

## WAS IT ALL PURE PROPAGANDA? JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES OF ‘SILENT RESISTANCE’ IN SOVIET ESTONIAN JOURNALISM

Epp LAUK<sup>a</sup> and Tiiu KREEGIPUU<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Communication, P.O. Box 35 (ToB), FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland; Epp.Lauk@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup> Institute of Journalism and Communication, University of Tartu, 18 Ülikooli St., 51014 Tartu, Estonia; Tiiu.Kreegipuu@ut.ee

This paper focuses on the journalistic strategies and practices that Estonian journalists and editors used for expressing both their dissent with the restrictions of the freedom of the press and opposition to the Soviet regime. As no underground dissident press existed in Estonia in the Soviet period (1940–1941 and 1944–1991), journalists developed various ways of ‘silent resistance’ within the official press. Our aim is to demonstrate and analyse journalistic practices – both discursive and editorial – that undermined the ideological purposes of Soviet journalism. At the discursive level, journalists often tried to diminish the official ideological discourse by enlarging the proportion of the apolitical journalistic discourse in the newspapers. Journalists also skilfully used various linguistic means to bypass the ‘party line’. On the editorial level, editors often passed, at their own risk, content that was not politically and ideologically ‘correct’. Censors often complained to Party headquarters about the editors who ‘tried to avoid the responsibility of editing’ and were ‘incompetent in applying the regulations and rules’.

### INTRODUCTION

The media’s primary function and purpose under the Soviet regime was to serve as “the Party’s sharpest weapon”<sup>1</sup> by legitimizing the power of the Communist party and its leaders. Peter Kenez, who defines the Soviet Union as a propaganda state, calls the Soviet press a “blood-circulation system of the body politic” and a vitally important tool for the Soviet regime that defined the terms of political discourse and established the limits of the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Soviet journalism lacked all the traditional functions that journalism has in a democratic

---

<sup>1</sup> **Lendvai, P.** *The Bureaucracy of Truth. How Communist Governments Manage the News.* Burnett Books, London; Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1981, 17.

<sup>2</sup> **Kenez, P.** *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization 1917–1929.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, 222–223.

society.<sup>3</sup> In order to ensure the unity of power and ideology, the Soviet media system was designed hierarchically<sup>4</sup> to enable efficient supervision and control. Any questioning of the leading role of the Communist party and its ideology would have undermined its power monopoly. Therefore, a huge mechanism of censorship continuously watched over the work of editors and scrutinized the content of all publicly distributed texts and images. The mass media also ought to actively form the public opinion for the course of the party.

Total control of the news filtering process, reflecting every change in foreign and domestic policy priorities, and the permanent, intensive and consistent repetition of simplified political messages are the outstanding features of the Communist propaganda technique.<sup>5</sup>

Against this background, it appears somewhat surprising and contradictory how popular this propaganda media was among Estonian people. According to studies carried out in the Department of Journalism of Tartu University, the organ of the Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*), *Noorte Hääl* (*The Voice of the Youth*)<sup>6</sup>, was regularly or irregularly read by 89 per cent of Estonians in 1976 and by 91 per cent in 1987. The Communist party's main organ *Rahva Hääl* (*The Voice of the People*) had nearly as large a readership. The cultural weekly *Sirp ja Vasar* (*Sickle and Hammer*) was not read only by those interested in the arts and culture, but had a far broader readership (68 per cent of Estonians in 1976 and 69 in 1987) due to its coverage of social issues and its satirical pages.<sup>7</sup> According to an Estonian sociological survey in the early 1980s, the readers' interests in general were opposite to the official hierarchy of the topics. The most popular issues among the readers were those of family and home, social welfare, nature, ethics, culture and education. Politics and ideology, heading the list of the official hierarchy, came last in the readers' rankings.<sup>8</sup>

These studies clearly indicate that the Soviet Estonian press was not only an ideological brainwashing machine, but also offered people something they were really interested in and could identify with. The whole picture of the Soviet media looks somewhat contradictory – within the framework of a tightly controlled and

---

<sup>3</sup> **Lauk, E.** The antithesis of the Anglo-American news paradigm. News practices in Soviet journalism. – In: Diffusion of the News Paradigm 1850–2000. Eds S. Høyer, H. Pöttker. Nordicom, Göteborg, 2005, 169–184.

<sup>4</sup> **Vihalemm, P., Lauristin, M.** Political control and ideological canonisation. The Estonian press during the Soviet period. – In: Vom Instrument der Partei zur “Vierten Gewalt”. Die ostmitteleuropäische Presse als zeithistorische Quelle. Tagungen zur ostmitteleuropa-Forschung, 4. Ed. E. Mühle. Verlag Herder-Institut, Marburg, 1997, 103–109.

<sup>5</sup> **Lendvai, P.** The Bureaucracy of Truth. How Communist Governments Manage the News, 21.

<sup>6</sup> All translations from Estonian and Russian into English in this document are the responsibility of the authors, Epp Lauk and Tiiu Kreegipuu.

<sup>7</sup> **Vihalemm, P., Kõuts, R.** Trükisõna ja lugejaskond Eestis 1965–2004 [The press and its readership in Estonia in 1965–2004]. – In: Meediasüsteem ja meediakasutus Eestis 1965–2004 [Media system and media consumption in Estonia in 1965–2004]. Ed. P. Vihalemm. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 2004, 66–67 [in Estonian].

<sup>8</sup> **Vihalemm, P., Lauristin, M.** Political control and ideological canonisation. The Estonian press during the Soviet period, 106–107.

supervised system it still appeared possible to realize goals different or even opposite to those for which the system was created. Several studies on Soviet journalism and society<sup>9</sup> demonstrate that the mass media did not function as a perfect propaganda weapon in the hands of the party, but at different times, deviated from their main tasks in various ways. As Thomas Wolfe argues,

the Soviet press was by no means the kind of perfectly orchestrated machinery of persuasion depicted in totalitarian anti-utopian fiction like Orwell's 1984.<sup>10</sup>

The complex multilayered bureaucracy of censorship was insufficient to be able to catch all possible deviations from the 'party line'. In Estonia, where no illegal opposition press ever emerged (except a few single copies of some leaflets), there were always journalists who tested the limits of 'permitted' and 'prohibited' within the framework of the official press. Numerous documents in the censorship and Communist party archives indicate the existence of various practices of editing and publishing that challenged the ideological guardians. In the journalistic texts, parallel to the ideological discourse, gradually another – hidden oppositional and critical discourse developed. These practices – we call them strategies of 'silent resistance' – always existed under the surface, but never turned into an active political protest against the authorities. Largely, it was journalists' professional aspirations to avoid making propaganda journalism and to talk about issues important to their audiences. An old journalist recalls in his memoirs:

We made an abrupt change in our newspaper and introduced a policy of following the readers' interests and not these of the authorities. This 'heresy' did not, however, extend to a mutiny against the almighty totalitarian system. We were inspired by the natural aspiration of a professional journalist to make a good newspaper that people read, value and like.<sup>11</sup>

This quotation also reflects the ambiguous position of journalists who were obliged to obey the party guidelines simply to keep their jobs. On the other hand, they tried to deserve their audiences' trust by discussing with them their everyday life problems, social and cultural issues, and doing so from a critical viewpoint. Among Estonian editors and journalists, a significant group challenged the constraints of official ideology by transmitting their message 'between and behind the lines', risking the attention of the censors and getting punished. Many journalists also tried

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. **Wolfe, T. C.** *Governing Soviet Journalism. The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin.* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indianapolis, 2005; **Lauk, E.** *Restoring democratic discourse in the Estonian press (1987–1990).* – In: *The Challenge of the Baltic Sea Region. Culture, Ecosystems, Democracy.* Eds G. Bolin, M. Hammer, F. Kirsch, W. Szrubka. Södertörn University College, Stockholm, 2005, 307–322; **Harro, H.** *Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press. Empirical Studies on Daily Newspapers under Different Political Conditions in 20th Century Estonia.* University of Oslo Press, Oslo, 2000; **Jakubowicz, K.** *Media as agents of change.* – In: *Glasnost and After. Media and Change in Central and Eastern Europe.* Eds D. L. Paletz, K. Jakubowicz, P. Novosel. Hampton Press, Inc., Cresskill, New Jersey, 1995, 19–48.

