

Through Rose or Blue and White Glasses?

Decades of News about the Soviet Union in the Finnish Press

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Abstract

The Finnish public discussion culture has often been criticized of being unanimous and consensual. In different times political journalism has treated foreign and home affairs as well as economic policy with care. In the present article, attention is paid to Finnish foreign reporting about the Soviet Union during the last decades of its existence. The empirical material used consists of media texts on major events during the Soviet era as well as interviews with key editors-in-chief at the time. The objective is to describe and analyze the ways in which critical reporting was carried out in different Finnish newspapers and the reasons behind this.

Keywords: Finnish newspapers, self censorship, Soviet Union, political journalism, foreign reportage, crisis reportage

Introduction

The concepts of Finlandization and self-censorship have been often applied when the image of the Soviet Union in the Finnish press has been discussed. It has been claimed that giving an accurate or real picture of the Communist neighbor was impossible. In connection with self-censorship, contemporaries have often underlined that it was a matter of conviction and patriotism in practice: foreign relations were not to be damaged by negative or critical press coverage. A line has been drawn between this unselfish action and the tactical self-censorship motivated by power politics in internal affairs. Whichever the case, construction of the Soviet image in the Finnish press has been connected to official foreign policy and especially to President Urho Kekkonen during his long term in office (1956-1981).

The aim of the present article is to describe and analyze the way in which critical reporting about the Soviet Union in the Finnish press was carried out from the end of the 1960s to the time of Soviet collapse at the beginning of the 1990s¹. The styles of reporting were closely connected to the Finnish political climate and the practices of politicians. The objective is to describe the differences between different newspapers – those that are party affiliated as well as independent – and the reasons for these differences. Also in focus is how the reporting varied across the decades and why. The

empirical material consists of newspaper articles in connection with certain key events and interviews with editors-in-chief.

A number of major events from different decades have been chosen for analysis: the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the invasion and war in Afghanistan in 1979, the nuclear accident in Chernobyl in 1986 and the attempted coup by Yanayev in 1991.² In societal conflicts and crisis situations, it is often the task of the media to offer social critique (see, e.g., Hallin 1984, 1994). Conflicts also typically polarize opinions and views and require comment. During crises, newspapers would therefore have to express their attitudes toward the Soviet Union more openly than in normal, everyday reporting. Thus, it would have been justified to analyze and critique the superpower status of the neighboring country as well as its socialist society and structures.

Critique of societal power can be seen as one of journalism's traditional tasks in upholding democracy (see, e.g., Schudson 2003). In the case of Finnish journalism, this feature has not been particularly emphasized, as journalism has been rather docile and consensual (see Kivikuru 1996: 63, also Lounasmeri 2010). Moreover, Herkman (2009: 15) points out that historically in Finnish political life, close relations to societal elites have been more pronounced than in an autonomous journalistic culture. This has been found in more recent research as well (Heikkilä 1996, Kantola 2002, Lounasmeri 2010, Kantola 2011: 17-41). Moreover, foreign policy has been one area where open public debate has been absent until recently.

The image of the Soviet Union in the Finnish press from the point of view of self-censorship has been studied by, for example, media researchers Esko Salminen (1979, 1982, 1996, 2011) and Turo Uskali (1990, 1994, 2001, 2003). The phenomenon of Finlandization has been analyzed by historians Timo Vihavainen (1991), Hannu Rautkallio (1991, 1999, 2001), Seppo Hentilä (1998, 2001), Mikko Majander (1998, 1999, 2001) and Aappo Kähönen (2001). In addition, the image of the Soviets and Russians in Finland has been researched in recent decades by Heikki Luostarinen (1986), Kari Immonen (1987), Outi Karemaa (1998) and Esa Seppänen (2010). This existing research gives an overview and tools with which to understand the style of Soviet reporting offered in the Finnish press.

Changing Finnish Politics after World War II: The Official Image of Finland's Neighbour

After World War II, Finland made peace with the Soviet Union, after fighting it in two wars, the Winter War and the Continuation War. This meant a changing foreign policy toward Finland's neighbor as well as a changing political atmosphere domestically (see Meinander 1999: 249-254, Alasuutari 1996: 112, 263). The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (the YYA Treaty) formed the basis of Finno-Soviet relations from 1948 until the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the war years as well as shortly thereafter, the Finnish press was heavily influenced by restricted freedom of speech. The information center of the Finnish government was in close contact with the newspapers and advised them to exercise extreme caution in reporting foreign affairs, especially after the peace treaty in 1947. In 1948, the criminal law was amended by making it an offense to publish material libeling a foreign nation or jeopardizing Finnish foreign affairs (in practice this implied the Soviet Union). This was a clear sign of

the necessity of self-censorship at the dawn of the Cold War, even though no one was ever convicted (Tommila & Salokangas 1998: 231-233, 239). The law remained in force until 1995, and it is obvious that it expressed the Finnish government's attitude toward the limits of free speech in the country.

