

Interview with Evelyn Sepp

"There is clear evidence justifying a new investigation of the casualty"

by Martin Roolvink

The Committee of Investigation appointed by the Estonian Parliament to ascertain the circumstances related to the export of military equipment from the territory of the Republic of Estonia on the ferry "Estonia" in 1994 has published its final report just before Christmas 2006. However Mrs Evelyn Sepp, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, refused to sign the report consisting of 24 pages.

In an interview with *FERRYcompass*TM the 34 year old politician reports on the background of the Committee's activities and calls for a new casualty investigation.

Martin Roolvink (MR): Mrs Sepp, all members of the Riigikogu Investigation Committee have agreed on the final version of the Investigation Report - apart from you. Why did you refuse to sign the report?

Evelyn Sepp: I have refused to put my signature below the report since some parts of it are contradictorily. Furthermore, the facts have not been assessed thoroughly enough and the proposals made to the Government of the Republic of Estonia are insufficient. I have outlined these reasons in detail in my today's statement.

MR: What was the reason for the internal argument in the Committee related to Trivimi Velliste?

Evelyn Sepp: Mr Velliste was the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1992 and 1994. Today he is member of the parliament and belongs to an opposition fraction. During the last meeting of our Committee on 2006-12-13 Mr Velliste has reported that it is not true that the Estonian political leaders would have been not aware of any transports of military equipment on the ferry "Estonia". Consequently he declared that the then leaders had knowledge of military transports onboard this ship. In my statement I have cited Mr Velliste's relevant sentences from the meeting protocol. However shortly after this meeting Mr Velliste has denied to have said the above. Now he underlines that he would have been misinterpreted. In my opinion his behaviour is not a surprise since it was a kind of political suicide to admit that he knew about the transports of military equipment onboard the ferry "Estonia" after having been arguing the opposite for more than 12 years.

MR: Are you convinced that the Government of the Republic of Estonia had knowledge of the military transports on 1994-09-14 and on 1994-09-20?

"THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT STRATEGIC EQUIPMENT WAS TRANSPORTED DURING THE LAST VOYAGE."

Evelyn Sepp: There is an agreement between the Swedish and the Estonian government which provided the legal basis for the export of military equipment from the Republic of Estonia to the Kingdom of Sweden. This agreement was kept secret and the relevant documents are still classified. The agreement was signed in 1993.



Evelyn Sepp has been member of the Estonian Parliament for more than 5 years now.

(Photo: Martin Roolvink)

MR: Does this agreement contain any details with regard to the kind of equipment, the transport modes or the final destination of the cargo?

Evelyn Sepp: As far as I know there are no operational details or procedures mentioned in this agreement. It contains mainly legal aspects.

MR: Did your investigation reveal any information about the kind of military equipment which was transported on the 1994-09-14 and 1994-09-20?

Evelyn Sepp: We do not have any official information about this. But I know that the Swedish Government has provided Prosecutor Margus Kurm with details regarding the kind of military equipment which was transported. But we, i.e. our Committee, have not received this information, neither from Sweden nor from Kurm.

Interview

MR: Have you found any reference to dubious cargo which was loaded onboard the "Estonia" in Tallinn on 1994-09-27?

Evelyn Sepp: The official version reads that there was no military equipment onboard the vessel during her last voyage. However this does not exclude the possibility that so-called strategic equipment has been transported on the 1994-09-27. In our report this is formulated as word-game - thus it is important to distinguish between the definition 'military' and 'strategic'. Also the latter was covered by the legal agreement which I mentioned before. There is clear evidence that strategic equipment has indeed been loaded onto the ferry "Estonia" on 1994-09-27.

MR: Which kind of evidence?

Evelyn Sepp: For instance the Swedish side has confirmed that they were awaiting some cargo which should arrive with the "Estonia" in Stockholm on 1994-09-28. It was planned to forward this unknown 'something' directly from the ship to the Airport Stockholm-Arlanda. But we haven't been provided with any details about this cargo.

MR: If this 'something' was to be transferred to the Stockholm Airport it can be assumed that it was destined for another country.

Evelyn Sepp: We don't know if this cargo was destined for a third country or not.

*"I BELIEVE THAT ALL
IMPORTANT POLITICIANS IN THE
GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN
AWARE OF THESE ACTIVITIES."*

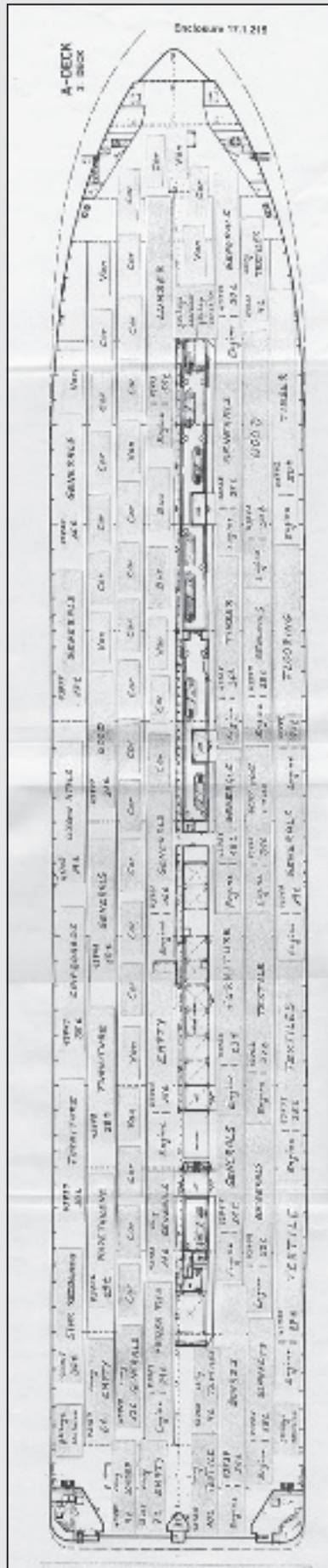
MR: Of which size were the transports of military equipment on 1994-09-14 and 1994-09-20?

