

ESTONIAN JOURNALISTS IN SEARCH OF NEW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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Introduction

Journalists in post-communist countries clearly face the problem of redefining their professional identity. This problem has generally been understood and formulated as “a redefinition of journalists from propaganda tools to providers of competently collected and written information and non-partisan, impartial and neutral interpreters of social reality” (Jakubowicz 1995, 78). However, the problem varies in different countries according to local circumstances, historical conditions and national traditions. Within the uniform pattern of controls over the media there is considerable variation between different East- and Central European countries in the way the control was practised by communist authorities as well in the general patterns of media performance.

This article focuses on how interpretations of roles and self-perception of Estonian journalists has changed since the end of the Soviet regime.¹ The pressure exerted by the central structures of power was not as overwhelming in Estonia as in Russia, Ukraine or Belorussia. In Estonia, journalists were for decades in an ambiguous situation: working within the framework of ideological brain-washing, a part of them was also involved in an oppositional cultural resistance. In Estonia media have played an important role in the national liberation processes since 1988. There are several questions we may ask: What happened to the “old guard” of journalists in Estonia during this process and after collapse of communism? Can we talk about a confrontation between the “old and new guard” in Estonia as in many other respective countries? How do Estonian journalists define their professional identity today? How is the quality of the editorial workforce² influenced by the changes in the conditions of media performance and working environments for journalists?

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The study is based on the data from a survey carried out in 1995 by the Department of Journalism of Tartu University. For comparative analysis we also used data from the first large survey of Estonian journalists (by the Department of Journalism and the Research Centre of Estonian Radio) in 1988, i.e. in the very beginning of the process of liberation. The data from 1988 reflect prevailing attitudes of the “old guard” of Estonian journalists before independence and during the years of stagnation in the 1980s.

For the 1995 survey, journalists were chosen randomly from 63 Estonian media organisations, employing approximately 1,500 journalists. The proportion of journalists from different types of media in our sample corresponded to the estimated overall editorial workforce almost exactly (although we had somewhat undersampled TV journalists, by including broadcast journalists the proportion allowed to make generalisations). The sample was also representative concerning the proportions of women and men in the editorial workforce. In all, 252 journalists responded, which amounts to 17 per cent of the estimated editorial workforce of Estonian language media.

Changing Self-Perceptions and Role Evaluations of Journalists

Definition and evaluation by journalists of their own professional roles and tasks has been a central issue in several studies of the professional behaviour of journalists in different countries.³ A common understanding does not exist on what should be the proper role of a journalist in the society. However, there seems to be unanimity about the professional criteria of “good” journalistic performance. Randal A. Beam's survey of the literature on professionalism in journalism describes a more or less generally approved ideal of a professional journalist. Beam (1990, 9-10) emphasises the willingness of professional journalists to stress education and training as a necessary preparation for a journalistic career; likewise professional journalists appreciate participation in professional organisations, commitment to and disinterest of their subjects of journalistic coverage as well as commitment to accuracy, service of public interest and protection of access of information, and, finally, ambitions to win professional awards. Empirical surveys of journalism in different countries show that this common ideal is not entirely met in practice (Wright 1974; Nayman, Lattimore, Alers-Montalvo 1974; Windahl, Rosengren 1976; Luostarinen 1982). Furthermore, to a certain extent, these studies yield controversial results. Journalism can develop in rather different directions, dependent upon political, legal, cultural and historical settings.

Role perceptions based on professional training tend to be rather universal and international. Professional education mostly stresses aspects that unify rather than diversify the role perceptions of journalists. Moreover, the generally recognised task of providing information to the public, the increasing similarity of technical conditions of work and production, and the bureaucratisation of news organisations promote a trans-cultural or trans-national image of the profession. As Splichal and Sparks (1994) report in their study of professional expectations among first-year journalism students in 22 countries, students express similar views about the role of a journalist. “There is no typical ‘European,’ ‘West-European,’ ‘American,’ ‘Latin-American,’ ‘socialist,’ or any other politically or geographically defined journalist or student of journalism” (Splichal and Sparks 1994, 181).

However, many studies clearly show that self-perceptions among journalists dif-

fer in different environments. Thus, British journalists see themselves “in the role of a transmitter of facts, a neutral reporter of current affairs.” German journalists stress opinion and interpretation of news (Köcher 1986, 43). The most common ideal among Swedish and Finnish journalists is that of an active examiner of public affairs who explains complicated events to the audience (Esaiaasson and Moring 1994, 272).