In post-war Finland, the threat experienced from the direction of the Soviet Union demanded political unanimity, and it also worked as a way to uphold internal political control. The new slogan in Finnish governance became "acknowledging the facts is the path to wisdom," as presented by President J.K. Paasikivi, who represented a realistic attitude toward the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Kantola 1997; 1998: 58-63; Meinander 1999: 249-269; Suomi 2001: 27-33; Rentola 2010: 285-294). According to Hans-Peter Krosby, Finnish self-censorship was more due to psychological training and an evolving tradition than to direct pressure from the neighbor. The most "visible" coaches were the presidents Paasikivi (1946-1956) and Kekkonen (1956-1981), who directed the Finnish media toward their own line of foreign policy publicly and also less publicly (Krosby 1978). It is said that certain practices in reporting about the Soviet Union emerged in the communication between the Finnish political leadership and the media (see, e.g., Jaakkola 1992: 24; Alasuutari 1996: 155-184; Luostarinen & Uskali 2006: 181-182).

Also of interest here is the role of the press in Finnish as well as Soviet societal structures. In the Soviet Union, the press was under the control of the Communist Party and ideologically regarded as part of the state apparatus. Finland was a country struggling to uphold liberal democracy and had a long tradition of a liberal press with a social responsibility (see also four theories of the press, originally Siebert, Peterson & Schramm 1973). This created a contradiction that could also be seen in the attitude of the Communist Party towards the press of a "friendly neighbor."³ This attitude differed depending on the medium or newspaper: whether it was a communist or socialist paper, big party paper or an independent one such as *Helsingin Sanomat*. In the present article, the different newspapers looked at include the chief organs of the most significant parties: the Centre Party paper *Suomenmaa* (SM), the Social Democratic *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* (SS), the Communist and Left Alliance (Finnish People's Democratic League) paper *Kansan Uutiset* (KU) and the right-wing National Coalition Party's paper (until 1976) *Uusi Suomi* (US) as well as the independent, liberal paper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS).

SM was originally established in 1909 under the name *Maakansa* (the name was changed in 1965) and became the official chief organ of the Centre Party (until 1965 the Agrarian League) in 1967. The paper's circulation was 33,262 in 1967, but due to a downward trend, it is today (2010) only 11,032. SS was first published in 1918 and was able to compete with the major Finnish daily HS in the capital until the end of the 1920s. Little by little, SS became more and more a party paper than a journalistic product, and in 1967 its circulation was 41,166. As the significance of party papers in Finland has diminished gradually over the past several decades (see Tommila & Salokangas 1998), the current circulation (2010) is 14,119. KU was established in 1956 when the chief organs of the Communist Party and the Left Alliance were merged. The circulation was 43,544 in 1968 and 13,616 today (2009). US was established in 1919 as the successor of *Uusi Suometar* by monarchist circles, and it was a paper of the new National Coalition Party, even though it was owned by private investors. Until the war and the end of the 1930s, the paper was able to compete with *Helsingin Sanomat*, but as the political situation weakened the position of right-wing papers after the war, the paper's circula-

tion took a long downward spiral. In 1968 the circulation was still 86,010. In 1976 the paper was transformed into an independent, commercially oriented paper owned by an insurance company and later also by banks. The paper's story came to an end in 1991, but was re-established as an online version in 2008. As for HS, it was established originally in 1889 as *Päivälehti* and became the biggest newspaper in Finland quite quickly. This is because the newspaper detached itself rather early on from party politics and concentrated on developing the paper as a journalistic product that was able to address the majority of the people. HS's circulation was 265,153 in 1968 and today is 383,361 (2010) (Suomen lehdistön historia 5 & 7; Finnish Audit Bureau of Circulations).

Motives for Careful Soviet Reporting

The newspapers in question all represented different backgrounds and stances on the Soviet Union. They also had different positions in the Finnish media scene, for example, HS was and is by far the biggest newspaper with the most resources. What was common to all of them, however, was the motive of national interest in one form or another. This came up in all the interviews carried out. Party papers were more or less mouthpieces for the organization they represented, and those in power had a special responsibility for good neighbor relations. This was quite obvious in Kekkonen's Centre Party paper SM, and Editor-in-Chief Seppo Sarlund (1977-1985) described the political leaders' as well as the paper's role as a "bridge builder" between East and West (a traditional role adopted by the Finns). The paper had adopted the Kekkonen-Paasikivi line of foreign policy as early as the 1950s. Sarlund also emphasized the mutual understanding of not interfering in each others' internal affairs – according to him, this gave Finns the moral right to defend their sovereignty. However, for example, Salminen has argued (1996, 67-68) that the paper's policy was also part of a tactical power play, as it offered a very positive picture of the Soviet Union, especially during Sarlund's time (the former editor-in-chief, Pentti Sorvali (1942-1976), although a friend of Kekkonen, was sometimes critical of his politics).

As for the Social Democratic paper SS, the editors-in-chief Pauli Burman (1968-1974) and Seppo-Heikki Salonen (1984-1988) emphasized the special responsibility of the party papers, especially when the party in question was in government.

[T]wo basic pillars were always the paper's relationship with Kekkonen and politics in general and the relationship with the Soviet Union. Every editor-in-chief had to figure out these two. ...and there was a clear difference between political papers and the rest, as there were always affiliations. (Editor-in-Chief Pauli Burman, SS)

These papers experienced pressure from the Soviet side (mostly from the embassy in Finland). In general, the party paper editors (excluding the right-wing US) had rather similar stances towards the Soviet Union, and they also had rather open communication between each other about the subject. At the same time, they did draw a line between themselves and the Communist papers, which they saw as receiving much more direct advice and pressure from the Soviet side. The Communist papers' position was seen as special for ideological reasons. However, it is interesting that Yrjö Rautio (1988-2004), the editor-in-chief of the Communist paper KU, underlined self-censorship as a nationwide phenomenon. He also concluded that the Centre Party papers were the ones most affected.

