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Aleksi Mainio

The Elite on the Warpath — Finland and the Russian Combat Organizations in 1918–1939

In this article based on my thesis[1] I examine the White émigré organizations that operated in the Finnish territory in 1918–1939 and their armed combat against the Soviet Union. Not only where there counter-revolutionary combat organizations operating in Finland, but government representatives also participated in various plots and even terrorist attacks.

These events in Finland were very much a part of the history of the Russian elite. The revolutions of 1917 had exiled a significant portion of the old Russian upper-class and lead to a "brain drain" from the east to the west. The refugees had lost a great deal during the political turmoil: possessions, social influence, and homes were left behind in the old homeland. Many refugees became unappeasable enemies to Bolshevism and driving forces for the counter-revolutionary struggle. They had the motivation, social relationships, and the capital without which credible combat against the Soviet Union was out of the question.

The Arrival of the Refugees

The geographical position of Finland had a significant impact on shaping its role in the history of the Russian diaspora. The country, which had recently become independent, was located next to the Russian Empire and its old capital Petrograd, so fleeing to Finland did not necessarily require enormous physical exertion. The exact number of refugees who arrived to Finland during the years of

the Russian revolution and Civil war is unknown. According to one estimate, in 1922 there were approximately 33,500 former Russian subjects[2] in Finland, 19,000 of which were Great Russians and the rest, in particular, Ingrians, East Karelians, and Finns[3]. During the 1920s, the number of refugees fell quickly at first, then slowing down[4].

Refugees came to Finland especially from Petrograd and its immediate vicinity[5]. Many of the arrivals were specifically high-ranking civilian and military authorities and influential political leaders, academics, and prominent representatives of the upper-class. These members of the old elite included, among others, Prince Vladimir Volkonsky and the former Prime Ministers Alexander Trepov and Vladimir Kokovtsov[6]. The refugees also included the cousin of the last Emperor of Russia, Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich. He and his son Vladimir Kirillovich, who was born in Finland, were legitimate heirs to the Russian crown.

Another significant group of refugees consisted of high-ranking White officers. The defeat suffered by the Northwestern Army led by General Nikolai Yudenich in the Baltics at the end of 1919 initiated a wave of migration to Finland. The Kronstadt rebellion and the disintegration of the Northern Army led by Lieutenant General Yevgeni Miller near Arkhangelsk and Murmansk at the beginning of 1920 had similar effects[7].

White Combat Organizations 1918–1920

Authorities from different countries were forced to take a stand on the clandestine operations of the Russian opposition forces during 1918, at the latest. Activists of the White forces established their own intelligence and combat organizations, which used Central Europe and the neighboring countries of Soviet Russia as their support areas. The idea was that these more or less competing organizations would act secretly behind the Bolsheviks' backs. They organized bomb attacks, arsons, and assassinations and smuggled clandestine information to White armies operating in different parts of Russia and neighboring areas[8].

By 1919, Nikolai Yudenich, a general in the Russian Imperial Army, became the most significant émigré leader. This military commander, who had fled to Finland, wanted to assemble an army in the Finnish and Baltic region, to lead the attack into Petrograd either by itself or with the Finns, for example. Yudenich held secret negotiations with General Gustaf Mannerheim, even discussing the seizing of Saint Petersburg. In the spring of 1919, General Yudenich created a secret espionage unit close to his staff. The unit's mission was to gather information from Russia. The organization established close ties to Petrograd and the White forces operating in different parts of Russia. Espionage, sabotage operations, and other clandestine initiatives were led from Finland by sending secret agents to Soviet Russia, in particular through the border parish Terijoki.

The émigré organizations and the Finnish military intelligence had an abundance of shared agents. In practice, the conspirative actions of the Finnish general staff and the émigré organizations were difficult, if not impossible, to separate from each other. Both were connected to Petrograd and elsewhere in Soviet Russia through counter-revolutionary agents and saboteurs[9].

