

## **EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ESTONIAN JOURNALISM AS A PROFESSION (FROM LATE 19TH CENTURY TO 1940)**

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Taking the concept of professionalisation as a theoretical framework, this article demonstrates how journalism in Estonia historically developed into an independent occupation with well-defined role perceptions, occupational standards and values, and how this development was interrupted by the Soviet authorities in 1940. The article is largely based on a research project lasting nearly two decades that was done for compiling the biographical database of Estonian journalists in the Institute of Journalism and Communication of the University of Tartu.

Nearly one hundred years passed from the emergence of the first Estonian periodical publication in 1766 to the appearance of the first full-time Estonian newspaper editor in the early 1860s. During the next three decades, a critical number of journalists emerged to view themselves as a group representing a particular vocation – newspapermen. The formation of Estonian journalists as an independent occupational group took another 56 years until a professional organisation was founded. The first stated goals of the journalists' organisations were to define journalism as an occupation, to discuss among themselves problems with the authorities, to invite delegates from journalist organisations in other countries to their conferences and to represent the national associations internationally. These are the functions that make the organisation, an agent of professionalisation and quality control over the occupation. All these elements emerged in Estonian journalism during the twenty years of independence, and the career developed towards professionalism with increasing speed, until it was interrupted by the Soviet invasion, occupation and annexation in 1940.

Emphasising the comparative approach, the theoretical points of departure of this article are the concept of professionalization applied to journalism, and the framework of modernisation focusing on the changes in the newspaper industry and differentiation of labour against the background of more general societal

changes. As indicated in several studies, modernisation served as a catalyst for the development of professions all over Europe in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONALISATION AND JOURNALISM

A considerable amount of literature on professions addresses the questions of what makes a professional occupation, what criteria characterise professionalisation and what are the roles and functions of professions in society. The term 'professionalisation' is partly referring to given conditions between an occupation and its several environments of employers, authorities and other social institutions, partly to a process of obtaining autonomy and social respect. Geoffrey Millerson gives a capsule definition of professional work as "a service provided with a variety of specialised skills on the bases of theoretical or scientific knowledge, given by the individual professional according to a given practice controlled by the professional organisation".<sup>2</sup> Autonomy from government and outside intervention is 'paid for' by the professional association in giving society a moral guarantee or a code of professional ethics.

When viewed through the narrow frame of a classical definition of a profession, journalism does not appear 'professional'. At the same time, journalists themselves unanimously view their work as demanding various competencies and developed skills and corresponding to high professional standards. Also many studies take as their basic starting point that journalism is developing towards professionalism.<sup>3</sup>

Professionalisation may be seen as a way of the social legitimisation of a developing occupation. In the process of formation and self-definition, an occupational group needs to construct and maintain occupational boundaries, "which are social or cultural divisions that help signify a group's work, societal roles and legitimacy".<sup>4</sup> The boundary building activities include defining certain work tasks and normative occupational values, establishing professional standards, seeking control over education and recruitment of newcomers. A professional organisation supports the attempts at seeking legal rights to control their field and resist external efforts to control the activities of the occupation's members. In fact, the process of boundary building contains most of the aspects of professionalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> **Elliott, P.** *The Sociology of Professions*. MacMillan, London, 1972; **Konttinen, E.** *Perinteisesti moderniin. Profioiden yhteiskunnallinen synty Suomessa*. Vastapaino, Tampere, 1991; **Jansen, E.** *Veel kord ärkamisaja kultuurimurrangust*. – In: *Vaateid eesti rahvusluse sünniaegadesse*. Ilmamaa, Tartu, 2004, 60–102.

<sup>2</sup> **Millerson, G.** *The Qualifying Associations. A Study in Professionalization*. Routledge, London, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., **Köcher, R.** *Bloodhounds and Missionaries: Role Definitions of German and British Journalists*. – *European Journal of Communication*, 1986, 1, 1, 43–64; **Weaver, D. H.** (ed.). *The Global Journalist. News People Around the World*. Hampton Press Inc., Cresskill, New Jersey, 1998; **Weaver, D. H. et al.** *The American Journalist in the 21st Century*. U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Mahwah, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> **Dooley, P. L.** *Taking Their Political Place. Journalists and the Making of an Occupation*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1997, 7.

