

Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts
Arbeitsbereich Politik

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Estonian National Identity Discourse in
1939-1940
The Emergence of a New Hegemony

92/2023

Freie Universität Berlin

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Abstract:

In this paper, I observe and analyse the developments in the Estonian national identity discourse from the bases era in 1940 all the way until Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared on 21 July. My understanding of hegemony is based on the Gramscian tradition, and the primary aim of this work is to focus on observing the destabilisation of the old hegemonic discourse. In order to map out the dominant discourse in Estonian media, I have worked through the numbers of Postimees from 01.01.1940-21.07.1940 and categorised the most important discourse elements. The change of the official discourse happened in June of 1940, with the most radical change happening with the change of government on 21 June. The new hegemon defined the old government as an enemy from the first speech onwards. Nevertheless, the new discourse was in the beginning clearly mixing elements from the old regime as well, continuing the positive narratives describing Estonian history and having both pro-Soviet and pro-independence people still in media, although the adopted narratives were usually manipulated to serve the new regime. There were additionally unexpected new narratives entering the discourse even after the regime change, which weakened the build-up of a logical alternative narrative. Despite apparent Soviet attempts to “get consent” from Estonians, the new discourse seems to have dominated only on paper.

Keywords:

discourse; Estonia; hegemony

Arbeitspapier 92/2023

Abteilung Politik am Osteuropa-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin

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Andreas Reimand (2023) Estonian National Identity Discourse in 1939-1940. The Emergence of a New Hegemony. Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts (Abteilung Politik) 92/2023 Freie Universität Berlin 2023.

Impressum

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Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts, Freie Universität Berlin
Abteilung Politik

Garystraße 55
14195 Berlin

Redaktion: Alexander Libman
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Lektorat/Layout: Alexander Libman

Table of contents

Abstract.....	4
Table of contents	5
Introduction.....	7
1940 as the Turning Point in Estonian History: Background and the Existing Research	10
Background.....	10
Existing Research	13
Studying Rapid Discursive Change: Theory and Method	17
Main Concepts.....	17
National identity.....	17
Political Discourse.....	20
Cultural hegemony.....	22
Conclusion.....	24
Research problem	25
Methodology	26
The media during the bases era (September 1939 – June 1940).....	29
Main themes of the bases-era discourse	29
Neutrality.....	29
Independent nation.....	30
Small state	31
Survival of Päts' narrative.....	32
Significant Others in Estonian discourse	33
The Soviet Union in Estonian public media.....	34
From bases to occupation.....	35
Establishment of the Soviet hegemony during the Red Month	38
First Week (21.06-29.06).....	39
Estonian identity.....	39
Enemies	42
Foreign affairs	43
Small state	44
Issues.....	44
Conclusion.....	45
Second week (30.06-05.07)	47
Clarifying “the Other”.....	47
Attitude to Estonian culture.....	48

Small state	49
Structural changes.....	50
Conclusion.....	51
Third week (06.07-14.07)	52
Elections.....	52
Including new social classes	55
“From West to East”	56
Redefining the Estonian history	58
Conclusion.....	60
Fourth week (15.07-21.07).....	62
New vocabulary	62
Estonian Working People’s Republic	63
Integration of culture and history into the new narrative.....	64
President Päts - Final remnant of the old Republic	65
Towards Soviet Estonia	66
Conclusion.....	67
Conclusion	69
Bibliography.....	72

Introduction

The studies of identity have received a lot of attention in the field of international relations. There are many studies related to how identity is formed, developed and strengthened. They are, however, mostly focused on how the cultural hegemon is strengthening its claim that it is the legitimate hegemon and how the state's identity is tied together with the hegemonic order. Much less studied are the moments in history where the hegemony has radically changed in the nation, and with it the national discourse.

My study aims to help understand what happens if there is a radical change in hegemony and the new hegemon aims to redefine the national identity. Which methods does the new hegemon use to justify their claim to power? How much of the old discourse is used, how much can we see conflicting messages from the hegemon due to articulation between the old and new hegemonies? Which methods are used to destabilise the identity so it can be redefined? How does the new hegemon justify radically redefined values?

In order to study the change of discourse due to changes in hegemony, a case study of Estonia was picked. The years of 1939-1940 characterised drastic changes in Estonian political history, where in less than a year after the beginning of the Second World War, the governmental and public narrative changed from authoritarian nationalistic values to totalitarian left-wing ones due to Soviet influence.¹ Such change in one year is radical and rare – especially considering that during this year developments in Estonia were mostly peaceful.

Since even repressive regimes rely not just on force but also on propaganda, they need to justify their actions to the population. In the worst case, they could at least mobilise support from collaborators, who become the new elites, and at best perhaps the regime is able to mobilise support from at least some parts of the public. The Baltic region can thus be a credible place for observing such a change in hegemony – in the summer of 1940 both Republican-era and Soviet-minded people were present in leading institutions and the new elite still used elements from the old era to legitimise their new status and the change of dominant discourse made it possible to test the discourse with new ideas. Some speeches were very socialist, while others tried to accommodate elements from both the old and new eras. Another element to follow is the pace of change in the discourse - just in a month, the discourse moved from cherishing the independent state to joining the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Soviet discourse of the period is still unique, as many ideas presented in the media then are not the ones used later in the ESSR.

¹ Seppo Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. Helsinki: Tänapäev. 471-478

The objective of this paper is to trace the rapid discursive change in Estonia by working through the national discourse of the “Red Month” from 21 June until 21 July² and to analyse the change of hegemony in Estonian society. This is done by studying a contemporary national newspaper named "Postimees" and analysing the discursive change in this source. To understand the differences from the national Estonian discourse, “bases era”³ ideals and discourse will also be introduced. This method has, however, its limitations. Since this study is based only on one newspaper and on a limited time span, it can be complicated to make a final conclusion based only on this study. Instead, it could be seen as a pilot study showing how to analyse the rapid change in discourse during the change in hegemony.

Both nationalist and Soviet elements appeared in Estonian media during the Red Month. Most of the studies focus on how nations are building a stable identity and how are national values embedded in the identity. Contrary to standard research design, my study tries to go upstream and focus on the opposite, asking how the new Soviet hegemony destabilises the Estonian national identity through a rapid discursive change with the Soviet influence growing on a weekly basis and the national hegemony diminishing on a month. Together with observing the changes in discourse, it becomes possible to observe the hegemonic change in Estonia, where the new hegemon uses both old and new elements in attempts to establish an alternative dominant Estonian discourse – and in time, a new Estonian identity.

The main goal of my study is to analyse the messages of the hegemon aimed at the public. It does not focus on the question of whether the new discourse was accepted by the majority nor which parts were accepted better. Also, my goal is not to analyse to which extent either discourse presents the truth or what was the role of censorship in the media. The only goal of this paper is to observe the Estonian discourse in the media; show which narratives were established, which were lost, and how the change happened during this critical period of the Second World War.

The first chapter “1940 as the Turning Point in Estonian History” will provide the reader with the historical background for our case study. It includes a summary of existing research on the topic. The following chapter “Studying Rapid Discursive Change” will introduce the theoretical background and the main concepts used in this study: national identity, political discourse and

² “Red Month” is my own term used to refer to the month (21.06.1940-21.07.1940) when the Estonian government had already been replaced by the more Soviet-minded one, but according to the official position of the Soviet Union, Estonia was still independent.

³ Bases era – a period in Estonian history when the Soviets had their bases on Estonian soil, but the state was still officially independent. It started in September 1939 and ended in June 1940. (Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg, Lauri Vahtre, et al. (2005). Eesti ajalugu. VI: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni. Tartu: Greif. 152-163)

cultural hegemony. It is followed by a thorough introduction of the research problem and methodology of the study. “The media during the bases era” provides the reader with the main points of the Estonian national narrative during the bases’ era from January May 1940: neutrality, small state, independence, president Päts, Others, and the Soviet Union. The last part of the chapter describes the Soviet seizure of power while continuing with the discourse analysis. The next chapter “Establishment of the Soviet hegemony during the Red Month” introduces the changes happening in the national discourse. It is divided into four sections, each dealing with a different week and what noticeable changes happened that week. During the first week, the changes to the discourse are described, analysed and compared with the bases’ era discourse. In the second week, the analysis focuses on how the new discourse is establishing itself and becoming more stable. In the third week, the new government declared elections and legalised the Estonian Communist Party which again caused changes in public discourse. The fourth week first declares a socialist, then Soviet state in Estonia, which again causes rapid developments in the discourse. The final chapter is the conclusion, where the findings of the research are shortly concluded and again presented: how the discourse changed during this period and how it matches with the theoretical background.

1940 as the Turning Point in Estonian History: Background and the Existing Research

The period between the Augusts of 1939 and 1940 marks the critical moment for the fate of the Baltic states and Finland, which decided their side on the upcoming Cold War. Lots of decisions were made during this era: the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the beginning of the Second World War, the “Bases Treaties,” Winter War, the military occupation of the Baltic states, declaration of the new Soviet Republics – all happened during this one eventful year and marked the turn from West to East for the Baltic states. The annexation of Estonia and the following 50 years of the socialist era are still considered to be tragic and illegitimate by modern Estonian discourse and are one of the pain points even today.

In this part of the paper, I will briefly introduce the modern interpretation of early 20th-century Estonian history, with the main focus being on the last years of 1939 and 1940. Additionally, I introduce the most important studies and books that have focused on this period and provide additional data for this paper.

Background

Estonia achieved its independence after the end of the First World War due to the collapse of the Russian Empire. Estonians were able to fend off the Russian Reds and achieve a favourable peace treaty, signed in Tartu on 2 February 1920. The threat of the Soviet regime, however, remained. For example, in 1924 Soviet-supported communists tried to take over the state. Estonia was able to remain democratic until 1934 when the head of state Konstantin Päts forbade political parties in order to avoid allowing the radical Vaps movement to gain power. However, Päts never gave up the authoritarian powers he gained, and he led Estonia until the end of the Republic’s independence.⁴

The beginning of the end of the Estonian state started with the outbreak of the Second World War. In the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, two totalitarian states – Germany and the Soviet Union – partitioned Eastern Europe into two spheres of influence, where both could act without bothering the other. In this pact, Estonia remained in the Soviet sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Estonia had failed to secure an alliance that could effectively guarantee its independence during the interwar era and so was easy picking for the Soviet Union.

When Germany attacked Poland on 1 September and while the Soviet Union was preparing to do the same, Estonia declared itself to be a neutral state, not wishing to participate in the war. On 14 September 1939, a Polish submarine fled to Estonia. The Soviets considered this a breach

⁴ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 388-468

of neutrality and demanded negotiations. Estonia caved into the Soviet demands made during the negotiations and on 28 September 1939 Estonia and the Soviet Union signed a mutual assistance pact, also known as the Treaty of Moscow or the so-called “*bases treaty*.” It was a military pact, which allowed Soviet troops into Estonia, but the Soviets also guaranteed to retain the existing regime in control.⁵ Similar treaties followed with Latvia and Lithuania at the beginning of October.⁶

Soviet troops entered Estonia on 18 October 1939 and although the number of troops was larger than what was initially agreed upon, the basis of the treaty seemed to work. The Soviet military was kept in its bases, contacts with local communists were avoided, and public relations between Estonia and the Soviet Union were good for once. The details of the treaty were not clear though and so, Estonia and the Soviet Union were constantly negotiating how to exactly implement the treaty.⁷

Although the treaty was seen as a de facto loss of independence by many states in the world, the Soviets kept their word for the first months. The government and media remained independent from the Soviet regime and were keenly focused on keeping their political independence. Regardless, the Estonian government did not have it easy during the Soviet era. The Moscow Treaty was signed hastily and there were lots of irregularities and uncleared points in the treaty and the Soviet Union used it to make further demands. For example, the Soviet Union claimed that the number of troops only counts for infantry on the ground and that the marines should be counted separately. Estonia claimed that the number of troops made up the maximum that Estonia could host, and it also included marines, families of soldiers, civilian positions, etc. In most cases, the Soviets were able to enforce their demands. Thus, while remaining Estonian, the government had to constantly balance keeping the ever-increasing Soviet demands at bay while trying to keep the public unaware of the issues they had with the Soviet regime. To the public the Estonian government presented the situation as a diplomatic victory, confirming that the relations with the Soviets were good and that the treaty they signed had prevented a war on Estonian soil.⁸

The situation changed in May 1940, when Germany was advancing in the west, conquering Benelux, Denmark, and Norway and thus cutting off any communication for Estonia with the rest of the world that was not approved by the Germans. The only nation Estonia was still able

⁵ Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg, Lauri Vahtre, et al. (2005). *Eesti ajalugu*. VI: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni. Tartu: Greif. 153-159

⁶ Hanno Ojalo. (2010). *1939: Kui me valinuks sõja...* Tallinn: Grenader Kirjastus. 11-13

⁷ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 473-478

⁸ Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg, Lauri Vahtre, et al. (2005). *Eesti ajalugu*. VI: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni. Tartu: Greif. 159-163

to keep contact with, were the smaller states in the neighbouring Baltic Sea and the states Estonia used to consider the biggest threat to Estonian independence – Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union took advantage of this new development by putting pressure on the Baltics and on 28 May, an article in Pravda accused the Estonian elite of being anti-Soviet, anti-German, and pro-British. This marked the change in relations between the USSR and the Baltic states and in June, the Soviets started accusing all three Baltic states of breaking the treaty and conspiring against the Soviet regime. On 16 June, the Soviets issued an ultimatum, demanding allowing a “sufficient” number of Soviet troops into Estonia and the creation of a new, Soviet-friendly government. At the moment of the ultimatum, there were over 400 000 soldiers mobilised next to the Baltic borders. Estonian leadership caved into the demands and the so-called “people’s government of Vares” was established. This government was handpicked and chosen by a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Andrey Zhdanov. It was headed by a left-leaning poet Johannes Vares-Barbarus, who had never had official ties with either the Soviet Union or the Communist Party and neither had any of the members of the new government. Despite this, they had all left-wing leanings or earlier connections with the Soviet embassy and were ready to obey the Soviet demands.⁹

The Estonian media largely followed the trends of the state. The freedom of the press had been mostly guaranteed in Estonia until President Päts established his authoritarian regime. In September 1934, the “National Propaganda Office” (*Riiklik Propaganda Talitus*) was established, which slowly but surely was able to establish its role as the censoring office, ending up with the head of the office also becoming the minister of propaganda in January 1939. By that time, Estonian journalism was largely institutionalised to the point of anonymity – written texts usually lacked the name of the author, and the writer of the text was not considered important. Estonians had few opportunities to sincerely express their opinion in the newspapers - instead, the articles were written in the name of the Estonian public.¹⁰ In the spring of 1940, the office was restructured under the name “Information Centre” (*Informatsiooni Keskus*), which could be considered an attempt to include the opposition in order to unite the society more during the bases era. Having a functioning censoring institution made it easier for the Soviets to take over control of the Estonian media.¹¹

The new government followed Soviet orders: the Communist Party of Estonia (ECP) was legalised, the military was politicised, new snap elections were declared for the lower chamber

⁹ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 485-487

¹⁰ Indrek Treufeldt. 2013. Ajakirjanduslikust faktiloomest ja selle analüüsimise võimalustest. Eesti Akadeemilise Ajakirjanduse Seltsi Aastaraamat. 17-18

¹¹ Laura Vaan. 2005. Propagandatalitus Eesti Vabariigis autoritaarsel ajajärgul. Tartu: University of Tartu. 20-34

of the parliament, and the upper one was disbanded. A new electoral bloc was created for the elections – the Estonian Working People's Union (where also the ECP was participating), which *de facto* was also the only bloc allowed to take part in the elections. It received 92,8% of the votes and formed the parliament. Only after the elections was the wish to join the Soviet Union made public. All three Baltic parliaments gathered on a single day, 21.07, and all three decided to join the Soviet Union. Estonia was declared to be the Estonian Socialist Soviet Republic and the Soviet Union officially accepted ESSR into the union on 6 August 1940.¹²

The newspaper we are observing – *Postimees* – was taken over by the leading members of the ECP (headed by Max Laosson) during the first half of the Red Month. Officially, on 7 July, the old editor of *Postimees* Jaan Kitzberg resigned from the newspaper, although *de facto* it happened sooner. Such a takeover did not happen with all newspapers – some (for example *Päevaleht* and *Teataja*) retained their old leadership, but “were visited by leading revolutionary members,” and the tone of all newspapers soon was both very similar and very supportive of the new regime.¹³

My study focuses on the described period – starting with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and ending with the declaration of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic on 21 July 1940. To explore the rapid discursive change, the paper asks which methods were used to justify the change of the public discourse in the Estonian newspaper *Postimees* from Estonian Republican to the Soviet one, which elements were used by the last leaders of the Estonian Republic, and what was the rationalisation of giving up Estonian independence in order to join the USSR. The emphasis of the study thus lies on the Red Month, which is when the transition happened from the nationalist discourse to the socialist one.

Existing Research

There are numerous studies and books that have dealt with this hotspot in Estonian history, focusing on how Estonia lost its independence. The most famous work belongs to the historical book set: *Eesti Ajalugu: I-VI* (“Estonian history: I-VI”). It was started in the thirties with the goal of creating one all-inclusive narrative of Estonian history and finally finished in 2020.¹⁴ It is considered one of the best collections on Estonian history, and the book number VI, which covers the bases era, helps me to compare news reports with the modern interpretation of the event of 1940.¹⁵ Similarly, Seppo Zetterberg’s “Estonian History (*Viron historia*)” is the most

¹² Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 487-492

¹³ Meelis Saueauk. 2010. *Nõukogude anneksioon 1940. aasta Eesti ajakirjanduse kõverpeeglis*. Tuna (4). 8-23

¹⁴ Teet Korsten. “Eesti ajaloole pandi punkt”, *Postimees*, 19.12.2020

¹⁵ Pajur, Ago, Tannberg, Tõnu, Vahtre, Lauri, et al. (2005). *Eesti ajalugu*. VI, Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni. Tartu: Greif

comprehensive book explaining Estonian history to the Finnish reader. His book, consisting of an in-depth introduction to Estonian history, is considered one of the best Estonian history studies written outside of Estonia, and its translated version has become popular in Estonia as well.¹⁶

Since my paper deals with the Soviet version of Estonian history, Soviet scientific books focusing on the history of Estonian SSR are also used as supporting literature. The first and earlier book, named “The history of Estonian SSR: From the antiquity to the contemporary times (*Eesti NSV ajalugu: Kõige vanemast ajast tänapäevani*)” is the second edition of full the Soviet version of Estonian history which the later Soviet history books used as a basis for further research.¹⁷ “History of Estonian SSR (*Eesti NSV Ajalugu*)” is a two-part set, aimed for the university students and provides a more thorough and later-Soviet discourse for Estonian history.¹⁸ These books are primarily used in my paper is to compare their version with the one presented in the contemporary media and to see, which elements were only present in the early Soviet Estonian discourse and which took root.