<sup>10</sup> **Wolfe, T. C.** *Governing Soviet Journalism. The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> **Uus, S.** *Leheneegri leivas [Being a journalist].* – In: *Kuidas vaata, nõnda näed. Eesti ajakirjanike elulood, III [What you see depends on what you look at. Biographies of Estonian journalists, III].* Eds A. Pallas, S. Uus. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 2009, 231 [in Estonian].

to avoid personal involvement in the system and to exploit apolitical issues and use non-ideological vocabulary when talking to their audiences.<sup>12</sup>

The studies emphasize the complex and polymorphous character of the Estonian Soviet press and journalism and the mechanisms of control.<sup>13</sup> Journalistic practices have mainly been researched on the level of newspaper texts or on the basis of the scripts of radio broadcasts. Gradually, the vast quantity of archive documents concerning party supervision and control over the Estonian press and journalism and the memoirs of journalists are gaining researchers' attention.

This paper focuses on the strategies of 'silent resistance' in the Estonian press during 1945–1985 (from the end of WWII until Gorbachev's 'glasnost'). We will demonstrate various journalistic practices on both the editorial and discursive levels. It is possible to find hidden discourses and messages by studying newspaper texts. The attempts of journalists and editors to use loopholes in the editing and publishing regulations and rules for enlarging the limits of the 'permitted' and smuggling something 'non-permitted' into print are not so clearly, or not at all, reflected in the texts. Therefore, our sources are not limited only to newspaper texts, but also include numerous documents from the archives of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP) and Estonian censorship authorities.<sup>14</sup> Systematically going through the documentation of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP CC), minutes of the meetings, shorthand records, resolutions, prescriptions, rules etc. dealing with the governance and supervision of the press and the occasions of 'ideological errors' during 1945–1985 were selected. For cases of 'ideological errors', we searched censorship archives, newspaper texts and published memoirs of journalists for complementary data.

The inevitable incompleteness of the source material does not allow us to argue that we have detected all possible strategies of 'silent resistance' used by Estonian editors and journalists under the Soviet regime. Our examples, however, allow the sketching of certain patterns that indicate the robustness of particular journalistic practices. Various 'ideological errors', deviations from 'the party line', 'anti-Soviet' expressions and other 'blunders' are continuously dealt with in the official documentation of the Soviet authorities. Also in the memoirs of journalists similar motives recur repeatedly. Discussing strategies of 'silent resistance' on

---

<sup>12</sup> **Lauk, E.** Estonian journalists in search of new professional identity. – *Javnost/The Public*, 1996, 3, 4, 96–106.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., **Lauristin, M., Vihalemm, P.** Recent historical developments in Estonia: three stages of transition (1987–1997). – In: *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*. Eds M. Lauristin et al. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 1997, 73–126; **Lauk, E.** Practice of Soviet censorship in the press. The case of Estonia. – *Nordicom Information*, 1999, 21, 3, 27–39; **Harro, H.** Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press; **Pärl-Lõhmus, M.** Journalistic editing in a closed society. – In: *Journalism at the Crossroads. Perspectives on Research*. Eds J. Koivisto, E. Lauk. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 1997, 108–120.

<sup>14</sup> Documents of the Estonian Communist Party in the branch office of the Estonian State Archives (Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaal (ERAF)): files of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party F1; files of the ECP's Tartu City Committee F 148; files of the Estonian censorship authority (GLAVLIT) in the Estonian State Archives (Eesti Riigiarhiiv (ERA)) R-17.

a discursive level, we rely on earlier studies and limit ourselves to presenting some characteristic examples without conducting a detailed discourse analysis of a large numbers of texts.

### **OUTLINING THE CONTEXT: THE LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PARTY AND THE PRESS**

In Estonia, the ECP CC with its Bureau was the highest instrument of Soviet power in Estonia. However, it was not an independent decision-maker, but a subordinate of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC) in Moscow. The ECP CC not only received instructions from Moscow, but also regularly reported to Moscow. The CPSU CC also created and orchestrated an enormous mechanism of control over public information and other kinds of public texts and images. The most important and powerful elements of this mechanism were GLAVLIT (the Chief Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in Press and the Other Media, or censorship office) and the KGB. Each Soviet ‘Republic’ and every larger administrative unit (e.g. *oblast*) had a similar structure of the controlling mechanism subordinated to respective all-Union institutions in Moscow.

The party supervision over the press covered two broad spheres: administrative and ideological. The administrative tasks included, for example, ‘work with cadres’ – nomination of the editors-in-chief and leaders of the ‘Party life’ departments of the newspapers and magazines, education of journalists and contributors (correspondents), punishing journalists in case of mistakes and errors. The party committees also confirmed the composition and size of editorial staffs, salaries and fees, prices of the issues and their circulation numbers, and initiated and carried out subscription campaigns. All new publications in Estonia needed a ‘visa’ from the ECP CC to be able to start appearing and their names had to be approved by the CC Bureau. Any decisions made by the ECP CC had to be confirmed in Moscow, especially concerning launches of new publications and staff appointments. The editors-in-chief of the main party organs, among them Estonia’s most important dailies *Rahva Hääl* and the Russian language *Sovetskaja Estonija* (*Soviet Estonia*) were appointed from among a specially trained and instructed status group of party cadres and belonged to the so-called communist party *nomenklatura*.

All the decrees, decisions and orders of the ‘masters’ in Moscow were to be discussed in the ECP CC, and respective actions undertaken. Especially important, concerning the press, were decrees and directives about ideological issues. The usual practice of response to such documents was initiating a case of critical assessment of a journal or newspaper and condemning it because of ideological mistakes. A renowned and researched example of this practice is connected with the decree of the CPSU CC “On the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*” of August 14, 1946.<sup>15</sup> In Estonia, this decree had severe consequences for the literary

---

<sup>15</sup> See more, for example, in **Clark, K., Dobrenko, E.** *Soviet Culture and Power. A History in Documents, 1917–1953.* Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007.

journal *Looming* (*Creation*) that was accused of ideologically and literarily weak content; the editor-in-chief of *Looming*, Mart Raud, was replaced and the editorial office re-staffed. The decree of the ECP CC ‘On the journal *Looming*’, on September 18, 1946<sup>16</sup> was published in the all-Estonian newspapers. The entire Estonian press had to be reviewed and discussed “in the light of the important decrees”. It started with the ECP’s main organ *Rahva Hääl*, “ideological shortages” of which were discussed at the meeting of the newspaper’s Party sub-organisation on October 19, 1946.<sup>17</sup>

The above-mentioned decrees generated a larger attack against the culture and literature of Estonia. On September 24 1946, *Sovetskaja Estonija* published Andrei Zhdanov’s presentation about the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* and then the same newspaper published an article against Valmar Adams, author and Tartu University lecturer, who had some months earlier published an essay on Gogol in a publication series of the University. He was harshly blamed for falsifying Russian literary history and using ideologically wrong arguments and examples. The University sacked him, forbade the distribution of the essay and closed down the publication series. Some time later, all the Proceedings of the University of Tartu ceased and they did not reappear until 1954.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the decades of Soviet rule, the CPSU CC regularly issued decrees in which it presented cases of deviations from the ‘party line’, of following the wrong (mostly ‘bourgeois Western’) ideas, and making ideological errors or avoiding criticism and self-criticism (e.g. concerning the magazine *Ogonjok* in 1958, *Novyi Mir* and *Oktjabr* in 1967). In addition to pointing out the right directions, they also served as demonstrations of ‘party vigilance’ and reminded journalists where the limits of their freedom of expression lay. The decrees were also echoed in the actions of the EPC CC in guiding the press.<sup>19</sup>

After Stalin’s death and especially since Khrushchev’s famous 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, ideological control in the Soviet Union eased slightly. Liberal tendencies spread and the monolithic Soviet society began to disintegrate into different spheres (e.g. the spheres of politics and culture became distinguishable). Although the basic relationship between the media and their rulers remained the same, the relative liberalisation, however, encouraged the emergence of criticism

---

<sup>16</sup> EK(b)P KK büroo 18., 25. ja 28. septembri 1946. a koosoleku protokoll nr 189 [Minutes of the Bureau of the ECP CC no 189 18, 25 and 28 September 1946]. ERAF 2-4-328 [in Estonian].

<sup>17</sup> Rahva Hääle toimetuse EK(b)P algorganisatsiooni 19. oktoobri 1946. a koosoleku protokoll nr 10 [Minutes of the party organisation of the newspaper *Rahva Hääl* no 10 19 October 1946]. ERAF 132-2-3, 27–28 [in Estonian].

<sup>18</sup> **Veskimägi, K.-O.** Kuidas valitseti Eesti NSV-d. Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei Keskkomitee büroo 162 etteastumist 1944–1956 vahemängude ja sissejuhatustega [How Estonian SSR was governed. 162 performances of the ECP CC in 1944–1956 with interludes and introductions]. Varrak, Tallinn, 2005, 175–178 [in Estonian].