Evelyn Sepp: On both days one truck was transported from Tallinn to Stockholm.

MR: What was the size of the assumed transport of strategic equipment on the ferry's last voyage?

Evelyn Sepp: Two smaller trucks probably carrying this kind of cargo were loaded onboard the ship in Tallinn on 1994-09-27.

MR: Which persons on the Estonian side have been involved in and / or informed about the transports?



Evelyn Sepp: I believe that all important politicians in the Government of the Republic of Estonia have been aware of these activities.

MR: Several days ago a newspaper published a statement of you saying that the former Prime Minister Laar would have received bribe money for keeping silent about the military and / or strategic equipment transports. On which facts do you base this accusation?

Evelyn Sepp: Actually I have only asked a question to the public. Mr Laar is member of the board of the Bank of Sweden although he has no qualification for this. He receives 100,000 EEK per month for being a member of the board. I wonder if this is only chance or if he receives this money for keeping silent. By the way, I also have the feeling that the involvement of the Russian Federation into the "Estonia" case has yet not been investigated thoroughly enough.

*"RUSSIA AT LEAST HAS BEEN
INFORMED."*

MR: Which role does the Russian Federation play?

Evelyn Sepp: Probably not the central role. But I believe that Russia had been involved or at least been informed about the transports of military or electronic equipment. Furthermore I wonder why Carl Bildt - who was Swedish Prime Minister when the ferry "Estonia" sank and who is Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs today - has considerable shares in Gazprom.

MR: Did your investigations reveal any details about an involvement of Estline into the transport of military and / or strategic equipment?

Evelyn Sepp: No. But we have found out that the vessel had an invalid Passenger Ship Safety Certificate which did not allow the ferry to sail between Stockholm and Tallinn. It should be investigated in the future why the ship had an invalid certificate and nobody took care about that.

MR: Did your Committee co-operate with Prosecutor Kurm and how is that state of affairs in his investigation?

Evelyn Sepp: Yes, we co-operated with Kurm. I don't know any further details about

The possible main deck stow plan of the "Estonia" at departure Tallinn on 1994-09-27.

(Source: German Group of Experts)



The 34 years old politician calls for a new investigation of the casualty.

(Photo: Martin Roolvink)

the present state of his investigation. It will be completed in March 2007 and for sure an official report will be published then.

MR: Would it be possible that the Prosecutor starts proceedings against Mr Velliste and Mr Laar and others on the basis of your statement?

Evelyn Sepp: In my opinion it's not only a governmental task to work with the results of our investigation. Now it is the turn of the Estonian law enforcement agencies to decide if they want to proceed against persons who apparently were involved.

MR: Your Committee has proposed to the Estonian government to continue the search for the missing crew members around Captain Avo Piht. Do you have any new findings or evidence regarding their whereabouts?

*"SEVERAL WITNESSES STATED THAT
CAPTAIN PIHT AND THE OTHER
DISAPPEARED PERSONS WOULD BE STILL
ALIVE."*

Evelyn Sepp: We have heard several witnesses who told us that these people would be still alive. Thus we have decided to include this matter into our proposals to the government.

MR: Do you think that the Republic of Estonia will start a new investigation of the entire case as a consequence of the findings of Prosecutor Kurm and the Parliamentary Committee?

Evelyn Sepp: As you probably know there is a gravesite protection convention including a diving ban which forbids us to collect new evidence from the wreck. Maybe this convention is a political document with the only purpose to hide something - who knows. But the chances for the Republic of Estonia to get out of this agreement do exist, for example if all states who have signed the convention agree to annul it. But we could also declare the convention for invalid if it reveals that the Republic of Estonia did not have all relevant information at the time of ratification.

MR: Has the Estonian parliament ever considered the possibility to go to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg in order to withdraw from the gravesite protection convention?

*"WE WOULD LIKE TO COLLECT MORE
EVIDENCE - WHICH INCLUDES EVIDENCE
FROM THE WRECK."*

Evelyn Sepp: No, this has not been taken into consideration so far. But we would like to collect more evidence, including evidence from the wreck.

MR: Let's return to the possible transport of strategic equipment onboard the "Estonia" during her last voyage. Do you think that this possible transport is linked with the causes for the sinking in any way whatsoever?

Evelyn Sepp: At least these transports could have led the Joint Accident Investigation Commission (JAIC) - which was appointed by the governments of Sweden, Finland and Estonia - to investigate the disaster not in an objective way. This would mean that the JAIC's conclusions do not conform with the real reasons for the catastrophe. Thus I have proposed to set up a new international and independent commission which should have the possibility to collect new evidence including a new diving to the wreck.

MR: What are the prospects for such a new investigation?

Evelyn Sepp: I see clear evidence which would justify a new investigation. In my opinion we must handle this case in a completely new way in the future. However I am not too optimistic currently. At first we will have the elections here in the Republic of Estonia in March. Only thereafter the Parliament will be able to decide on further steps.

MR: Mrs Sepp, thank you very much for this conversation. 