Self-censorship has definitely played a very important part in Finnish journalism...and it did not involve only socialist or that sort of papers...but almost all the media in Finland. ...I would say that in a way we practiced less self-censorship than, for example, the Centre Party papers, where you can find a long period with no critical remarks [about the Soviet Union].(Editor-in-Chief Yrjö Rautio, KU)

He did recognize the ideological solidarity between Communists, but pointed out that the general stance of the majority on the Soviet system was critical. As for the right-wing US, editor-in-chief Johannes Koroma (1976-1989) drew a clear distinction between both the ruling party papers as well as the Communist and socialist ones:

[T]he correspondents of our paper had in a way greater freedom of opinion and acquiring information...than those who were in some way dependent on the Soviet Union or the official foreign policy. (Editor-in-Chief Johannes Koroma, US)

In addition to political and ideological motives, economic motives were also strong in explaining the carefulness of Soviet reporting. The economic angle can also be seen as connected to national interests, as trade was bilateral and state driven. For example, in Uskali's research (2003: 316), trade was seen as a much more important element in Finno-Soviet relations than has previously been realized in historical research or contemporary journalism. HS and US in particular were approached by "red" captains of industry⁴ when they were unhappy about the way the Soviet Union was presented in the papers (see, e.g., Uskali 2003).

HS represents an independent and powerful paper in the Finnish media scene. Its stance on the Soviet Union is difficult to describe, as the editors-in-chief of the paper have traditionally been very silent regarding their official policies. This was also the case in the interview carried out for the present research. Editor Heikki Tikkanen wanted to emphasize that there were no ties – political or otherwise.

I was very neutral...and luckily so. (Editor-in-Chief Heikki Tikkanen, HS)

He also evaded the question about HS's role as the biggest paper with more resources than the other newspapers and the power to reach its own decisions regarding Soviet reporting. Generally speaking, societal stability and the promotion of harmony have been seen as important to HS, as the paper has not striven to bring societal conflicts into view. Critique has been represented through apparent diversity, and the reader has had to read between the lines for the paper's viewpoint. Moreover, the paper has traditionally tended to back the powers that be (see more in Klemola 1981, Pietilä & Sondermann 1994, Holmberg 2004, Lounasmeri 2010).

Decades of Finnish Reporting on the Soviet Union

The End of the 1960s and the Occupation of Czechoslovakia: Controlled Critique

The 1960s represents a period during which it was possible to handle Soviet matters with a rather critical approach in the Finnish press. Nikita Khrushchev's seizure of power in 1955 brought more liberal times to the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Freeze 1997: 353-362). Uskali, who has studied the Finnish correspondents in Moscow, states that the Soviet press also started writing about society's evils. He defines the years 1962-66 as the so-called golden age of Moscow foreign correspondence (Uskali 2003: 203, 417). After Khrushchev

was toppled in 1964, a new period began in the country, which also affected the cultures of politics and communication as well as foreign relations. By the end of the 1960s, the Communist Party's policy became much more rigid and inflexible (Freeze 1997: 363-377; Ruusunen 2008: 22). The end of Leonid Brezhnev's leadership (1966-1982) in particular has been called an era of stagnation in the Soviet Union. In 1968, the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact countries occupied Czechoslovakia. This cut short the political liberalization in Czechoslovakia called the Prague Spring. In Finland, the situation was quite difficult for the government, and Prime Minister Mauno Koivisto tried to rein in the press and emphasize caution. The Finnish public broadcasting company YLE's reporting of the event was at center stage, as the foreign correspondent Lieko Zachovalova reported directly from Prague. Critique of the occupation was evident, even though it was agreed with the Prime Minister that caution would be exercised. This meant avoiding direct news flashes of demonstrations or advertising them or comparing the situation with that in Hungary in 1956 (Salokangas 1996: 186-189; Visuri 2003: 78-79; Pernaa 2009: 103-110). In his official statement, the Prime Minister said that Finland (and Finns) should not act hastily as this could backfire later on. This is a good example of how the Soviet Union, and later Russia, has been considered in the Finnish public discourse: regardless of the subject, it is seen through the lens of how matters affect Finland.

The newspapers analyzed in connection with the events in Czechoslovakia mainly published news stories: 80-90 percent of the material consisted of news items, which does not give much room for analytical or critical handling of the matter. Tommila and Salokangas (1998: 278) have stated that Finnish newspapers from the 1950s to the 1980s did not particularly practice investigative journalism or sink their teeth into their subjects. In this case, all the papers did publish commentary pieces as well, especially HS and US, and each had at least one editorial.⁵

Using qualitative content analysis, it was possible to distinguish different styles of handling and commenting on the Soviet Union and its politics. The newspaper articles were sorted into six categories in relation to their criticalness: directly supportive of the Soviet Union and its policies, indirectly supportive, neutralizing or objectifying articles, analytical, indirectly critical and directly critical articles. Those representing a directly or indirectly supportive stance had a sympathetic take on the Soviet Union's actions as a state. Those articles with a neutralizing undertone tried to avoid committing or taking sides to the extent possible. This was evidenced by the presence of very little journalistic input and by references being limited to outside sources. The choice of sources was taken into account. If a paper decided to print a statement that was extremely critical of the Soviet Union and that could not be found in other papers, one could say that the paper had made an active choice. A story such as this was categorized as indirectly critical. In the stories representing an analytical style, the matter at hand was commented on, and background information was offered, but no supportive or critical reflections were brought forward. This style is important to distinguish from the neutralizing story type, which represents a very declaratory style. The neutralizing story type is paralleled by the objectifying news discourse (see Ojajarvi & Valtonen 2011). Finally, at the other end of the spectrum are stories that took an indirectly or directly critical stance on the Soviet Union. Indirect criticism is presented through outside sources or between the lines, whereas direct criticism presupposes direct statements about, for example, Soviet foreign policy or its social system.