<sup>19</sup> **Uus, S.** Nõukogude ajakirjanduse teooria ja praktika probleeme [Issues of theory and practice of the Soviet journalism]. – In: Õppevahend ajakirjanike kvalifikatsiooni tõstmise kursustele [Textbook for the qualification raising courses for journalists]. Ed. J. Peegel. Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli eesti keele kateeder, Perioodika, Tartu, 1970, 24–85 [in Estonian].

and dissent and the rise of ‘cultural liberalism’ – “the rejection of Stalinist orthodoxy in cultural expression”.<sup>20</sup> First of all, it appeared in the cultural sphere.

Unlike many other East European countries there was no significant organized opposition or dissident movement involving large circles of intelligentsia in the Estonian SSR.<sup>21</sup> Within the circumstances of the ‘softening’ of the regime, certain dissenting voices and opposition spirit still appeared in the Estonian society and press. Furthermore, the period of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ is considered to be vitally important in the development of the Estonian press. The liberation from the shackles of complete totalitarianism made possible changes in press that have even been called “the revival of the press”.<sup>22</sup> It became possible to establish new, non-propagandistic press, especially cultural weeklies, journals and magazines. Although ideologically controlled, they often reflected the critical views of the authors, poets, journalists and philosophers. Russian philosopher Mikhail Kapustin, who has analyzed the emergence of the ‘generation of the sixties’, divides the Soviet culture into three sectors: the “machine-gunner culture” that directly and unconditionally served the state ideology, the dissident culture, which focused on criticizing the regime, and the ‘intermediate’ sector, which balanced between the first two.<sup>23</sup> In Estonia, cultural journals, such as the organ of the Estonian Writers’ Union *Looming* and cultural weekly *Sirp ja Vasar*, youth magazine *Noorus (Youth)* and regional newspaper *Edasi (Forward)* represented this ‘intermediate’ sector.

The censorship archives clearly reflect that attempts to transmit hidden messages ‘behind and between the lines’ became quite frequent from the late 1950s through the 1960s and somewhat less frequent in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the end of the 1960s, in connection with the Czechoslovakian uprising, control over the public word became stronger again and remained so until Gorbachev’s reforms started.

## DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF ‘SILENT RESISTANCE’

### Journalistic discourse versus political discourse

The Soviet press can largely be seen as an example of pure *political discourse*: a textual form of a social-political act of sending the message of the power elite and ruling authorities to the people, as defined by discourse studies.<sup>24</sup> The official-

<sup>20</sup> **McNair, B.** *Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Media*. Routledge, London, 1991, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Some small-scale organized dissent did, however, exist but it remained marginal as these people did not have any influence in the cultural sphere.

<sup>22</sup> **Høyer, S., Lauk, E., Vihalemm, P.** (eds). *Towards a Civic Society. The Baltic Media’s Long Road to Freedom. Perspectives on History, Ethnicity and Journalism*. Baltic Association for Media Research/Nota Baltica Ltd., Tartu, 1993, 204.

<sup>23</sup> **Kapustin, M.** *Proshloe i budushchee sotsializma [The past and future of Socialism]*. Novosti, Moskva, 1990, 448 [in Russian].

<sup>24</sup> **Chilton, C., Schäffner, C.** *Discourse and politics*. – In: *Discourse as Social Interaction. Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Ed. T. van Dijk. – SAGE, 1998, 2, 206–230; **Dijk, T. v.** *Opinions and ideologies in the press*. – In: *Approaches to Media Discourse*. Eds A. Bell, P. Garrett. Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford, 1998, 21–63.

political discourse appeared as long speeches or greetings of the leaders, legal documents and party decrees, editorials, reports on fulfilling five-years plans or achievements of ‘socialist competition’. The official-political discourse was usually presented in the “collective social-political dimension and stereotypes of happy people were obligatory”.<sup>25</sup> This political discourse used a specific ideologically tinged language full of ritual elements and clear value judgements, the language of Soviet Communism or a ‘newspeak’ as Françoise Thom has named it referring to Orwell.<sup>26</sup> The Orwellian term indicates the most important aspect of this officially promulgated language – it played an important role in the functioning of the State and served only one purpose: to be a vehicle of ideology and the only way of expressing the ‘universal truth’.

The Soviet political discourse, representing the culture and political order of the occupying power, was forcefully incorporated into the Estonian language and press from the first days of the Soviet rule. Despite the efforts of the authorities, however, real control over the language use was hard to achieve. The linguistic standards and codes came from a foreign language – Russian, which was specifically used in all Soviet ‘Republics’ for strengthening the positions of the authorities. Therefore, the elements of Soviet ‘newspeak’ in the Estonian language remained artificial and strange. Pathetic Soviet exclamations lost their earnestness when translated and turned into parodies that consequently gave rise to jokes and popular ballads. Ridiculing the occupiers and their humbly submissive satellites formed a significant expression of spiritual protest by Estonians.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the Estonian language, an important element of national identity, acted as a counterpower to the Communist project of constructing a uniform community of Soviet people. Rein Ruutsoo who analysed the antisystemic elements in Soviet Estonia argues that

the Estonian language, operating as a multilevel code for Estonian ethnic community remained to act as a mechanism of preservation of self-identity.<sup>28</sup>

Estonian journalists learned not only the most important elements and basic techniques of ‘newspeak’, but also acquired the skills of using it for transmitting alternative messages between the lines. The language barrier and linguistic difficulties enabled Estonian journalists to challenge and get the better of the ideological guardians. Although ‘newspeak’ became a permanent component of the Estonian Soviet journalism for decades, it did not become a natural element of the texts and remained alien and dissembling, and was thus, easier to ignore.

Three general stages can be distinguished in the development and use of the Soviet ideological discourse in the Estonian media:

---

<sup>25</sup> Harro, H. Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press, 206.

<sup>26</sup> Thom, F. Newspeak. The Language of Soviet Communism. The Claridge Press, London, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Hoyer, S., Lauk, E., Vihalemm, P. (eds). Towards a Civic Society, 26–28.

<sup>28</sup> Ruutsoo, R. Estonia. – In: Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe. Eds D. Pollack, J. Wielgoths. Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Hampshire, 2004, 126.

1. Adaption and introduction of the new Communist political vocabulary and rhetoric in 1940 and from 1944 to the late 1950s;
2. Emergence and development of an alternative, formally apolitical discourse, used alongside the ideological one. In the 1960s, a new generation of journalists, publicists and authors challenged the constraints of the official ideology, and started to use metaphorical language, allegories and allusions;
3. In the late 1980s, when the control and ideological oppression eased, it became unnecessary to hide messages between the lines.<sup>29</sup>

Attempts to use *journalistic discourse* instead of political discourse can be seen as a strategy of deviation from the prescribed ideological course. Journalistic discourse refers to the specific information processing by journalists and consumption of factual and non-fictional phenomena in the form of mediated messages. Journalistic discourse is based on other types of discourse: reports, declarations, interviews, speeches, meeting records, court trials and police documents. This implies that “the text published in a newspaper usually has gone through what we may term a ‘journalistic processing filter’. This means that events fit into specific journalistic genres.<sup>30</sup>

Halliki Harro demonstrates that during a ten-year period, from 1971 to 1981, alongside with a growing proportion of journalistic discourse, the proportion of political discourse had decreased from 34 per cent to 18 per cent in the texts of Communist youth newspaper *Noorte Hääl*.<sup>31</sup> This tendency was not welcomed, but still tolerated by the authorities.

A vivid example of the improvement of journalistic discourse was the Tartu city and county newspaper *Edasi*. The staff of the newspaper had already gradually started enlarging the scope of the topics in the late 1950s, when along with political and economic issues, cultural and entertaining material (travel stories, jokes, literary discussions etc.) were published. During the 1960s, the proportion of the journalistic discourse increased even more. According to a member of the editorial staff Sulev Uus,

the most revolutionary innovation was giving up publishing the favourite genre of the authorities – editorials

and replacing them with columns, features and articles on topical issues.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the political discourse was also represented and *Edasi* remained a true Soviet newspaper (while being the most popular among the Estonian readers). Therefore, its distancing from propaganda journalism was not impeded during the period of the ‘Thaw’. However, the resolution of the Bureau of the ECP CC of April 16, 1968 ‘About the shortcomings in the work of the editorial staff of *Edasi* and the ideological errors in the newspaper’ clearly indicated a tightening of control. The resolution strongly condemned the diminishing of the proportion of propagandistic and political materials in the paper:

<sup>29</sup> Lauk, E. Practice of Soviet censorship in the press, 27–39.

<sup>30</sup> Harro, H. Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press, 13, 199.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 207–208.

<sup>32</sup> Uus, S. Leheneegri leivas, 227, 234.