In addition to direct contact with the Soviet history books, my paper was further supported by studies of Kokk and Adamson, who introduce how the Estonian Republic and the June coup d'état were handled during the Soviet era. Kokk focused on analysing how the history of the Republic of Estonia was depicted in Soviet history books throughout the Soviet era, noticing that with time passed, the interpretation of the Estonian Republic in Soviet discourse became less directly hostile (the first and most hostile version being published in 1952).¹⁹ Adamson brings out the silence regarding the June *coup d'état* – during the first Soviet year, they were largely ignored after Estonia had joined the Soviet Union.²⁰

In order to understand the situation in the media, two studies are used to explain the limits contemporary Postimees had to face. Laan's study focused on the institutions enforcing censorship in Estonia, analysing its reasons, effectiveness, and effects on the local newspapers.²¹ Saueauk's scientific article analysed the situation of Estonian journalism in 1940 from the beginning of the year until the Red Month. His work is focusing on the wider developments, which accompanied the Soviet takeover of Estonian media. Thus, he explained which newspapers were taken over and compared the news reported in contemporary

¹⁶ Seppo Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. Helsinki: Tänapäev

¹⁷ Gustav Naan. 1957. *Eesti NSV Ajalugu: Kõige vanemast ajast tänapäevani*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus

¹⁸ Karl Siilivask. 1976-1980. *Eesti NSV ajalugu: I-II osa*. Tallinn: Valgus

¹⁹ Toomas Matthias Kokk. 2020. *Eesti Vabariigi kuvand Eesti NSV eestikeelsetes ajalooõpikutes*. Tartu: University of Tartu

²⁰ Andres Adamson. 1994. 1940. aasta juunisündmuste ajaloolisest seletusest Eestis aastail 1940-1989. Tartu: University of Tartu. 8-26

²¹ Laura Vaan. 2005. Propagandatalitus Eesti Vabariigis autoritaarsel ajajärgul

newspapers with the reflection of these events in modern historiography. This article complements my study well, providing the context needed outside of the newspapers' discourse, for example by explaining how Postimees was taken over and highlighting the similarities and differences between the topics published by different newspapers during the Red Month. Saueauk made some important discoveries. Firstly, he acknowledged that the Red Months' newspapers adopted some of the old rhetoric (such as keeping calls for Estonian people to keep their calm, which had been common already during the bases era). Secondly, he marks that due to previous censorship, the contemporary newspapers avoided creative interpretation of new messages of the government, publishing them without any further explanation. Thirdly, he states that after the June events some newspapers seemed to sincerely hope for the increase of liberties at the beginning of the Red Month.²²

Regarding the previous discourse analysis of the era, Ventsel analysed how the meaning of the words "us" changed in Estonia from 1940-1953. Red Month's Estonian Republic received a chapter as well. An important change from already Vares' first speech is the change of address. Instead of the classical beginning that appealed to the "Estonians" or to "compatriots," Vares turned to the "Estonian citizens" instead, marking the start of the turning era, adding "comrades" already in his next speech. Ventsel however also notices the incoherent usage of this new way of addressing and marks that finally, "comrades" took root only after Estonian had been annexed into the USSR and the word "citizen" acquired a negative ring.²³

Estonian identity has received noticeable attention before, both in Estonia and abroad. It is interesting to note though, that different researchers have reached different conclusions in their studies. For example, Kerstin Saarkoppel introduces the various scholarly interpretations present in Estonia: an ethnic nation centered around the ethnic state (Pettai); the identity which is moving away from the ethnocentric perspective towards a more individual pragmatic one (Lauristin); potential movement towards the wider net of identities (Feldman; in case of Estonia, for example, European, Nordic, Finno-Ugric, etc.). In her analysis, Saarkoppel focuses on Estonian identity from the national awakening in the 19th century all the way until the beginning of the 21st century, emphasizing that the ideal identity in the Soviet era was without strong nationalist sentiment.²⁴ Modern Estonian identity studies have focused on the current nation-building with the focus of where Estonian identity is aiming for. Polese et al brought examples

²² Meelis Saueauk. 2010. Nõukogude anneksioon 1940. aasta Eesti ajakirjanduse kõverpeeglis. *Tuna* (4). 8-23

²³ Andreas Ventsel. "“Meie” konstrueerimine Eesti poliitilises retoorikas 1940.-1953.a.," Tartu: Tartu Ülikool. 26-31

²⁴ Kerstin Saarkoppel. 2002. Estonian identity, Estonian nationalism: Impact of European Union accession. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia

from e-Residency and contemporary tourist marketing strategies, which emphasise innovative and de-Sovietised identity tied together with Nordic aims.²⁵

Peetersoo has analyzed the role of Significant Others in Estonian identity, analyzing the relations between the Estonian-speaking majority and other languages-speaking minorities throughout contemporary history. Most historical minorities are viewed positively in Estonia. The largest one, however – Soviet-era Russian migrants are often seen as a threat. What is noticeable, is that the last considerable shift in defining the Other happened during the period my study is also analyzing. With historical internal negative Other, the Baltic Germans leaving Estonia and the Soviet Union becoming the threat to Estonian independence, the migrant Russians became the focus of negative attention during the Soviet era.²⁶ Clearly this was not the planned effect the Soviet Union wanted to have with its new discourse, but this side-effect cannot be ignored when analyzing the development in Estonian identity during the Soviet era. The goal of my study in the empirical field is to introduce the politically dominant discourse of the “people’s government” of Estonia. Both Soviet and Estonian identities have been studied on a grander scale, but Estonian identity lacks in-depth studies regarding this specific moment. As Estonian historians have noted, since Estonia is small, and scientific study of its history has been only going on for a century, there are still many fields in Estonian history where only the surface has been scratched.²⁷ All the previously mentioned authors – Saarkoppel, Peetersoo, and Ventsel focused on a grander scheme, while I aim to provide a more in-depth study of Estonian discourse during this specific and very important moment in Estonian history.

²⁵ Abel Polese, Thomas Ambrosio, Tanel Kerikmäe. 2020. Estonian Identity Construction: Between Nation Branding and Building. *Czech Journal of International Relations*, 55. 24-46

²⁶ Pille Petersoo. 2007. Reconsidering otherness: constructing Estonian identity. *Nations and nationalism*, 13(1). 117-133

²⁷ Liisi Esse, Andres Kasekamp, Jüri Kivimäe, Mart Kuldkepp, Anu Mai Kõll, Kristo Nurmis, Kristjan Toomaspoeg. 2020. Milline on Eesti ajalooteaduse tulevik? *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 26. 190–208

Studying Rapid Discursive Change: Theory and Method

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical framework utilised in this paper. The main subject under analysis is the hegemonic change, which is observed through the discursive changes in the public media. The aims of the hegemon can be observed in media to see what kind of alternative values the subjects are expected to have and what will be the new core of the identity. I bring out the most important studies that define and limit, how these definitions are used in this study. The following parts of the chapter focus on defining the exact research problem and introducing the method used in my study.

Main Concepts

This theoretical review focuses on introducing the conceptual background necessary to follow the paper and reveals the values this case study brings to the field of international relations. National identity, political discourse analysis, and cultural hegemony are the main concepts this study uses. All three are well-known in social studies, are tied to one another, and have been used in political sciences for at least half a century. By creating a new discourse, the new hegemon moved towards creating a new alternative Soviet Estonian identity, even if it did not immediately influence the Estonian public.

The mainstream identity case studies have so far focused on the nation's identity building. This study aims to provide the reader with the opposite: how to destabilise identity and what is the rationalisation for the new hegemon in the "closed" system to justify its takeover. Thus, this study aims to add to the theoretical debate by showing that in addition to identity-building states and other actors also make attempts at identity-destabilisation.

National identity

Identity is a wide concept, and its exact definition depends on the definer in the study. Common traits are that identity defines the core of self and/or collective belonging, defining the grounds for social and political actions (all the while possibly also defining itself through these same actions). While defining the characteristics of the group (Self), it also defines the characteristics not inherent to this group (Other). The study of identity became popular in International Relations in the 1990s and various earlier phenomena such as nationalism and norms became integrated into the new concept.²⁸ In the post-structuralist and post-modernist literature, identity is usually considered to be unstable and fragmented, resulting from multiple consisting

²⁸ Felix Berenskoetter. 2010. *Identity in International Relations*. London, University of London. 1-22

discourses.²⁹ Due to this, identities are considered to be constantly transforming, reinterpreted and renegotiated according to changing circumstances and interests.³⁰

Due to its wide and conflicting nature, Brubaker and Cooper caution us to be extra careful when using identity as an analytical concept. The different definitions of identity have become ambiguous and often conflicting, defining the term in opposite directions with stronger definitions entailing problematic assumptions, and emphasizing the *sameness* while the weaker definitions might struggle to establish a clear connection with the concept of identity as such. Instead, Brubaker and Cooper offer to conceptualise “identity” with stronger clarity, while using new more exact definitions such as “identification” and “self-understanding.”³¹ This is supported by Berenskoetter, who additionally emphasises the uncertain role of identity and its messy relationship with culture – it seems to be unclear, where one ends and the other one begins and what is the role of identity between culture and politics.³²

Since I am focusing on the effect the state can have on identity and how national identity is formed, my definition of identity remains collective, reinterpretable, and transforming in time according to the needs of the state. According to Bloom, national identity becomes meaningful if people relate to the nation’s symbols *en masse* and if they react to the threat as one group. While a nation can be created with power politics, without strong nation-building, and thus with no identity, it would not endure even moderate levels of controversy.³³ Collective identities have also been seen as a source for peaceful relations between states, which has helped to redefine enemies as friends and structure anarchy, the most famous example of it being European integration process.³⁴

Neumann organised the use of “Self” and “Other” in identity formation. In international relations, identity formation is seen not only as forming an “in-group” but also an “out-group.” The self-other relationship is dependent on each other – by defining the “Other,” the definer also comes closer to defining the “Self.” This process is seen as active and constantly ongoing. The dividing line between “Self” and “Other” can either be maintained by the current discourse or challenged in case of discursive change, for example by the “Other” with “Self.” The distance between the “Self” and the “Other” is not formed only by ethnicity, but also by class, gender, religion, history, language, etc. There are “Others” that are close to the “Self,” “Others” that

²⁹ Rogers Brubaker, Frederick Cooper. 2000. Beyond “identity”. *Theory and Society*, 29(1). 1-15

³⁰ Pille Petersoo. 2007. Reconsidering otherness: constructing Estonian identity. *Nations and nationalism*, 13(1). 117-133

³¹ Rogers Brubaker, Frederick Cooper. 2000. Beyond “identity”. *Theory and Society*, 29(1). 1-47

³² Berenskoetter. Identity in International Relations. 2-7

³³ William Bloom. 1990. Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 52-59

³⁴ Berenskoetter. Identity in International Relations. 2-7

are considered strange and hostile, and “Others” against whom the “Self” is indifferent. Mostly, the state is the unit that creates the distinction between the public enemies and friends. The Copenhagen school has shown that the state “Self” is not always the same as the society “Selves,” which sometimes makes them clash.³⁵

Bentley Allan and Ted Hopf study national identity as an already independent concept of its own. They divide the definition into several categories that describe the nation, analysing how the state defines both itself and outsiders and thus its politics toward those entities. National identities are created by public discourses that influence individuals’ behaviour and values. National discourses are said to be as stable as they are accepted by society. Allan and Hopf claim that so far scientific attention has been focused only on already existing identities while the analysis of Self vs Other shows that the greatest threat to a Self is an Other that could replace the self by being a better version of the Self.³⁶

Hopf has been credited for working out methods to analyse national identities and has made in-depth identity studies with a focus on Russian identity. His articles analyse the development from 1955 to 2014 and show how the changes in Russian identity characterised the events that Russia made in foreign policy.³⁷ Hopf follows Gramsci in claiming that the ruling regime cannot be overthrown successfully without an alternative hegemonic articulation, which would ensure the new regime’s legitimacy. When the alternative ideology has been created, which is able to fill the role the state has had so far and can justify its reason to rule, the chance for the change in hegemony is real. He also shows how one can study this by reading and analysing the texts from the era, looking at the justifications and norms in place and apparent in speeches and media.³⁸ The methods developed by Hopf form the basis for the analysis I am using.³⁹

Overall, most authors see self-identity as a stable concept that changes only due to drastic/tragic situations. However, some authors oppose such theories. Similarly to Brubaker and Cooper, Lebow argues that there are no stable identities but rather processes of identification. Thus, Lebow argues against the concept of identity, showing that people tend to strongly identify with their states and their self-identities are heavily influenced by it. He argues that more often than not, attractive national identities are built around claims that make the identity distinctive and its qualities positive. Different conflicting identities in the same person/nation can rise and fall

³⁵ Iver B. Neumann. 1999. *Uses of the Other*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 4-

³⁶ Ted Hopf, Bentley B. Allan. 2016. *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship. 1-29

³⁷ Ted Hopf. 2016. ‘Crimea is ours’: A discursive history. *International Relations*, 30(2). 227-255

³⁸ Ted Hopf. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics. Identities & Foreign Politics, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1-257

³⁹ Ted Hopf, Bentley B. Allan. 2016. *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship. 1-29

and change in time which makes studying them difficult. Identities influence behaviour and vice versa, stable behaviour helps embed it as part of personal identity.⁴⁰

In culturalist extensions of the Weberian sociology of the state, the state is often seen as a power trying to monopolise the power to name and identify, who is good and what is not accepted. This could either be seen literally (for example, with passports) or indirectly through classifications through ethnicity, religion, etc. The state can be considered an identifier since it has the resources to impose categories, even though this does not usually create identities. The Soviet Union is brought as an example since it worked towards institutionalizing and codifying the numerous minorities living in the nation.⁴¹

Even though identities are always in flux, in this study, we do not observe an identity change. This has two reasons: 1) the period we are observing is a very short one and 2) in the contemporary discourse, the Soviet Union was defined as an Other even though it had *de facto* become the hegemon. It is notable, however, that by observing the changes in the public discourse, we can see the seeds the new hegemon sows that will become the basis for the Soviet Estonian identity.

Political Discourse

Discourse is a system of layered key concepts, which includes social practices, traditions, and how institutions and organisations function. Empirically, discourses exist as sets of statements. Each statement depends on the reproduction of the same system and at the same time is the main link in reproducing the same discursive system. All human-made reality is constructed through the norms, systems, rules, and common truth which is reproduced and transformed in social actions.⁴²

Foucault has been one of the founders of the contemporary term ‘discourse,’ which he used to denote a social system that produces knowledge and meaning. He described discourse as constitutive of reality – discursive systems define our thoughts and acts, even if we are unaware of it. Discourse both sets a certain meaning to the text and at the same time disqualifies alternative explanations to the text, thus discourse masks itself as objective and stable. Foucault also sets the task of discourse analysis to unfix and destabilise these accepted meanings.⁴³

⁴⁰ Richard Ned Lebow. *The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1-3

⁴¹ Rogers Brubaker, Frederick Cooper. 2000. Beyond “identity”. *Theory and Society*, 29(1). 15-16

⁴² Lene Hansen, Ole Wæver. 2001. *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States (1st ed.)*. London: Routledge. 20-42;

Kristi Raik. 2003. *Democratic Politics or Implementation of Inevitabilities?* Tartu: Tartu University Press

⁴³ Michel Foucault. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books;

Rachel Adams. 2017. Michel Foucault: Discourse. [*Critical Legal Thinking*](#)

Foucault's theory has received some criticism. While he established the influence discourse can have in society, Foucault deals with only how discourse is being regenerated but struggles to explain who is behind generating the original discourse. Construction and reproduction of dominant discourse is always a choice – theoretically, an alternative discourse can be established by the opposition.⁴⁴

Discourse analysis is a methodology that focuses on understanding the linguistic phenomenology of discourse in its social context.⁴⁵ Discourse analysts aim not to analyse the thoughts of the actors, nor the shared beliefs among the population, but the codes political actors use to relate to each other.⁴⁶ Discourse analysis as a tool is in use both in linguistic studies and political sciences and accordingly there are different analysis methods, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA) and political discourse analysis (PDA).⁴⁷

Wæver has proposed a layered analysis of discourse, which makes it possible to follow the change within continuity and follow the three layers: 1) the basic conceptual constellation of state and nation, 2) the relational position of the state vis-à-vis its geopolitical region and 3) state policies pursued in its geopolitical region. Usually, the dominant political line and the opposition share a lot of their discourse, but only the marginalised opposition's discourse is significantly different. In our case, a rare situation happens, where this marginalised opposition is able to come into power, sharing only the most basic codes with the formerly dominant line, which causes the change of discourse to be very profound and to touch all of the discursive layers. The change in our case study can be seen in all three levels, already Ventsel's paper confirms that the relationship between the state and nation changes during the Red Month: president Pääts' discourse had differentiated between the Estonian nation and state ("dear Estonians") while prime minister Vares' discourse had the nation and the state in a tighter connection ("dear Estonian citizens").⁴⁸

Political discourse analysis focuses on the broader critical approach to discourse, while also contributing to the political sciences. Political discourse forms through the functioning of the political institutions – in politicians' speeches, cabinet meetings, protests, parliamentary sessions, etc. Analysis of political discourse should not only focus on the code but also observe

⁴⁴ Norman Fairclough. 1993. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity. 37-73

⁴⁵ Ayu Anggita. 2018. *INVESTIGATE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS USE OF FOUCAULT*. Universitas Lancang Kuning. 1-3

⁴⁶ Wæver. 2001 *European Integration and National Identity*. 26-33

⁴⁷ Teun A. van Dijk. 1998. What is Political Discourse Analysis? *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* (11). 11–52

⁴⁸ Wæver. 2001 *European Integration and National Identity*. 33-39

the context and its relation to the discursive structures. Through this, we can uncover the agenda hidden behind the statements and follow the politicians' logic of reasoning (or lack thereof).⁴⁹ In this study I will conduct political discourse analysis, using Wæver's system of layers. While critical discourse analysis could also introduce valuable results in this case study, CDA mainly focuses on the aspects of society and language, examining people and their interactions with other people. Due to censored media, where politicians get much more attention and society's discourse is very limited, political discourse analysis provides us with answers more effectively.⁵⁰

Cultural hegemony

The idea of cultural hegemony is inherited from Gramsci's writings.⁵¹ Gramsci was an imprisoned Marxist in fascist Italy who tried to understand why the socialist revolution had failed in the West and instead of socialists, the fascists were successful at establishing themselves, despite the apparent world revolution. He proposed the explanation by establishing what we now know as the concept of cultural hegemony, which claims that no political leadership can survive long-term without consent from the masses.⁵²

The monopolisation of the instruments of force could be used to establish the elite's dominance in society, but only as a temporary measure. By the 20th century, the state had in addition to administrative functions "educative and formative" apparatus, which the elite could use to communicate with the masses and establish their hegemony long-term. This can be done by feeding its narratives, ideas, and ideology to the citizens through political speeches, schools, church sermons, public/state media, trade unions, and protests.⁵³ The power is not limited to the political and economic sphere, but it includes cultural as well. When the masses become convinced in the truths spread by the hegemon, they give their implicit consent to the general direction imposed on them. Therefore, the maintenance of hegemony does not require an active commitment to preserving the elite's rule, even being passive is enough as consent for the regime to preserve its rule.⁵⁴

Hegemony differs from Lenin's conception of proletarian dictatorship since it not only requires political coercion but also ideological work to create "class unity." Ideology itself is both

⁴⁹ Dijk. 1998. What is Political Discourse Analysis? 11-15

⁵⁰ Imtiaz Ahmad. 2021. Difference between Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Discourse Analysis: What is Discourse? FKIP Universitas Lancang Kuning. 1-9

⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci. 1999 (*reprint*). Selections from the Prison Notebooks. London: Elecbook

⁵² Thomas R. Bates. 1975. Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36(2). 351-366.