Kronstadt Rebellion

When the Provisional Revolutionary Committee launched the rebellion on February 28, 1921, the émigré circles began to think that the end of the Soviet Russia had finally come. In Finland, refugee activists tightened their contacts to the flagship of the counter-revolution, the Kronstadt fortress. Dozens of ambassadors from the combat organizations arrived to Vyborg and the Isthmus from Central Europe[10]. In defiant spirits, the so-called *Petrograd Combat Organization*[11] had been formed in Petrograd and the neighboring areas.

The most important communications of the Petrograd Combat Organization — or *the Tagantsev Conspiracy* — went through the couriers of the activist organizations and intelligence services from Finland to Petrograd. The messengers smuggled letters and weapons over the border and delivered reports and other information to Finland[12]. While the clandestine activities died down in 1921–1922, they were seen as alarming by the Soviet Russian security services. They concluded that the Finnish region had been used as a support area for espionage and bombings[13]. Even the All-Russian Congress of Soviets emphasized that Finland was "becoming an outpost of the world, thrust in front of the counter-revolution"[14].

ROVS

The setbacks in the counter-revolutionary struggle forced the émigré circles to head out for new ideological winds. The support for monarchism especially increased in the early years of the 1920s, but its influence never reached the level it could have. The refugee circles could not reach a consensus on who should wear the crown. This resulted in two competing camps, one supporting Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich and the other standing behind Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich. The dispute over the order of succession originated from the fact the most logical Romanov heirs had been murdered during the Russian Civil War.

The monarchists' schism impeded the fight against Bolshevism, which was suffering from other problems as well. After the Russian Civil War, The Russian White Army had disintegrated into smaller parts. The situation was dire. The commander of the White Army Pyotr Wrangel tried to maintain the combat readiness of his troops by setting up a common umbrella organization for white officers. This coalition was officially established in September of 1924 and named the *Russian All-Military Union*[15], i.e. *ROVS*[16].

A secret combat organization led by General Alexander Kutepov was created within the ROVS. One of its most important Russian routes, so-called "windows", was located in the Karelian Isthmus. ROVS agents traveled through Southern Finland using secret routes over the eastern border and back into Western Europe[17].

The Isthmus Window

The collaborative initiatives between the émigrés and their allies caused a great deal of concern in the Soviet Union. The secret police *OGPU*[18] decided to fight back using a tactic which was heavily influenced by the history of the Okhrana, the secret police of the Russian Empire. OGPU created fake counter-revolutionary organizations, the most famous of which was the *Monarchist Union of Central Russia*, or more simply *Trust*. This organization, which presented itself as anti-Bolshevist, but was actually monitored by the OGPU, pretended to operate in the Soviet Union. It managed to win the trust of both the Finnish general staff intelligence and the *Secret Intelligence Service* (SIS) of Great Britain[19].

With the help of the Trust, the head of the secret police of the Soviet Union Lubyanka and its subdivision in Leningrad managed to control the intelligence and other clandestine operations by various western countries and the émigrés in Soviet Russia in 1921–1927[20]. The scheme was successful, but gradually suspicions began to emerge. The émigré activists and western intelligence officers found it hard to explain to themselves why counter-revolutionary operations met with ever-increasing misfortune.

The situation culminated in the beginning of 1927. In March, a meeting was held in the Frolov Villa in Terijoki, protected by the Finnish general staff intelligence. Attending the meeting were Trust liaisons and general staff officers, but also a secret guest of honor from Paris. "The actual leader of the Russian Monarchist émigrés" Alexander Kutepov had been allowed into Finland. Atmosphere at the meeting was intense and the discussion focused on initiating a counter-revolutionary bomb war[21]. The secret police of the Soviet Union drew its own conclusions on the situation. The operation of Trust was no longer worthwhile, because the fake organization was dangerously close to being exposed and it could no longer curtail the terrorist plots by émigré activists. Evidently, the first step in shutting down the organization was a mission given to an OGPU agent. He was ordered to reveal the deception which had continued for years to the ROVS representatives smuggled into Moscow[22].

The scandalous news quickly travelled to Helsinki and Vyborg and from there to Paris raising concerns[23]. If an organization like Trust could have been controlled by the OGPU, then anyone could be a traitor[24]. The leadership of the ROVS was shocked by the revelation, but not paralyzed. The émigré generals in Paris wanted revenge. In the spring of 1927, the leader of the armed wing of the ROVS Alexander Kutepov and his allies decided to launch a terror campaign against the Soviet Union.