When the occupation of Czechoslovakia occurred at the end of the 1960s, the attitudes of the Finnish government and the press were still clearly separable. The papers judged the occupation either through the voices of their sources or independently, whereas the government stressed the country's neutrality, peaceful co-existence and policy of non-interference. The press, however, did not criticize the Finnish government for its silence.

Neutralizing or objectifying articles comprised most of the material, especially in the party papers (except for US). In these, the technical and operational side of the occupation was typically emphasized, whereas the political role and actions of the Soviet Union were minimized. This was also done by talking about the five Warsaw Pact countries as if they were equally involved (see the appendix for the full quantitative data and analysis). The reporting was largely based on the reactions and statements of different countries, parties and organizations, and it was easy to "hide" behind these. The critical stories, however, contained criticism of the Soviet system, which was mostly absent in the 1970s. The most critical stance was taken by US followed by HS, which also had the largest coverage (and resources). SS and KU had some indirectly critical pieces, but SM had none. Instead it published two indirectly supportive pieces, of which one was an editorial. The commenting in SS was also rather mild compared to HS and US. According to the editor-in-chief, this line of commenting was carefully planned:

We regretted the situation and hoped for a peaceful [solution]...this was the phraseology that was the most tolerable. In a way we condemned the occupation but did not say... anything harshly. It was rather skillful.... [T]he party leadership was also formulating it...the chief organ of the paper backed the party policy, which was absolute caution. (Editor-in-Chief Pauli Burman, SS)

SM gave a bigger role to the Soviet sources than to the information coming out of Prague. Along with KU, it made the clearest attempt to balance between the stands of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. SM's editorials took a mildly understanding view of the Soviet action instead of taking a moral stance. KU tried to balance the opposing views, but presented critical material mainly through the use of sources. The paper left the analysis and interpretation mostly to the reader as it tried to remain "objective." KU was seen by the Soviets as "one of their own," but 1968 changed this situation quite dramatically. The occupation widened the gap in the Finnish Communist Party between the minority and majority, which was turning more toward Eurocommunism. The party split in two, and the critical stance on the Soviet Union during the occupation caused KU to lose its position as a "favorite" of the Soviet communist party⁶ (see Salminen 1996: 101-103; Uskali 2003: 349; Ruusunen 2008: 265-266).

As for US, it had the widest reportage with over 100 articles. Its stance was already clear through the colorful language used in its headlines. In its editorials, the paper was directly critical of the Soviet action. Even though US commented that the leftist parties in Finland had a dilemma in deciding how to react, the paper did not comment on the less critical statements by the parties of the right and center or on the government's very mild reaction. During the 1960s, US still criticized the Soviet system rather heavily (see Salminen 1996: 75-77). Its editor-in-chief at the time was Pentti Poukka, who was known to represent the right faction of the National Coalition Party and to be a friend of Estonia (Uskali 2003: 138-139). Kekkonen even labeled the paper "the most anti-Soviet in Finland" during Poukka's time (Salminen 1996: 75-77).

The approach of HS was much more journalistic and edited than in the other papers. By the same token, the paper regarded its sources with much more care and distance than the others did. Its description of the occupation was, however, very accurate and made it very easy to empathize with the Czechoslovakians. The paper also published a few commentary pieces that were highly critical of the Soviet Union through a historical perspective, which was not very common. In an editorial it was stated that almost everyone in the East and the West had condemned the occupation – making it safe to do so also in the paper.

The 1970s as an Era of Growing Self-censorship

The 1970s brought about growing self-censorship, which weakened only with the coming of *glasnost* in the 1980s and even more dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There was a turn in Finno-Soviet relations starting in 1969, when Finland's neutrality policy was questioned by the Soviet Union and the country started to place more emphasis on the YYA treaty (Suomi 1996; Alholm 2001: 123-124). Further, the Finnish foreign ministry received more protests about the writings of the press. In addition, the general atmosphere was affected by leftist radicalism and a conforming attitude toward the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Vihavainen 1991). The culmination of Finlandization and self-censorship has been situated in the 1970s by, for example, Vihavainen (1991) and Salminen (1996). During this period, the media began to cooperate with the state and its political aspirations in relation to the East, and even independent papers started assuming responsibility for the country's foreign policy agenda. What was deemed to be the national interest became a guideline for journalistic work as well (Salminen 1996: 264; Kantola 2002: 295).

In the 1970s, the leading party papers experienced changes in their editorial leadership, and at the same time the papers were directed to a more Soviet friendly line (see Salminen 1996: 84). This was also a question of political power. It was impossible to reach the core of Finnish politics unless one had good relations with Kekkonen as well as the Soviet Union. Burman, the editor-in-chief of SS (1968-1974), described in his interview how the Social Democrats bowed to Kekkonen's wishes, as they realized that it was not possible to reach the core of Finnish political power without his consent.