⁵³ Stuart Hall. 1986. Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(2). 5-27

⁵⁴ T. J. Jackson Lears. The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities. *The American Historical Review*, 90(3). 567-593

collective and social, needing inter-discursive struggle of political hegemonies, through which intellectual and ethical unity could be established. Gramsci admits though that ideology is not only philosophical but also organic – meaning ideologies are constantly evolving, adapting, and developing, according to the dialogue in the society and current needs of the environment. This means that under normal circumstances, there can be no single unified coherent dominant ideology in the society.⁵⁵

Since fascism ingrained itself in Italy, Gramsci argued that an immediate transition from fascism to socialism was improbable and that the power should be won first by “restoring the liberal-democratic political structures and intensifying the cooperation between the proletariat, peasantry and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Only by establishing such a system of alliances could the help proletariat become the leading class” This theory came to be called national-popular class politics and establishes that different social classes can find common interests and work together, although he failed to establish a clear method on how to do so.⁵⁶

Following Gramsci’s theoretical framework, we can see in the Estonian case study, how the Soviet Union not only tried to integrate Estonia through force but also used various methods to legitimise its power, most of which fit well with Gramsci’s writings. Officially, democratic political structures seem to be restored and different classes are invited to cooperate with the proletariat, the new hegemon’s narrative is fed to the public, and aims for “class unity” seem to be attempted.

⁵⁵ Hall. 1986. Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity. 411-440

⁵⁶ David Forgacs. 1999. *The Cultural Studies Reader*; Chapter 15: National popular genealogy of a concept. New York: Routledge. 209-219

Conclusion

The goal of my paper, which is to study the weakening of identity through the media discourse after the change in hegemony, can be observed through these concepts. **National discourse** is a dominant public justification for a state and society on why the state should exist and why are they acting the way they act. As a result of this discourse, one could reconstruct a certain articulation defining the national Self, which is termed **national identity**. The process of justification can be observed through the lens of **cultural hegemony**. The tool for studying the changes in messages appearing in the public is called **discourse analysis**. By using the methods of discourse analysis, we can observe how the new hegemon delegitimises some elements of the old discourse while adopting or manipulating the others according to its needs.

During the summer of 1940, we can observe an attempt to construct a new identity in the public media of Estonia. The new hegemon uses the public media as a tool to legitimise its occupation and as a method to look for collaborators for the new regime. By creating the new discourse, the new hegemon moved towards creating the values and ideas necessary for the new alternative Soviet Estonian identity, even if it was not immediately accepted by the Estonian public.

Research problem

During 1939-1940 Estonia was still a formally sovereign republic, governed by Estonians. While the changes introduced to Estonian discourse were in great part derived from its communication with the Soviet Union, it would be wrong to claim that the new hegemony in Estonia at the time was exclusively Soviet and not Estonian. In order to establish their dominance, colonial/occupation regimes usually mobilise local collaborators to help them govern the newly occupied domain. This means that the collaborators can form a connection between the new hegemon and its new subjects by introducing the wishes of the hegemon while using the familiar lens of national discourse. This can also be seen in Estonia in the summer of 1940 when a noticeable part of the late base-era discourse was presented (and to some extent derived from) Estonian native collaborators. The gradual change of Estonian discourse can be well-observed and analysed during the Red Month (and the base-era discourse was still mostly Estonian, only trying to accommodate the neighbour's wishes): during the first week, it is emphasised that Estonia will retain its independence, while during the last days of the month, public calls to join the Soviet Union became widespread. Although the Red Month's discourse could already be considered to be mostly Soviet, it did also make efforts to keep using elements familiar to Estonian discourse, in order to explain the changes to the locals.

Due to the rare situation that Estonia found itself in, the discourse during the years 1939-1940 went through drastic changes and constantly developed further, with conflicting narratives at times. The conflict is further strengthened by the fact that the locals themselves seemingly did not know exactly what would happen next. By the summer of 1940, it had become clear that the Soviet discourse would come to dominate Estonia, but it was still questionable what was going to happen with the Estonian statehood. Some hoped Estonia could be like Mongolia – a *de jure* independent puppet state. Because of this, there were still speeches from the old elite, trying to fuse old and new discourses and the narratives switched from nationalist to socialist and vice-versa depending on the speech and the speaker. This mix of discourses together with the attempt of a new hegemon trying to assert their truth in the society while the old one was still very widespread, makes this case study an interesting phenomenon to research.

This study aims to develop the analysis of identity-building by observing a rarely occurring event when an old identity is knowingly dismantled, and an alternative is presented to the people. By turning attention to less-often observed identity destabilisation during the change in hegemony, we can see, which methods have been used to build an alternative to the dominant discourse (although this study does not analyse how effectively the new discourse was accepted by the audience). The aim of this study is to reconstruct this transition between the old and the

new hegemonic order (understood as two hegemonic articulations), combining it with the opportunity to test the tools of poststructuralist discourse analysis by applying it to a case of rapid discursive change. Additionally, since there seems to be no previous discourse analysis of such extent on the topic, this study aims to support the empirical Estonian history studies as well by providing a case-study discourse analysis of this critical moment in Estonian history.

The research questions this study aims to answer are:

1. How does the radical change in the political system reflect in the official discourse?
2. Is the change rapid/rough or smooth?
3. To what extent does the new hegemon integrate elements of the old hegemonic discourse?

Another value of my study is to observe the radical change of discourse in a so-called “closed” society. Gramsci described hegemonic cultures to be on a scale from “closed” or “open,” where in closed hegemonies subordinate groups are left without means to express their resistance to the dominant discourse, while in more open hegemonies counterhegemonic alternatives can flourish.⁵⁷ Both the bases era Estonia and Soviet Estonia had quite noticeable censorship and little space for counterhegemonic alternatives, while in the beginning the people’s government Estonia could be considered seemingly more open. This makes it observable, how change happens from one closed hegemonic culture to another closed one.

Methodology

This study will be conducted as an in-depth case study of the hegemonic transition period of Estonia during the period of the “people’s government” Estonia (21.06.1940-21.07.1940). The study utilises layered political discourse analysis using a contemporary Estonian newspaper named “*Postimees*” as the main source while other newspapers are seldom used to specify the details. *Postimees* (meaning “Postman” in Estonian) is one of the oldest newspapers in Estonia, established in Tartu in 1886. It was based in Tartu still during the bases era in 1939-1940 and had been subdued to the state censorship, despite its symbolic resistance to the censorship in the earlier years.⁵⁸ With extra restrictions put in place after the beginning of the Second World War, we can be sure mainly the messages that are published, were supported by the current hegemon. I worked through each and every newspaper of *Postimees* from 1 January 1940 until the report of the declaration of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic appeared on 22 July 1940, with a special focus being on the news appearing from 22 June until 21 July. The most important elements and messages from speeches were collected and analysed. Additionally, the

⁵⁷ Lears. *The Concept of Cultural Hegemony*. 573-574

⁵⁸ “*Postimees*”. 1994. *Eesti Entsüklopeedia VII*. Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus. 430

quantitative methods were used as a supporting measure to follow, which discursive patterns became most repetitive. In order to support the comparison of the older discourse dominant in Postimees, multiple earlier Postimees numbers were used to compare the content of news, vocabulary, structure, and sources of these papers with their bases era counterparts.

In order to observe the changes in discourse since before the Red Month, the bases era discourse will also be introduced and analysed – showing the changes from before the Second World War and establishing a basis, with which the People's government's discourse can be compared. With the basis in place, I worked through the dominant features of the new trends and ideas introduced during the Red Month, supporting the analysis with numerous examples. If the newspapers fail to introduce critical background info, I fill the gap with other sources. The main part of the discourse analysis is based on political speeches, especially during the bases era. However, opinion articles and speeches are also used, especially since Estonia media was censored both during the republican era and the Soviet era, meaning these articles reflect the ideas supported by the contemporary hegemon.

In order to compare the Soviet Estonian and modern Estonian understanding of events and their discourses, history books are used from both the Soviet era and the contemporary era. News from Postimees is sometimes put into the context of modern historical understanding in order to see whether the claims made in the papers survived the test of time.

There are some limitations to this method. Focusing mainly on Postimees limits the research to one example, where the analysis could be influenced by the factors influencing the newspapers, such as Laosson's takeover as the editor. While both secondary sources and my preliminary comparison with other articles show the discourse in other contemporary newspapers being similar, further research could give us the comparison and expand our knowledge on how national discourse was destabilised on a nationwide scale.

Additionally, this research is limited in time, dealing mainly with a war-time discourse in the year 1940. Due to this, I am focusing little on how the Republican national discourse had previously been preserving the Estonian national discourse stable, and mostly focus on how the Soviet discourse was dismantling it. Due to this, further research into the main changes in the discourse before and during the beginning of the bases' era could further help with in-depth comparison and also allow us to analyse the effects the bases treaty had on the narrative in the media.

Due to these limitations, this study could be seen as a pilot study. It does examine a phenomenon an important phenomenon that has so far not been thoroughly studied, the dismantling of a national discourse and an attempt to redefine the national identity of Estonians, and establishes

a method on how such a concept could be studied, but it is too narrow to make final conclusions on the topic itself without further research.

The media during the bases era (September 1939 – June 1940)

In order to show the changes in the Red Month, it is first necessary to introduce the Estonian dominant discourse in the local media during the final months of the bases era. During this era, Estonian newspapers were still fully following the national republican discourse but with the start of the Second World War and the arrival of Soviet troops in Estonia, the discourse had to adapt and develop new aspects that were not present before.

Main themes of the bases-era discourse

After Poland was invaded by the Germans and the Soviets, Latvia and Lithuania declared partial mobilisation of their troops. While this was not the case for Estonia, Postimees called for “mental mobilisation” already shortly before the bases treaty was signed. On 22 September 1939, Postimees published an article that asked Estonians to be diligent, not complain loudly against the current situation, and not spread fake rumours. “We cannot tolerate that there are some, who due to stupidity might become a mental deserter. It is in both our and state’s interests to remain calm and balanced mind, thus if anyone among us were to spread rumours, they will be treated as mental deserters.”⁵⁹ This came to form the backbone of what could be called the bases era discourse: do not rock the boat, keep the public discourse neutral and avoid using any kind of emotional manner of speech.

Zetterberg called it “*Formal optimism*” – the public leaders making statements that everything in Estonia is under control and that people need to remain calm and keep working. Common explanations said that the deal with the Soviets was made because it was a rational and good idea, helping Estonia through the hard times of the war. This treaty was the only way to ensure that Estonia was able to avoid the war – it was a victory, not a loss.⁶⁰ If one was to spread rumours claiming the opposite, they were fined (which is seen by the news articles reporting the people getting fined for “spreading damaging rumours”).⁶¹ Thus, Estonian politicians chose to try and show the Moscow Treaty of 1939 as a win in the media and present the Soviets as an ally.⁶²

Neutrality

By the late thirties, Estonia had failed to secure an alliance against the two states it considered a potential threat to its independence – Germany and the Soviet Union. In order to try and make a good face on a situation, Estonia had declared itself a neutral state (despite its defence treaty

⁵⁹ “Vaimsed wäejooksikud”, Postimees, 22.09.1939

⁶⁰ Jüri Uluots. “Meie suurim wäärtus on riiklik iseseiswus”, Postimees, 22.01.1940

⁶¹ “Karistusi aluseta kuulujuttude lewitajaile”, Postimees, 21.09.1939; “Karistati ärewust tekitawate teadete lewitamise pärast”, Postimees, 24.09.1939; “Karistati kuulujuttude lewitajat,” Postimees, 11.07.1940

⁶² Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 483-484

with Latvia), which was officially respected by its neighbours. Since Soviet troops had entered Estonia in October 1939, by 1940 the official discourse was very focused on emphasizing the neutrality of the Republic of Estonia. The bases era prime minister Jüri Uluots brought out neutrality often in many of his speeches: “Already in the Declaration of Estonian independence on the 24th of February 1918, Estonian Manifesto declared nations wish to live in peace and prosperity with all the nations in the world. These peace and neutrality politics has always been the star in the sky, according to which Estonia has tried to aim its foreign politics.”⁶³ Not only does this emphasise Estonian neutrality but it also rewrites the history of the twenties, when Estonia made attempts to secure an alliance with multiple neighbours, including a successful one with Latvia.⁶⁴

Post-Cold War historians see the Estonian inability to secure an alliance during the Interwar era as its greatest failure while the contemporary leaders presented neutrality as an opportunity: neutral means you consider no nations to be a threat.⁶⁵ Uluots even used Estonian neutrality as reasoning for signing the Moscow treaty: “The treaty which Estonia signed last September is aimed to keep Estonian neutrality, the way it has always been. So far both Estonia and our eastern neighbour have done everything possible to keep the treaty functioning. Thus, Estonia has so far aimed to keep its peace, neutrality, and peace consistently.”⁶⁶ This meant that according to the public discourse, the Soviet troops were not there because Estonia had chosen an ally but because the Soviet Union was ready to guarantee Estonian neutrality with his own army.

Independent nation

The dominant idea in the politicians’ speeches throughout the bases era was the unwavering and definite wish for Estonia to remain independent. “The last War of Independence taught us that our political independence is necessary. Without it, our nation would fade.”⁶⁷ This goal was above all and was often used to elaborate the decision-making process of the leaders, ignoring the Soviet troops in Estonia nor the Estonian elite’s wish to satisfy their eastern neighbour. “We as a small state cannot nor do we want to interfere in the conflicts between the Great Powers. The main goal of our foreign policy remains to keep our country politically and socially independent, as it always has been. At the same time, our goal is to develop relations with all the nations both in economic and in the cultural sphere.”⁶⁸ The repetition of this

⁶³ Jüri Uluots. “Meie suurim wäärtus on riiklik iseseiswus”, Postimees, 22.01.1940

⁶⁴ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 412-423

⁶⁵ Hanno Ojalo. (2010). 1939: Kui me valinuks sõja... Tallinn: Grenader Kirjastus. 33-40

⁶⁶ Jüri Uluots. “Õiglane suhtumine kõigisse elanikkonna kihtidesse”, Postimees, 15.02.1940

⁶⁷ Hans Kruus. “Rahwuslikule ärkamisele Aleksandrikooli mõtte kaudu”, Postimees, 22.04.1940

⁶⁸ Ants Piip. “Arendada sõbralikke wahekordi kõigi riikidega”, Postimees, 18.04.1940

message was constant and the idea clear – whatever the leaders of Estonia do, it is to keep Estonia independent.

Small state

A noticeable part of Estonian identity is related to its size. Estonians feel that their state is small and surrounded by larger and stronger neighbours. In the bases era, this discourse was also tied with the reasoning for the Treaty of Moscow – the Second Great War was being fought between great nations and the small ones were the ones getting caught in the middle. By having a strong ally in the east, Estonia is able to avoid the war: “...even less secure are smaller nations. We have witnessed how throughout the years many smaller states have ceased to exist. During recent years we have seen how only in one night, decisions can be made that will change the fate of countries and people. It’s perfectly understandable that smaller states are anxious about their future.”⁶⁹ Estonians saw how in the war between the Great Powers, many smaller states suffered and lost their independence. “As you’ve noticed, during the last World War many small nation-states were created. This war it seems the opposite is happening.”⁷⁰

War had become very present in Estonian public discourse very quickly. Despite Estonia not being a participant in the war, Postimees was following the developments in the war very closely and it influenced Estonian life as well. Germany was attacking every ship that was crossing the Baltic Sea and the news regarding Estonian drowned ships in the Baltic Sea during the winter of 1939-1940 was regular. “...we have not been safe from the hardships of war. So far, economic war has hit us neutral states hard, especially due to the lack of sea trade. Naturally, the raw materials that are necessary for the war have gotten more expensive, but additionally, it is even harder for us since we are cut off from the wider world. The war makes it near impossible for any ship to get in or out of the Baltic Sea.”⁷¹ The neutral small state of Estonia had little to do against the German state.