Seldom do interesting materials that distribute exemplary experience or sharply criticize the shortcomings in the work of enterprises, collective farms and higher education institutions of Tartu appear. Especially small is the share of propagandistic articles on the theoretical issues of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>33</sup>

The introduction of new topics and the enlargement of the journalistically processed content were also strongly criticized:

Instead of dealing with important issues of economy and culture of the City and county, *Edasi* publishes sensational and exotic material that /.../ contains vague formulations and ideological errors. Especially serious suspicions arise concerning its dubious articles on literature and arts.<sup>34</sup>

The party resolution demanded an increase in the proportion of the political discourse by dealing with all issues from the political viewpoint, while the apolitical approach was labelled as an 'ideological error'.

Gradually, the other newspapers had followed *Edasi*'s lead and enlarged the alternative journalistic content on the account of 'ideologically correct' content. The decree of the ECP CC of April 29, 1969, "On enhancing the responsibility of the editors for the ideological-political level of the materials submitted for publishing" marked, however, the end of the 'Thaw' for the Estonian press. This decree was followed by several meetings in the ECP CC that resulted in the resolutions of its Bureau about 'insufficient work of editorial offices' of several particular newspapers and journals (e.g. "On the serious shortcomings in the editing of some periodicals" of September 30, 1969).<sup>35</sup> Censors, encouraged by such signals from high Party authorities, tried to diminish their own responsibilities in everyday censorship. They repeatedly complained to Party headquarters about the editors who tried to "avoid the responsibility of editing" and were "incompetent in the regulations and rules". For example, in a secret letter to the Ideology Secretary of the ECP CC, the Head of Estonian GLAVLIT complained:

The editors do not take seriously enough the decree of the ECP CC of April 29, 1969 and tend to favour those few authors who claim that we do not have freedom of expression. Backing themselves with the argument of avoiding the "restriction of the freedom of creation", the editors of *Loomingu Raamatukogu* and *Noorus* offer for publishing materials that are clearly not in accordance with the ideological-political criteria or even include disorienting expressions.<sup>36</sup>

The editors, however, still succeeded in getting 'incorrect' materials published as revealed by a secret letter of the chief censor to the Ideology Secretary of the ECP CC of October 1973:

---

<sup>33</sup> Puudujääkidest ajalehe *Edasi* toimetuse töös ja ideoloogilistest vigadest ajalehes [About the shortcomings in the work of the editorial staff of *Edasi* and the ideological errors in the newspaper]. – In: EKP KK büroo 16. aprilli 1968. a koosoleku protokoll nr 73 [Minutes of the Bureau of the ECP CC no 73 16 April 1968]. ERAF 1-4-3648, 78–79 [in Estonian].

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Tõsisest puudustest mõningate perioodiliste väljaannete toimetamisel [On the serious shortcomings in the editing of some periodicals]. – In: EKP KK büroo 30. septembri 1969. a koosoleku protokoll nr 123 [Minutes of the ECP CC Bureau no 123, 30 Sept. 1969]. ERAF 1-4-3806, 11 [in Estonian].

<sup>36</sup> ENSV GLAVLIT-i ülema Arnold Adamsi 1971. a 2. juuni salajane kiri EKP KK sekretärile Vaino Väljasele nr 107c [Secret letter of the Head of the GLAVLIT of ESSR Arnold Adams to the Secretary of the ECP CC Vaino Väljas no 107c 2 June 1971]. ERA R-17-3-78, 22–26 [in Estonian].

The censorship authorities still have to deal with the questions that should be resolved in publishing houses and editorial offices before they present the materials for printing permission. Unfortunately we have to admit not only denying many materials printing permission because of ideological-political reasons, but also having unintentionally allowed several incorrect materials to be printed...<sup>37</sup>

### **Intertextuality – interlace of different discourses**

The technique of intermingling and mixing elements of different discourses was also well known in the Estonian Soviet journalism. In the critical discourse analysis this technique is called intertextuality<sup>38</sup> – shaping the texts' meanings by other texts, through establishing relationships between the texts and indicating meanings that emerged out of these relationships. For example, journalists used elements of political discourse in otherwise non-political texts (inserting quotations from the 'classics of Marxism-Leninism') to make them more similar to the required ideological-political discourse. Halliki Harro shows in her study that, during the 1970s and 1980s, various types of intertextuality appeared in Estonian journalism, and that the newspaper discourse tended to take the 'human-interest approach' even when covering political or ideological events.<sup>39</sup> A prominent example of intertextuality is the front cover of the Komsomol daily *Noorte Hääl* of January 2, 1981. On the left part of the page a photo of Leonid Brezhnev is printed with his New Year's speech that represents the purely ideological discourse. The right part of the page offers a clearly journalistic discourse, which includes the picture of a happily smiling child accompanied by a reportage stressing family and home values. The whole text includes one single ideological sentence.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the picture of the child is about four times as big as the picture of Brezhnev.

Another example of intertextuality demonstrates how a very sensitive issue was inserted into a formally ideologically 'correct' text. At the end of 1968, *Edasi* published a review on the Baltic conference of history researchers in Riga.<sup>41</sup> Within a detailed description of the conference, a comment from a well-known Estonian historian Sulev Vahtre appeared where he emphasized that historical sources should not be used for distorting the truth and not be interpreted outside their context. Vahtre actually commented upon a book of memoirs about Lenin, published in Latvia, which used some quotations from Pravda in a context that changed their original meaning. For Estonian readers, the historian's criticism

---

<sup>37</sup> ENSV GLAVLIT-i ülema Arnold Adamsi salajane kiri EKP KK sekretärile Vaino Väljasele [Secret letter of the Head of the GLAVLIT of ESSR Arnold Adams to the Secretary of the ECP CC Vaino Väljas]. ERA R-17-3-90, 4 [in Estonian].

<sup>38</sup> **Fairclough, N.** *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992; **Fairclough, N.** *Discourse and text: linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis*. – *Discourse and Society*, 1992, 3, 2, 193–217; **Fairclough, N.** *Media Discourse*. Edward Arnold, London, 1995.

<sup>39</sup> **Harro, H.** *Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press*, 209.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–207.

<sup>41</sup> *Ajaloo allikaõpetuse teemadel* [On the issues of teaching history sources]. – *Edasi*, 25.12.1968 [in Estonian].

touched upon a sensitive issue – the Soviet interpretation of Estonian history. The official, ideologically correct version of history offered a distorted picture of Estonia's past and was produced for legitimizing the Soviet regime.<sup>42</sup>

Sometimes, intertextuality appeared in the more direct interplay of the text and context. At the end of 1978, the CPSU CC had passed the notorious 'Russification decree' called 'On the measures for further advancing the learning and teaching of the Russian language in the Soviet Republics', and the Estonian Communist Party immediately started to carry it out – mostly in the spheres of education and culture. It was not coincidental against this background that in the first issue of *Sirp ja Vasar* of 1979 an essay "About a nation with an old culture" by University Professor Juhan Peegel was published, where he stressed:

In the survival of our nation, an amazingly strong, peculiar and rich spiritual culture has played a role, perhaps more than we believe. The unwritten literature – folklore – is a part of it /.../ as well as our language, without which the culture cannot exist.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview with *Sirp ja Vasar* in 1979, the well-known author Viivi Luik said:

I have been writing in order to while away the time... In order to say: everything is possible; one must only want, and try and be patient. One has no right to give up, no right to surrender.<sup>44</sup>

### Choosing the 'right' voice

The Soviet doctrine of journalism emphasized the participation of 'the people' in journalism as only those personally involved in production of goods and services could report objectively on the real state of affairs. As a rule, 40 to 60 per cent of the newspaper material had to be produced by people outside the editorial office.<sup>45</sup> As the newspaper's function was to be the voice of the party, a large part of the contributors were sitting in the party offices. High-ranking officials and cultural figures and scientists were also represented among the authors. Another voice was reserved for the 'working people' – farmers, factory workers, shop assistants etc. Their contribution was especially favoured and required, although it mostly appeared in the form of readers' letters to the editor in Estonian newspapers. Journalists were in the position of amplifying and transmitting these voices rather than presenting unbiased information or expressing their own views. In this position, some journalists still found a way of mixing different voices in journalistic discourse to give anti-regime signals to their readers. There were cases where journalists themselves took over the role of a 'working man' by starting to work as a fisherman,

---

<sup>42</sup> Alongside with the official history concept another, unofficial version existed that contradicted the official one. American researcher James Wertsch has studied Estonians' understanding and interpretations of both versions in his book: *Mind as Action*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> *Sirp ja Vasar*, 5.1.1979.

<sup>44</sup> *Sirp ja Vasar*, 27.4.1979.