[W]e concluded in the party that we could never beat Kekkonen, we would have to become allies...and later came to learn the fact that he was after all the only force that was able to control the aspirations of the NKP⁷ here. (Editor-in-Chief Pauli Burman, SS)

Already in Burman's time, the paper had changed its stance on the Soviet Union and shunned critical writing. This continued more heavily during the editorship of Aimo Kairamo (1974-1984), who even sacked the columnist Simppa because of the paper's alignment with Kekkonen. Also, Salonen, the editor-in-chief during the period 1984-1988, said that his paper published material critical of the Soviet Union only through external sources. In the case of SM, Kekkonen did not need to worry, as Sarlund was "one of his boys" and strictly Soviet friendly:

Me of course, and us, we backed Kekkonen's politics. It was in a way a built-in world of my generation and still is. We were Kekkonen's boys. (Editor-in-Chief Seppo Sarlund, SM)

The neighboring nation was happy with the paper and even awarded Sarlund for his journalistic efforts in 1983 (see also Salminen 1996: 66-67). As for US, it was forced to change its critical policy, as it was heavily criticized by the Soviets in the 1970s and was also experiencing financial difficulties (see, e.g., Salminen 1996: 75-77). The paper became independent in 1976, and a new editor-in-chief, Johannes Koroma, was appointed. In his interview, he stated that he had been chosen to change the course of the paper to be more constructive and neutral regarding Finland's neighbor. This would satisfy the party as well as the industrial circles to which trade with the Soviet Union was important.

My mission was unambiguous, as the former editor-in-chief and his political columnists had become a liability in the relationship between business life and the Coalition Party with the Soviet Union...the paper was to consider the Soviet Union in a constructive and neutral manner. (Editor-in-Chief Johannes Koroma, US)

As for HS, the paper's relations to the East had been cool during Eljas Erkko (owner of the paper and foreign minister of Finland before the war), a well-known friend of the United States (see, e.g., Manninen & Salokangas 2009), but they improved when Aatos Erkko became active in the matter (see Salminen 1996: 71). After the war, the paper did not hire its first Moscow correspondent until 1975, while US had already employed one in 1958. The primary reason was that E. Erkko was reluctant to establish one (Manninen & Salokangas 2009: 540-541), but the paper probably was not able to secure an accreditation in E. Erkko's time (see Uskali 2003: 325). This was denied in the interview with Tikkanen, who said that E. Erkko's role was never mentioned by the Soviets in negotiations. Finding a correspondent that suited both parties was, however, a long process. All in all, the Soviet relations of the paper took a turn for the better in the 1970s, and A. Erkko had a contact in the Soviet embassy, as was customary (Salminen 1996: 71). The paper's relations to Kekkonen have been described as cool but functional, which was corroborated by Tikkanen in his interview (in E. Erkko's time, critique of the president was even occasionally harsh, see Manninen & Salokangas 2009). As for the writing in the paper, Kekkonen for the most part only intervened in Kari Suomalainen's cartoons.

As for the political atmosphere of the 1970s, the editor-in-chief of HS kept a distance from the issues and saw the paper as an objective and neutral outsider. When asked about the strengthening of self-censorship in the 1970s, he was very careful in his comments and mostly talked about not leaving out essential information. He did not want to comment on the manner or style of writing. What he did admit to was the difficulty of criticizing Kekkonen and the official foreign policy.

The Invasion and War in Afghanistan in 1979: A Deep Silence

The coup in Afghanistan on 27.12.1979, carried out with the help of Soviet troops, started a ten-year-long war in that country. The Communists had seized power in 1978 but were divided, and in 1979 the Soviet-backed Babrak Karmal was elevated to power. The Soviet Union occupied Kabul as well as the biggest cities with a large military operation. This caused widespread criticism about interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. In the Finnish papers, reports on the coup were perceptibly few and did not include any editorials or other commentary. This can be partly explained by the remoteness of the

country as compared to Czechoslovakia. In the party papers, the use of Soviet sources was emphasized along with Afghan radio, which led the reporting to look at the matter through Soviet eyes. The communist propaganda type of expression was given space in a very different way than had been the case ten years earlier.

In KU the reporting was mainly neutralizing. One could find some analysis of the situation when the history of Afghanistan was discussed, but only the United States, Saudi Arabia and China were mentioned as meddling in the country's affairs. SM notably broke away from Western sources and their line of reporting as the paper wrote about US accusations of Soviet interference in the coup. There was no analysis to be found in the paper. The editor-in-chief stated in his interview that he had even been invited by the Soviets to visit Afghanistan, but did not go and underlined a cautious take on the issue. The news content in SS was the most modest and relied heavily on Soviet sources. As for the independent HS and US, their reporting was also very much news driven. Both papers' reporting seemed very different from the Czechoslovakia case ten years earlier. All comments were presented either through Western sources or hidden between the lines. The editor-in-chief of US said in his interview that the papers' Moscow correspondent's position was difficult, and it was decided that he would not touch the subject. All in all, little reporting was carried out, and the reporting that took place was much more careful than in the case of Czechoslovakia. Also, the Finnish political leadership saw fit to remain silent (Salminen 1996: 108-109, 144).

