jaan Tõnisson had declared a state of emergency and temporary censorship,^[23] that was lifted only when Päts's transitional government took office.^[24] On 27 February 1934, Päts himself imposed a law, prohibiting members of the military to take part in politics. This action forced several thousand members of the army to secede from the Vaps Movement.^[25]

Päts was one of the candidates in the presidential elections,^[26] but he was accompanied by threats by the Vaps Movement to take power and rumors of a forthcoming coup. Konstantin Päts then carried out a [self-coup](#) on 12 March 1934. He was supported by general [Johan Laidoner](#) and the army.^[22]

Era of Silence^[edit]



Oru palace in [Toila](#) was used as the summer residence of Päts during his authoritarian and presidential years. The palace was destroyed in World War II.



The presidential palace in [Kadriorg](#) was finished during Päts's presidency in 1938.

A state of emergency was declared and the [Vaps Movement](#) was disbanded, with about 400 members arrested, including the presidential candidate [Andres Larka](#). Johan Laidoner was appointed Commander in Chief of the Armies. On 15–16 March 1934, the Riigikogu approved of Päts's actions, hoping to save the democracy. Päts postponed the presidential elections until the end of the state of emergency for "emotions being too high because of anti-government agitation by the Vaps Movement".^[27]

In August 1934, Päts appointed [Karl August Einbund](#) as Minister of Internal Affairs, making him the third leading figure of the era next to Päts and Laidoner. In September, the Agitation and Propaganda Department was created,^[28] in October, all parliamentary work was stopped after the opposition criticized the political restrictions^[29] and in December, censorship was introduced.^[30]

In February 1935 the [Patriotic League](#) (*Isamaaliit*) was formed to replace political parties,^[31] while all other political organizations were disbanded in March. Päts thought that political organizations should unite the society, not fragment it.^[32] The initial state of emergency was declared for six months in March 1934, but after September 1934, Päts extended it for a year for a total of six times.^{[33][34][35][36][37][38]}

As Päts believed that a nation should be organized not by political views into parties, but by vocation into respective chambers, a series of [state corporative institutions](#) were introduced, based on [corporatism in Fascist Italy](#). Päts had promoted the idea of corporate chambers already in 1918, but the idea did not gain support from strong left-wing parties at the time. Päts was the main proponent of the formation of the chambers and the first two were also founded while his government cabinets were in office in 1924 and 1931. Fifteen more chambers were established between 1934 and 1936, bringing the total number to 17.^[39]

On 7 December 1935, a *coup d'état* attempt (the "Estonia plot", named after the [Estonia Theatre](#)) by the Vaps Movement was exposed. More than 750 people were arrested throughout the state, crushing the movement conclusively.^[40] Leaders of the movement were eventually given punishments as hard as 20 years of forced labour,^[41] they were pardoned in December 1937.^[42]

Meanwhile, [Jaan Tõnisson](#) had criticized Päts's inability to bring the new constitution into effect. In July 1935, Tõnisson was ousted from the [Postimees](#) board.^[43] In October 1936, four former State Elders, [Juhan Kukk](#), [Ants Piip](#), [Jaan Teemant](#) and Jaan Tõnisson, sent a joint letter to Päts, demanding civil freedoms.^[44]

During the authoritarian regime, it was easier for the government to pass reforms, since there was no longer an organized opposition. Päts ruled mostly through presidential [decrees](#), because the Riigikogu was needed to pass real laws. The economy grew and the infrastructure, industry and education were developed. The [Estonianization](#) of personal names was supported, the most prominent example being Minister of Internal Affairs Karl August Einbund, who changed his name to Kaarel Eenpalu.

Regarding the 1934 constitution as too undemocratic, Päts organised the passing of a new constitution through a referendum and a constituent assembly. The [corporate chambers](#) were to be the basis of forming the assembly.^[45] Its formation was approved (with 76% in favour) in a [referendum](#) in 1936. The [1936 National Assembly elections](#) were boycotted by the opposition in most electoral districts.^[46]



Konstantin Päts giving at the 20th anniversary of the [Republic of Estonia](#).



Konstantin Päts

On 28 July 1937, the assembly adopted the [third constitution](#), that was based on Päts's draft.^[47] A bicameral parliament was to be elected and the president was to be elected by the parliament, not by the people. On 3 September 1937, a 120-day period of transition began, during which Päts ruled as [President-Regent](#).^[36]

On 1 January 1938, the new constitution came into force and the [1938 parliamentary elections](#) were held. Opposition candidates were allowed to take part, however they were given little or no attention in the media. Päts's supporters in the [National Front for the Implementation of the Constitution](#) won 64 of the 80 seats in the lower chamber, the Riigivolikogu. The president, who was yet to be elected, was also able to directly appoint into office 10 of the 40 members of the higher chamber, Riiginõukogu.^[48]

The parliament, together with municipal appointees elected Konstantin Päts the first [President of Estonia](#). No other candidates were nominated and Päts was elected with 219 votes in favour and 19 ballots left empty.^{[2][49]} He took office on 24 April 1938 and appointed Kaarel Eenpalu as Prime Minister on 9 May 1938. On 5 May 1938, all political prisoners, mostly Communists and members of the Vaps Movement, were given amnesty. There is no consensus, whether the so-called "[Era of Silence](#)" ended in 1938 with the adoption of the new constitution, or in 1940 with the Soviet occupation.

