



## Commercial aviation in Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania

Independence, 1921-40

# BALTIC Triangles

Having gained their independence from the Russian Empire in the wake of the First World War, the three Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — soon recognised the plentiful opportunities offered by aviation to serve their national and regional transport objectives. **GÜNTER ENDRES** chronicles the evolution of civil aviation in the Baltics between the wars

**T**HE BALTIC STATES of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania share a troubled and complex political history, which inevitably exerted an influence on the aviation sector of each. Ruled by the Russian Empire until the end of the First World War, all three gained their independence at that point, although their newly-acquired freedom was marred initially by civil war and border disputes with Germany and the recently-minted Soviet Union.

Authoritarian governments defined the inter-war period, but on June 14, 1940, the Soviet Union's Red Army occupied all three territories and engaged in executions and mass deportation in an attempt to secure its control, which was briefly interrupted by Nazi Germany the following year. Rather than granting the expected independence, Germany established a civil administration, known as the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. This occupation lasted until late 1944, when the Red Army reoccupied the



*A Junkers F 13 of Estonian airline A/S Aeronaut passes overhead the company's hangar at Lasnamäe in the nation's capital Tallinn circa 1923-24. The German influence on aviation was strong in the Baltics in the 1920s, Junkers having established the Osteuropa Union and, later, Nordeuropa Union consortia, which played a major part in establishing commercial services in the Baltic states and Finland.*

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