The 1980s as the Era of Glasnost and the Process of Opening Up

The tradition of self-censorship started to show signs of weakening by the end of the 1970s (see, e.g., Vihavainen 1991: 115, 251-263, 289-290). A great turning point for the Finnish press was when Kekkonen stepped aside in 1981. The same year a political pamphlet called "Tamminiemen pesänjakajat"⁸ was published by the political editors of HS under a pseudonym, and this marked the start of a process during which the relationship between journalists and politicians became less respectful (see Aula 1991). The new president Koivisto continued the official foreign policy, but comments on the press concerning what was published about the Soviets ceased almost completely (Salminen 1996: 173-176, 180). The Soviets, however, continued to criticize and comment on the press, as became apparent in the interviews and the archive material of the foreign ministry of Finland. The new decade meant a gradual shift in attitudes and a subsiding fear of the neighbor in journalism as well (Salminen 1996: 190). Writing about Finno-Soviet relations and foreign policy still remained delicate matters.

For the Soviet Union, the 1980s meant a decade of great upheavals. Social changes had already begun during Yuri Andropov's leadership in 1983-1985, but after Mikhail Gorbachev took the lead in 1985, the country saw a massive reformation. Starting in 1986 this reformation was called *perestroika*, another slogan being *glasnost*, which meant open access to information and citizens' right to freedom of expression within certain limits (McCauley 1997: 381-393; Seppänen 2010: 89, 92). This had effects across the borders, and the editors that I interviewed felt that reporting became much more liberal by the end of the 1980s, and writing about the Soviet society's evils started to become a genre in itself.

Gorbachev actually imposed a new way to communicate about the Soviet Union, this glasnost was in a way a proclamation: tell everything and put the record straight about this country. ...[W]hen one was to tell about the failures and flaws of a society – that’s what we did too. (Editor-in-Chief Johannes Koroma, US)

At the end of the eighties it was however quite free already, it could be done quite well... writing whatever we could about the Soviet Union’s upheaval, perestroika and the rest. (Editor-in-Chief Yrjö Rautio, KU)

In 1988, many Finnish correspondents in Moscow wrote statements criticizing Gorbachev for the first time. In spite of everything, it was only after the attempted coup in 1991 that most of the correspondents seemed to be clearly free of the burden of self-censorship (Uskali 1994: 125).

The Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster in 1986: Could This Have Happened Elsewhere?

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster occurred on 26 April 1986, but the Soviet Union only admitted that the accident had occurred several days later. The accident was not reported in the Finnish press until the 29th when some information was made available. At the time, there was a civil servants strike in Finland, which also slowed down the flow of information and prompted massive criticism of the Finnish authorities. Most of the stories published on the first day were by HS and US. SM concentrated mostly on discussing Finnish energy solutions, but also wrote about the safer Finnish nuclear plants compared to those of the Soviet Union. The paper also criticized Finland’s neighbor indirectly for releasing information so slowly. SS did not reveal in its first day of reporting that doubts about the Soviet disaster had arisen well before the country’s own announcement. Commenting on the matter was rather cautious on all fronts with regard to the security arrangements of Soviet plants as well as Soviet communication policies. The paper gave ample room to the Finnish Foreign Ministry’s view that the Soviet Union had acted pertinently: had there been cause for alarm in Finland, the Soviets would have informed the Finns. The editor-in-chief of SS remembered the difficulties they had had obtaining any information:

It took so terribly long before the Soviet Union corroborated it...Moscow lied, said that nothing had happened there. ...[D]uring the first week there was no definite information...there were no sources...and when the source is the Soviet Union and Russia, and lying is such a strong habit, getting the number of dead and everything else right [is very difficult]. (Editor-in-Chief Seppo Heikki Salonen, SS)

KU’s reporting was rather neutral, and Soviet sources were treated objectively. The paper did indirectly criticize the Soviet information policy and also analyzed its changing nature (in the past it would have been unthinkable that an accident would be made public). The most space was given, however, to general nuclear criticism, which pointed out that the accident could have happened in Finland.

The reporting in US was much more open and assertive. The editorial on the 30th was, however, peculiar as it concentrated on criticizing the Finnish officials’ actions, while the Soviets were shown some understanding. It seems that the motives of the editorial

were to be found elsewhere – in the interests of the industrial sector and in defending nuclear energy. All in all, the reporting focused on Finnish officials and energy solutions (see also Timonen et al. 1987: 158), even though the Soviet silence about the accident was criticized. The differences between Finnish and Soviet nuclear power plants were not particularly emphasized. HS in turn announced on its first news page that this was the first time the Soviet Union had publicly spoken about a nuclear accident. The paper presented an open criticism of Soviet policies along with a careful analysis by its Moscow correspondent. At this point, the fact that the paper had greater resources than others was evident. Moreover, the extremely critical comments made by the Finnish construction workers in Kiev along with the Swedish energy minister's statements were published only in HS. HS was also the only paper to comment on the great caution of the Finnish government in reacting to the accident. The paper clearly distanced itself from the Finnish officials' statements.

The Chernobyl disaster was the first real test of openness for *glasnost*. Even ten days after the accident, Soviet reporting on the issue was typical of Brezhnev, according to McNair. Drawing on Kagarlitski (1992), he concludes that, after Chernobyl, *glasnost* became a concrete practice instead of a mere slogan, as news about accidents started to appear in Soviet papers (McNair 1991: 66). In the Finnish papers, three broad themes emerged: the failure of Finnish official communications about the accident, nuclear safety and Finnish energy solutions (see also Timonen et al. 1987; Salminen 1996: 209, 212). The role of the Soviet Union in the accident was not central, and this also led the reader to see the country more as a location for the accident than as an active operator. It seemed almost as if Chernobyl could have happened anywhere.