For journalists in post-Soviet countries like Estonia, definition of their professional role during the communist regime was quite controversial. On one hand, they had to follow the official conception of the roles and tasks of a Soviet journalist as they were determined by Communist Party: the main function of Soviet media was to be an ideological weapon in the hands of the Party. This meant that the ideal of a Soviet journalist was not based upon professional, but on political and ideological values and standards. A “professional” Soviet journalist was not allowed to be an unbiased transmitter of news. He or she was required to maintain an “active” position and to be an advocate of the Communist Party ideology. Professionalism of the Soviet journalist was measured by loyalty to the Party: “the level of political and party responsibility is a trait that characterises his professional maturity and (...) professional fitness” (Tepljuk 1989, 101). On the other hand, media performed their brain-washing role with different intensity and results in real life. Moreover, journalists could even perform a task opposite to that of spreading Party ideology. The Solidarity press in Poland during 1980-1981 is the best known example. This press was a major source of system-challenging and system-opposing content, according to Jakubowicz, who continues, “Much of the effort of the ‘Solidarity’ press has been to reclaim and present to its readers banned areas of Polish history, passed over in silence in official publications.(...) Publications of this kind did not directly oppose the communist system, but did present a challenge to its project of thought or cognitive control” (Jakubowicz 1992, 84, 86). The situation in the Baltic countries is not as well documented and understood as the Polish case. The main difference in the media situation between Baltic and Central European countries relates to the lack of their own state: Baltic nations were occupied by Soviets and submitted to the forcible russification. In these circumstances there was considerably stronger national cohesion and more unanimous mutual understanding between all groups of population. Common goals of national identity and membership survival, common native language (which was seriously endangered by official policy of russification) formed the ground for “silent” resistance, based mainly on the preservation of the traditional national cultural forms. Estonian media (even under the coverage of the official ideological lip-service) tried to contribute to the objectives of national survival. They carried a long tradition of participation in national cultural opposition to oppressing regimes through history (Hiiyer, Lauk, Vihalemm 1993). Paradoxically enough, participation in the cultural opposition against the pressure of the Soviet ideology did not mean that perception of their professional role among Estonian journalists differed significantly from the Soviet standard: although the attitudes were different from the official ideology, journalists felt themselves more advocates of certain values than producers of neutral information or non-partisan commentators of current affairs.

In the course of transforming the media's role and place in society, journalists in former communist regimes responded to the challenge of redefining their professional identity in different ways. This depended on the extent to which they had adopted the role of a propaganda tool, and succeeded in freeing itself from state and power structures after the collapse of communist regimes. Having been part of “propagan-

distic journalism” for decades, journalists could not shed their Messianic roles even under new circumstances (Vdovin 1995, 11). Journalists often continue to define themselves as “guardians” or “leaders” of society, providing politically biased information masquerading as objective knowledge (Jakubowicz 1996, 63). The confrontation between adherents of politicised and free media, the “old” and “new” guard, is more or less topical in Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, Belorussian, Ukrainian media, and in many other post-communist countries. Even after victory of the new political forces they are often themselves interested in keeping media under control, still considering them as “servants of (new) power.” However, this does not apply to Estonia in the same way. Having been deeply involved in the political struggle of the independence movement, Estonian media have been relatively successful in obtaining political independence, as compared with some other Central and Eastern European countries. This does not mean that the media are not influenced by politicians nor that there have not been attempts at indirect pressure from state authorities and politicians. However, this has not led to an “Italianization of the media,” as described by Splichal (1994), with partisan and state controlled media interwoven with politics, as it has frequently happened in Central and Eastern Europe.