By the late Spring of 1940, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg had all been dragged to war and had suffered in the war even though the main participants of this war were Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. This gave the Estonian government a solid basis to justify the Treaty of Moscow with the current situation and to show it as symbiotic: “I would like to emphasise that this treaty will include the interests of both parties as well as possible. For our great neighbour to the east, it is important to be able to protect themselves in the Baltic Sea. Estonia and the rest of the Baltic states would like to provide this help to our neighbour. On the other hand, with this treaty our neighbour has taken

⁶⁹ Jüri Uluots. “Ühisel jõul saame võitu rasketest aegadest”, Postimees, 23.04.1940

⁷⁰ Jüri Uluots. “Sõprus naabritega ja üleshitaw töö”, Postimees, 08.06.1940

⁷¹ Ants Piip. “Peame kohanema suuremate raskuste kandmiseks”, Postimees, 06.05.1940

the responsibility to guarantee the independence of our state and also guarantee our independent internal politics.”⁷² Unlike many smaller nations in Europe, Estonia had been spared from war, and thanks to the treaty, had even new opportunities: “It’s one of the signs of the current era, that the economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Baltic states is the key to keep all participants happy and Estonian economy normally functioning in the current war economy.”⁷³

The war was also used as an excuse to justify politically inconvenient decisions. For example, the deal with the USSR was made so that 1) Soviet interests would be fulfilled and thus there would be no threat of war in Estonia from the east, and 2) there would be a Great Power that would guarantee the independence and neutrality of small Estonia.

Survival of Päts’ narrative

While the foreign politics of Estonia had to adapt to the changes in the discourse, the internal discourse did not have to adapt to many changes and the narrative of President Konstantin Päts remained the dominant one in Postimees: “We were saved from the fall to authoritarianism, not by the people, but the precise decision-making of Konstantin Päts at the critical moment. This can be considered especially interesting because it seems to be the only time when a dictatorship was used to save democracy.”⁷⁴ Päts’ authoritarian regime had kept its strength in internal politics and retained the main discourse: our state is a democracy, and it is so thanks to our President Konstantin Päts, who saved it. The old constitution was chaotic, and Päts’ constitution is much more “stable.”

Although Päts is considered the symbol of “formal optimism,” it is his discourse which is the only case in the bases era Postimees is ready to imply that left-wing politicians can be a threat to the political stability (something Estonian public media had tried to avoid ever since the pact with the USSR was signed): “... it seems that some members of the Parliament, mostly left-wing radicals, are putting in great effort to change our Parliament back from our hardly gained stable one to the one full of chaos and gradual degradation. I struggle to believe they are sincere representatives of our nation.” Even the fear of the Soviets, which had otherwise made Estonian public discourse much more careful, did not fully remove Päts’ attacks on the “chaotic left-wing.”

Overall, until June 1940, Päts’ narrative seemed to actually strengthen with time. During the winter months, the president did not hold any speeches publicly and was seldom mentioned in Postimees. The strengthening can be seen in the category named “Greetings and congratulations

⁷² Jüri Uluots. “Meie suurim väärtus on riiklik iseseisvus”, Postimees, 22.01.1940

⁷³ Leo Sepp. “Eesti ja N. Liidu kaubavahetus viib vastu avaratele võimalustele”, Postimees, 27.04.1940

⁷⁴“Mineviku Varjud“, Postimees, 11.02.1940

to the President of the Republic,” which was used to show, how grateful the entire society of Estonia was to the president. It had disappeared almost completely during the Winter War, used only during the festive days (such as Estonian celebrations of Independence Day), but it slowly was taken into more use again since March-April. President also finally appeared before the public in May and gave a bases-era speech: “We know, our military strength is small. [...] Let us try to defend our land only with weapons but also use our words to explain that this is not the time for divisions. Right now, we have to stand man beside man and support and defend our nation!”⁷⁵ Presumably the president had been startled by the developments in Estonia and thought to keep his head low at first. When he saw that although there were troubles with the Soviet army, the Estonian internal politics were not under direct attack, he was ready to re-establish his dominant position in the discourse.

Significant Others in Estonian discourse

The war and bases era also brought a change of balance in the attention Estonian neighbours received from the media. The two bigger neighbours, who received lots of attention, were the Soviet Union and Germany, whose state-owned news agencies’ articles were quite often translated and published. Because of this, anti-western rhetoric appeared in Postimees through translated texts from TASS or DNB (although it was not too common). One example of such claims would be a TASS article claiming that “the friendship and non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany foiled the attempts of the West to pull the Soviets into the war.”⁷⁶ Although these messages were published, no discussion followed: it was neither approved nor disproved, it was just printed.

Compared to the situation a year earlier, the West played a little role in Estonian media at least in Postimees. The only news regarding the developments in the West was the war news. These were constantly published but war news was usually short, much more thoroughly censored than usual articles, and often arrived with some delay. Also, in the war reports neutrality was very strongly followed – there could be no adjective nor judgement describing the developments. The role of the West had thus decreased, which could be seen for example by comparing the role of Reuters in Postimees. During the occupation of Czechoslovakia one year earlier Reuters had been one of the main sources, now it was mainly used to report these short and censored war reports.

The change in news sources was probably influenced by being physically cut off from the West. Both the Soviet Union and Germany were anti-Western nations and thus it was better *realpolitik*

⁷⁵ Konstantin Päts. „Wõime rahulikult oma tööd edasi teha“, Postimees, 16.05.1940

⁷⁶ „Molotowi osa Nõukogude riigi ülesehitamisel“, Postimees, 09.03.1940

to not show pro-Western messages when one anti-Western nation has its troops in your country and the other one is gunning down your ships. It is worth mentioning as well that although Estonian discourse tried to avoid a pro-Western stance, the Soviet regime in the end still accused them of being supportive of the West and ultimately used it as one of the excuses to occupy Estonia.⁷⁷

With the Soviet Union and Germany considered potential threats to Estonian independence and the West being far away, Estonian focus also drifted closer to other “smaller nations.” News about Scandinavian and Baltic states remained very common and especially with other Baltic states, politicians were ready to show public support and to look for stronger cooperation. More and more articles were published talking about the visits and speeches of important Baltic statesmen. There were even a couple of opinion articles dedicated to the Baltic cooperation, publishing an opinion article over a topic abroad was a really rare feat in those days. The boldest speeches given were related to Baltic cooperation: “As of now we should be on guard or else one of us might fall under the influence of a neighbour too much, which could weaken the Baltic bridge. Maybe this threat is not present at the moment though, since our bigger neighbours have allowed us to guarantee our independence. But as we have seen from history, currents can change quickly. Our survival instinct states that we must protect our independence together, as one state.”⁷⁸ The most radical opinion piece even tried to introduce the idea of forming a united Baltic state in the region: “According to the writer’s option, neither regional and cultural cooperation nor customs and monetary union would be enough. The real aim of Baltic Unity should be the United States of the Baltics.”⁷⁹

The Baltic leadership clearly felt that tightening friendship along each other was “allowed,” which would later prove otherwise: Estonia was blamed for plotting against the Soviet Union with other Baltic states, and the Baltic journal “*Revue Baltique*” – the result of the cooperation, was used as evidence in support of the Soviet accusations of building an anti-Soviet alliance.⁸⁰ While Finland retained its important spot in Estonian media and economic cooperation did continue (which can be seen by the number of articles regarding Finland, for example during the Winter War), there were no similar speeches calling for closer ties with Finland.

The Soviet Union in Estonian public media

Throughout the bases era, there was a slow but steady increase of news reporting on Soviet developments, news, and special translated articles from TASS, which introduced wider Soviet

⁷⁷ “Tõrjutakse tagasi väärarvamist poliitilistest meeleoludest Eestis”, Postimees, 31.05.1940

⁷⁸ Kehtutis Bulota. “Pidulik aktus "Estonias" Leedu wabariigi 22. aastapäewal”, Postimees, 17.02.1940

⁷⁹ Joakim Puhk. “Balti riikide koostöö eesmärgiks Balti ühendriigid?”, Postimees, 07.05.1940

⁸⁰ “Nõukogude Liidu wahekorraest Eestiga ja Lätiga”, Postimees, 18.06.1940

achievements to the reader (i.e., creating a plant, which grows tobacco, potato, and tomato all together,⁸¹ introducing Soviet republics, etc). New focus can be seen in Soviet news being published, which did not receive any attention beforehand, such as the anniversary of Lenin's death.⁸² As would be expected, there were no articles that would be critical of the Soviet actions. At best, the Estonian narrative regarding the USSR was simply official and neutral, not taking any stance at all – for example during the Winter War.⁸³ Quite often former narratives were rewritten to be softer, i.e. Stalin was not a “dictator”⁸⁴ any longer but a “leader.”⁸⁵ Similar change of narrative can be seen in talking about Estonian history – the Estonian War of Independence (*Vabadussõda*) is no longer seen as a cause for conflict with the Russians, but rather a long-forgotten (although still cherished) event - because these days Estonian and Soviet relations were cordial, they were allies and their interests aligned “Estonia has decided that it does not want to be a wall between the West and Soviet Russia, as was hoped to be by many in Paris Peace Conference, but a bridge helping to develop the relationship between the West and the East.”⁸⁶

Thus, Estonian politicians found a clear new discourse to present to the public that was also acceptable to the Soviets: Estonia is a neutral state with the main goal of preserving its independence. The Soviet Union is Estonia's ally (and definitely not a threat), and helps to keep Estonia safe from the Second Great War – there have been many smaller nations pulled into the war by Germany and the West, however, nobody would dare to attack Estonia with Soviet army defending it. By guarding Estonia, the Soviet Union can also safeguard Leningrad, meaning this is a mutually beneficial situation. Despite foreign fears, it is clear that the Soviets have let Estonian politics remain the same, so there is no threat from the East. Nevertheless, war shows no signs of ending so let us be ready for the tough times.

From bases to occupation

It seems that the Winter War shocked the Estonian public since during the winter of 1940, politicians gave few careful speeches and there were few opinion articles. After the war ended, the fear seemed to slowly fade in the spring. President Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner, the leading men of the autocratic regime, who had disappeared from public life during the winter, appeared again before the public. This can be seen by an increase in their public

⁸¹ “Tubakas, kartul, tomat ühes taimes”, Postimees, 07.06.1940

⁸² “Lenini 16. Surmapäew”, Postimees, 22.01.1940

⁸³ There are numerous examples from the Winter War era. One of them would be:

“300 lennukit Soome kohal”, Postimees, 16.01.1940

⁸⁴ “Stalin naerab”, Uudisleht, 25.09.1938

⁸⁵ Robert Sinka. “Emade- ja lastekaitse Nõuk. Liidus”, Postimees, 29.05.1940

⁸⁶ Ants Piip. “Eesti-Wene rahuleping meie välispoliitika nurgakiwiks”, Postimees, 03.02.1940

speeches, more articles supporting their regime, and people expressing their gratefulness becoming a usual characteristic once again in the newspapers. The discussion regarding the Baltic cooperation became more active and even some military exercises were declared. It seemed that at least in public media, a new *status quo* started to take root, and people started getting used to the new situation.

This new situation was challenged at the beginning of the summer. The first sign of Soviet discontent with the current situation became very clear in the article published in Pravda, which was also translated into Estonian on 31.05.1940. The accusations were that the Estonian elite was pro-British (and thus, clearly anti-German and anti-Soviet), that the Estonian neutrality was fake, and that there were anti-Soviet elements in Estonia who did not publicly show any appreciation for the positive developments which the cooperation with the Soviets had given.⁸⁷ In the same paper, another headline blamed Lithuania for attacking Soviet troops in the country.⁸⁸ As a reaction to the accusations, next public speeches that are readable in Estonian media, mostly emphasised the support and good influence the Soviet Union had had on Estonia. Both articles from TASS and such speeches became more common and clearly Soviet-focused, but despite this, the larger discourse remained the same for the next couple of weeks.

By mid-June, Soviet troops had concentrated around 435 000 soldiers next to the border with the Baltic states and on 14 June, the Soviet regime gave Lithuania an ultimatum, demanding a new government and allowance of more Soviet troops into the land. Lithuania caved in the early morning of 15 June and Soviet troops immediately entered the Baltic state, effectively cutting Estonia and Latvia off from the outside world. Estonia received a similar ultimatum on 16 June and Estonia caved to the demands.⁸⁹

News reports regarding the Soviet occupation were struggling with what to report. When Soviet troops entered Lithuania on 15 June, the newspaper still felt confident enough to report that Lithuanian cities would be “occupied” after Soviet demands.⁹⁰ The next day, when the Estonian government was forced to accept a similar ultimatum, the word “occupation” was clearly avoided. Instead, it was reported as “an additional treaty regarding the exact positioning of the troops” in Estonia.⁹¹ What was reported as “an occupying force” one day, became “an additional troop treaty” the next.

These were the haziest days of the newspapers, where local media had no clear understanding of what was happening. Estonian independent media was falling but the Soviets had not yet

⁸⁷ “Tõrjutakse tagasi väärarvamist poliitilistest meeleoludest Eestis”, Postimees, 31.05.1940

⁸⁸ “Mitme N. Liidu sõjawäelase kallal tarvitati Leedus vägiwalda”, Postimees, 31.05.1940

⁸⁹ Pajur, et al. (2005). Eesti ajalugu VI. 164-167, Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 485-487

⁹⁰ “Nõukogude Liidu armee läks üle Leedu piiri”, Postimees, 16.06.1940

⁹¹ “Täiendaw lepe Nõukogude Liiduga wägede paigutamise asjus”, Postimees, 17.06.1940

established their hold over the press. News that was reported on one day was claimed to be false the next day – an example would be a published Latvian report, which claimed that Latvians forbade gatherings due to a Soviet request – a swift denial of such demand was given by the Soviet Embassy in Riga the next day.⁹² Mostly though, events were shortly described without much explanations given: the fleeing of Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona was reported as “going abroad,”⁹³ Latvian border guard post was reported destroyed but without any explanation, why.⁹⁴

The Soviet demands (named “Narva Dictate” due to the characterisation of the negotiation), which Estonia accepted and signed on the early morning of 17.06.1940, were published as if they were Estonian decisions (i.e., closing the gatherings, a new friendlier government).⁹⁵ With this move, the Soviets had established their military domination over the Estonian state and society and could now move towards manufacturing a “consent” of the locals to solidify their control. Estonians seemed to understand that their world was about to change but it was not yet clear what kind of rules the new hegemon would establish. Thus, much news regarding the events in Estonia is simply reported through TASS and there is no alternative presented either to TASS’ narrative or to the Soviet accusations.

⁹² „N. Liidu Riia saatkonna seletus“, Postimees, 20.06.1940

⁹³ “Leedu president sõitis välismaale”, Postimees, 17.06.1940

⁹⁴ “Läti piiriwalwe asukoht tuhas”, Postimees, 17.06.1940

⁹⁵ Pajur, et al. (2005). Eesti ajalugu VI. 164-167

Establishment of the Soviet hegemony during the Red Month

By June 21, 1940, Soviet troops had fully occupied Estonia. In order to legitimise the new situation, there was the need to establish a new Soviet-friendly government and show people's support for the cause. On the same day Estonia was fully occupied, a new government, the so-called "people's government" was established, and workers' demonstrations in support of the new power were organised. The exact size of the protest and the ethnic composition is still not entirely clear,⁹⁶ but the *June coup d'état* (in contemporary Estonian history), or sometimes so-called "*June Revolution*" in Soviet historiography, marked the beginning of a new era.⁹⁷

We can see this hegemonic move happening during the one-month period from 21.06.1940-21.07.1940, with the old Estonian national discourse being phased out, relationships with the West and the Soviet Union being further revalued and the state's goals and values being redefined. Although the Soviet discourse has become dominant in the new republic, it is not the only one in the media yet – there are still many notable members of the Estonian Republic present who are trying to keep their position by keeping up with the changing discourse. While we do know from many sources that the new hegemony is contested, the new discourse definitely makes the claim as if the new regime would already be hegemonic.

Despite the short time span, the attempt to establish a new cultural hegemony means there are huge numbers of articles focused on introducing the new values and trying to establish the logic that moves from "we want to be an independent nation-state" to "we want to be a socialist worker state in the USSR" within a month. In order to accommodate the logical development, during the first two weeks, politicians and newspapers argued against the idea of joining the USSR. This means that although the period is short, there are many different messages and vast changes during this time. Due to this, I will analyse the discursive transformation of this month week by week.

⁹⁶ Estimations of the number of participants vary from 2000 to 40 000. Soviet armoured vehicles were accompanying the protestors. - Pajur et al. Eesti ajalugu. VI, 168-169

State auditor Karl Soonpää saw many Soviet military trucks heading towards the city centre, mostly full of Soviet soldiers but some were also in civilian clothing – Kaupo Meiel. "Karl Soonpää päevik 21. juunil 1940. aastal", ERR, 21.06.2020

Estonian ambassador to the USSR, August Rei claimed to hear "Soviet songs unknown to the wider Estonian public" during the protests that "he himself had first heard in Moscow" – Pekka Ereht. "Juunipööre 1940: kuidas me 80 aastat tagasi iseseisvuse kaotasime", Eesti Ekspress, 21.06.2020

Postimees claims that Tallinner workers were forced to the protests by agitators, which is further confirmed by Soonpää's diary – "Täna ajaloos 21.06: okupatsiooniväed kukutasid Eesti valitsuse", Postimees, 21.06.2020

⁹⁷ Pajur et al. Eesti ajalugu. VI, 164-166

First Week (21.06-29.06)

The new discourse was originally framed by the new hegemon as something old and familiar to the Estonian people. The change in hegemony was described not as a new power taking over, but a restoration of the good old socialist way that many Estonians craved. “Already around 8-9 all the factories ended their work and the workers headed to Freedom Square, bringing out their hidden old revolutionary flags and hastily made posters with them.”⁹⁸ Thus, the first step that the new hegemon made in order to create some legitimacy was making the claim that after the long break, an old, democratic, friendly, and familiar system was being re-established in Estonia.

Postimees’ news regarding the changes on a large scale can be divided into two categories: firstly, news regarding worker meetings, which usually expressed more radical opinions, and secondly, state news, coming from the Estonian government and from people in leading positions, expressing more balanced news. The messages from the worker meetings were already radical from day one, praising Stalin and talking about the elitist bourgeoisie clique that had been in power so far. The speeches from state leaders were more careful, focusing on finding a common ground between the current situation and the previous government.