The situation seemed opportune, as the relationship between Great Britain and Soviet Union had been severed, which was believed to predict war.

The expectant atmosphere culminated with terrorist attacks attempted by ROVS activists in Leningrad and Moscow, with the support of the Finnish general staff intelligence and the Secret Intelligence Service of Great Britain[25]. The attack on Lubyanka's dormitory was a failure, but the devastating grenade assassination at a party clubhouse by the Moyka encouraged the attackers to continue the bombing campaign. In August of 1927, the new leader of Kutepov's combat organization, émigré activist Georgy Radkovich, arrived to Finland, sending two two-person bombing teams to the Soviet Union from the area to the north of Lake Ladoga[26].

From Brotherhood to Separatists

ROVS's most active clandestine operations in the Karelian Isthmus began to fade in 1928–1930. The change resulted, in particular, from the fact that the Finnish authorities had banished Russian activists from the country after the terrorist attacks carried out in the Soviet Union had unnerved the Finnish political leaders. The President and the government did not want to sever all of their ties to their eastern neighbor. As the ROVS was losing its ability to take action, another activist organization, *Brotherhood of Russian Truth*[27] and its leader in Finland Anatoly Toll intensified their operations in Finland. Brother number 213 sent his spies into Leningrad from the Isthmus and made arrangements in several other directions. Toll and his contacts in Berlin caused concern in the Finnish security authorities. They were still interested in influencing the events in the Soviet Union and even contributing to terrorist attacks, but they were afraid that OGPU had interfered in Toll's clandestine undertakings[28].

The concerns were justified as the secret police had infiltrated the brotherhood. Most terror plots by Toll and his partners were doomed to fail. OGPU was aware of both the clandestine undertakings of the brotherhood and their connections to the intelligence services of various countries. This was especially clear in the case where the general staff intelligence and Toll attempted to sneak Armenian freedom fighter terrorists into Caucasia from Finland in the early years of the 1930s[29]. The "Armenian case" and other similar incidents were part of a larger chain of events: underground operations by Soviet national minorities intensified in the turn of the 1930s. New activist organizations attempted to turn Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and many other regions into independent countries and did not shy away from violent methods[30].

The Skoblin Affair

When General Yevgeny Miller was elected to lead the ROVS in 1930, his position was far from enviable. While Miller took a more reserved view on terrorism than his predecessor Alexander Kutepov, he also wanted to increase underground contacts

into the Soviet Union. One aspect of this was the attempt to establish a new intelligence channel from the Karelian Isthmus to the Soviet Union in 1933[31].

Miller tightened his contacts with Major General Severin Dobrovolsky[32]. The émigré officer who resided in Vyborg suggested in 1933 that the intelligence connections could be established with the help of the Finnish security authorities[33]. A little later, General Miller received a letter from Finland, in which the head of intelligence at the Finnish general staff Erik Malmberg announced that the Finnish general staff supported the idea[34].

Major General Nikolai Skoblin was named to head the new intelligence channel. He made arrangements with the Finnish intelligence officers regarding the shared intelligence channel for ROVS and the general staff. The ROVS activists wanted to gather information from the Soviet Union, but also to attempt to carry out terrorist attacks and even assassinate Joseph Stalin. Despite the big talk, the cooperation between the intelligence officers and ROVS did not work as planned. The agents that ROVS had delivered to Finland were not only exposed, but very nearly captured on their way to Leningrad. The general staff was unnerved by the firefight on the Soviet Union's side of the border and cancelled the agreement, never continuing the cooperation on the previous scale after 1936.

While the Skoblin affair ended in a failure, even that did not convince the Finnish general staff intelligence officers to end the ROVS cooperation for good. The policy seems stubborn at first, but it was based on some rational justification. When the international situation grew tense in the final years of the 1930s, the general staff could not relinquish their émigré contacts as the information they provided was more valuable than ever before[35]. The final boom of counter-revolutionary activism happened just before the Second World War. The Russian policy of Nazi Germany was activated, leading to a momentary warming of relations between Germany and a few White émigré organizations. This also reflected quickly on Finland. The region of the republic was once more to be used as a support area for terrorists and spies, but operations ceased with the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939[36].