Traditions of Journalistic Resistance and Four Ways How to Adapt to the System

In Estonia the tradition of resisting ruling systems through journalism goes back more than a hundred years. During the decades of russification in the 1880s to 1890s, newspapers supported national identity and self-assessment. Under severe censorship, the press taught people to read between the lines. The retention of historical memory of the people has been one of the most important missions of journalism (Lauk 1992). The media's role in the nation building process has been enormous in all Baltic countries and throughout their history.⁴

For the Baltic nations, the communist ideology was as alien and unacceptable as the occupation. It was enforced from outside by the occupying power, while the ruling system made significant and systematic efforts to destroy the historical memory of Baltic peoples. For example, during the after-war period millions of books and periodicals, published in the independent Republic of Estonia (1918-1940) were burnt in the central heating plant. Severe repression of cultural values, authors, musicians, journalists, and scientists during the Stalinist period told more about communism than any slogan or doctrine. Of course, a certain number of collaborators, careerists, and convinced supporters can always be found, but they remained a minority. Since Soviet propaganda was aimed directly against national values and absolutely undermined the true historical experiences of the people, a permanent conflict between the content of the media and the real life-world helped maintain collective national memories (Lauristin 1996, 2). Latent opposition surfaced in a variety of forms whenever signs of relief from political pressure and control appeared.

Specific conditions of the Soviet media created different modes of mixed adaptation/resistance among journalists. The ability to fulfil their ambiguous role without losing the confidence of audiences and the trust of authorities was adopted as a strategy of survival, widely known as the “radish phenomenon:” red from the outside and white from the inside. Journalists gained popularity by dealing with everyday life issues of ordinary people, treating problems “in a human way,” although in an ideo-

logically accepted form. Journalists and their audiences felt that they belonged to the same national and language community, in opposition to “them,” the ruling aliens. We can identify four strategies of professional survival typical to Estonian journalists during Soviet time.

First, there was a small number of cynical conformists who did not overtly oppose official ideology but just made fun of it. They acted according to the principle “the worst is the best,” enjoying absurdity and foolishness of the system. For them the “new times” are difficult because they are not used to being sincere and trustworthy. Instead they continue to look for the absurdities of the new power, demonstrating their independence.

Second, a significant group of so called “culturally responsible” journalists existed, who challenged the constraints of the official ideology, using metaphorical language, allegories and allusions. In a small language community like Estonia, there was also considerably large intelligent audiences who were able to follow quite complicated cultural codes and who felt themselves participating in common anti-power language games, led by national media. Since politics and ideology were the spheres of control by the Communist Party until the end of Soviet supremacy in 1988, no successful resistance was imaginable in those spheres. The cultural media created a public space where quite open political discourse became possible. Fully conscious and partly open cultural opposition to the officially fostered treatment of life was developed in cultural journals, literary and theatrical magazines, and cultural radio and television programmes. For this part of profession, new “information” media and commercialised broadcasting channels seem too simplified and too “lowbrow.” Today, these journalists still preserve their independent critical attitude. Many such journalists continue working in their former positions, some have found fresh opportunities in new weeklies and specialised magazines or prefer to work as free-lancers. For them the main problem seems to be inability to adapt themselves to the market driven journalism.

Third, a remarkable section of journalists, especially in the local papers, but also among the radio and TV staff, just did their job without problematising its political meaning. They felt themselves very much alike their audience, the so-called “average people.” Strong social control among the Estonian national community helped them to avoid the worst collaboration with the system. In the new situation these media workers have had to make critical assessment of their experiences as “Soviet journalists.” As they did not have any strong personal involvement in the old system, they were able to go along with the new expectations, feeling themselves now more comfortable to speak about “everyday life as it is.”

Finally, the smallest fourth group of the journalistic staff belonged to the Soviet elite (*nomenklatura*). They were editors-in-chief, heads of political departments, and a few leading political commentators who were trusted by the “Party bosses,” but mistrusted by their colleagues. editors-in-chief were nominated directly by the Central Committee of the CP and often they were recruited from the ranks of Party officials. As a rule, they were submitted to tight control by Party and KGB. We can fairly state that they really did not have journalistic identity, but more often identified themselves with the Party elite. By being included in the closed circle of the Party trustees, they often demonstrated to their fellow journalists their ability to protect “their own channel” against official pressures. After independence these “soldiers of the ideological front” mostly disappeared from the public stage into private business or they retired. Only very few former chief editors have remained in active positions in the

Estonian media. Political commentators seem to be more successful in converting their old political capital into a new one. Some of them have been elected into parliament, some are still working in the media due to their high professional skills which are valuable at any time, and some have retired.

As there were fewer channels and respectively less jobs in the media during the Soviet time, most journalists working in Estonia today are newcomers, generally very young people without any imposed Soviet identity.