<sup>45</sup> **Pietiläinen, J.** From participatin to informing. The transition of journalism in the Russian regional press. – In: *Diffusion of the News Paradigm 1850–2000*. Eds S. Hoyer, H. Pöttker. Nordicom, Gothenburg, 2005, 200.

a farmer in a kolkhoz or a restaurant doorman, and published stories as if written by these representatives of ‘working people’. Olev Anton, a journalist at *Edasi* became extremely popular among the readers with his satirical-humorous features of a simple kolkhoz herdsman. His ‘common man’ appeared to be a stubborn, wilful character who used rough expressions of farmers’ everyday spoken language. Through the herdsman’s mouth Olev Anton succeeded to undermine the image of the ‘authoritative’ source and the whole Soviet ideology.<sup>46</sup>

### Individual versus collectivist perspective

The cornerstone of the concept of the ‘Soviet person’ was collectivism. In Soviet society, the individual was always subjected to the collective. Individualism was condemned as a ‘bourgeois relic’ unsuitable for the ‘Soviet person’. The collectivist perspective was characteristic of the political discourse, while “journalistic discourse often used the private sphere or the personal-human dimension to avoid politics”.<sup>47</sup> Gradually, newspapers and magazines started printing feature articles covering not only the societal collective, but also the lives of individuals. Genre-wise, portraits and features were the best options for bringing forth individuals, their personalities and concerns. Although the enlargement of the ‘personal-human’ perspective was probably not a purposeful activity directed against the ideological pressure, it definitely undermined the positions and influence of the political discourse in Estonian journalism.

### ‘Purposeful alienation’

A relatively often-used method for challenging ideological guardians has been called ‘purposeful alienation’<sup>48</sup>. The method involved intentional attempts at changing the meanings of political terms or at least giving them ambiguous and ridiculous meanings. Sometimes translation errors had the same effect. An early example that became a popular joke among Estonians comes from 1940. Russian propaganda texts and newspapers often used an expression ‘*borba za bolshoje djelo Lenina i Stalina*’ (the struggle for the great undertaking of Lenin and Stalin). The Russian word ‘*djelo*’ has two Estonian equivalents, each with an associated meaning: ‘*üritus*’ meaning ‘undertaking’ and ‘*asi*’ meaning ‘thing’. However, ‘*asi*’, also has a particular connotation to the male sex organ. In the newspaper of the Estonian CP *Kommunist* (12.11.1940, No. 130), this expression was translated, using ‘*asi*’ instead of the more literal ‘*üritus*’ so that the sentence read as:

The Soviet journalist must be an uncompromising fighter for the big organs of Lenin and Stalin...<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> See more Høyer, S., Lauk, E., Vihalemm, P. (eds). *Towards a Civic Society*, 204.

<sup>47</sup> Harro, H. *Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press*, 206.

<sup>48</sup> Susiluoto, I. Deritualization of political language: the case of the Soviet Union. – In: *Texts, Contexts, Concepts. Studies on Politics and Power in Language*. Eds S. Hänninen, K. Palonen. The Finnish Political Science Association, Helsinki, 69–80.

<sup>49</sup> Lauk, E. *Restoring democratic discourse in the Estonian press (1987–1990)*, 313–314.

## Analogy

Soviet censorship did not allow public discussions or even naming a range of sensitive issues and problems of Soviet society. At the same time, condemning and criticizing the same deficiencies in other societies was fostered and favoured, especially during the Cold War. Shortages of goods and products, low living standards, illiteracy, violation of human rights, absence of civic freedoms – could be discussed when ascribed to capitalist societies. People's everyday experiences, however, easily projected these deficiencies to their own realities in Soviet society. In many instances, journalists and authors intentionally constructed these analogies. For example, the cultural weekly *Sirp ja Vasar* published in 1968 an article by Paul Rummo who criticized the practice of the authorities to destroy the unsold copies of periodicals three months after the date of publication. This made it impossible for people to obtain old copies of journals and magazines in the bookshops or from the publishers. In his article, Rummo gave an example about destroying books in Nazi Germany and China as “a monstrous form of ideological struggle” and compared ‘killing’ books with killing people. He also said:

It is still heartbreaking to think of killing books in the furnaces of the central heating plants and in paper mills, and yes, chopping them up with an axe on the wooden block – which happened in the not so distant past.<sup>50</sup>

This was a clear reference to a crime Soviet authorities had committed in Estonia, although it was put into the context of China. As the annual reports of the censorship authorities attest, in just the first year of Soviet rule (1940–1941), over 200 000 copies of Estonian books had been destroyed. During the four years after the war (1944–1948), almost half a million copies of books and periodicals were burned.<sup>51</sup>

Afterwards, the case was examined by GLAVLIT at a meeting of the leadership, which condemned the censor who had committed this dangerous ideological error. The Head of the Estonian GLAVLIT, Arnold Adams in his speech accused the censor:

Comrade Dils [the censor] should have used his rights to report to the leadership... It is wrong to compare the recycling of some unsold copies with the destruction of the books in fascist Germany and contemporary China, and even worse is to indicate to “our not so distant past”. Also the phrases of killing books etc. are overflavoured.<sup>52</sup>

## Use of Aesopian language

Hiding messages between the lines or using the so-called double writing is a long tradition in Estonian journalism that goes back to the times of tsarist censorship. Already the editors of the first regular Estonian newspapers taught their readers to

---

<sup>50</sup> **Rummo, P.** Trükisõna ja utiliil [Printed papers and waste paper]. – *Sirp ja Vasar*, 26.1.1968 [in Estonian].

<sup>51</sup> **Lauk, E.** Practice of Soviet censorship in the press. The case of Estonia, 36.

<sup>52</sup> ENSV GLAVLIT-i juhtkonna laiendatud nõupidamine 29.1.1968 [Meeting of the leadership of the Estonian GLAVLIT on 29 January 1968]. ERA R-17-3-67, 11 [in Estonian].

look behind the lines. Lioudmila Savinitch, who analysed the use of Aesopian language in the Russian press of the 19th century defines the Aesopian language as

an utterance, used strategically, which by means of various discursive devices, may generate a second semantic level of speech, i.e. a hidden layer, the content of which is officially undesirable or forbidden; in other words, with the implicit content, or subtext, that is officially undesirable or forbidden.<sup>53</sup>

She lists various methods of using Aesopian language, such as irony and euphemisms on a stylistic level, ellipses, statistics and quotation on the text level, tropes like metaphor, analogy, allegory, acrostic etc. Most of these elements can be found in the Soviet Estonian press. Practices of using Aesopian language in the newspaper texts could be an independent topic of research and it is not possible to go into details in the limited space of this article. Instead, we give some case examples together with the context in which they occurred and how the authorities responded.

A poem by a young Estonian author Arvi Siig *Lasteaiatädi* (*The kindergarten teacher*) serves as a marvellous example of expressing non-agreement and also well illustrates how allergic the guardians of the public word were towards the attempts to undermine their authority. The poem, published in *Sirp ja Vasar* in March 1967, described a visit of a group of kindergarten children to the Zoo. Their teacher Masha (the name indicates that the teacher was Russian) explained to the children what they saw, claiming that they should take her words as the truth and not what they saw with their own eyes. The first letters of the lines, read from top to bottom, formed the words ‘people’ and ‘the whole truth’.<sup>54</sup> In addition to that, the author had read one of his forbidden poems in a literary programme in Estonian Television.

A succession of numerous meetings and subsequent reports followed. The meetings involved GLAVLIT, the ECP CC with its Bureau and departments, the party sub-organisations of the State Television and Radio Committee and the weekly *Sirp ja Vasar*. In addition, the Union of Writers and the Committee of the Young Communist League, *Komsomol*, of which Siig was a member, were represented. At the meeting of the ECP CC Bureau, all the parties involved tried to deny responsibility to avoid the consequences by claiming that they had not noticed the hidden messages. The Head of the GLAVLIT justified his workers’ inattention on the basis of the brevity of the printing deadlines (just ninety minutes in this case between receiving the proofs and the print deadline).<sup>55</sup> As a result of lengthy acrimonious discussions with each organ accusing the others, the Bureau decided that the case

was not one of literary thoughtlessness but a political act

---

<sup>53</sup> **Savinitch, L.** Pragmatic goals and communication strategies in journalistic discourse under censorship. – In: *Power without Domination: Dialogism and the Empowering Property of Communication*. Ed. E. Grillo. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2005, 109.

<sup>54</sup> **Siig, A.** *Lasteaiatädi* [The kindergarten teacher]. – *Sirp ja Vasar*, 10.3.1967 [in Estonian].