In Conclusion

It can be said that Finland had a significant role as a support area for the counter-revolutionary struggle. Several intelligence and combat organizations, in which the old elite of the Russian Empire in particular had a key role, operated in the region of the republic. The representatives of the old elite wanted to overthrow the Soviet system and return to their homeland, one way or another. Some did not hesitate to use terrorist attacks, sabotage, and assassinations to help reach their goals. It is clear that most terrorist attacks and espionage plots would have lost their vitality without the active and passive support of the Finnish authorities. Some Finnish security authorities saw the Soviet Union as a giant with feet of clay, who could

collapse at any time. This belief was at its strongest in the 1920s, but did not disappear during the 1930s. This view was based on an anti-Bolshevist worldview, but also on knowledge of the problems gnawing at the Soviet Union. The political elite and the security authorities of the Soviet Union often defined the Finnish region to be "a country of White bandits" and even "a den of terrorists"[37]. It was not left unnoticed in Moscow that the Finnish authorities turned a blind eye to the activities of the counter-revolutionary forces and even supported them. This phenomenon provided the political leadership of the Soviet Union a major propaganda weapon which it was able to use masterfully. Purpose-oriented anti-Finnish views with enough basis in fact to seem plausible were publicized at convenient times. The trails of many exposed espionage and terror plots led straight to the headquarters of the secret police of the Soviet Union, Lubyanka. The intelligence officers of the Bolshevik authority infiltrated their provocateurs inside the combat organizations, thus attempting to control their underground operations. The tactic was successful and made active resistance difficult.

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1 *Mainio A.* 1) Näkymätön sota. Suomi vastavallankumouksellisen terrorismin ja vakoilun tukialueena 1918–1939. Doctoral thesis. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2015; 2) Terroristien pesä. Suomi ja taistelu Venäjästä 1918–1939. Siltala, 2015.

2 It should be kept in mind that before the revolution, Russian empire had over 130 million residents, who were divided into dozens of different nationalities. "Former Russian subject" was an ambiguous concept: at the time, it could just as well be used to described Great Russians, Armenians, or, for example, Ingrians, who had previously had a Russian citizenship. When this article speaks about Russians, it usually means Great Russians. The terms "Russian refugee" and "émigré" can be used to mean all persons who arrived to Finland, regardless of their nationality.

3 *Kopteff G.* Venäläisten emigranttien järjestötoiminta Suomessa 1917–1945. Master's thesis. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1983. S. 7–8; *Haimila M.* Kun kumous vie kodin. Suomeen paenneet venäläiset 1917–1927 // Historiallinen arkisto. 1998. N 111. S. 61; *Nevalainen P.* Viskoi kuin Luoja kerjäläisiä. Venäjän pakolaiset Suomessa 1917–1939. Helsinki: SKS, 1999. S. 307; *Marrus M.* The Unwanted, European Refugees from the First World War Through the Cold War. Temple University Press, 2002. S. 61.

4 According to one estimate, in 1927–1935 the number of Russian, Ingrian, and East Karelian refugees remained at around 18,000, from where it declined to 14,000 by 1938.

5 *Polvinen T.* Venäjän vallankumous ja Suomi 1917–1920 II. Toukokuu 1918 — joulukuu 1920. Helsinki: WSOY, 1971. S. 63; *Leggett G.* The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police. The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage. December 1917 to February 1922. New York: Clarendon, 1981. P. 105–123; *Jussila O.* Neuvostoliiton tragedia. Utopiasta vankileirien saaristoksi. Otava, 2012. S. 128, 365–373; The National Archives (TNA), Lontoo, War Office (WO) 106/6101, General Information Received by Military Intelligence Branches, Extract from Military Intelligence Summary 11, Situation in Soviet Russia 9.1.1919 and Intelligence Summary of Information 14.12.1918.