Estonian identity

The new prime minister Johannes Vares-Barbarus started his first speech by declaring: “Yesterday the new Government of the Estonian Republic was formed. It replaced the **people-hostile** government, which could not nor did want to ensure the necessary politics that the Estonian nation requires.”⁹⁹ Thus, already in the prime minister’s first speech the old government was characterised as a bad one, which was especially eloquent since the “people’s government” initially tried to frame their messages in the more neutral, balanced way than the workers in their meetings. Already on day one, in the new discourse, the new prime minister claimed that the previous government had been bad for Estonia. It was necessary not only for establishing the new Other but also for legitimisation of the processes. By saying that the former government was conspiring against the Soviets and thus against the peace, the new government’s attempts to build the new discourse make perfect sense. Additionally, the same degrees earlier demanded by the Soviets were now used as a legitimizing tool: “Our Commander-in-Chief gave out a degree forbidding any public meetings. This decree is against the Mutual Assistance Treaty, and the workers have cancelled it.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ “Suured tööliste meelevaldused Tallinnas”, Postimees, 22.06.1940

⁹⁹ Johannes Vares. “Walitsuse töökawa: teenida rahvast”, Postimees, 22.06.1940

¹⁰⁰ Neeme Ruus, “Tartu töörahvas nõudis uut walitsust”, Postimees, 22.06.1940

What was not as clear, though, was the extent to which the old system had been bad. The more radical worker meetings and the new editor of *Postimees* Max Laosson declared that all Estonian leadership so far had “never been loved by the Estonian people,” the only exceptions being the socialist movements such as the Estonian Workers Commune or the 1924 communist uprising.¹⁰¹ More moderate speeches concentrated the blame mainly on the previous government. There was no clear narrative yet during the first week, who was the enemy. In addition to this, neither the contemporary Estonians nor the Soviets knew exactly how the newly selected leaders would lead the new government and whether they were ready to follow orders. It seems that the Soviets were ready to replace the government if it would resist its wishes. Such claims were expressed in the news: workers during a gathering claimed that “We do not want it [Vares’ government] to become a Kerensky government, it must become worker’s government. If our demands are not fulfilled, we will gather again to protest on Thursday.”¹⁰² In order to avoid estranging the public, it seems that the new regime knowingly avoided the words that would be associated with the Soviet regime, such as “Bolshevik,” “socialism” and (especially) “communism.” Stalin and Marx were called “leaders of the working people” instead. The first noticeable time “communism” was mentioned was on 28 June when the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party called its representatives from local committees to visit “comrade” Säre and get instructions for opening the registration for the party members – although the Estonian Communist Party had not even been legalised yet.¹⁰³ Instead, new discourse adopted already familiar such as words of “nation/people” and “workers” (*tööliskond*) from Päts’ era discourse, although the meaning of these words shifted quickly. During the bases era, the term “workers” usually referred strictly to a class living in the towns and working in factories, especially in oil shale mines. Red Month’s meaning and usage of the word “workers” could better be compared with Päts’ “nation,” including almost everyone while emphasizing that a normal citizen is a working person. “People” and “workers” were almost synonymous and used to replace socialist words and bring contrast to the concepts of the bases era.

Regarding the Soviet interpretation of the broader Estonian history, there was no clear narrative yet and almost no one spoke about exact details. Overall, the focus was on the Republic of Estonia, and it was agreed that the recent republican government had been bad for the workers. Such an example could be seen in the opinion article about the Estonian national flag: “In times when blue-black-white was the symbol of Estonian anti-tsarist fight for its own nation, it had a

¹⁰¹ Max Laosson. “Eesti rahvas tõelise demokraatia künnisel”, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹⁰² “Poliitilised wangid wabastati”, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹⁰³ “Eestimaa kommunistliku partei keskkomitee”, *Postimees*, 28.06.1940

progressive and organizing value. It inspired the nation to fight for its language, literature, culture, and democracy. [...] Now, however, Estonian Workers should only carry the clean (red) flag.”¹⁰⁴ Messages like that show how Estonian history was still valued as a good thing, while it was also emphasised that socialist elements were a better alternative. Democratic opposition and the president were accepted in this new discourse, only the recent bad regimes that had ruined the nation’s recent history. Neither the Estonian War of Independence against the Soviets nor the Republic of Estonia were ever under attack since wanting to separate from the autocratic Russian Empire, because it was fully understandable: “During the Great Russian Revolution, we separated from the revolutionary work class because Estonians hoped to gain their freedom with independence and organise it better than it was in Tsarist Russia.”¹⁰⁵

The events of the June coup d’état were shown in *Postimees* as revolutionary and appreciated by the public: “21 and 22 June will forever be reminisced by all. I will never forget the moment where we gathered for the spectacular worker’s parade in front of the city hall, even though we had to hear quite a few unpleasant remarks from passers-by.”¹⁰⁶ Real democracy was claimed to be restored, under which all Estonian citizens can flourish: “...the government devotes all its energy to the full realization of the rights of the people [...] so that the government could ensure the exercise of the democratic rights of the people.”¹⁰⁷ Ironically, by claiming the new regime to be democratic and better than the previous system, it could be said that the people’s government kept the Päts’ era discourse rather in place. Both discourses claimed their current regime to be truly democratic and tried to fix the issues caused by the last government.

It was considered liberating for the Estonian workers (who according to the newspapers, were the most important part of the nation). It was made clear though, that the liberties they had secured were those of the bourgeoisie and the socialist state is something of the future. “Last Friday Estonian nation won their civil liberties. There are such comrades, who impatiently demand an immediate Soviet system. Creation of such system depends on how fast the workforce is able to organise themselves to organise such kind of system that the people want.”¹⁰⁸ “Is the current government trying to establish a Soviet regime in Estonia? We saw from the Government’s declarations that this is not the case. The current government has given us bourgeois liberties. [...] Is there going to be an Estonian Communist Party organised? There are no political parties allowed in Estonia. The centre for Estonian working people to organise around exists as the Estonian Workers' Unions' Confederation (*Eestimaa*

¹⁰⁴ Aadu Hint. “Lippudest”, *Postimees*, 25.06.1940

¹⁰⁵ Osvald Hirsch. “Tööliskond vajab teadlikke seltsimehi”, *Postimees*, 30.06.1940

¹⁰⁶ ““Naised, saage ühewäärseks meestega!””, *Postimees*, 28.06.1940

¹⁰⁷ Johannes Vares-Barbarus. „Walitsuse töökawa: teenida rahvast“, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹⁰⁸ Aadu Hint. ““Meie ei anna wabadust iialgi käest””, *Postimees*, 28.06.1940

Töölisühingute Keskliit)...”¹⁰⁹ Messages similar to that one were emphasised multiple times, trying to convince the public that the goal of the government is not to merge Estonia into the Soviet Union nor to nationalise private property.¹¹⁰ That being said, the change in rhetoric was clear and so was the message: “Worker’s government’s task is mainly to make preparations so that one day we could achieve true socialism”¹¹¹ and “Our path is shown to us by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.”¹¹²

Enemies

Characteristic to the Soviet discourse and especially uncommon for bases era Estonian one is the search for enemies. There are many accusations towards the “bourgeoisie, the West, and capitalist cliques” on a daily basis. Capitalism was usually shown as a problem in contemporary society: “Capitalists provoke the wars since they are enriching from them. Workers are impoverished because they are the ones paying for those wars.”¹¹³ “Such a course of action has been chosen by the current clique in power, where there is no consideration to people’s will.”¹¹⁴ Such aggressive claims are contrary to the bases era discourse, where “peace and calm heads” were called to prevail almost on a weekly basis. Also new to Estonian public media was the emotional way of writing and the widespread use of judgemental adjectives when describing events, states, and people. While during the bases era, even events such as the Winter War received little to no public judgement one way or another, now states were described as “mighty” or “evil.”¹¹⁵

That being said, only in very few cases there are specific mentions of names or cases— usually, only a vague group of such transgressors is referred to. Even if the state so far has been bad, it does not mean the public officials are all bad: most have tried to do a good job.¹¹⁶ While the military has been the repressor of the working people – we must not forget that modern military is mostly made up from children of the working people, who have little freedom in making their own decisions.¹¹⁷ This was even the case with Estonian Defence League – while the organisation itself was one of the early antagonists of the new Estonian state and called “a dark institution that was working against the [Mutual Assistance] Treaty, spread misinformation about the USSR and was preparing to fight the Worker’s Republic,”¹¹⁸ it was still mentioned

¹⁰⁹ “Loomas õigeid eeldusi”, *Postimees*, 25.06.1940

¹¹⁰ “Valitsuse deklaratsioon”, *Päevaleht*, 25.06.1940

¹¹¹ Arnold Veimer. “Praegune walitsus on töörahwa huwide kaitsja”, *Postimees*, 25.06.1940

¹¹² “Meie ei anna wabadust iialgi käest”, *Postimees*, 28.06.1940

¹¹³ Moissei Sverdlov. “Töö muutugu kõigile auasjaks”, *Postimees*, 26.06.1940

¹¹⁴ Kristjan Jalak, “Tartu töörahwas nõudis uut walitsust”, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹¹⁵ “Kilde töötawa rahwa meeleavaldustelt”, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹¹⁶ Neeme Ruus. „Riigiaparaadi puhastamine kuritahtlikest ja bürokraatlikest ollustest“, *Postimees*, 04.07.1940

¹¹⁷ Arnold Veimer. „Praegune walitsus on töörahwa huwide kaitsja“, *Postimees*, 25.06.1940

¹¹⁸ Kristjan Jalak. “Tartus oli weel teine tööliste rongkäik”, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

that even there, there were lots of people who were misinformed and just wanted to protect their homes.¹¹⁹ Thus, there clearly was an enemy for the worker nation – but it was established very vaguely, almost anyone and everyone could be included or excluded from the definition according to the interpreter of the narrative.

Foreign affairs

Another change was redefining the relationship with the Soviet Union. Although the change of relations and a corresponding change in the discourse had already happened after the treaty of Moscow, after June 22 the Soviet Union pretty much remains the only state Estonian foreign policy is dealing with. Estonian's eastern neighbour is described with many different adjectives and expressions, i.e., “Our great Eastern neighbour and friend”¹²⁰ or “the world's most cultural, progressive and powerful nation the Soviet Union.”¹²¹ While not present in political speeches, “reader reviews” or worker's meetings contain ovations to the Soviet leaders – usually for Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Zhdanov.¹²² Estonians' great impression of the Red Army – first described by TASS during the take-over, was now also adopted by the new government. “The Red Army has not come here as occupiers, but as the bringer of peace and happiness”¹²³ Foreign affairs were also publicly reorganised according to the aims of the Soviet Union: “The goal of Estonian foreign policy is to deepen the relations with the USSR since it is the Great Power that is friendly to us. Foreign relations between the Soviet Union and Estonia form the basis for each government's foreign decisions.”¹²⁴ What was pretty much clear from the start was the disappearance of the meaningful independent Estonian foreign policy. While the reports from the war remained, there was little news regarding any independent foreign policy besides intensifying the relationship with the USSR and similar news from Latvia and Lithuania. “Ever since the Treaty of Tartu in 1920 we have been fully isolated from the Soviet Union.”¹²⁵ The change in closer connections with the Soviet Union came with the attempts to tie Estonian history closer to Russia. As such, there were many references to the common history the two peoples shared. In addition to the previously mentioned Kerensky reference, the prime minister claims: “We are the children of the Russian Revolution, history has once again shown us our spot next to the friendly Soviet Union.” In the speeches held during the Red Month, parallels

¹¹⁹ “„Isamaaliidu” lõpp, Kaitseliidu likvideerimine“, Postimees, 29.06.1940
„Kaitseliitlaste ja naiskodukaitse liikmete suured hulgad olid aga organiseerunud siira tahtega aidata omalt poolt kaasa julgeolekule väikses riigis, kellele käib üle jõu suure sõjawäe loomine.“

¹²⁰ “Uue walitsuse töökawa”, Postimees, 25.06.1940

¹²¹ Max Laosson. “Eesti rahwa iseseiswust kindlustada suudab waid Eesti Töötawa Rahwa Liit”, Postimees, 13.07.1940

¹²² “Suured tööliste meeleawaldused Tallinnas”, Postimees, 22.06.1940

¹²³ “Osawõturohke rahwakoosolek Narwas”, Postimees, 27.06.1940

¹²⁴ Nigol Andresen. “Walitsuse liikmed tulevastest uuendustest”, Postimees, 26.06.1940

¹²⁵ Osvald Hirsch. “Tööliskond wajab teadlikke seltsimehi”, Postimees, 30.06.1940

with Russian history are drawn often.¹²⁶ This becomes quite standard – using suitable examples from already thoroughly worked-through Russian history was much easier than little-known capitalist Estonian history. Also, it brings Estonia back to the eastern focus – no longer are they compared with the Western states, now the examples of history and standards are from the USSR.

Already in his first speeches the new prime minister Johannes Vares noted that “Thanks to the Mutual Assistance Treaty implemented between Estonia and the Soviet Union last autumn, which the new government wants to fulfil sincerely, honestly and friendly, we have been able to live in peace and ensure our independence so far and we will be able to keep doing so in the future.”¹²⁷ This fact had been emphasised often by the old government, but for the new regime, this fact was much more important. No day passed by without someone thanking the Soviet troops for keeping Estonia out of the war, workers’ protests were held in support of it, and workers’ resolutions thanking the Soviet regime for the support were adopted. The claim that “friendship with the Soviet Union saved Estonia from the war” remained in public media until the 1941 German invasion of the USSR.

Small state

The Soviet Estonian regime adopted the small state discourse but used it mainly to justify the Soviet military bases in Estonia. “Small states cannot defend themselves militarily, Estonian foreign policy is a policy of peace. If it had been the goal of the USSR to liquidate Estonian independence, it would have not been hard to do this.”¹²⁸ What was different from before, was that the Estonian side no longer mentioned the Soviet needs – the old hegemony had claimed the bases treaty to be conducted so the USSR would feel also safe, “people’s regime” was avoiding such claims. Also, the old hegemony never claimed it could not defend itself. Thus, while the element itself remained similar, it was used in a different manner by the People’s Government of Estonia.

Issues

The new media gave lots of attention to multiple problems in Estonian society – fake or real. These issues were defined and the guilty who caused the problems were tied to the oppressive former regime or the capitalist abuse of workers. Then, a solution was offered, which was only possible under the new democratic regime. It can be seen as an attempt by the new hegemon to coerce specific classes to collaborate with the new hegemon by emphasizing the failures of the

¹²⁶ Johannes Vares. “Kõik töötavad kihid on meie riigi tuum ja raudwara”, Postimees, 25.06.1940

¹²⁷ Johannes Vares. “Kõik töötavad kihid on meie riigi tuum ja raudwara”, Postimees, 25.06.1940

¹²⁸ Nigol Andresen. “Valitsuse liikmed tulevastest uuendustest”, Postimees, 26.06.1940

old regime and the opportunities under the new hegemon. Most noticeable were the attacks on education, gender equality (“women workers are worth just as much as their male contemporaries”¹²⁹), and state-organised promotion of alcohol.¹³⁰

One of the earliest examples of this is the attacks on the Estonian education system. The main argument stated that only rich people are getting quality education: “Our higher education is mostly for the richer folk. Schools are being closed and tuition fees are being often raised. What is taught in high school is how to shoot a gun, the quality of education is, however, poor. The future position in the university is being determined by their fraternity.”¹³¹ Interestingly, another issue that plagued Estonian education according to the new hegemon was the lack of teaching in Russian in the Estonian schools: “It is an unnatural phenomenon that we understand so little our neighbour’s language which prevents us from getting acquainted with the achievement of our great neighbour.”¹³²

Conclusion

This first week of the Red Month has probably the most divisive character from all the weeks analysed. It introduces arguably the most radical discourse change in Estonian history almost overnight while retaining many aspects of old discourse that will fade later. Many main points of the old regime are affirmed: Estonia is an independent state, which values democracy. The War of Independence was an important feat in Estonian history and peace is our main goal during these challenging times. At the same time, radical changes happened in the discourse: the USSR became a major ally to the Estonian state, the old governments became the Other, enemies who had damaged the interests of the Estonian people, and socialism was declared to be the end goal of the current hegemon. Many arguments felt generic though and lacked depth, also there was a discrepancy between the speeches of the workers and speeches of politicians, with workers being much more radical. However, neither communism nor joining the Soviet Union was ever explicitly mentioned as a goal. Postimees feels like it is made by two different regimes. Articles that deal with political developments are almost fully presenting the Soviet discourse, while almost nothing has changed in the other non-political topics such as sport, culture, and regional news – they still report the news in the same style they did a week ago. The Soviet Union tried to establish its cultural hegemony by establishing claims as if it would be restoring the old and desired regime and by bringing out the failures of the old regime. In

¹²⁹ ””Naised, saage ühewäärseks meestega!””, Postimees, 28.06.1940

¹³⁰ “Alkoholimüük piiramisele”, Postimees, 08.07.1940

¹³¹ Aadu Hint. “Rahwamiiting Tähtwere pargis”, Postimees, 22.06.1940

¹³² Jüri Nuut. “Eesti-Nõukogude Liidu sõprus kõige laiemale alusele”, Postimees, 06.07.1940 (*While this is a repetition of the same idea from next week, I found its expression much better than the one from the first week.*)

the new discourse, many articles are devoted to including many different classes under the new “workers” definition and to prove, how bad the old regime had been to the majority of the people. The Soviet discourse seems to carefully try to push the Estonian identity towards the socialist direction – at first, trigger words such as “communism” are avoided, “workers” is used as a wide term and the independence of the Republic of Estonia is not questioned. Thus, the new hegemon seemingly tried to balance between fulfilling its goal of introducing the new discourse while at the same time avoiding some radical claims that could estrange some of the locals.