<sup>55</sup> Stenogramm EKP KK büroo koosoleku protokoll nr 31 juurde 21.3.1967 [Shorthand record of the minutes of the meeting of the ECP CC Bureau no 31, on 21 March 1967]. ERAF 1-4-3569, 102–103 [in Estonian].

and officially reprimanded the chief editor of *Sirp ja Vasar*. The Bureau also stressed that cases like this should not happen again and that

the sense of responsibility among the editorial staff needs to be strengthened.<sup>56</sup>

The party did not punish the author but delegated this task to *Komsomol*.

A similar case occurred in 1981, when a student author published a poem in *Looming* where the first letters of the lines formed the words ‘blue, black, white’ which are the colours of the flag of independent Estonia. During the Soviet time, it was strictly forbidden to use these colours together and to even mention the existence of such a flag in public. However, the censors did not discover the dubious poem for six months. The ECP CC Bureau dealt with the case in a meeting and decided that as the chief editor of *Looming* had already been punished (for something else) and as the case was relatively old, they put it aside. The punishment for the censor responsible for the issue was only a reprimand. The censor’s error was mitigated by his previous good work in “removing lots of disorienting material from the journal” and his promise “to improve his work and be more diligent in the future”.<sup>57</sup>

Aesopian language was often used in satirical texts. It has been argued that the appearance of *satire* became a certain way to fight against the Soviet ideological system.<sup>58</sup>

Ridiculing the ‘newspeak’ was one way of doing so. The massive use of adjectives was among the characteristic features of ‘newspeak’. Adjectives played a specific role in prescribing the value schemes and assessing everything. The use of aggressive and often improper adjectives was growing beyond sense in the Estonian political discourse. In a satirical pamphlet *Sirp ja Vasar* wrote:

The other day the founding conference of the Association of Adjectives took place. /.../ The chairman of the Board was elected Sharp, the deputy chairmen became Serious and Decisive, members Remarkable, Stimulating, Ardent, Purposeful, Grandiose, Overwhelming and Permanent. The responsible secretary became Active. A resolution was adopted to promote the use of these adjectives in our everyday language.<sup>59</sup>

## EDITORIAL PRACTICES OF ‘SILENT RESISTANCE’

As argued above, alongside the discursive level, editorial and publishing practices also offered opportunities to deviate from the ‘party line’ and express non-agreement and opposition. Archive documents and memoirs of journalists and editors reflect various practices of taking advantage of personal relationships,

---

<sup>56</sup> EKP KK büroo 21. märtsi 1967. a koosoleku protokoll nr 31 [Minutes of the meeting of the ECP CC Bureau no. 31 on 21 March 1967]. ERAF 1-4-3501, 50–51 [in Estonian].

<sup>57</sup> ENSV GLAVLIT-i ülema käskkiri nr 2-ak 1981. aasta kolme kvartali töötulemustest [Decree no 2-ak of the Head of GLAVLIT on the result of the first three quarters of 1981]. ERA R-17-2-148, 11–13 [in Estonian].

<sup>58</sup> Hoyer, S., Lauk, E., Vihalemm, P. (eds). Towards a Civic Society, 204.

<sup>59</sup> Havi, T. Omadussõnade konverents [The conference of adjectives]. – *Sirp ja Vasar*, 18.6.1965 [in Estonian].

loopholes in the regulations and overlappings in the chain of command, as well as misleading the attention of the censors.

### Using the ‘human factor’ – personalities matter

The exactness in following the ‘party line’ by a publication largely depended on the personality of the editor-in-chief, but to an extent, also on the personality of the censor. Between the 1960s and 1980s, censors were recruited from among people with a University education, most often graduates of the humanities. The motive to become a censor could be a perspective of getting certain privileges (censors belonged to the *nomenklatura*) and a higher than average salary. Censors were, generally, loyal to the regime they served. However, as we can read in several memoirs of journalists and book publishers, some of them happened to feel uncomfortable in communication with the editors and journalists. It could happen, occasionally, that censors even advised journalists and editors how to get their ‘unorthodox’ messages through. For example, Linda Poots, editor-in-chief of journal *Eesti Loodus* (*Estonian Nature*) in the 1970s, recalls that the censors who controlled her journal were

extremely culture-friendly, understanding, and even helpful, sometimes giving advice on how to rephrase the texts or redesign the charts in order to get them through the “needle eye” of the censor.<sup>60</sup>

Some editors even look positively back to the Head of Estonian GLAVLIT during 1959–1983, Arnold Adams, who was generally known as a strict and pedantic official.<sup>61</sup> The editor-in-chief of *Looming* in 1968, Paul Kuusberg has written about him:

...it was possible to debate with him and in many cases he finally agreed with the arguments of the editors. The situation with his counterparts in Moscow was much more complicated and troublesome.<sup>62</sup>

The case of the chief censor, however, was more about advising how to better follow the ‘correct political line’ rather than to get something oppositional published, as the editor of the Communist party main propaganda journal *Küsimused ja Vastused* (*Questions and Answers*) remembers.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> **Poots, L.** Kuidas ma ajakirjanikuks sain, ajakirjanik olin ja ajakirjanduse maha jätsin [How I became journalist, was journalist and left journalism]. – In: *Meie jäljed jäävad. Eesti ajakirjanike elulood, I* [Our footprints will remain. Biographies of the Estonian journalists, I]. Eds A. Pallas, S. Uus. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 2004, 105 [in Estonian].

<sup>61</sup> **Veskimägi, K.-O.** Nõukogude unelaadne elu. Tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed [The Soviet drem-like life. Censorship in the ESSR and its masters]. Tallinna Raamatutrükikoda, Tallinn, 1996, 63 [in Estonian].

<sup>62</sup> **Kuusberg, P.** Teist korda abielus “Loominguga” [Married with “Looming” for the second time]. – *Looming*, 1993, 4, 547 [in Estonian].

<sup>63</sup> **Lillemäe, V.** Adraseadjana kolmel ajakirjanduspõllul. Meenutusi [Ploughman in three fields of journalism. Memoires]. Maalehe Raamat, Tallinn, 2008, 99 [in Estonian].

Numerous complaints from GLAVLIT to the Propaganda Department of the ECP CC during the 1960s and 1970s indicate that the editors often used their position for passing content that was not ideologically and politically ‘correct’. For example, in 1962, the chief censor repeatedly complained about the editor-in-chief of the linguistic and literary magazine *Keel ja Kirjandus* (*Language and Literature*) Olev Jõgi. In one of the letters, the chief censor wrote:

When the Head of the GLAVLIT had explained to comrade Jõgi what the changes are and why they are necessary, comrade Jõgi answered that nobody else, but he personally as the editor, is responsible for what is published in the magazine. After this statement I refused to give permission for publishing. After a while, comrade Jõgi made the corrections and got permission for publishing. I find such behaviour in an editor intolerable.<sup>64</sup>

The document also reveals that the editor had been invited to the Central Committee for a ‘chat’. The Ideology Secretary, comrade Ranne wrote on the complaint:

The issue has been discussed with comrade Jõgi.

According to the memoirs of journalists and editors, it was a frequent practice that oral reprimands and instructions were given by high censorship officials and party officials. Therefore, very few of them are documented.

The chief editor of the literary publications series *Loomingu Raamatukogu* (*The Library of Looming*) Otto Samma also caused a good deal of trouble to the censors and the party officials. He managed to publish several issues of ‘dubious content’ and fought with the censorship authorities about almost every issue. In 1973, he was sacked.

### ‘TIME FACTOR’ – TAKING ADVANTAGE OF CONSTANT PRESSURE OF TIME

Publishing was a long and time-consuming process in the Soviet Union because of numerous bureaucratic procedures that preceded printing and distribution. Each manuscript had to be approved at different stages of publishing and printing process by different officials. At each stage the controllers had the right to demand corrections or stop the whole process. Sometimes the process was stopped even at the distribution stage.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> ENSV GLAVLIT-i ülema A. Adamsi kiri EKP KK propaganda ja agitatsiooni osakonna juhatajale V. Rannele 3.7.1962 [The letter of the Head of the Estonian GLAVLIT A. Adams to the Head of the ECP CC Propaganda and Agitation Department V. Ranne 3 July 1962]. ERAF 1-254-27, 51 [in Estonian].

<sup>65</sup> Cf. **Maimik, P.** Tõkkes ajalehtede-ajakirjade trükkimise teel enne tsensuuri kaotamist Eestis [The hindrances to the printing of newspapers and magazines before the abolishment of censorship in Estonia]. – In: *Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost, X* [On the history of Estonian journalism, X]. Ed. P. Maimik. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 1996, 99–107 [in Estonian].