Generation Replacement in Estonian Media

Generation replacement among journalistic profession in the last five years has been one of the strongest factors creating new professional identity. In the course of emerging a new professional ideology and the reorganisation of the division of labour and tasks of editorial staffs, a young generation of journalists has gradually occupied key positions in the media. Young editors of new publications prefer young journalists as employees. Thus, most Estonian journalists are under 40 years of age. This indicates that the generational change in the Estonian media was also the natural result of age and retirement among journalists. Most of those who were 50 or older in 1988 have retired by now (until 1995 the retirement age in Estonia was 55 for women and 60 for men). About 30 per cent of the journalists belonged to this age group in 1988. Equally, many women between 40 and 49 in 1988 have reached retirement age. This break in the age of journalists coincided with the transition period in society. But the breakthrough of a younger generation of journalists in the early 1990s reflects a typical phenomenon in the Estonian society: A remarkable part of the new political and economic elite is under 35. Thus, the change of generations has taken place without dramatic confrontations and struggles on a political basis between the “old” and “new” guards of journalists.

Table 1: Changes in the Age of Estonian Journalistic Workforce
(Percentage in Each Age Group in 1988 and 1995)

Age Group	1988	1995
Under 24 years	3	21
25-29	9	19
30-39	31	28
40-49	27	15
50-59	25	14
60 and older	5	3
Total	100	100

Most journalists, being relatively young, have a limited work experience. The most inexperienced ones work in weeklies: 73 per cent have less than five years experience. The growth of new enterprises has been highest among weeklies and apparently many newcomers also started their journalistic careers with these publications. Editorial staff in daily newspapers was more stable, although the proportion of young and inexperienced people is also high (57 per cent began their careers less than five years ago). The longest careers belong to television journalists: 52 per cent of them more than 10 years.

Table 2: Duration of the Job Career of Estonian Journalists in 1988 and 1995
(in percentages)

	1988	1995
Less than 2 years	11	25
3-5 years	14	26
6-10	20	14
11-15	13	13
16-20	11	8
21-25	11	4
25 and more	21	10

Since about half of today's journalists in Estonia began their careers less than five years ago, they have no work experience in the Soviet media system. In addition, 14 per cent of the journalists began their careers after 1986, a period of reforms and the independence movement. Thus, these individuals have entirely different social and professional experiences than the older generation. The fact is that the nature and influence of the media in Estonian society today depends largely on the knowledge and attitudes of young people. Although they have more energy, flexible minds and are capable of finding relevant answers to the challenges of transitional times, they also lack knowledge and experience, which too often makes Estonian journalists dependent on their sources and open to manipulation by politicians.

The Role of University Journalistic Education in Forming Professional Identity

Professional education and training are important preconditions for forming the professional identity of a journalist. An occupational consciousness emerges and develops in an atmosphere of formal studies and with the support of fellow students who adopt certain professional standards and values in the course of their studies. Tartu University is the only institution in Estonia that offers professional education in journalism.

Journalism training at Tartu University certainly contributed to developing cultural opposition among young journalists. Journalism as an academic field emerged at Tartu University during the first Soviet "thaw." From the late 1950s until the sixties and early seventies, journalism was considered a part of studies in Estonian language and literature. Students of journalism were taught more about the historical traditions of national journalism in 19th century than the realities of the Soviet media.

The Department of Journalism was established in 1976. Over the past 40 years, from 1957 to 1996, 504 journalism students have graduated from Tartu University, while 238 students have graduated from the department of Journalism.

Despite strong ideological pressures and control, Tartu University was one of the centres of latent opposition to the ruling regime. Although the journalism curriculum was based on the official Soviet model, the teaching atmosphere in Tartu was completely different. In spite of an officially accepted curriculum, and the recorded syllabi for the benefit of inspections from Moscow, many tried to teach journalism within the national context rather than through Soviet ideology. In 1980 students adopted a code

of ethics which remains the only code of conduct of Estonian journalists. It contained no official, ideologically shaded words, but stressed human and professional values. For example, it stated that journalists should not work for authorities but for the Estonian people; they should defend publicness and truth and not propagate values that they personally do not accept. A copy of the code reached soon the Party secretary of the University and KGB. As the text of the code was presented in non-confrontational way, stressing the common human values that were formally accepted also by the communist ideology, loyalty of students and teachers was not made a problem, but only the use of ideologically “incorrect” formulations.