Second week (30.06-05.07)

With the beginning of July first signs of stabilisation are seen and the newspapers also concede this fact: “There were many rumours as if their [peasants’] private property would be taken and they would have to go bankrupt.”¹³³ It is becoming clear that new discourse has arisen, and many institutions are trying to adapt to the new situation and release messages which would make them acceptable to the new society. Many organisations which actually would not be accepted by the soon-to-be Soviet regime, congratulated the new government, emphasised how they support the new democratic workers’ regime, and published messages showing their support of the new regime. Such examples can be brought from the fraternities,¹³⁴ city officials¹³⁵ and clergy.¹³⁶ On the other hand, these organisations were able to keep working in the people’s Estonia while the organisations which did not show their public support, were either taken over by new leaders (such example included for example Postimees) or closed immediately, for example, Chamber of Workers.¹³⁷

Clarifying “the Other”

During the first week, most of the speeches attacking the Estonian leadership and history were generic and avoided details, making it nearly possible to use such narrative universally in different states simply by switching the name of the country. This changed during the second week when the arguments became clearer and more refined. The definition of self and other - who are included in our workers’ nation and who is not, was taken into focus. “Under the definition of the ‘working people,’ almost all of our nation can be included. There are only a few exceptions who cannot fit into it.”¹³⁸ This was a clear sign that the new hegemon was trying to accommodate the majority into the new republic, instead either certain names were named or the vague “capitalist clique” was still used to define the enemy. The new ministers, who were a local Estonians, seemed to play part in expressing this new, more relatable discourse to the public in their speeches, referring to specific names and naming specific events while using the new discourse: “In addition to foreign capital, the national capitalist group arose consisting of

¹³³ “Põllumehe töötahe jälle tugev ja kindel”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹³⁴ “Eesti üliõpilasseltside terwitus uuele walitsusele”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹³⁵ Robert Sinka (*Mayor of Tartu*). “Tartu sai wäikekorterite üüriseaduse”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹³⁶ Artur Wõõbus. “Kirik ja klassiwalitsus, kapital, riik kuulwad ühte”, Postimees, 02.07.1940; „*There are many progressive and reasonable circles among Christians who have understood that the current distribution of wealth is shameful. Such circles can only feel joy from the current reorganisation of our state, where capital can be redistributed from the elite to the masses.*”

Jüri Kimmel. „Pastor A. Wõõbuse deklaratsioon puhul“, Postimees. 02.07.1940; „*Capitalism is horrifying and rotten, it is collapsing – there is no alternative to its collapse. I do not have anything against the Soviet Union, but I cannot support the fact that the Soviets do not tolerate the Church. Because who created the Soviet Union and communism? It was God.*”

¹³⁷ “Tööliskoda likvideeritakse”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹³⁸ Nigol Andresen. „Kõik uuendused seaduslikus korras ja kaalutult“, Postimees, 02.07.1940

many, leading members being August Jürima, Viktor Päts, and Oskar Suursööt. But their relationship with the Estonian nation was as in a colony, just like the foreign capital group.”¹³⁹

As can be seen from the example, this inclusive pattern established during the first week remained the same, but now specific names were mentioned.

Another addition to the discourse was the clear condemnation of President Konstantin Päts and his dictatorship (called “the Era of Silence”). As a way to both delegitimise Päts’ regime and legitimise his own, prime minister Vares declared in one of his first speeches “Our nation is healthy and sober. Without any cause has he been declared sick and nurtured so throughout these years.”¹⁴⁰ Päts’ regime was said to be the most repressive era of the republic: “Since June 21 Estonian people have recovered their democratic rights that had been taken six years ago”¹⁴¹ or more radical “During the Era of Silence, we have tried to modestly expose, how controversial has been the elite and their definition of “national integrity” which has been used to justify hostile governing.”¹⁴² Anti-Päts rhetoric was overall in a rising trend which remained in Soviet discourse – in Soviet Estonian history books his regime was called fascist.¹⁴³

The tribal era, known then as “the ancient independence,” was also still appreciated in the new regime: “Thus, we can hope that this government will create such democratic liberties and order, which has been historically characteristic to the Estonian nation since the ancient independence.”¹⁴⁴ Also, since it became more clear that the Päts’ regime was the main hostile other, for the time being, opponents of Päts, such as former head of democratic opposition Jaan Tõnisson, could also receive positive description in the news: “Especially interesting was Professor Jaan Tõnisson’s speech who claimed that the values of the culture must be available to the masses. Instead of bowing down, the Estonian free spirit must straighten up and through organisations fulfil the so-long-awaited national aspirations.”¹⁴⁵

Attitude to Estonian culture

The end of the second week and the beginning of the third started to deal with the topic of culture. Unlike in political history, there was no need to change the discourse radically in this field since the cultural elite was quite often respected in the Soviet discourse: “First Estonian

¹³⁹ Neeme Ruus. “Sotsiaalminister paljastas korruptiivseid nähteid meie majanduselus”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹⁴⁰ *The speech referenced Päts’ claim that “The Estonian nation is sick; it needs a guiding hand” which Päts used to usurp power in Estonia.*

Johannes Vares-Barbarus. “Kõik töötavad kihid on meie riigi tuum ja raudwara”, Postimees, 25.06.1940

¹⁴¹ Nigol Andresen. „Kõik uuendused seaduslikus korras ja kaalutult“, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹⁴² Hans Kruus. “Peaministri asetäitja prof. H. Kruus kõneles: Eesti ja Nõukogude Liidu huvid ühtuvad”, Postimees, 01.07.1940

¹⁴³ Gustav Naan. 1957. *Eesti NSV Ajalugu: Kõige vanemast ajast tänapäevani*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 477-494

¹⁴⁴ Karl Laagus. “Ühistegelased!”, Postimees, 01.07.1940

¹⁴⁵ “Jüri Annusson Haridusliidu esimeheks”, Postimees, 01.07.1940

generation of intellectuals was strongly intertwined with the people. [...] Their works were not only read but also sung during the Estonian song festivals.”¹⁴⁶ Naturally, the new discourse had to show that the cultural elite had always been pro-socialist values and suffering under the capitalist regime: “In the poetry of past day Estonia, during the peak of the reactionary regime, Kärner was a poet belonging to the better part of the petty bourgeoisie. He represented vividly the anguish, pessimism, despair, and lack of purpose as a bard of his era.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, in this field the change mostly came from adopting the old “elite” into the new discourse, not by introducing a new elite.

The most important character whose fate was decided during this time was the recently deceased famous Estonian writer Anton Hansen Tammsaare. He was shown as a positive “workers’ figure,” who would have supported the new regime and whose thoughts matched with the workers’ ideas: “Estonian great writer Tammsaare did not only leave us with rich literature works but also with many articles in which his deep, unique, peculiar ideas as philosophical and societal thinker appear.” He was thus accepted, but his ideas which passed Soviet goals now became especially emphasised: “By throwing out the religious studies from the university and closing the theology faculty it would be by Tammsaare’s own words “commendable merit of liberating the temple of science from a millennium of dust and the facility finally would not have to deal with matters that have little common with science. [...] one of the obstacles Tammsaare believes to be our servility towards the West.”¹⁴⁸ It is also a good way to show how the new discourse learned to borrow passing elements from the local former narrative, instead of using the generic socialist discourse. Tammsaare received more attention next week from deputy prime minister Hans Kruus: “Our deceased great writer Tammsaare has had tried to wrestle with the questions of the current dictatorship to its roots in his works. Just like in his works, our society must be liberated from the authority and violence of comrade-look-a-likes similar to Clever-Ants”.¹⁴⁹ Such use of Tammsaare in the current discourse solidified Tammsaare’s place as a symbol also in the new hegemony and learned to use his well-known works for solidification of the new regime.

Small state

One narrative that was never challenged by the new regime was Estonian identity as a small state. This idea was adapted from the old regime, although used in a manipulative way. The foreign minister Nigol Andresen said: “Each military-politically literate person agrees these

¹⁴⁶ ““Izwestija” toob ülewaate eesti kirjandusest”, Postimees, 11.07.1940

¹⁴⁷ Karl Kivi. „Pessimism eesti eilse päeva luules“, Postimees, 03.07.1940

¹⁴⁸ “Usuteaduskond ja Tartu Ülikool”, Postimees, 06.07.1940

¹⁴⁹ Hans Kruus. “Töötawa rahwa lipu all”, Postimees, 10.07.1940

days that a small country cannot defend themselves militarily. As long as wars are inevitable, every smart leadership of a smaller state looks for a Great Power which could defend it” and “The attempts of smaller states to remain neutral has turned out to be a deception of oneself.”

¹⁵⁰ Statements like Estonia could not defend itself would have never been said in the old republic. Minister also used a similar argument to his bases era counterpart Ants Piip, claiming that “since such a grand Soviet centre of Leningrad was thus threatened by the war-provocateurs, it was necessary to [...] secure Soviet western border” and Estonia would have needed the bases at some point.¹⁵¹ Although at first glance the argument seems similar, Andresen’s claim makes the Soviet base a necessity for Estonia, while Piip usually referred to bases as Estonian concession to the Soviet Union so it could fulfil its needs.

While it was made clear that “no independent Estonia could exist without the support of a great power,” there were no hints of people having the wish to join the Soviet Union. Rather it was emphasised indirectly that Baltic state symbols remain untouched. In Latvia, the state flag was attacked, which prompted the Latvian Communist newspaper to publish an article (which Postimees also referred to): “Some people have torn down the Latvian state flag. Such behaviour must be condemned in the strictest way, state flag cannot be insulted. It can be used along with red workers’ flag.”¹⁵² Regardless of whether the newspaper claimed it to simply to keep the Latvian state looking like it was still independent or whether the Latvian flag was still being valued, the message is clear: the Baltic state symbols remain as they are for the time being.

Structural changes

During the second week, the structure of the newspaper started to change. Starting from June 30, socialist-minded poems began to be published every now and then, one of the first of which was already strongly anti-Finnish, calling the Finns fascist.¹⁵³ New title called “Life of workers (*Töölise elu*)” was starting to be published, which followed the new discourse – workers had it hard so far, but now things are developing.¹⁵⁴

This week was thus described by the activation of the new leadership. What appeared though was the vague border between the ministers’ fields of responsibility. Minister of foreign affairs Nigol Andresen could very well talk about the developments in the economy and in internal

¹⁵⁰ Hans Kruus. “Peaministri asetäitja prof. H. Kruus kõneles”, Postimees, 01.07.1940

¹⁵¹ Nigol Andresen. „Kõik uuendused seaduslikus korras ja kaalutult“, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹⁵² “Riigilippu ei tohi teotada”, Postimees, 06.07.1940

¹⁵³ Aira Kaal. “Soome sõda”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

¹⁵⁴ “Töölise elu”, Postimees, 02.07.1940

affairs¹⁵⁵ and almost all ministers emphasised at some point how important the Soviet-Estonian relations are. This trend was only becoming more common in the coming weeks.¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

The second week was able to rectify the shortcomings of the first week. During the first week, the new discourse was clearly established, although it lacked details specific to Estonia. By having the people's government take a more active role in media, the discourse which had been adopted the previous week became more refined and had elements related more directly to Estonia: the Other was more defined, and new discourse was justified using important figures in Estonian society, such as Tammsaare. If the two weeks are compared, the claim to the hegemony definitely seems stronger after the second week. The strengthening of the discourse's structure is logical since it was able to build itself on the discourse established last week instead of challenging the elements that were taken over from the republican era.

¹⁵⁵ For example, Nigol Andresen. "Kõik uuendused seaduslikus korras ja kaalutult", Postimees, 04.07.1940

¹⁵⁶ For example, the Minister of Agricultural Affairs Aleksander Jõeäär: "The basis for our foreign politics is true friendship and strong alliance with the Soviet Union." - Aleksander Jõeäär. "Praegusel silmapilgul ei tohi tekkida rahwas lahkeli", Postimees, 14.07.1940

Third week (06.07-14.07)

Starting from July 6, there are a couple of cases where discourse had to adopt a new narrative overnight. The most radical examples of the change were the legalisation and acceptance of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP) together with the declaration of new elections. Although the wider discourse continued to be strengthened by the collaborators, this “leap” in the discourse seemingly made it harder for the collaborators to justify the acts of the new hegemon.

Elections

There had been almost no mention of ECP at all in the papers until on July 6 it was declared restored and its goal publicised in their newspaper *Kommunist*, which was also published in Postimees: “ECP has never ceased its work, it has only changed its form of activity, changed from an illegal party to a legal one [...] The main task of the Communist Party is to organise and unite the entire working people [...] Right after the legalisation of the ECP, there have been massive amount applications for joining the party.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, the narrative is clear: ECP and by extension, the Soviet regime has always been active in Estonia and popular among the people. It is their job to unite the working people. Also, just next to this news, the following article appeared which published the statement “many factories had already adopted”: “We, the workers of the factory of cordially greet the Estonian Communist Party...” and had a long speech about the victories of socialism. While nothing was said out loud, such a publication felt like an instruction for factories. Although it was mentioned nowhere in the paper, ECP was the only restored party during this era (Päts’ dictatorship had disallowed political parties).

The other radical change that happened also on July 6 (and was strongly related to the ECP), was the declaration of new elections for Riigivolikogu. To this date, there had been no discussion in Postimees at all about elections, but starting from July 6, a huge part of the new discourse was focused on the topic: one article after another talked about the need to elect “a new and democratic” parliament and how the last parliament had been fully illegitimate. “Those who had any understanding about the heritage of our current Riigivolikogu (*lower chamber*) and Riiginõukogu (*upper chamber*) will not drop any tears to the grave of these institutions. [...] We remember how Riigivolikogu came to be – no one could speak about democratic nomination of the candidates or about fair competition.”¹⁵⁸

On the next day, the Estonian Working People's Union (*Eesti Töötava Rahva Liit*) was established - an electoral bloc whose goal was “to create a true people’s government. [...]”

¹⁵⁷ “Eestimaa Kommunistlik Partei astus uuesti legaalselt tegewusse”, Postimees, 06.07.1940

¹⁵⁸ “«Rahwarinde» Riigikogu lõpp”, Postimees, 06.07.1940

Throughout many years Estonian nation was suffering under the yoke of magnate plutocrats. The worst example of such was the previous government, which was hated by all.” Thus, they declared the old governments to be terrible and established the future they are seeing: “It’s time to choose a Riigivolikogu, which would correctly reflect its people and regime. [...] Estonian people must go to the ballot boxes, knowing that the basis for their state’s favourable and free life is the strong and indestructible alliance between Estonia and the great Soviet Union, the brotherhood between the nations of Estonian and Soviet people, who must now go hand in hand, inspired to fight for the common will to fight for Estonian and Soviet peoples’ people and prosperity.”¹⁵⁹

Interestingly, the discourse in the newspapers seemed to rather use the methods recommended by Gramsci than Lenin. Although the only political party participating in the electoral bloc was Estonian Communist Party, (the rest were non-political organisations), the discourse remained overall very vague but inclusive, using slogans to involve as large masses as possible. using sometimes conflicting slogans next to each other.¹⁶⁰ The power was not a thing to be seized by the workers, rather it was to be taken by a coalition of different classes under the leadership of the ECP, although at no point whatsoever, did any slogan promise communism or joining the Soviet Union. Calls to vote for the electoral bloc remained the dominant topic throughout the week, it became the main focus of Postimees for the week.

In addition to the communist movement, the Estonian opposition tried to organise themselves and also run for the new Parliament. This opposition received absolutely no attention in the papers to promote their ideas or thoughts and the only way we learn from the media that an alternative to the Working People’s Union exists, is because of the new regime’s criticism towards these people. In his speech, the foreign minister of Estonia commented on elections: “Do we know, why we have a bunch of candidates who run for the Riigivolikogu outside the Working People's Union? It seems to me that both these candidates and their voters should clearly elaborate on why they are not content with the Working People’s Union representatives since they seem to submit alternative candidates.” Furthermore, the minister hinted that the opposition could be either the anarchists, enemies of the people, or servants of the West in the same speech. Finally, minister Andresen said: “If a certain region already has a candidate (in the Working People’s Union), whose election program seems fair and good, we see no reason

¹⁵⁹ “Eesti Töötava Rahva Liit valimistel”, Postimees, 07.07.1940

¹⁶⁰ For example, “Long live the Estonian Communist Party” and “No one is allowed to force peasants into forming Kolkhozes, no one can seize the private belongings of the peasantry” were next to each other. “Eesti Töötava Rahva Liidu walimisloosungeid”, Postimees, 10.07.1940

to set up alternative candidates and make the elections thus more complicated” thus marking it clearly that alternative candidates to Working People’s Union would not be tolerated.¹⁶¹

Similar messages were repeated throughout this week: “Each vote that is not given to the Estonian Working People’s Union’s candidate decreases the chances of peace and increases the danger of war. [...] each candidate, no matter from which side must be able to prove they have had no history with the foreign politics of the nation’s enemies. If they do not do this, they are the wolf in sheep’s clothing.”¹⁶² Even with these explanations I feel like the elections are the weak point of the new discourse: it is clear both the media and the government are only supporting one side, the only time the opponents are given any attention at all, is when “the heroic” side is showing opposition’s faults. Also, the reasoning for not allowing the opposition to run with the EWPU seems really weak and makes it hard to believe the illusion of the democracy the Soviets worked so hard to create.