The 1990s: Moderate but Fresh Reporting on the Yanayev Coup

The attempted military coup by Gennadi Yanayev and his conservative Communist associates in August 1991 lasted only three days. The coup leaders dismissed Gorbachev and declared a state of emergency. The coup failed as Russia's president Boris Yeltsin and civil resistance based mostly in Moscow actively opposed it. The coup led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The coup was the first case in the empirical material where papers other than US and HS had openly critical reports. The only paper to refrain from open criticism on the first day was SM. Of special interest is the fact that HS's material on the first day was the most news oriented and had the least commentary pieces proportionally to the other papers. Only SM had less critical material on the first day.

All of the papers wrote about the situation in the Baltic countries on the first day: the Estonian leaders as well as ordinary Estonians traveling in Finland were interviewed. They were able to speak about their fears and memories of the totalitarian system in HS, US and KU. Reporting about Estonia was one theme to be avoided during the Soviet era, but now it became an open topic. Also, Soviet sources were available in a wholly new manner as new information was becoming available. All of the papers also noted the traditionally careful reactions of the Finnish political leadership: party papers with their cautious analysis or between the lines reporting and US openly and HS more indirectly commenting on the foreign policy line. The status of trade between Finland and the Soviet Union was only covered by US and HS on the first day. Viuhko (1994:

11, 85), who has analyzed the reportage over several days, concluded that the reaction to the coup grew more negative by the day. According to him, there occurred no return to the old times of extreme carefulness; however, the comments in the papers became sharper only when it was certain that the coup had failed. The editor-in-chief of KU spoke about the reactions in his paper:

The reaction was very clear, the junta was condemned. ...And we did not believe... that we should in any way prepare ourselves that this would be the new regime.
(Editor-in-Chief Yrjö Rautio, KU)

Changes in Soviet Reporting

One can see a clear change from the Finnish papers' reporting on Chernobyl in the 1980s to the coup of 1991, where ordinary people were represented in an entirely new manner. The coming of *glasnost* also meant that social problems and maladies became more public. Uskali (1990: 37-38) and Eberwine et al. (1991) have stated that prior to *glasnost*, the focus of Finnish as well as international reporting was on international politics and Soviet foreign relations. Along with *glasnost*, it shifted to the thus far hidden internal state of the country. What is more, ordinary Soviet people appeared in the news alongside officials, who had dominated the coverage until then.

In the Finnish media, a clear difference can be detected between the policies and views of the newspapers and political elite in the 1960s. This changed in the 1970s as the media strongly imitated the practices of the politicians. During this decade, writing between the lines and presenting critique through Western sources increased.

The reporting of the 1980s became more liberal, but the official foreign policy or Soviet relations still were not directly criticized. This was first apparent in the case of the 1991 coup. What has characterized Finnish political journalism in general until the end of the 1970s is the close relations between political editors and politicians. Journalists are said to have identified with the viewpoints of the political elite (Pernaa & Pitkänen 2006; Pitkänen 2009). The elite set the boundaries for valid journalism, which included refraining from criticizing the Soviet Union (Pitkänen 2009: 84). The turning point in these relations was in the 1980s, which marked the beginning of more critical and independent journalism (see Aula 1992; Salminen 2006: 91-92; Pitkänen 2009: 84). Journalists distanced themselves from party politics and started to develop a more professional attitude, relying on their own ethical codes. Another aspect of the background to these developments is the gradual structural transformation of the newspaper scene between 1950 and 1980: party political papers started declining and their political affiliations were gradually dropped, commercial competition intensified, and the number of newspapers diminished, giving more readers to the remaining papers (Salokangas 1998: 244-254). During the 1980s, the monopoly of the public broadcasting company YLE ended, the political affiliations of newspapers diminished even more, and the tabloid papers solidified their position in the market (Salminen 2006: 39-47).

When looking at the different papers' policies, one can conclude that the Centre Party paper SM emphasized understanding the Soviet Union and played down criticism for a long time. The first indirect criticism was found in the Chernobyl reporting. More than SM, the Social Democratic SS also tried to present critical material between the lines

and through outside sources. The Communist KU is an interesting case, as it tried to balance between opposing views and leave the interpretation to the reader. Direct criticism was most often presented by US. At the same time, the paper aspired to write in a “hygienic” manner. HS seemed rather versatile like KU, but of course did present rather heavy Soviet critique from time to time. It has been, however, typical of HS to construct the criticism in a journalistically skillful way so that the paper has often avoided taking a direct stand.

“This Is About Larger Issues”: Critical Reporting Had no Value in Itself

In the Finnish newspapers, the image of the Soviet Union was seen more through blue and white than rose glasses. Even though one can distinguish between the societal backgrounds, motives and resources of the papers, a common feature across the board was that critical reporting did not have enough intrinsic value to overshadow the common interest. The common interest was defined as the political and economic interest of the nation. It was therefore not expedient to willfully write critically about the Soviet Union if this did nothing but cause problems. A representative of the Finnish media had no incentive to be brave or rock the boat, as this was about larger issues:

[I]n some form Simppa [the columnist] stated that there is a dictatorship in the Soviet Union – I told Simppa – well, we all agree that the Communist system sucks big time but – it won’t break or become better if we comment on it – these are such delicate matters, these relations, that it is not worth being brave, this is about larger issues. (Editor-in-Chief Pauli Burman, SS)

It seems that there was quite a clear consensus on the limits of Soviet reporting by the Finnish papers (though this did vary depending on the nature of the paper, as discussed earlier), and the consequences were seen quite quickly when those limits were crossed. In this respect, the ethics of Finnish journalism appeared to have been teleological, that is to say, concentrated on the consequences of actions. Pragmatism and realism were central in reporting, whereas idealism and the pursuit of the higher, democracy-related goals of journalism took second place. These characteristics were connected to the idea of the common national interest, which was also the first priority of Finnish journalism. It is impossible to say at which point the public interest became private, as it is also difficult to say how many of these traits have carried on to the present day.