6 *Kokovtsov V.* Out of My Past. The Memoirs of Count Kokovtsov. Stanford: Stanford University, 1935. P. 530–531; *Pankakoski J.* Varjonyrkkeilyä itärajalla. Venäläisten emigranttien poliittinen liikehdintä Suomessa 1917–1927. Licentiate thesis. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2005.

7 Approximately 1,000 refugee soldiers exhausted by the northern front traveled to Finland at the beginning of 1920. When the rebellion in the Kronstadt fortress was squashed, a large group of beaten refugees consisting of 6,500–8,000 sailors, officers, and civilians arrived to Terijoki over the ice. Up to 5,000 of the comers returned to Russian during the 1920s. *Haimila M.* Kun kumous vie kodin. S. 76; *Nevalainen P.* Viskoi kuin Luoja kerjäläisiä. S. 18–19, 26–27.

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[9] National Archives. The Sörnäinen office (SA), pikkukokoelma (PK) 2414, suojelukuntain tiedustelukeskus 1919–1920, communiques 183 and 441, July 29 and October 21 1919.

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[13] Kronštadtskaja tragedija 1921 goda. Kn. 2. GPU employee Mikhail V. Pavlov's presentation 24.01.1923; "final summary of Matvei A. Komarov's delo", representative Stepan Lebedev 19.07.1921; Cheka special assistant Yakov S. Agranov's communique to Lenin 08.09.1921. S. 301–310, 176–177,195.

[14] *Korhonen K.* Naapurit vastoin tahtoaan. Suomi neuvostodiplomatiassa Tartosta talvisotaan I 1920–1932. Tammi, 1966. S. 57–58.

[15] Русский общевоинский союз.

[16] *Goldin V. I.* Rossijskaja vojennaja emigratsija i sovetskije spetsslužby v 20-e gody XX veka. Solti, 2010. S. 234, 243; *Robinson P.* The White Russian Army in Exile 1920–1941. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. P. 98–102.

[17] Bakhmeteff Archive (BAR), Columbia University, New York. ROVS Collection. Box 9. Correspondence, correspondence between Kutepov's representatives and Högström, 1924–1926; Russkaja vojennaja emigratsija 20–40-h godov, dokumenty i materialy. T. 6. M.: RGGU, 2013. S. 468.

[18] Объединенное государственное политическое управление. OGPU had other names in 1918–1939, but for clarity, this article only uses one.

[19] *Brook-Shepherd G.* Iron Maze. P. 255–256, 283–290; *Elfvengren E., Laidinen E.* Vakoilua itärajan takana. Yleisesikunnan tiedustelu Neuvosto-Karjalassa 1918–1939. Helsinki: Minerva, 2012. S. 112–122, 296–297; *Kotakallio J.* "Kaikkialla läsnä oleva Lontoon Secret Service". Secret Intelligence Service ja Suomi 1918–1941. Doctoral thesis. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2014. S. 172–184; Rossijski gosudarstvennyi arhiv sotsialno-polititšeskoi istorii (RGASPI), Moscow. Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. F. 76. Op. 3. D. 356. L. 1–8, Top secret report to KRO's head Artur Artuzov signed by Vladimir Styrne 05.02.1925; *Smith M.* Six. A History of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service. Murder and Mayhem 1909–1939. Dialogue, 2010. P. 288. Regarding the British agency, see also: BAR, ROVS Collection. Box 9, correspondence, Kutepov's letters to Bunakov, years 1925–1926; RGASPI. Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. F. 76. Op. 3. D. 356. L. 1–8, Top secret report to KRO's head Artur Artuzov signed by KRO's assistant director Vladimir Styrne 05.02.1925.

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22 KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10170, Georg and Maria Schulz, Georgy Radkovich's interrogation, 05.09.1927.

23 KA, Pontus Artti collection, 5, Esko Riekki's letter to ambassador Pontus Artti, 26.05.1927.

24 KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10170, Georg ja Maria Schulz, top secret report, based on the statement of émigré informant Kirill Pushkarjov, 19.08.1927. Compare also: BAR, Alexander Kutepov Collection, box 2 and 3, correspondence, Kutepov's materials on Trust, 1927.