Another issue the new discourse had to deal with was the fast pace of the elections. Officially the document declaring the elections was signed on 5 July and the elections were to happen on 14 July. According to the laws, the minimum time for preparing for the elections was 35 days.¹⁶³ While this fact was not mentioned in the media, some indirect justifications were brought to justify the breach of law: “We have chosen such road which will avoid the looming war and potential time of troubles. There is no opportunity to stop on such a route since the delay would also mean the danger of perishing. Storm crushes the ships that are still.”¹⁶⁴

The third week can thus mostly be described as a one-sided but intense political election campaign in the media. Politicians, workers, and intellectuals all publicly declared their support for the EWPU and called for people to vote for the electoral bloc. “In the Estonian Working People’s Union’s program, no citizen can find any such promises which the intended representative institute could not fulfil. It is realistic and feasible.”¹⁶⁵ More than half of the articles, no matter whether directly related to the topic or not, called to vote for the bloc, using both promises of a better future and vague threats: “By voting for the EWPU on 14-15 July, the Estonian people can show its political maturity and understanding the current situation correctly. With this, we will show our great neighbour that here lives a nation that is interested in friendship with it and the friendly Red Army can keep without any issues continue its task in here.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Nigol Andresen. “Walimistel otsustame kogu rahwa saatuse üle”, Postimees, 10.07.1940

¹⁶² “Eelseiswate walimiste tähe all”, Postimees, 10.07.1940

¹⁶³ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 490

¹⁶⁴ Hans Kruus. “Töötawa rahwa lipu all”, Postimees, 10.07.1940

¹⁶⁵ “Rahwas läheb rõõmsalt walimistele wastu”, Postimees, 14.07.1940

¹⁶⁶ Aleksander Jõeäär. „Praegusel silmapilgul ei tohi tekkida rahwas lahkeli“, Postimees, 14.07.1940

In addition to integrating new groups of interests into the workers' movement, the media started to warn about spies among the masses: "As we can see from the workers' meetings in Valgamaa, former members of the Patriotic League have tried to infiltrate the meetings. Such men from the former elite might sow more class hate and increase gaps among the working class, which is why we have to be more careful with such collaborators."¹⁶⁷ "Also we cannot trust the socialists, who held the power in Estonia during its first years but gave it to the reactionaries. They have only brought disappointment with their promises."¹⁶⁸ Thus, the new leadership defined clearly, that no one else besides EWPU was expected to run for the new parliament. A newly defined enemy was also Jaan Tõnisson, leader of the democratic opposition to Päts' regime, who in the early days of the new discourse had been shown from a rather positive side: "Tõnisson's solidarity with Mr. Piip is wide-known, as is his anti-Estonian-Soviet pact rhetoric last autumn in Vanemuine. What else is wide-known is his support to the Uluots-Jürima violent regime directed against the workers' movement in Tartu from autumn to spring, when the workers were thrown out of the city council."¹⁶⁹ Probably as a reaction to the Tõnisson's attempt to run for the parliament, a clear anti-Tõnisson narrative was adopted.

In the end, the opposition was able to present 83 candidate names, but due to the state's intervention, only one was able to actually participate in the elections, the rest of the applications were denied.¹⁷⁰ There were many justifications in *Postimees* for denying these candidates the participation in the elections: the opposition made only generic promises, which were often copied from the EWPU; many opposition candidates had previously been part of "hostile" organisations such as Vaps' movement and Patriotic League (*Isamaaliit*, which was the alternative to the parties; president Päts used this organisation to support its rule in the country); many were related to either reactionary movements or capitalist businessmen; some applicants had a criminal history, especially rape was many times brought out as an example.¹⁷¹

Including new social classes

In order to achieve the consent of the masses, the Soviet hegemony focused even more on bringing out the shortcomings of the current republic. With new zeal, articles were aimed at women, railroad workers, rural people, intellectuals, court, soldiers, and policemen calling them to support the new regime and aiming to show the unfair life they had had before. Compared to the earlier weeks, the calls for support seemed more systemic and more organised. It was no

¹⁶⁷ "Isamaaliidu tegelased poewad tööliste hulka", *Postimees*, 09.07.1940

¹⁶⁸ Kristjan Jalak. „Töötava rahva kandidaadid kõnelesid Tähtvere pargis“, *Postimees*, 10.07.1940

¹⁶⁹ Max Laosson. „Taltsutagem tagurluse vallatused“, *Postimees*, 12.07.1940

¹⁷⁰ Zetterberg, 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 491

¹⁷¹ „Rahvavaenlased ei saa kandideerida valimistel“, *Postimees*, 11.07.1940

longer random workers holding speeches, such articles were written by journalists and provided more facts than before. For example, the article calling for women's support claimed that: "So far, no woman has made it to a leading position in Estonia. Even our girls' schools are led only by men, while this has never happened vice versa," which can be considered more or less accurate information, at the time in Estonia there were no female judges, no women in the parliament.¹⁷²

Especially intensive were the hegemon's articles focusing on bringing the Estonian police and military, (meaning the people with the opportunity to challenge the hegemony) to the fold: "Our old government tried to stay away from the working people and also keep the military distant. Estonian military had contact only with the elite who were taking all our income. This is why our military is a stranger to us. But with the arrival of freedom, our attitude to the military also changes." As it can be seen, the narrative was similar to the one established around the "workers vs Estonians" narrative – most military people are our own, they're our people, there are only a couple bad people. The new goal of the narrative was to clearly integrate them into the new and current system: "Red army is truly a people's army, where there are no bosses or subjects, everyone is on the same level. Our army must also become a place of similar comradeship. You soldiers, our people will grow closer to you, just as Red Army has."¹⁷³ Just two days later similar call was directed towards the police: "You were taught to remain silent and follow orders, you were criticised and punished top to bottom. The new government wants every policeman (as every other Estonian citizen) to be able to show with their work what they can do and what are their abilities."¹⁷⁴ The articles focusing on the military will continue to appear until the end of the republic.

"From West to East"

By now, the "new republic" seemed to have clearly established itself. New discourse had been more or less established, and swings between the old and new narratives started to become rare. According to the new discourse, Estonia had never been that free before: "With the freedoms of speech, press, and association, Estonia stands on the top of the list in the capitalist world (along with Latvia and Lithuania). Only in the socialist Soviet Union are these liberties present

¹⁷² Examples of an article aimed at the

Women: „Keda waliwad naised“, Postimees, 11.07.1940

Railroad workers: "Raudteelased käsikäes töötava rahwaga", Postimees, 11.07.1940

Rural people: "Maarahvas hääletab Töölava Rahva Liidule", Postimees, 13.07.1940

Police: "Politsei aparaat tuleb demokratsiseerida", Postimees, 12.09.1940

Intellectuals: Friedrich Niggol. „Kuhu kuulub meie töötav intelligents?“, Postimees, 13.07.1940

Court: „Kõik kodanikud eituse ees üheväärseks“, Postimees, 14.07.1940

¹⁷³ Osvald Hirsch. "Walimiswõitlusse läheme kui üks mees", Postimees, 07.07.1940

¹⁷⁴ "Tööliskond ja politsei käsikäes", Postimees, 09.07.1940

even on a greater scale.”¹⁷⁵ However, the new hegemony denied that this change was happening only due to the revolution in June – it tried to link its heritage together with the bases era discourse: “as if after the events of 21 June, the orientation of Estonian Republic had turned 180 degrees from West to East. The radical turn did really take place, but not on 21 June 1940 but rather earlier, namely on 28 September 1939, when Estonia and the Soviet Union signed the Mutual Assistance Treaty.”¹⁷⁶ The link between the bases era and the Red Month survived the Soviet era and is present even in modern Estonian historical analysis.

An important new element that appeared on the government level in the third week, was sending salutations to the Soviet leaders. “At the end of his speech premier minister Vares-Barbarus let the people know that the government of the republic had decided to send regards from the government and Estonian working people to Stalin and Molotov: [...] Government of the Estonian Republic send its thanks to the leader of the peoples Stalin for having the trust of the agrarian and urban people, saving our land from the dangers of war and securing the true freedom for the people.”¹⁷⁷ Also, mentioning Lenin and Marx became a common thing: “Our current politics is based on modern social sciences, which is created by the leaders of the proletariat: Marx, Lenin, etc.”¹⁷⁸ Such thanks were not unseen in Estonian media – until June 1940 there were many similar greetings and thanks, although with a slightly different tone and aimed at the president Päts.

Among the Estonian public, there seem to have been some worries regarding the close bond Estonia now had with the Soviet Union. Such accusations were never mentioned in the public media (in 1940), but there were quite a few speeches focused on countering such worries (which was also the only moment these accusations were made public): “...such claims as if nations would be destroyed in the Soviet Union, are false. There are currently different journals and literature published in 111 different languages.”¹⁷⁹ Throughout the entire year of 1940, there had been no article making such a claim and through this speech, I learned for the first time that such accusations against the Soviets had arisen in Estonia.

That being said, there was still no narrative calling for uniting with the USSR. In the media, there were even no hints that the Baltics would be interested in joining the Union. Neither did the Soviet side bring out the topic to the public: “Stalin – the leader of the working people in the entire world, does not only take care of the Soviet working nation but also takes care of

¹⁷⁵ Max Laosson. „Taltsutagem tagurluse vallatused“, Postimees, 12.07.1940

¹⁷⁶ “Eesti välispoliitika”, Postimees, 11.07.1940

¹⁷⁷ “Wabariigi Walitsuse terwitus Stalinile ja Molotowile”, Postimees, 07.07.1940

¹⁷⁸ “Töötute haritlaste ühingul puudub alus”, Postimees, 12.07.1940

¹⁷⁹ Helene Johani. „Naised nõuavad õiglast ande ja võimete hinnangut“, Postimees, 11.07.1940

allied nations' workers, from which Latvians is one of the most important nations.”¹⁸⁰ This example, shown with Latvia, clearly differentiates Latvians from other Soviet republics. That being said, the new system was noted to be similar to the Soviet system more than once: “Although our political system has certain differences from the Soviet one, there are no meaningful contradictions. Similar differences could be seen between different Soviet republics.”¹⁸¹

Redefining the Estonian history

Max Laosson, the new editor of the *Postimees* since late June of 1940, could be considered one of the more radical speakers in the newly arising discourse. Already his first speeches had shown elements of historical revisionism but by the third week, he had already created a fully alternative presentation of Estonian contemporary history. “Our capitalist clique, which had been in power for 20 years, has put in an immense amount to show our people as if our civil war of 1918-1920 had been the reason for our independence. The Estonian working class has never believed this claim. [...] The Estonian state was created with the help of Russian Whites, with adventurers from Scandinavia and Finland. [...] This republic remained an outpost and vassal of English-French capital and imperialism until 21 June 1940 [...] For the last 20 years, Estonian people have been simply British-French colony and have been exploited mercilessly.” The discourse Laosson presents shows how much of the soon-to-be Soviet Estonian discourse already existed by that time – all these arguments and claims are to be repeated in the later Soviet Estonian history books.¹⁸² The main difference with the later discourse is that according to Laosson, July 1940 was the moment to “secure Estonian true independence, not to sell the country to an imperialistic power.”¹⁸³

In opposition to Laosson's new discourse, writer August Jakobson presented his take on Estonian history which did not become widely known: “The infamous 12 March, which is, without doubt, the opposite to our 21 June, the biggest day of disappointment in our history [...] we were generously promised all kinds of democratic liberties all the while the worst kind of reactionary autocracy was established [...] The nation was officially declared sick and to be taken under treatment [...] This time we should change the idiom: kick the dog so long that it really stays down – we have to kick the so-called Second Republic, which was created on 12 March so long that all the scum that was connected to it will never want to rise again.” It is a

¹⁸⁰ „Töötajate suur meeleavaldus Riias“, *Postimees*, 07.07.1940

¹⁸¹ Paul Vihalem. “Riigimõisate asutamise jutt – absoluutne lollus”, *Postimees*, 12.07.1940

¹⁸² Karl Siilivask. 1980. *Eesti NSV ajalugu: II osa*. Tallinn: Valgus. 123-127; 141-143

¹⁸³ Max Laosson. “Eesti rahva iseseisvust kindlustada suudab vaid Eesti Töötava Rahva Liit”, *Postimees*, 13.07.1940

different narrative, which presents president Päts as the biggest criminal to be blamed for Estonia's current situation and separates it clearly from the pre-Päts republic, by proclaiming it to be the "Second Republic." While the later Soviet historiography will present the Päts era as the worst, it still gives the blame to the wider Estonian bourgeoisie republic as a whole, unlike Jakobson in this article.¹⁸⁴

Estonian-Soviet/Russian relationship was also cleared. In addition to admitting to the change in foreign politics (unlike the bases era discourse, which emphasised that nothing had changed with Soviet troops), it became established in the discourse that Estonia has been blossoming the most only under Russian rule. "The article ends with a note saying that over the last twenty years, the Estonian literature was forced to develop separated from the Russian neighbour nation's culture, which had always had a fruitful effect on Estonian literature."¹⁸⁵ It could be considered a development from the narrative of the first and second week that claimed, "small state cannot defend itself alone." This narrative is one of those which remained in the Soviet Estonian discourse until the end of the USSR.¹⁸⁶ At the moment under consideration though, the main focus was on how the cooperation with the Soviet Union has the potential to also help Estonia develop: "We can solve the unemployment by developing a tight relationship with the Soviet Union not only in foreign politics but also in economic politics. [...] Cooperation with the Soviet Union, approved by all the classes of Estonia, makes it possible for our economy to bloom that has been stagnant to this day."¹⁸⁷

Not only was the relationship with Russia reinterpreted, but the cooperation with the Baltic states was also now shown as a negative concept aimed against the Soviet Union: "The Estonian-Latvian alliance treaty of 1923 was signed against the threat of any third state, includes the Soviet Union. Since the mutual assistance treaties both stated conducted with the USSR, the danger from the Soviets was fully eliminated. Despite this fact, the Estonian-Latvian pact was kept in force, meaning that either the Baltic states were not sincere with their new partner, or they were not fully aware of the consequences of signing the mutual assistance treaty. [...] Instead, they showed special eagerness to demonstratively cultivate relations with Latvia and Lithuania."¹⁸⁸ The relationship with Latvia itself never became contested (there simply were no public statements related to the relationship with the Baltic state during the Red Month), but its previous cooperation was shown in a negative light.

¹⁸⁴ August Jakobson. "Tagurlased astugu vabatahtlikult eduteelt kõrvale", Postimees, 13.07.1940

¹⁸⁵ "'Izvestija" toob ülewaate eesti kirjandusest", Postimees, 11.07.1940

¹⁸⁶ Paul Vihalem. "Riigimõisate asutamise jutt – absoluutne lollus", Postimees, 12.07.1940

¹⁸⁷ Neeme Ruus. „Koostöö Nõukogude Liiduga võimaldab õitsengule viia senini kiratsenud majanduselu“, Postimees, 12.07.1940

¹⁸⁸ "Eesti välispoliitika", Postimees, 11.07.1940

Conclusion

The third week is to a great extent defined by “the second leap.” Only in two days, four radical changes had appeared in Estonia: the Communist Party was established, the old Parliament was disbanded, new elections were declared, and a new electoral union was created. None of these events were discussed in the media beforehand at all – the most we have is Vares claiming that at one point in the future should the elections be held.¹⁸⁹ Due to sudden elections, the legitimacy of the current narrative also suffered. Claims such as only allowing one list to participate in the elections, so “the Estonian people would not have to be confused by the choice” were weak enough that the later Soviet regime would never use it in its later Soviet Estonian discourse. Also, the constant and one-sided support towards the EWPU echoing through the newspaper makes the legitimacy of democracy weak – the only information we get about the opposition is received through criticism. If the leaders had not criticised the opposition, we would not even be aware of the opposition (only by reading *Postimees*).

Since discourse was going through the change anyway, it is unclear why these ideas could not have been introduced beforehand. After these decisions were published though, there were many articles justifying the decision-making logic for all these decisions, which means the new hegemony did see it necessary to justify the new elections. Why would it not be justified beforehand? It could be that the people’s government, which according to most current Estonian leading historians was mostly taking orders from the Soviets¹⁹⁰, received the order to make these decisions so suddenly there was little time to introduce the new steps beforehand or that the Soviet regime did inform them but for unknown reasons did not allow them to publish this info.

During the elections, we can see Gramsci’s national-popular class politics theory to be indirectly implemented in our case study: the electoral bloc, which was created, consisting of ECP and different (usually non-political) unions, uniting people from different classes and backgrounds under the common bloc, and being led by the proletariat. Even if this only existed on paper, the Soviet hegemon tried to show, how its hegemony has been accepted by the majority in Estonia.

Besides the elections, the new hegemony seems to have secured its discourse and it was developing toward more Soviet-minded discourse. Estonian near history was challenged, and Soviet alternative narratives were presented. Cheers to the Soviet leaders became the norm for

¹⁸⁹ Johannes Vares-Barbarus. „Walitsuse töökaava: teenida rahvast“, *Postimees*, 22.06.1940

¹⁹⁰ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu: Nõukogude vabariigi esimene aasta*. 485-493

the Estonian political leadership and criticism towards the state or the Soviet Union was only mentioned when it could be rebutted by the people's government.

Fourth week (15.07-21.07)

“The Chinese Walls surrounding us have fallen! Firstly fell the wall that separated us from each other, and from the friendly state Soviet Union, its diverse and rich culture, literature, and art. The mighty Red Army is with us! Secondly, along with cheering and without the trumpets of Jericho fell the Chinese Wall between the government and the people. The last government encouraged the growth of wealth for a few hundred families, empowering these reactionaries’ power and rights”¹⁹¹ This is prime minister Vares’ speech which starts the last week of the Estonian Republic. To some extent, he seems to be correct, the transition to the socialist discourse seems to be final. Big fluctuations are over, the Soviet discourse has adopted the acceptable elements from the Estonian old discourse and declared the rest to be bad. By now both government positions and workers’ meetings are using similar discourse in their speeches. Soviet slogans and references to the Soviet leaders have become common – i.e., Postimees on 14 July began with: “Long live the friendship and tight alliance between Estonia and the great and mighty Union of Soviet Socialist Republics!”

New vocabulary

Until after the elections, Postimees had avoided specific triggering keywords such as “communism,” “socialism” and “bolshevism” even if the rhetoric and discourse had already been adopted. Instead, vaguer, and less specific words such as “workers” and “people” were used – Stalin was the leader of the workers’ nation, and Marx was the founder of the workers’ movement. The main exception was talking about the communist party, but the party was the only thing using this name: even secretary Säre was mostly talking about workers’ democracy. Postimees’ editor Laosson tried to challenge this policy for the first time on 15 July. “During a peoples’ meeting in Võru, I was recommended by local intellectuals not to talk about “communism” since the petty bourgeoisie was not supposed to like this. They were shocked to see the spontaneous ovations when the leading part of the Estonian Communist Party in our War of Independence was mentioned.”¹⁹² While this article itself still does not fully embrace the public use of these keywords, the message of the article was clear – the Estonian nation has embraced the communist movement and it would be time to embrace the vocabulary as well. Yet his article marked the beginning of the change, and by his next article on 21 July, socialist words already were in wide circulation.