The publishing and printing processes always had deadlines that were to be followed. Staffs of the newspapers, as well as the censors, were always in a hurry to get the issues printed and distributed on time, especially in case of the daily press. Under these circumstances the editors tried to gain some benefit from the pressure of the deadlines by presenting sensitive materials at the last moment. Lembe Hiedel, one of the former editors of *Loomingu Raamatukogu* has written in her memoirs that sometimes she deliberately gave ‘dubious’ texts to the printing-plants and to the censors at the last minute. A clever strategy was to remind the censors and the printers that there were plans and deadlines to follow or some important holiday was approaching.<sup>66</sup>

In several cases, when caught by the censors, the editors used the time factor for justifying their slip-ups and errors. For example, the editor-in-chief of the youth magazine *Noorus*, Aleksander Koel explained in his letter to the party officials that because of the need to meet the deadline he did not replace an ‘ideologically wrong’ article with another but tried to correct it.

The publishing of this article was, indeed, a slip of my and my staff’s vigilance. /.../ The author categorically demanded, just before the printing deadline expired, restoring some of the paragraphs we had previously deleted...<sup>67</sup>

The documentation of the Bureau of the ECP CC reveals that this time, the editor-in-chief was not severely punished because he had already been active in correcting his ‘mistake’ by discussing the case in the editorial office and by making staff changes. His verdict was to be put ‘under surveillance’<sup>68</sup> since, in fact, he was loyal and obedient. This case, however, demonstrates how some authors took advantage of the ‘time factor’ and sometimes succeeded in getting their ‘incorrect’ texts through, even with the ‘vigilant’ editors.

### ‘Format factor’

In 1957, a new type of periodical publication was established, called *Loomingu Raamatukogu* (*The Library of Looming*). This was a serial supplement of the literary magazine *Looming* for publishing translations from foreign literature and also new books of Estonian authors. The books in this series were published in paperback format and had a unified layout and design similar to magazines. They appeared regularly as magazine issues. As a result, the less rigid and faster publishing and printing procedures of periodicals were applied, as opposed to the lengthy fixed procedures for books. *Loomingu Raamatukogu* became extremely popular because books became available that would never have appeared through the regular book publishing system (e.g., works of Kafka and Havel).

---

<sup>66</sup> Hiedel, L. *Loomingu Raamatukogu alaeast: märkmeid ja meenutusi* [Remarks and memoirs of an editor of the Literary Series *Loomingu Raamatukogu*]. – Vikerkaar, 1995, 8, 72 [in Estonian].

<sup>67</sup> A. Koeli seletuskiri EKP KK sekretärile sm Väljasele 1.2.1972 [A. Koel’s explanation letter to the Secretary of the ECP CC comrade Väljas of 1 February 1972]. ERAF 1-11-246, 1 [in Estonian].

<sup>68</sup> EKP KK büroo 15. veebruari 1972. a koosoleku protokoll [Minutes of the meeting of the Bureau of the ECP CC of 15 February 1972]. ERAF 1-4-4161, 115 [in Estonian].

### Playing hide-and-seek

Under Soviet censorship certain topics and facts could never be mentioned publicly, such as big disasters with human losses, everything that concerned the armed forces, criminality and jails, etc. A central document guiding the censors and editors in securing ‘secret information’ from the public was the list of banned data, which was regularly updated according to changes in official policy and ideology (e.g., the same facts, names, data could be forbidden at one time and allowed at another time).<sup>69</sup> The editors and also journalists knew, generally, what was not allowed. Sometimes, however, they deliberately included something that they knew would catch the censor’s attention. Several editors recall in their memoirs<sup>70</sup> that when they suspected that the censor might forbid something they wanted to publish, they placed this text among clearly provocative material that was certainly forbidden. Misleading the censor’s attention in this way they succeeded in publishing sensitive issues in several cases, especially in the literary magazines where the ideological suitability of the texts was often arguable and dependent on the context of other texts published in the same issue.

These practices that put not only their publications but also editors themselves in danger of getting punished for ‘ideologically harmful’ texts, were characteristic of the cultural and youth publications and local newspapers (for example *Edasi*) since the 1960s. In many cases the risk was justified – several writings were published without serious consequences even after passing the post-printing censorship. The cases documented by the censorship authorities, however, tell us only of unsuccessful attempts.

One of these is symptomatic. In 1975, *Loomingu Raamatukogu* prepared an edition of Estonian proverbs and enclosed, at the end of the book, a list of all the publications that had been published since the launch of the series in 1957. This list included the names and works of authors who, at that time, were forbidden and had been announced as *persona non grata* (such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Vassili Aksjonov, Anatoli Kuznetsov).<sup>71</sup> The issue successfully passed the censorship and was already printed when suddenly the Head of the Estonian State Publishing Committee ordered the destruction of the whole edition. He claimed that the book had too narrow and too scientific approach for being suitable for a large audience and that the book contained vulgar and ‘dirty’ expressions and words.<sup>72</sup> Although similar collections of Russian proverbs with much ‘dirtier’ expressions had been earlier published in the Soviet Union, GLAVLIT now issued a decree forbidding the publication.<sup>73</sup> The real reason for the ban was never revealed

<sup>69</sup> Lauk, E. Practice of Soviet censorship in the press. The case of Estonia, 31.

<sup>70</sup> E.g., Hiedel, L. Loomingu Raamatukogu alaeast: märkmeid ja meenutusi, 72; Villandi, V. Toimetaja või kirjanik? [Editor or author?]. – Looming, 1991, 4, 541 [in Estonian].

<sup>71</sup> Ojamaa, J. Kümme aastat “Loomingu Raamatukogus” (1973–1983) [Ten years in “Loomingu Raamatukogu” (1973–1983)]. – Loomingu Raamatukogu, 2006, 37–40, 212 [in Estonian].

<sup>72</sup> Veskimägi, K.-O. Nõukogude unelaadne elu. Tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed, 263.

<sup>73</sup> GLAVLIT-i ülema käskkiri 7.2.1975 [Decree of the Head of the GLAVLIT of 7 February 1975]. ERA R-17-1-614, 4 [in Estonian].

to the editors involved. What makes this case ironic is that a month after the edition was destroyed, the all-Union GLAVLIT in Moscow issued a decree that cancelled the publishing ban.<sup>74</sup>

### **Taking advantage of institutional subordination**

Estonian GLAVLIT was not always the final arbiter in the editing and publishing process. A higher rank authority could overrule the decisions of local GLAVLIT censors if the editors had enough courage to appeal. For example, when the local censor banned publishing a panorama photograph of river Emajõgi in *Edasi*, the editor received permission to publish it from the military censor in Riga. Tartu was a 'closed city' because a large military base and airfield were located just at the boundary of the city, and it was strongly forbidden to publish photographs of Tartu taken from the air.<sup>75</sup>

The hierarchy of the Soviet media and publishing system also made it possible sometimes to publish texts that the local censors would have regarded or regarded as unsuitable. When in 1965, *Loomingu Raamatukogu* wanted to publish Finnish author's Veijo Meri's book 'Manillaköysi' in Estonian, the Estonian censorship authorities forbade it as the book dealt with a sensitive historical fact – Jatkosota (The Continuation War) between Finland and the Soviet Union. When the book had been translated into Russian and published in Moscow, it was finally allowed to publish it also in Estonia "in the same format as in Moscow".<sup>76</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Estonia, as well as the other Baltic states, remained in many aspects different from the other Soviet Union republics throughout the decades of the Soviet occupation. Several cultural, economic and social differences were possible for the reason that the pressures of the totalitarian system were weaker in the Baltic countries than in the rest of the Soviet Union. The relatively weaker pressure is explained partly by the shortness of the repressive Stalinist period in Estonia (years 1940–1941 and 1944–1953)<sup>77</sup> and the politics that considered Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as 'exemplary' Soviet Republics, the so-called 'Soviet West'. Therefore certain cultural resources of resistance (literature and press in national language, old cultural traditions like song festivals etc.) were allowed in the Baltic countries to a greater extent than in many other parts of the Soviet Empire.<sup>78</sup> The Soviet

---

<sup>74</sup> **Veskimägi, K.-O.** Nõukogude unelaadne elu. Tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed, 263.

<sup>75</sup> **Uus, S.** Leheneegri leivas, 253–254.

<sup>76</sup> GLAVLIT-i ülema asetäitja H. Azhnina/Laulu ettekanne Moskvasse 5.8.1966 [Report of the Deputy Head of the Estonian GLAVLIT H. Azhnina/Laul to Moscow on 5 August 1966]. ERA R-17-3-62, 4–9 [in Estonian].

<sup>77</sup> **Ruutsoo, R.** Estonia, 122.