Since the 1960s, but more so during the 1970s and 1980s, key positions in the media were held by journalism graduates. Coming from the small “academic community” of journalists they never became true collaborationists. Some of them, making career as editors-in-chief or even as Party apparatchiks managed to use “the strategy of radish” in their everyday work. This contributed to maintaining an oppositional spirit and even rescued the existence of university training (the only opportunity to get journalism education in Estonian and to be prepared for working in Estonian media). At the beginning of the 1970s, journalism training was in serious danger of being abandoned at Tartu University to be taken over by Communist Party high schools that were specialised in training the “Party soldiers” and used Russian as a language of instruction. Both in Riga, Latvia, and Vilnius, Lithuania, the admission of journalism students was discontinued for several years. With the help of a former journalism student, the then head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party, journalism training at Tartu University continued.

1976, however, the Department of Journalism was established but until 1995, journalism remained a part of humanities, while in 1996 it joined the Faculty of Social Sciences. This change was a sign of the changed perspective of the whole profession: from the preservation of cultural traditions and critical self-expression in complicated literary forms, professional standards have shifted towards objective knowledge of society, analysis of political and economical trends and comprehensive surveillance of the domestic and international events.

Changing Characteristics of Journalistic Workforce

During Soviet times, the journalistic job market was determined by a certain number of channels which were fixed by the structure of the Soviet media system. The staff of media organisations were appointed under the direct supervision of the Communist Party. Since the advent of **glasnost**, the Estonian press has been expanded enormously. In 1985, for the population about 1,5 million, 49 newspapers and 30 magazines appeared in Estonia. In 1990, the numbers were already 165 and 51, respectively. During the last six years nearly 600 new periodicals were launched. However, most of them were soon badly hit by economic hardship and disappeared. By the middle of 1996 there are four Estonian and two Russian national dailies, about 20 national weeklies, 30 national magazines, and about 40 local newspapers. In addition, there are hundreds of publications with relatively limited readership: special magazines and newspapers for specialised groups, advertising and entertainment publications (cross-words, comics, etc.), special publications of numerous organisations, enterprises, institutions, and schools. Along with a diversified media system, the high demand for a journalistic workforce brought to the job market hundreds of newcom-

ers with very different backgrounds. In a few years, the number of individuals involved in journalistic work, including publishing, increased about 40 per cent. The increasing number of journalists also has its influence on the development of a new professional identity. Many occasional workers have left media by now, but the average number of journalists is still about 20 per cent greater than at the end of the 1980s. The general educational level of Estonian journalists has been decreasing during the last 6 to 7 years. According to the 1988 survey, 78 per cent of the journalists graduated from universities, whereas in 1995 only 70 per cent had completed their studies. Since 1988, the proportion of journalism graduates among working journalists has not increased. Instead, the years of expansion introduced an unqualified labour force into the job market and the number of graduated journalists decreased.⁵

Table 3: Educational Background of Estonian Journalists

Degree:	1988	1995
Journalism degree	29	29
Other university degree	49	41
Some academic studies	7	9
High-school	8	13
Other	7	8
Total	100=362	100=252

This general educational level would appear to be insufficient for developing professionalism among Estonian journalists. However, when journalists themselves evaluate the importance of education and professional training to their career, they are rather uncritical and seem to underestimate the role of education in general. According to the 1995 survey, more than half of the interviewed journalists (64 per cent) shared the opinion that the average professional level has increased during the last five years: 80 per cent of them were partly or completely satisfied with this level, whereas 79 per cent of the interviewees considered their education and training as sufficient for working as journalists.

In principle, Estonian journalists agree that higher education and good knowledge are indispensable for good journalism, but ideals and practices seem to differ. Their best way of improving knowledge and skills is first of all offered by "the school of life:" learning in the course of everyday work was mentioned by 98 per cent of the journalists in 1995 and by 97 per cent in 1988. Academic studies were ranked eighth among ten possible ways of professional self-improvement in 1995 (29 per cent of the journalists considered them very important, 48 per cent important). In 1988 university studies in journalism were ranked more highly (48 per cent considered them very important, 33 per cent important). On the other hand, contemporary journalists have many opportunities for self-improvement which were quite limited before independence. Among these are professional literature, journals in several languages, travel abroad, scholarships, or access to the World Wide Web.

It can be stated (and the surveys support it) that journalistic work does not yet demand extraordinary professional knowledge and skills from Estonian journalists. There is no real competition on the level of professional competence among journalists, and keeping a position does not yet presuppose special professional education

and training. Also, journalists easily underestimate the importance of professional self-improvement. However, almost three quarters of the journalists (1995) suggested that the demands for competence and better professional skills are gradually increasing, indicating that the need for improving one's education and training will soon become a topic for Estonian journalists.