¹⁹¹ Johannes Vares. “Müürid on warisenud, walimistega wõidame kõik kindlused”, Postimees, 15.07.1940

¹⁹² Max Laosson. „Meie rahwahulkade poliitiline küpsus“, Postimees, 15.07.1940

Estonian Working People's Republic

After the elections, most political statements seemed to cheer for the results. The workers' meetings declared that "Now, the Estonian Lords' State has come to an end, and from this point on our Estonian Working People's Republic begins."¹⁹³ Similar messages were repeated both during the workers' meeting and by the new leadership: "We know now – Estonia is working peoples' republic and it will remain such."¹⁹⁴ In speeches as such, new Estonian state was seen on the rise.

This means even one week before Estonia applied to join the union, there was still not any intent shown that the crowd would wish to join the USSR. That being said, there seem to be preparations towards integrating Estonia into the Soviet Union starting from 18 July: the minister of the interior made it obligatory starting from 20 July to always have the Soviet flag next to the blue-black-white state flag and ¹⁹⁵ the minister of foreign affairs declared the following day that the banks will be limited to paying out no more than 100 Estonian crowns per person. The first secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, Karl Säre was also declaring closer ties with the Soviet Union: "New, free Estonia wants to create fraternal friendship and tight alliance with the USSR. Estonia wants to orient itself towards the Soviet Union and only to the Soviet Union."¹⁹⁶ "Estonian working people want to walk in unison with the nations of the Soviet people under the leadership of Great Stalin."¹⁹⁷ Säre's proclamations in Postimees was rather an exception than a rule though, and without the knowledge of hindsight could not be clearly interpreted as a wish to join the USSR – the proclamation was vague enough that it could also mean "alliance".

Additionally, there were no public signs from the Soviet side that Estonia would soon join it. On 18 July, a new Soviet ambassador arrived in Estonia, declaring in his speech he hoped that the relations between the states would remain cordial. Also, the commissioner of the Red Army battalion in Estonia confirmed the usual message: "Regarding Estonia, we have signed the mutual assistance treaty intending to ensure Estonian security and remove the opportunity of anyone attacking the Soviet Union through Estonian land."¹⁹⁸ Thus, there was no reason to presume of any radical changes happening in the near future.

¹⁹³ "10.000 tartlase võimas meelevaldus raekoja ees", Postimees, 18.07.1940

¹⁹⁴ "Üksmeelne usalduavaldus", Postimees, 16.07.1940

¹⁹⁵ "17. juuli tõi esile uued poliitilised nõudmised", Postimees, 20.07.1940

¹⁹⁶ Karl Säre. „Rahval on võimetus määrata oma tulevikku vabal tahtel“, Postimees, 15.07.1940

¹⁹⁷ Karl Säre. "Tohutud rahvahulgad meelevaldusel Tallinnas", Postimees, 18.07.1940

¹⁹⁸ "Nõukogude Liidu tanke rohkem kui Inglismaa, Prantsusmaa, Ameerika, Jaapan, Itaalia ja Poola kokku", Postimees, 15.07.1940

Integration of culture and history into the new narrative

The field of culture received lots of attention from the hegemon during the last two weeks to become fully accommodated to the new discourse. While the cultural achievements of the republic were not devalued like the republican leadership was, the focal point of the culture had to adopt the new narrative. Only on 15 July, a new film was announced that would describe the life of “martyred” Estonian communist Viktor Kingissepp, Leningrad’s cultural figures visited Tartu’s Vanemuine Theatre and Postimees published “Lenin’s Aphorisms” for the first time. Most cultural articles emphasised how they had suffered during the bourgeoisie era, for example, they “could not even think about publishing a biography of Marx.”¹⁹⁹ As a new aspect, there were calls for stopping the forced Estonification “the reactionary regime forced to Estonicise citizens’ names and graves and tried to even make it become a state-wide policy.”²⁰⁰ Thus, the news related to culture also adopted the socialist elements of the new hegemon.

The focus on revising the discourse of history continued, with the focus being on the War of Independence – something that had not been reframed during the first two weeks. “And thus, started the civil war. On the one side, there were small-numbered reactionary bourgeoisie, Russian officers who had fled from Russia, the army of Yudenich, the bastards and adventures from Finland and Scandinavia, who were called “volunteers,” English fleet, Western capital and many conscripted workers brought to the war against their will. On the other side was the Estonian working people’s Red Army along with their poorly armed comrades from Latvia and Russia. Such was our front of the civil war from 1918-1920. The working class lost this fight.”²⁰¹ Laosson’s articles continue to introduce the Soviet narrative from the Estonian War of Independence to the wider audience, such a version of the war remained dominant in Estonian SSR history books until the end of the USSR.²⁰²

Since the war had been a defining moment for both Estonian nationalist and Estonian socialist sides, it was easy for the workers’ regime to retain the focal point of the Estonian War of Independence in Estonian discourse, while fully alternating the narrative. Now the socialist side was the heroic one and its importance became emphasised in the new Estonia: “This place is holy for Estonian working people. This location is working people’s Golgotha. Here are buried the best sons of Estonia’s working people. Today, Estonia’s working people commemorate their fallen heroes [...] For many years, we had to avoid this location, where our comrades fell fighting for their freedom, sacrificing their most cherished possession – life. [...] Yesterday’s

¹⁹⁹ “Eesti Kirjanduse Seltsi uus tegevuskava”, Postimees, 16.07.1940

²⁰⁰ “Postimehe” lugejad kirjutavad: Nime-de-vabadust“, Postimees, 19.07.1940

²⁰¹ Max Laosson. “Eesti kodusõja lõpp”, Postimees, 21.07.1940

²⁰² Karl Siilivask. 1980. *Eesti NSV ajalugu: II osa*. Tallinn: Valgus. 112-140

youth had to go to the graves of nationalists and visit the statues for “the War of Independence,” the youth of the future get to come here and gratefully lower their heads for the fallen.”²⁰³

By the final week, not much had remained from the old discourse. By 20 July, even newspaper ads had become socialist in content and more and more new subcategories had emerged to replace the old elements in the newspaper, for example, the daily excerpt from the Scandinavian novel “Olav Audunipoeg” was replaced with a Soviet counterpart.²⁰⁴ Other structures remained the same, such as “News from Tartu” but its content had become socialist. One category, which surprisingly did not show signs of changes was the war reports. Foreign news had been centralised under the state-controlled Estonian Telegraph Agency (*Eesti Telegraafiaagentuur*), which was the only intermediary of foreign news for the Estonian media. Although the opinion articles declared the “war in the West” to be caused by the capitalist clique, the news reporting the actual battles and war events remained neutral, avoiding judgements and adjectives. Since war news was one of the strongest censored news in Postimees already during the bases era, it looks like the Soviet Union saw no reason to alter their neutral tone.²⁰⁵

President Päts - Final remnant of the old Republic

During the final week of the republic, the representative of the old republic President Päts got one final chance to appear in Postimees. The president of Estonia, who just two months before had had articles thanking him for leading Estonia almost on a daily basis, had disappeared almost fully from the public media after the events of 21 June. Despite this and numerous articles condemning him and his regime, Päts had officially been kept as the head of state. There were two times when Päts received an opportunity to express some limited opinions in Postimees: firstly, a decree signed and allegedly written by him was published on 6 July, explaining the reasons for declaring new elections. It was written laconically though and lacked any message from the president himself.²⁰⁶

Secondly, on 18 July the president had the opportunity to share his thoughts when accepting the mandate of the new Soviet ambassador: “The treaty concluded in 1920 between Estonia and the Soviet Union in Tartu created a secure basis for the relationship between our states. It has constantly developed and on 28 September of the last year evolved with the mutual assistance treaty, promoting our fertile cooperation, and ensuring the security of both nations. The mighty army of the Soviet Union has found cordial welcome by the entire Estonian nation as you surely

²⁰³ “Wõimas mälestusmiiting töötava rahwa sangareile“, Postimees, 18.07.1940

²⁰⁴ “Kaks tüüpi“, Postimees, 21.07.1940

²⁰⁵ Indrek Treufeldt. 2013. Ajakirjanduslikust faktiloomest ja selle analüüsimise võimalustest. *Eesti Akadeemilise Ajakirjanduse Seltsi Aastaraamat*. 17-18

²⁰⁶ “Uued parlamendi walimised kiires korras“, Postimees, 06.07.1940

have been able to make sure of yourself. The Estonian nation appreciates the part the Soviet army is playing in securing our nation during these restless times. The peace politics of the Soviet Union is ensuring the best opportunities for Estonians to work and develop their culture. I am convinced that the strong bond with the Soviet Union provides the opportunity for all Baltic states to improve their economic situation and allows them to see the multicultural environment of the Soviet nations. As the first ambassador in Estonia, who gets to work in this newly established atmosphere of friendship, I sincerely wish the best of work to you...”²⁰⁷

The final speech of president Päts fused the elements of the bases era and the Red Month era: Päts was ready to express the good effects the Soviet-Estonian relations had on Estonia, but his speech still remains republican – no mention of workers, newly received democracy nor evil capitalist clique. On these issues, Päts chose the classical bases era method of dealing with the issue – he ignored the unpleasant topic. President Päts finally stepped down on 21 July, the same day Estonia applied for statehood in the USSR. His resignation was accepted but not published in any media.²⁰⁸

Towards Soviet Estonia

The first direct reference to creating a Soviet republic in the Baltics appeared on 19 July. Postimees reported of the workers’ gathering in Riga, where “posters were carried, titles demanding establishing the creation of Soviet Latvia.”²⁰⁹ This seemed to have opened Pandora’s box.

The next day, on 20 July, Postimees published an article from TASS claiming that after the elections: “demonstrations which flooded the entire nation on 17 July, brought up new political demands: the creation of the Working People’s Soviet and reorganisation of the Estonian Bourgeois Republic into the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, along with Estonia joining the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics.”²¹⁰ This is accompanied by an article containing Latvian prime minister Kirhenšteins declaring the Latvian SSR, Lithuanian leadership claiming how joining the USSR would be good for them²¹¹ and Tartu workers gathering and asking for Estonia to join the USSR. There is little reasoning behind this decision: “In order to create a better and more just system and in belief and faith that our little Estonia could achieve the

²⁰⁷ Konstantin Päts. “Nõukogude uus saadik Botškarev esitas oma volitused Vabariigi Presidendile”, Postimees, 18.07.1940

²⁰⁸ Zetterberg. 2009. *Eesti ajalugu*. 493-494

²⁰⁹ “Suur võidumeeleavaldus Riias”, Postimees, 19.07.1940

²¹⁰ “17. juuli tõi esile uued poliitilised nõudmised”, Postimees, 20.07.1940

²¹¹ “200.000 töötaja meelevaldus Riias”, and “Leedu ajalehtede kirjutised”, Postimees, 20.07.1940

position, where already 13 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are, we hope to see Estonia as a member of the USSR.”²¹²

Politicians joined the call for Estonia to join the USSR the next day. The members of the new Riigivolikogu, Mihkel Jürna, and Kristjan Jalak called in their speeches for Estonia to join the Soviet Union: “Only the accession to the great and mighty Soviet Union ensures that our small nation will not become a victim of imperialistic state again. [...] This decision is determined by foreign policy considerations, by our economic and cultural interests, and by the wish to secure the independence of our nation.” And finished his resolution with “Long live the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic! Long live the Union of Soviet Socialist States!”²¹³ The big headline of the next day already states: “Estonia was declared a Soviet Socialist Republic.”²¹⁴ Thus, the Estonian Republic had come to its end.

Conclusion

The last week concluded the transition from the Republic of Estonia to the Estonian Working People’s Republic. The results of the elections seemed to amplify and legitimise the new hegemon and thus more radical discourse could be achieved. Finally, socialist words were accepted, the republic’s history was almost fully disassociated from its former narrative, and the symbol of the old state – president Päts had his last moment in public media.

This development was weakened again by “the third leap.” Once again, a new claim appeared quite unexpectedly that the Estonian people wanted to join the USSR, just two days before it happened. Despite being considered a drastic change in the Estonian course of history by both hegemons, the explanations provided for joining the Soviet Union in the Estonian discourse were scarce. In Jalak’s resolution, we can see a reference to the “small state” narrative – “little Estonia cannot defend itself; it must join the Union to protect itself.” But besides that, it reminds the first days after the June *coup d’état* – the declarations for joining the union were generic and lacked any detail that would be specific to Estonian earlier (neither nationalist nor worker) discourse.

On the other hand, the Soviet Estonian discourse had elements that had indirectly supported Estonian integration into the Soviet Union already from the start. It had been made clear since 21 June that the Soviet Union was the most advanced nation and a natural ally to the Estonians. It was also proven that Estonia has strong ties with the Russian cultural sphere, which had been cut off only by a hostile bourgeois government. Thus, it would seem logical for Estonia to want

²¹² “Tartu töölised nõuavad liitu NSV Liiduga”, Postimees, 20.07.1940

²¹³ Mihkel Jürna. “Tartu töötava rahva otsus ühineda Sotsialistliku Nõukogude Vabariigiga”, and Kristjan Jalak. “K. Jalak esitas järgmise resolutsiooni”, Postimees, 21.07.1940

²¹⁴ “Eesti kuulutati Nõukogude Sotsialistlikuks Vabariigiks”, Postimees, 22.07.1940

to join this advanced nation, with whom Estonia had strong ties. Additionally, Soviet discourse seemed not to see the conflict between joining the USSR and losing independence – all Soviet nations were independent together, meaning that by becoming a member of the Soviet family, Estonia had not lost anything.

Not only did the declaration conflict with long-established nationalist discourse, but it also challenged the old workers' government's discourse – many times the members of the June government confirmed that Estonia would remain independent, and while new discourse had challenged the old Estonian politics and foreign relations, it never challenged the idea of independent Estonia. The more logical conclusion to the developments of the people's government's discourse would have been an independent but closely Soviet-aligned Estonian socialist state.

Conclusion

The goal of my paper was to observe and analyse how the change in hegemony influences the national discourse and how the new narrative was established. For that, national discourse developments in the Estonian media in 1940 were followed from the bases era until the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared. The focus of this case study was on legitimizing the change in hegemony in the Estonian Republic from 21 June until 21 July. The summer of 1940 is considered a vital moment for Estonia – in June 1940 it started as an independent nation with its own statehood and discourse, and by the end of August, it had become a Soviet republic with clear Soviet discourse. Events that happened during this period are still defining Estonian political discourse and identity to this day. This makes it possible for us to observe quite a rare phenomenon: a change of hegemon in the Estonian society with a very different national discourse, which takes over the state – by establishing its power at first with the military and then using public media to justify the takeover.

In my paper, this change of hegemony is observed. I worked through all the numbers of *Postimees* – one of the leading Estonian newspapers of the time – from 1 January until the end of the republic and analysed the most important changes in the public discourse, using national bases era discourse as the basis of comparison. Since the media in Estonia was state-controlled, both the old and new hegemon's messages to the people were well-observable.

The change of hegemony is reflected in the public media rapidly. The first changes happened overnight, and the new discourse already had lots of elements from the Soviet discourse. Pro-Soviet and anti-capitalist messages appeared, and the old government was redefined as an enemy. The vocabulary became more emotional and descriptive, in contrast to the previous discourse there was always an enemy defined in public media (which could be a capitalist clique, old government, etc). During the first weeks, there was a discrepancy between the messages from the governmental level, which were more balanced, and from the workers meeting in public spaces, which were more radical and Soviet-minded, but by the last week, the government's rhetoric had become very similar to the workers' one.

That being said, the Soviet hegemony did integrate elements from the old discourse. The discourse of independent, small Estonia was continued and the dominant message in the media continued to be that the Soviet armies were there only to guarantee peace for free Estonia, so its people could focus on peaceful growth. There is also a clear attempt made to be inclusive and broaden the definition of "workers" – the core of the new Estonian state, to almost all social classes. Quite often, the elements were taken over from the old discourse but manipulated to fit

the needs of the new regime, such as the idea of the “small state,” which was used in Red Estonia as a justification for having Soviet troops in the country.

In the first week, the messages were more generic, and the messages were often not based on facts specific to the Estonian case, whereas later as new collaborators rose more to prominence, the discourse became more specific. While on the larger scale, the development of the discourse in the newspaper seems more natural from the second week onwards, there were two more “leaps” (in addition to the first one on 21 June), when new, unexpected elements appeared in the Estonian discourse. These leaps happened on 6 July, when new elections were declared, and 19 July, when the public media explicitly declared the Estonian intention to join the USSR. All three leaps had little warning ahead of them – the change was declared beforehand and the reasoning for it came afterwards the following days. The leaps made the development of new alternative discourse bumpy and its argumentation weaker than it would have been with the gradual development.

Gramsci’s model was surprisingly effective in observing the change of hegemony in Estonia. Firstly, the Soviet regime established its dominance with the instruments of force, then seemed to focus on looking for consent in the newly gained land. Instead of directly establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the Soviet regime made it look like the democratic system was restored and worked hard in order to establish an alliance between the socialist movement and the potentially pro-Soviet groups: different newspaper articles were aimed at petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, women, the military, etc., which all seemingly accepted the leading role of the ECP during the elections. Thus, the Soviet regime apparently worked to establish its hegemony not only with military means but also tried to achieve native consent, even if the actual situation was not the same as presented in the media.

The destabilisation of Estonian identity seems to leave us with an interesting conflict – despite the Soviet apparent success at establishing hegemony in the public discourse, almost all non-Soviet sources seem to refer on a wider scale to the establishment of an alternative Soviet Estonian identity as a failure. While the present-day Estonian discourse contains elements that are seemingly adopted from the Soviet discourse (for example currently popular Estonian areligious discourse – the faith was brought to us by Germans, it has never been native to us), this paper has identified only a few relatively insignificant elements of the new Soviet Estonian discourse that today’s Estonian dominant discourse would agree with. The survival of the Estonian national alternative discourse in the local society after 40 years of Soviet hegemony in the region (with Soviet successful attempts to include local collaborators in the new regime), is something that could be researched further.

In sum, this study examines a case of how an identity can be destabilised in the case of a change in hegemony. The new hegemon created a radically different national discourse, with the aim of redefining the national identity. While the new national discourse presented in the media was generic at first, it quickly adopted the usable parts of the local discourse. In the Estonian case study, the hegemonic re-articulation did not last long, meaning the new hegemon, relying on overwhelming control over the public space, was able to establish the new discursive reality with relative ease. However, there was still a month of transition in Estonia, where aspects from both old and new hegemonic articulations are simultaneously present in the discursive space.

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