<sup>78</sup> **Lauristin, M., Vihalemm, P.** Recent historical developments in Estonia: three stages of transition (1987–1997), 75.

ideology and propagated values of *homo sovieticus* had not much in common with the reality of Estonians. Furthermore, some scarce sources of alternative information were accessible (e.g. Finnish television in the northern part of Estonia) that fed critical thinking. The emergence and development of a non-political discourse in the press definitely did not contribute to the main purposes of the Soviet media – strengthening the positions of the Communist party and its leadership. Although the Estonian party and censorship authorities made big efforts in constructing and maintaining an all-penetrating controlling mechanism that generally prevented open resistance, silent opposition always existed and also found its expression in the official media. As demonstrated in this paper, the editors and journalists challenged the ideological guardians in various ways on both discursive and editorial levels. The use of a non-political journalistic discourse in parallel to the official-political discourse gave opportunities to develop discursive practices that enabled to transmit alternative messages. People read these two parallel discourses in different ways. One was for ‘us’, for the people, and the other was for the authorities. Dualism like this corresponded to the dual sense of reality in people’s minds that has been described, for example, by James Wertsch<sup>79</sup> and Aili Aarelaid.<sup>80</sup> One half of the duality was the Soviet sphere of communication, where one had to follow unacceptable and alien norms and values and to pretend that these were the right ones. The other half was the essentially private sphere, in which the norms and values obtained during earlier life experiences or from parents were hidden and maintained.

Analysing the process of societal and media transition in Eastern Europe, the Polish sociologist Karol Jakubowicz argued that

the media fell short of attaining for the system the legitimacy and credibility they were expected to provide. Rather, their operation was largely counterproductive. /.../ Accordingly, they performed the quite unintended function of undermining the system.<sup>81</sup>

Among the conditions and reasons why the Estonian Soviet press did not serve as a homogeneous propaganda channel and the journalists did not form a loyal group of ideology workers, we would point out the following:

- changing ideological-political context in the Soviet Union in general. Soviet society and politics did not remain the same throughout the decades of the Communist project. Changes in the ideological orientations of the party leadership and accordingly, the whole society, variations in power practices (e.g. the rigidity and crudeness of the Stalinist period, relative liberalisation in the 1960s, the stuffy stagnation period) – all these were reflected in the media;
- the hierarchical structure of the media system in the Soviet Union that was created for making control more efficient, but simultaneously also undermined it. Newspapers and magazines each had their own ideological importance. The all-Union press, the organs of the party organisations and newspapers in Russian

---

<sup>79</sup> **Wertsch, J. V.** Mind as Action.

<sup>80</sup> **Aarelaid, A.** Topeltnõõtlemise kujunemine kahel esimesel nõukogulikul aastakümnel [Development of double thinking in the two first decades of the Soviet time]. – Akadeemia, 2000, 4, 755–773 [in Estonian].

<sup>81</sup> **Jakubowicz, K.** Media as agents of change, 26.

language were considered more influential and therefore also more carefully controlled. The same applies to authors and topics. The publications on the lower levels of the hierarchy were less strictly controlled and supervised (regional and local newspapers, cultural, youth and sports press). The emergence and development of the journalistic discourse since the 1960s in these publications was tolerated and sometimes even encouraged;

- peculiarities of Estonian conditions compared to many other parts of the Soviet Union: the anti-Soviet, nationalistic and cultural resources were still maintained (among those the national language as the most important element of Estonians' identity); the relative openness towards the West and access to the alternative information sources;
- the flaws in the mechanism of supervision and control that made it possible to challenge and occasionally even ignore the censorship.

The discursive methods challenging or opposing the system that the authors and journalists used were often supported by editorial practices. In most cases, however, the editors were more cautious than the young and bold authors and journalists, and discouraged rather than encouraged clearly provocative acts against the Soviet system. The endeavours to pass rigid rules and break the chains of censorship were mostly driven by creative and professional motives. Open anti-Soviet political messages were regarded as provocations of no avail since they were too easy for censors to identify. Therefore, cases expressing straight criticism against the Soviet political system were very rare.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT of the University of Tartu, Estonia) and the project 'Actual Complexity of Cultural Communication and Methodological Challenges of Cultural Research' (SF0180002s07).

## **”VAIKSE VASTUPANU” PRAKTIKAD EESTI NÕUKOGUDE AJAKIRJANDUSES**

Epp LAUK ja Tiiu KREEGIPUU

Nõukogude Eesti trükiajakirjanduse olemuse ja rolli lahtimõtestamine nõuab mitmekülgset lähenemist. Kui toleaeget ajakirjandust näha üksnes ametliku info- ja propagandakanalina ning külma sõja aegse ideoloogilise relvana, siis tekib küsimus, miks eestlased seda ajakirjandust ikkagi tellisid ja lugesid. Vastus viitab sellele, et hoolimata eel- ja järeltensuurist sisaldasid ajalehed-ajakirjad ka midagi muud kui poliitilis-propagandistlikke kirjutisi ning et neis leidis midagi, mis vastas inimeste ootustele.

Erinevates väljaannetes, eeskätt väiksema rangusega kontrollitud kultuuri- ja noorteajakirjanduses kujunes välja hulk ajakirjanduslikke praktikaid, mis avardasid võimu poolt pressile ette kirjutatud rolli. Toimetustes püüti etteantud raamide (tsensuuri-reeglid, parteiline kontroll ja surve, ideoloogiline propagandistlik käsitluslaad jne) piires leida võimalusi ning vahendeid alternatiivse käsitluslaadi, uenduslike teemade ja vormide toomiseks ametliku pressiga veergudele. Võimu poolt ajakirjandusele ette kirjutatud kursilt kõrvale kaldumisi võib arhiividokumentide ja ajakirjanduslike tekstide põhjal vaadelda kui erinevaid ajakirjanduslikke praktikaid nii diskursiivsel kui toimetamise tasandil. Artiklis on käsitletud nõukogude ajakirjandussüsteemi reeglitele ja ideoloogilistele alustele mittevastavaid (või koguni vastanduvaid) ajakirjanduslikke praktikaid mõlemal tasandil.

Kuigi kõiki nõukogude ajakirjandussüsteemi proovile panevaid ja võimu ootusi eiravaid ajakirjanduslikke võtteid pole võimalik täielikult süstematiseerida, saab siiski välja tuua teatud enam levinud ning sagedamini kasutatud praktikaid. Näiteks *diskursiivsel* tasandil hakkas alates 1960. aastatest üha enam levima ajakirjanduslik diskursus, mis võimaldas oskusliku kasutamise korral (näiteks põimimine poliitilise diskursusega, sõnumite peitmine jne) teemakäsitluse avardamist ja uusi lähenemismurki. *Toimetamise* tasandil püüdsid aga toimetajad ja ajakirjanikud ära kasutada nõukogude ajakirjanduse kontrollimehhanismide puudusi ning nõrkusi. Tänu isiklikele kontaktidele ja sidemetele ajakirjanduse valvuritega tsensuuri- ning parteiorganites, manööverdades osavalt kattuvate käsuliinide ja mõnikord vastuollu sattuvate ideoloogiliste nõuete vahel, suudeti mitme väljaande (näiteks Edasi, Loomingu Raamatukogu, Noorus) toimetuses tsensuuri vāravate vahelt läbi suruda mitmekūlgset ning huvitavat materjali.

Artikkel tugineb arhiivimaterjalidele ja ajakirjanike mälestustele. Algallikadena on kasutatud Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei (peamiselt EKP Keskkomitee büroo fondi) ja Eesti NSV GLAVLIT-i dokumente aastatest 1945–1985. EKP KK büroo koosolekute protokollidest, stenogrammidest ja ENSV GLAVLIT-i aruandluse ning kirjavahetuse dokumentidest on välja otsitud juhtumid, kus partei või tsensuuriorgan on trükiajakirjandusest leidnud “ideoloogilisi eksimusi” ja “vigu toimetuse töös”. Aastakümneid hõlmav allikmaterjal osutab, et “vead” ja “eksimused” olid üsna ühetüübilised ning sageli olid nende taga ajalehtede ja ajakirjade toimetuste töötajate sarnased käitumispraktikad. Mitmekūlgsema pildi saamiseks ja veendumaks selles, et üht või teist ajakirjanduslikku võtet on nõukogude ideoloogiat ning ajakirjandusele seatud ootusi eiravalt kasutatud sihilikult, on teiseks oluliseks allikatüübiks ajakirjanike mälestused. Selles osas on põhi- allikaks TÜ ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituudi välja antud kolm köidet eesti ajakirjanike elulugusid (“Meie jäljed jäävad”, “Teelised helisillal”, “Kuidas vaatad, nõnda näed”).