Late republic and Soviet Occupation [\[edit\]](#)



Estonia's leaders before the Soviet occupation, celebrating the country's independence day for the last time, on 24 February 1940. From left General [Johan Laidoner](#), President Konstantin Päts and Prime Minister [Jüri Uluots](#).

After the beginning of World War II Estonia declared its neutrality, but was compelled to sign the [Soviet–Estonian Mutual Assistance Treaty](#) on 28 September 1939 to allow Soviet [military bases](#) in Estonia. On 12 October 1939, Päts appointed [Jüri Uluots](#) as a new, moderate Prime Minister.^[50]

In May 1940, Päts believed that the best option for Estonia would be to follow Soviet guidelines until the [German-Soviet war](#). In case of such war, "Estonia would be saved".^[51] However on 16 June 1940, the Soviet Union delivered an ultimatum to the Estonian government, which was forced to accept it. Complete [occupation by the Soviet Union](#) followed on 17 June 1940.

Päts was allowed to stay in office, but on 21 June was forced to appoint the Communist [Johannes Vares](#) as Prime Minister. Now effectively a puppet, for an entire month Päts signed about 200 decrees for the new Soviet regime.^[52] Among other things, he signed a decree to change the electoral law, allowing the new regime to organize preliminary elections. Only the lower chamber of the Riigikogu, the Riigivolikogu, was convened, its members being only Communists. On [Victory Day](#) of 23 June 1940, Päts declared that "the greatest thing we have accomplished is the creation of the Estonian state. To her we have given our strongest love, our loyalty, our work and our life." From 29 June 1940, Päts remained under permanent house arrest.^[53] Even in early July, Päts declared to the German ambassador that he didn't believe Estonia would be Sovietized.^[54] On 21 July 1940, the [Estonian SSR](#) was proclaimed and Päts was forced to leave office.

Deportation and imprisonment^[edit]

On 30 July 1940, together with his son Viktor and Viktor's wife Helgi-Alice and sons Matti and Henn, Päts was deported to [Ufa, Bashkir ASSR](#), where they arrived on 9 August. There they lived under surveillance in a large apartment for a year. In Ufa, Päts wrote his memoirs of his time in office and pleaded that his grandsons, their mother and nanny would be sent to either [Switzerland](#) or [Italy](#), since his grandson Henn was already in a bad health. After receiving no answer, he pleaded for them to be sent back to Estonia. In his naivety, he pleaded to be exchanged with [Ernst Thälmann](#), former leader of the [Communist Party of Germany](#), who was imprisoned in [Germany](#). After that, Päts remained quiet, while his son Viktor was certain that [Nazi Germany](#) would invade the [Soviet Union](#) and that he would soon be living abroad.^[55]

The family "randomly" met an Estonian couple, both NKVD agents, in an Ufa market on 29 May 1941. They received an invitation to the family's home the next day. After the visit, it was reported that both Konstantin and Viktor demonstrated particular viciousness against [Joseph Stalin](#) and [Vyacheslav Molotov](#), sympathized with Germany and announced, that they were impatiently waiting for a German assault on the Soviet Union.^[56]



Konstantin Päts as a Soviet prisoner.

On 26 June 1941, they were arrested and imprisoned in Ufa, the children were sent to an orphanage. Päts was interrogated for hours, but didn't take the blame. Even in March, 1942, he believed that the [Western powers](#) would pressure the Soviet Union to send him abroad. Eventually, Päts and his son were sent to [Butyrka prison](#) in [Moscow](#) and Helgi-Alice to [Gulag prison camps](#) in [Siberia](#). In Butyrka prison, [Johan Laidoner](#) was prisoner No. 11, Konstantin Päts No. 12 and Viktor No. 13.^{[56][57]}

On 24 March 1943, Päts was sent to forced treatment in psychoneurotic hospitals first in [Kazan](#), then in [Chistopol](#) in [Tatar ASSR](#). His forced psychiatric hospitalization was justified by his "persistent claiming of being the President of Estonia". On 29 April 1952, Päts was found guilty according to [§ 58-14 and § 58-10](#) of the Penal Code, which meant counter-revolutionary sabotage and [anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary propaganda and agitation](#).^[58] Forced treatment was ended in 1954 and Päts was sent to a psychoneurology hospital in [Jämejala](#), Estonia. Recognition by the locals and too much attention resulted him being sent to Burashevo psychiatric hospital in [Kalinin Oblast](#) (now Tver Oblast), where he eventually died on 18 January 1956.