Notes

1. A version of the analysis has been presented in a Finnish language book *Näin naapurista* (2011, edited by Lounasmeri)
2. In each case, the first three news days have been analyzed, except for Czechoslovakia (382 stories on the first two days) and the Yanayev coup (211 stories on the first day).
3. A communiqué was signed between the two countries in 1973 which stated that the press had a special responsibility to uphold friendly relations. The Soviets also appealed to this paper in their complaints about the Finnish press.
4. The Soviet Union was an important bilateral trading partner for Finland, and the industrial circles also wanted to maintain good relations in order to support business.
5. In the analysis, the articles have been categorized into news, commentaries, background stories and others.

6. As a manifestation of the split in the Finnish Communist Party, a new paper called *Tiedonantaja* was established in 1968. It was the mouthpiece of the minority “taistolaiset” (the leading figure of which was Taisto Sinisalo) and declared itself an orthodox Marxist-Leninist paper. It became a favorite of the Soviets. See more on the subject in Salminen 1988: 244-245.
7. The Soviet Communist Party.
8. The name refers to the presidential residence and the distribution of the estate after Kekkonen.

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APPENDIX: Quantitative Analyses of Soviet Reporting in the Finnish Press

Table 1. *Reporting on the Occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968*

Newspaper	Quantity	News	Commentaries	Back-grounds
Helsingin Sanomat	76	88 %	7 %	5%
Uusi Suomi	100	87 %	8 %	5%
Suomen Sosialidemokraatti	74	91 %	8 %	1%
Kansan Uutiset	89	89 %	9 %	2%
Suomenmaa	43	79 %	19 %	2%
Total	382			

Newspaper	Indir. supportive	Neutralizing	Analytical	Indir. critical	Direct. critical
Helsingin Sanomat	0 %	47 %	32 %	20 %	1 %
Uusi Suomi	0 %	42 %	37 %	14 %	7 %
Suomen Sosialidemokraatti	1 %	64 %	30 %	5 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	0 %	81 %	17 %	2 %	0 %
Suomenmaa	5 %	77 %	19 %	0 %	0 %

Table 2. *Invasion and War in Afghanistan in 1979*

Newspaper	Quantity	News	Commentaries	Back-grounds
Helsingin Sanomat	9	78 %	0 %	22 %
Uusi Suomi	18	83 %	0 %	17 %
Suomen Sosialidemokraatti	2	100 %	0 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	17	94 %	0 %	6 %
Suomenmaa	6	100 %	0 %	0 %
Total	52			

Newspaper	Indir. supportive	Neutralizing	Analytical	Indir. critical	Direct. critical
Helsingin Sanomat	0 %	0 %	89 %	11 %	0 %
Uusi Suomi	0 %	61 %	33 %	6 %	0 %
Suomen Sosialidemokraatti	0 %	100 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	24 %	65 %	12 %	0 %	0 %
Suomenmaa	17 %	83 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Table 3. *Nuclear accident in Chernobyl in 1986*

Newspaper	Quantity	News	Commentaries	Back-grounds
Helsingin Sanomat	46	72 %	13 %	15 %
Uusi Suomi	47	83 %	6 %	11 %
Suomen Sosialidemokraatti	6	67 %	33 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	20	80 %	20 %	0 %
Suomenmaa	15	87 %	13 %	0 %
Total	134			

Newspaper	Indir. supportive	Neutralizing	Analytical	Indir. critical	Direct. critical
Helsingin Sanomat	0 %	48 %	28 %	17 %	7 %
Uusi Suomi	0 %	68 %	21 %	4 %	6 %
Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti	0 %	67 %	33 %	0 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	5 %	80 %	10 %	5 %	0 %
Suomenmaa	0 %	73 %	7 %	20 %	0 %

Table 4. *Yanayev attempted coup in 1991*

Newspaper	Quantity	News	Commentaries	Backgrounds	Others (reportages)
Helsingin Sanomat	53	89 %	4 %	6 %	2 %
Uusi Suomi	59	69 %	14 %	15 %	2 %
Demari	24	79 %	13 %	8 %	0 %
Kansan Uutiset	31	58 %	16 %	23 %	3 %
Suomenmaa	22	82 %	5 %	14 %	0 %
Total	189				

Newspaper	Indir. supportive	Neutralizing	Analytical	Indir. critical	Direct. critical
Helsingin Sanomat	0 %	42 %	42 %	8 %	9 %
Uusi Suomi	0 %	46 %	25 %	5 %	24 %
Demari	0 %	38 %	38 %	17 %	8 %
Kansan Uutiset	6 %	16 %	48 %	16 %	13 %
Suomenmaa	0 %	50 %	41 %	9 %	0 %