New professional standards are also formed by the new working environment and new technologies. Computerisation of work processes, especially in the print media, has been very rapid in recent years. Most journalists are accustomed to using computers in their everyday work. It is worth emphasising that Estonian journalists have excellent access to the Internet. According to RIPE (an organisation that monitors the growth of the Internet), Estonia has the second highest rate of connections among Eastern European countries and exceeds many other European countries in per capita access to the net (in June 1996 about 7,600 connections to the Internet were counted; the user numbers approach 20 000). 28 Estonian periodical publications have their electronic versions on the World Wide Web. Also 7 radio, 2 TV channels, and 3 news agencies maintain home pages. A survey by Illinois State University last spring shows that editors value highly the Internet experience of job candidates: 89 per cent of the editors from 108 newspapers claim that an experience with the Internet is important or very important (Press Notes, 1996).

Table 4: The Use of Computers in Everyday Work in Different Media
(Percentage of Users)

Journalists in:	Regularly	Sometimes	Do not use
Daily Newspapers	87	3	10
Weeklies	77	9	14
Magazines	67	6	27
Radio	61	12	27
TV	48	22	30

Formation of a New Professional Identity

During the last 8 years, Estonian media have undergone several stages of development, from being an agent in the rebirth of a political public sphere to the emancipation from the state and political parties. The image of national leadership has been replaced by the conception of a completely free press. The media system continues to develop towards a diversity of channels and different modes of performance. The influence of market forces is increasing rapidly; together with Western investments, Western professional criteria are spreading in the Estonian media world.

During the 1980s, a critically disposed generation of journalists emerged in the Estonian media. They were well educated (89 per cent of them had completed university studies), and they were active and socially sensitive, according to 1988 survey data. When defining the main tasks of a journalist in society, most journalists emphasised defending and expressing the interests of the public (97 per cent) and providing public information in the interest of the widest possible audience (99 per cent). This response corresponds to the main criteria of professionalism recognised

among Western media. When asked whose opinion about their work they considered important, 89 per cent of the journalists mentioned the audience, 77 per cent referred to their colleagues. The opinion of the party nomenclature was important only for 6 per cent, not important at all for almost a half of the journalists (48 per cent), while 34 per cent answered that it depends on the concrete person, and the rest remained indifferent. These attitudes clearly reflect a set of values that contributed to the assertion of a non-Soviet paradigm. This 1980s generation continues to be able to adapt to the new circumstances that emerged along with a changing role of the media after independence.

The new media generation needs to define its role under circumstances and pressures that are completely different from those of older generation. For the new Estonian journalists, the question of professional identity consists of at least three parts: what role do journalists take on the political battlefield; how do they define their positions in the commercialisation of the media industry; and what are their obligations towards the public? For journalists, this is a much wider circle of problems than a mere redefinition of their role in the new political environment, and it is becoming more topical in the "old" democracies as well.

An additional, important aspect emerges for journalists in connection with defining their roles in a changing social and media environment: what is their personal contribution and relation to their work, what are their personal opinions and moral responsibilities? More often than not, journalists hide their personality in their products; opinions are presented as those of sources or specialists, and the passive form of expression is often used. Even when reporting live, journalists prefer not to express their own point of view but that of some authorities (Kivikuru 1995, 107). This seems to be one way of retaining the image of "objective reporting," while losing the personal aspect of reporting at the same time.

The latest survey shows that journalists have, by and large, adopted the roles of transmitter of information and "watchdog." According to the 1995 survey, the vast majority of journalists (99 per cent) consider getting information to the public quickly and investigating the wrongdoing of the powerful (87 per cent) as their most important tasks. Most of them (85 per cent) also include a defence of the interests of people and this corresponds to the self-perception of American journalists. As Weaver and Wilhoit (1994, 4) point out, two journalistic roles are seen as extremely important by a majority of U. S. journalists: getting information to the public quickly (69 per cent) and investigating government claims (67 per cent). Finnish journalists also value their "watchdog" role highly (Heinonen 1995, 97).

However, in real life objective and qualitative reporting seems to be quite problematic. Commercial interests of privatised media become more and more separated from public interests, raising the question whether all publicly relevant issues, needs, and interests of different social actors are fairly represented in the media (Lauristin 1996, 2). Journalists must define for themselves more clearly the real meaning of objective reporting.