Legacy^[edit]

Politics^[edit]



Statue for Konstantin Päts in his birthplace [Tahkuranna](#). Erected in 1939, it was removed by the Soviets. The statue was restored in 1989, exactly fifty years after it was first erected.

Päts's ideology went through major changes during his career. During the [1905 Revolution](#), he was considered to be a socialist, as many of the progressive ideas were considered socialist at the time. During his exile years, he became more social liberal, trying to use the best of both ideologies. During independent Estonia, he acted as a conservative with even elements of [statism](#) during his authoritarian years.^[59]

Several aspects of Päts's career are still under critical public debate. Päts has been seen as a politician, who destroyed democracy in pre-war Estonia. According to some historians, he and his close allies used the 1934 coup for their own personal gains and not to keep the Vaps Movement from taking power. Several members of the Päts family gained important positions in ranging from clerical to cultural fields.^[60] Others have criticised the long time that took to adopt a new constitution (more than three years).

His actions before and during the Soviet occupation have been questioned even more. One of the more prominent critics has been [Magnus Ilmjärv](#). In 1918, Päts refused to compromise with the Communists, but in 1940, he gave Estonia to Soviets without many objections. This controversy has led to theories, that Päts's bad health didn't let him realistically analyze the situation.^[61]

Other theories maintain that Päts trusted the Soviet officials and had befriended some of the Soviet leaders. It is also possible, that the [NKVD](#) controlled Päts's health or the information that reached him. Another theory suggests, that Päts knew of the outbreaking war between [Nazi Germany](#) and the [Soviet Union](#) and was only looking for a way for Estonia to survive the short period in between.^[61]

One more theory insists that Päts knew of the difficulty of the situation and tried to keep Estonians as safe as possible by avoiding war with the Soviets. As a lawyer, he also had to understand that his decisions were not valid when forced by an occupying power.^[61] Under international law a war would have invalidated the [Tartu Peace Treaty](#).

According to international law and the Estonian constitution, Päts's actions were of no effect from the beginning of the occupation, or at least from 21 June 1940, when [Andrei Zhdanov](#) dictated the formation of government cabinet led by Johannes Vares. The laws passed by the Vares government and promulgated by Päts were illegal in any case as they were not ratified by the upper chamber as required by the Estonian constitution.

Legally, he remained the *de iure* President until his death in 1956. His active duties went to the last Prime Minister Jüri Uluots, who let [Otto Tief form a government](#) in 1944, before the Soviet reoccupation. After Uluots died in [Stockholm](#) in 1945, presidential duties went to the oldest member of Tief's cabinet, August Rei, who formed the [Estonian Government in Exile](#) in 1953. The last Prime Minister in duties of the President, [Heinrich Mark](#), handed over his credentials to the incoming President [Lennart Georg Meri](#) on 8 October 1992.

Society^[edit]

A number of places and institutions in Estonia have been named after Konstantin Päts. Kentmanni street in Tallinn was named after Konstantin Päts in 1939–1940 and 1941–1944^[62] and Lossi street in [Põltsamaa](#) was named after him in 1936–1940.^[63] Konstantin Päts Boarding School of Tallinn was opened after Päts's own initiative for children with respiratory disorders.^[64]

A museum of Konstantin Päts was set up in 1991 in the [Tallinn Botanical Gardens](#), where Päts's farmstead still remains. The museum still exists, but the farmstead was returned to Päts's descendants in 1995.^[65]

Päts has been portrayed in literature, one of the best known is the satirical *Memoirs of [Ivan Orav](#)* by [Andrus Kivirähk](#), where Päts is portrayed as a true people's person, who was beloved by the entire nation and who was a thoroughly good person.^[66] Periods of Päts's life were also portrayed in the television series [Tuulepealne maa](#).^[67]

Foreign relations^[edit]



[President of Finland Pehr Evind Svinhufvud](#) and Konstantin Päts in [Narva](#) in 1936. Päts's idea of a [Finnish-Estonian union](#) never came into existence.

In 1918, Päts made a proposal for an Estonian-Finnish [personal union](#). However, Finnish leaders weren't so eager about the union and the idea was rejected.^[68] Päts still bore the idea in his mind, as testified by his so-called "political testament", written in July 1940. In 1922, during his first term as State Elder, he made the first Estonian [state visit](#), to Finland. He also made unofficial visits to Finland in 1931,^[69] 1935^[34] and 1937. [President of Finland, Pehr Evind Svinhufvud](#) visited Estonia twice during Päts's authoritarian rule, in 1934^[70] and in 1936.^[71]

In 1933, Päts also made a state visit to [Latvia](#)^[72] and the [Baltic Entente](#) between Estonia, Latvia and [Lithuania](#) was signed in 1934 during his authoritarian regime. This agreement was another attempt to draw Finland closer to Estonia, but saw no results.^[33] During the 1930s, Estonian and Polish officials made several state visits to both countries.