25 For more detailed information on the terrorist attacks, see: KA, EK-Valpo, émigrés, folder 2830, Schultz affair, interrogation of Dmitri Monomakhov and Viktor Larionov, 15.09.1927. On Rosenström's role, see also, for example: KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10170, Georg and Maria Schulz, top secret report, based on the statement of émigré informant Kirill Pushkarjov, 19.08.1927.

26 *Goldin V. I.* Rossijskaja vojennaja emigratsija i sovetskije spetsslužby v 20-e gody XX veka. S. 413–414; KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10170, Georg and Maria Schulz, Esko Riekki's report to the Minister of the Interior and Foreign Minister, 25.01.1928; *Kosonen M.* Raja railona aukeaa. Tiedustelua Neuvosto-Karjalassa 1920–1939. Ilias, 2001. S. 182–183; KA, Pontus Artti collection, 5, Esko Riekki's letter to ambassador Pontus Artti, 24.09.1927; KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10682, Alexander Shvetsov, Riekki's notes on a phone discussion with Lieutenant Colonel Ilmari Relander, 10.12.1927; Lubjanka, Stalin i VTŠK–GPU–OGPU–NKVD, janvar 1922 — dekabr 1936. Memo sent by the head of KRO Artur Artuzov to Dmitri I. Kursk, 09.09.1927. P. 140.

27 Братство Русской Правды.

28 KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 10886, Anatoly Toll, Esko Riekki's notes 05.01.1929 and Toll's interrogation 07–08.01.1929.

29 KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 11041, Anushavan Zatikjan, passim; *Mainio A.* Näkymätön sota. P. 223–237.

30 KA, EK-Valpo, foreigners in Finland, folder 2755, refugee question, Stendahl and Pajari's report of a meeting with Kaapre Tynni and Roman Smal-Statski, 18.4.1932; *Mainio A.* Näkymätön sota. P. 238–242.

31 *Prianishnikov B.* Nezrimaja pautina, VTŠK-OGPU-NKVD protiv beloi emigratsii. M.: Tšas pik, 1979. S. 269.

32 BAR, ROVS Collection. Box 12, correspondence, correspondence between Yevgeni Miller and Severin Dobrovolsky, year 1933.

33 BAR, ROVS Collection. Box 12, correspondence, Severin Dobrovolsky's letters to "Ivan Ivanovich" i.e. Yevgeni Miller, 23.05 and 28.08.1933. Compare also: KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 11180, Jalmari Sinivaara's top secret communique, 20.08.1933; KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 11180, Severin Dobrovolsky, Jalmari Sinivaara and Kaarlo Stendahl's handwritten notes on meeting with Severin Dobrovolsky and Nikolai Skoblin, 30.01.1934.

34 *Prianishnikov B.* Nezrimaja pautina, VTŠK-OGPU-NKVD protiv beloi emigratsii. S. 270–271.

35 KA, EK-Valpo. Personal file 10886b, Anatoly Toll, Sinivaara's notices on meetings with Salokorpi and Toll, 27.04. and 05.08.1936. See also: KA, EK-Valpo. Personal file 4491, Toivo Salokorpi, reports on the general staff intelligence operation, 22.04.–22.05.1947, A. Toll; *Kosonen M.* Raja railona aukeaa. S. 81.

36 KA, EK-Valpo, émigrés, folder 2829, Jalmari Sinivaara's report "Venäläiset emigrantit", 07.09.1938; KA, EK-Valpo, personal file 11160, Ivan, Yuri, and Boris Solonevich, passim.

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Aleksi Mainio. The Elite on the Warpath — Finland and the Russian Combat Organizations in 1918–1939

Author examines the White émigré organizations that operated in the Finnish territory in 1918–1939 and their armed combat against the Soviet Union. Not only where there counter-revolutionary combat organizations operating in Finland, but government representatives also participated in various plots and even terrorist attacks.

Key words: Finland, White émigré organizations, Soviet Union, 1918–1919.

Mainio, Aleksi — researcher, Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki.

Майнио, Алекси — исследователь, факультет философии, истории, культуры и искусств Хельсинкского университета.

E-mail: aleksi.mainio@helsinki.fi