In their practice Estonian journalists obviously lack a clear understanding of their watchdog role. Whose watchdogs journalists should be, whether their work ought to be restricted to investigating political issues, and should it also concern the economic and commercial spheres of society — all these questions remain unresolved for Estonian journalists.

Estonian media have generally shifted from political and cultural to economic fields, which resulted in charges of irresponsibility among media driven by commercial in-

terests (Lauristin 1996, 4). The attitudes of journalists seem to confirm this statement. When asked about their feelings of responsibility, journalists emphasised their individual responsibility for personal practices (99 per cent) and the performances of their media organisations (93 per cent). Less than half of the interviewees (42 per cent) were ready to share responsibility for the Estonian media. Thus, for a majority of journalists, personal ambitions or the interests of their employers seem more important than the quality of the system as a whole.

Evaluations of the qualities of professional journalists reflect a substantial change in the character of journalistic work. Contemporary market oriented journalism has lost many of the creative and artistic features of the profession. Thus, in 1995, as a reflection of increasing market pressures, practical skills were regarded most highly. All journalists considered the ability to grasp problems quickly and formulate points clearly and understandably for the public as the most important and necessary quality of a good journalist (very important 91 per cent, important 9 per cent). Equally important was the ability to react fast to events, followed by objectivity and exactness of facts and expressions as additional qualities. Different attitudes of old and new generations also emerge from these evaluations. For instance, in 1988 journalists mainly stressed moral values and journalism as a cultural and national mission. Most highly evaluated were honesty, fights against lies and hypocrisy, creative attitudes towards one's work, a good education, and a high level of knowledge.

Conclusions

Five central points may be made in conclusion: (1) Journalism in Estonia could not develop as a profession with its own identity before independence. (2) The majority of Estonian journalists did not adopt the Soviet interpretation of the role of media and journalists in society, but tried, instead, to find ways of resisting the ruling system through journalism. Journalism was not a profession but it was a mission to a great extent. (3) After independence was regained in 1991, preconditions for the professionalisation of journalism emerged at the institutional level. The concept of a free press together with the growing influence of market forces are the driving forces that influence formation of a new professional identity. (4) Professional journalistic standards will continue to exist theoretically rather than practically until a serious need for professional requirements occurs as a consequence of the saturation of the job market. (5) Distinctions between employers and employees are often unclear, since many Estonian journalists are employers and employees at the same time as shareholders or owners of media enterprises. Further developments of market relations and the democratic structures of civil society will soon demand a more distinct definition from journalists about their position in the society than they have provided to date.

Notes:

1. For better understanding it has to be added that Estonian media system is rather small. For 1.4 million inhabitants (about 900 000 Estonian speaking among them) we have about 250 titles of newspapers and magazines. Besides the public broadcasting (Estonian Radio with 4 channels) and TV, several new private radio stations are acting in Estonia today.
2. Editorial workforce in this study includes journalists who are responsible for the preparation and transmission of information and who belong to the editorial staffs of print or electronic media; they

are employed full-time and have a salaried position (e.g., all types of editors, correspondents, reporters, columnists, but not photographers, cartoonists and technical TV and radio staffs).

3. The largest of them are: Tunstall 1974; Johnstone, Slawski, Bowman 1976; Weaver, Wilhoit 1991; Weibull 1991; four large surveys of Finnish journalists have been completed: Vehmas 1963; Kehlinna, Melin 1988; Melin, Nikula 1993; Heinonen 1995.

4. A comprehensive survey about how media in the Baltic countries contributed to national survival, resistance to several occupational forces, and the building of democratic societies is presented by: Hyer, Lauk, Vihalemm, (eds.) 1993.

5. According to Weaver and Wilhoit, the proportion of U.S. journalists with at least a bachelor's degree has grown (from 58 per cent in 1971 to 82 per cent in 1992). The number of those who majored in journalism or other communications subjects was 56 per cent in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1994, 3). In Russia about 86 per cent of the journalists had bachelor's degree in 1992 (Johnson and Weaver 1994). The average educational level of journalists in Finland is more similar to that in Estonia. About one fourth of Finnish journalists have completed academic studies in journalism and 40 per cent have undertaken academic studies in some other field (Heinonen 1995, 89).

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