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Editorial

Journalists' Associations as Political Instruments in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract
This editorial provides the overall context for the five cases—three national and two international—covered in this thematic issue. While the cases are from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), they highlight fundamental questions of journalism everywhere, including contradictions between freedom and control, professionalism and politics, individual and collective. The associations of journalists serve as very useful platforms to study these questions, especially at historical turning points when the whole political system changed, as happened twice in CEE after World War II.

Keywords
Central and Eastern Europe; journalism; journalist associations; political control; professionalism

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Histories of Collaboration and Dissent: Journalists' Associations Squeezed by Political System Changes", edited by Epp Lauk (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) and Kaarle Nordenstreng (University of Tampere, Finland).

Media and journalists—with their professional associations—have everywhere had a sensitive relationship with political regimes, ranging from total collaboration to vehement opposition. The leading Western ideal of journalism has included an autonomous and slightly oppositional relationship of the media to the existing powers, with journalist associations as crucial instruments in maintaining professional autonomy. On the other hand, in the authoritarian conditions pervading under Nazi and Communist rule the journalists' associations operated as instruments expressing obedience to those in power.

A cornerstone of professionalism in any field is an association to advance professional standards, legitimate the status of the profession, develop collective ideology and support the individual and collective autonomy of the members of the profession. This evolution of professionalism around professional organizations is particularly characteristic of the history of journalism (Høyer & Lauk, 2016). A distinguishing feature of journalism has always been its relation to freedom of expression and of the press. Journalism is the only profession with this important mission as an element of its professional ideology. The primary functions of journalism—providing people with relevant and adequate information, and investigating the use of power in society—are impossible to fulfil without at least a certain degree of freedom. Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes always endeavour to suppress this freedom, which places journalists' organizations in a difficult position between pressure from the authorities and the pursuit of professional autonomy—a choice between collaboration and repression.

The most dramatic stages in the development of journalism as a profession coincide with the political crises and upheavals of the 20th century in the Western world, especially after World War II and following the collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). During the post-war years and up to 1991, journalism in these countries was officially regarded as a part of political ideology and controlled by the Commu-

nist authorities. The same applies to journalists' associations. However, oppositional voices did exist, although often only as whispers. Various discourses of dissent developed, even in the official media, and an atmosphere of non-compliance was fairly strong in the journalists' associations of many countries. After the collapse of Communism in the 1990s, journalists and their associations were faced with many challenges, not only politically, but also financially and organizationally.

The articles in this thematic issue focus on crucial junctures in the history of journalists´ associations, when the political systems changed after World War II: from Nazism to Western democracy, from democracy to Communism and back from Communism to democracy. The examples come from national associations in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Estonia, with the additional perspectives of international associations of journalists both inside and outside CEE.

Jan Cebe's (2017) article tells the less known story of how immediately after World War II journalism and its associations was "cleansed" from its Nazi past—a process which actually led to some death sentences. In Czechoslovakia this paved the way for later political house cleaning after the Communist takeover in 1948. The Polish history reviewed by Wojciech Furman (2017) shows how closely journalists' associations reflected the situation of the political forces in the country—by no means serving as crude political instruments of those in power but rather as platforms of political struggle. Epp Lauk's (2017) article on the developments in Estonia also reminds us that while the political system at large—democracy, Nazism or Communism—naturally determined the basic order in society, journalists and their associations still found some ways to resist the pressure from the authorities. Moreover, the Estonian case shows us how history has a tendency to repeat itself—and how little we are ready to learn from it.

The national cases are followed by the perspectives of international associations. Markéta Ševčíková and Kaarle Nordenstreng (2017) focus on Czechoslovakia, which in 1947 became the host of the only worldwide International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) established one year earlier in Copenhagen to carry on the legacy of the pre-war Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ). However, in a couple of years the IOJ became a hostage of the nascent Cold War, making it a fellow traveller of the Soviet-led global East. This article demonstrates the sensitivity of the relations of an international association with the national associations of the country in which its headquarters are located: while both are governed by the same political order, the international organization may enjoy much greater autonomy. The article also shows how important it is to know the whole political history of the country—something that is too often overlooked when studying journalists and their associations. Finally Martin Nekola's (2017) commentary serves as a reminder of how emigrant journalists from CEE became part of the Western Cold War front.

One lesson to be learned from these stories is that CEE during the Cold War was not a monolith and that each national history has its particular characteristics, which should be taken into consideration instead of maintaining a stereotype view of a "free West" and a "totalitarian East". Actually history in CEE was quite manysided as shown in the thematic issue of *Media and Communication* (Volume 3, Issue 4) (Lauk, 2015). After all, the "Iron Curtain" was not entirely opaque and impermeable, as shown by research on cultural exchanges (Mikkonen & Koivunen, 2015).

Another lesson of this thematic issue is that the history of journalists' associations has still been insufficiently studied. Although many national histories of journalists' associations exist, they are primarily "surface" histories documenting principal events and people but lacking more profound socio-political analysis as well as an international perspective (Nordenstreng, 2016). A case in point is the centenary history of the British National Union of Journalists (Gopsill & Neale, 2007)—a good story of the Union itself and its relations to press industry and the state, yet with no ambition to place the Union into a wider political and societal framework.

The third lesson takes us back to the study of the basic professional values and occupational ideology of journalism. Examined from the organization's perspective using sociological and political science approaches, they may reveal additional qualities not so far noticed.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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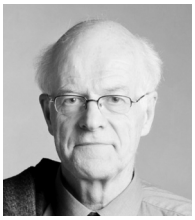

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