In late 1930s, the Soviet Union excited interest for the Baltic states, causing Estonia to move closer to Germany in its foreign policy. This change was marked by appointing the ambassador to Germany, [Friedrich Karl Akel](#), as [Minister of Foreign Affairs](#) in 1936.^[73] On 3 December 1938, Estonia declared its neutrality.^[74]

Economic and cultural activities^[edit]

Päts actively participated in economic activities. In periods between 1919 to 1933, he was chairman of the insurance company "Estonian Lloyd". From 1925 to 1929, Päts was the chairman of the council of the [Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) and continued as its honorary councillor from 1935. He also served as the chairman of the board of the Harju Bank and chairman of the Tallinn Exchange Committee. He ran a farm in [Kloostrimetsa](#), near Tallinn – a place which now functions as the [Tallinn Botanic Garden](#).^[4]

Päts was among the founders of [Estonian Sports Association Kalev](#) in 1901 and also its first deputy chairman.^[75] Päts was the chairman of Estonian-Finnish-Hungarian Association from 1925 to 1936 and continued as honorary chairman from 1936. From 1927 to 1937, he was the chairman of the "Fenno-Ugria" foundation.^[4]

Päts received honorary doctorates from Tartu University in 1928, [Tallinn Technical University](#) and [Andhra University](#) (in [India](#)) in 1938, along with honorary membership of the [Learned Estonian Society](#) in 1938 and the [Estonian Academy of Sciences](#) in 1939. In 1938, he became honorary member of the Estonian Naturalists' Society (*Loodusuurijate Selts*) and the Estonian Institute of Natural Resources (*Loodusvarade Instituut*). He was also named honorary

alumnus of the fraternal [student corporation Fraternitas Estica](#) and honorary citizen of [Tallinn](#), [Narva](#), [Pärnu](#) and [Tartu](#) and [Tahkuranna Parish](#).^[4]

Remains^[edit]

In 1988, Estonians Henn Latt and Valdur Timusk decided to search for Konstantin Päts's remains in Russia. They reached Burashevo village, 15 km from Kalinin (now [Tver](#)), where Päts had been a patient in the hospital. They met his last doctor Ksenya Gusseva, who described Päts's funeral in 1956. She said that Päts was buried like a president – in a coffin, unlike other deceased patients of the time. On 22 June 1990, his grave was dug up and the remains were reburied in Tallinn Metsakalmistu cemetery on 21 October 1990.^{[76][77]} In 2011, a commemorative cross was placed in Burashevo village, where Päts was once buried.^[78]

Personal life^[edit]



Konstantin Päts and his wife Helma.

In 1901, Konstantin Päts married Wilhelma ("Helma") Ida Emilie Peedi (b. 1878),^[79] whom he had met in [Pärnu](#) High School. They had two sons, Leo and Viktor. Konstantin left his family for exile in 1905 and his second son was born while he still resided in Switzerland. They were united when Konstantin moved to Ollila, Finland. His wife died of lung disease in 1910 while he was imprisoned in Saint Petersburg, and Päts never remarried. His children were raised by his wife's unmarried sister Johana (Johanna) Wilhelmine Aleksandra Peedi.^[2]

Päts was seen as a kind person, who was able to give good speeches, was grown in a rural area and therefore had a heart for the land. He took a special interest in issues related to children. He often donated money to large families and organized events for students, which he also took part of. He was also known to take long walks in the morning in the [Kadriorg park](#) around the Presidential Palace and to get into conversations with park workers.^[2]

Descendants^[edit]

Konstantin's eldest son, Leo Päts (1902-1988), managed to escape to Finland in 1939. He eventually moved on to Sweden, where he died in 1988.^[80] Konstantin's second son, Viktor Päts (1906-1952), died in [Butyrka prison](#) in [Moscow](#) on 4 March 1952.^[56] Viktor's sons Henn (Enn; 1936-1944) and Matti (b. 1933) were sent to an orphanage in 1941, but were soon separated. They were united once a week, until Henn died of starvation in Matti's arms in 1944.^[55] All living descendants of Konstantin Päts are the children and grandchildren of Matti Päts, who returned from Russia with his mother Helgi-Alice in 1946.^[81] Helgi-Alice however was arrested again in 1950 and sentenced to 10 years in prison in [Kazakh SSR](#) and returned in 1955.^[58] Matti Päts has

been director of the [Estonian Patent Office](#) since 1991; he has also been a member of the [Riigikogu](#) and [Tallinn](#) city council.