In addition, occupational groups seeking to establish and maintain boundaries must create markets for their particular skills and/or products.<sup>5</sup>

Michael Schudson also suggests that professionalism must be discussed “in relation to concrete political structures and the political culture of a given society”.<sup>6</sup>

A comparative historical perspective allows the defining of certain common elements of professionalisation of journalism internationally and temporally. For example, a succession of stages and distinct traits can be discovered, which reflect the expansions, consolidations and contractions of the press system and its occupations. A logical order of specialization and role differentiation in the press looks as follows:

- *the postmaster* serving as news-gatherer and as distributor of written news-sheets;
- *the all-purpose printer* who takes on all business connected to printing (book-trade, production of newspapers and magazines). The printer may serve as editor, and sometimes hires an outsider on a part-time basis;
- *the publisher-printer*: gradually newspapers become the main business for some printers. The same persons are often both publishers and printers. Sometimes a hired editor serves as a part-time consultant maintaining contact with the world of authors, writers and intellectuals;
- *the fully employed editor*: by the second half of the 19th century, it became gradually rarer for printers to edit a newspaper of their own. Editors were hired on a more permanent contract. Their first task was to edit;
- *the full-time salaried journalist* who works for one paper alone, supplemented by full-time freelancers and spare-time contributors recruited from other professions;
- *the diversified newspaper firm* where journalism eventually divides into specialities and according to the field or genre.<sup>7</sup>

These stages and traits can also be identified in the history of Estonian journalism. However, in addition to universal factors, the development of journalism and every media system depends on a historically set cultural and political environment. In Estonia, the first printers and editors who published newspapers and magazines in Estonian and for Estonians were themselves not Estonians. Several educated Baltic Germans among the ruling elite considered their mission to enlighten and educate the Estonian people. Only one part-time editor of Estonian origin appeared among them as late as the 1840s (Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald who was a physician). Estonians were peasants with rare exceptions until the 1870s, when the intelligentsia of Estonian origin started to emerge. Therefore, it can be stated that Estonian journalists skipped the earliest stages of the post-master and all-purpose printer (these roles were performed by Germans). The formation of the occupational group of Estonian journalists is clearly connected

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup> Schudson, M. *The Power of News*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Lauk, E. *Historical and Sociological Perspectives on the Development of Estonian Journalism*. Tartu University Press, Tartu, 1997, 23.

to the development of the national intelligentsia and the engagement of its members in professions (the number of clergymen, physicians, schoolteachers, lawyers of Estonian origin began to increase remarkably from 1870s onwards). In many European countries editors were recruited from these social layers when the professions modernised in the 19th century. For instance, during the first five decades of the 19th century half of the 114 newspaper editors in Finland were university teachers or schoolmasters and had academic degrees.<sup>8</sup> The situation was the same in Germany at that time.<sup>9</sup>

### FORMATION OF A NEW OCCUPATIONAL GROUP

Although the first full-time editor of Estonian origin, Johann Woldemar Jannsen appeared in the early 1860s, it took two more decades before journalism became a full-time job of some magnitude and a new occupational group started to take shape. In the 1880s-1890s, some Estonian newspaper editors were also publishers and owners of the printing shops; some were hired by other publishers-printers. The actual history of Estonian journalists thus starts in the late 1880s, when the Estonian press market began to expand and the number of jobs gradually increased.

The formation of the Estonian press market took about 120 years. In 1766–1767 there was only one Estonian periodical publication, during 1767–1805 no Estonian newspapers or magazines appeared (only the German-language press developed). Up to the 1880s, the number of Estonian periodicals grew very slowly (in 1847 – 2 titles, in 1857 – 6, in 1878 – 11, in 1880 – 14). By the end of the 1880s and beginning of 1890s, the press market expanded and diversified despite the continuing censorship and other restrictions. The potential audience for the Estonian press already existed in the 18th century (according to the censuses, the rate of literacy at the end of the 18th century was 60% among the adult population and in 1897 – 95%). A sufficient technological potential for printing and publishing had also emerged. In 1890, 30 printing shops were in operation, and in 1900 their number was 44.

The importance and prestige of the Estonian press increased enormously during the peak of the national movement from the late 1850s to the mid-1880s. The editors of national newspapers (Carl Robert Jakobson, Ado Grenzstein, Karl August Hermann, Jaak Järv and others) were also the leaders of this movement. In several articles during the 1880s, they emphasised the power and influence of the press on the society and people's minds.

It is a newspaper, where Estonian people find the expression and promotion of their desires and hopes. /.../ No wonder then that Estonians rely on and trust the newspapers and let them lead their minds and opinions,

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<sup>8</sup> **Tommila, P.** Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi. 1809–1859. Toimittajat ja toimitustyö. – In: Suomen Lehistön Historia, 1. Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905. Ed. P. Tommila. Kustannuskiila, Kuopio, 1988, 196–207.

<sup>9</sup> **Koszyk, K.** Deutsche Presse im 19. Jahrhundert. Geschichte den deutschen Presse. Teil II. Colloquium Verlag, Berlin, 1966.

*Olevik (The Present Time)* wrote.<sup>10</sup> The most influential newspaper in the 1880s, *Postimees (The Postman)* wrote in 1887:

Especially large is the influence of newspapers on the nation in the national and political questions. The public word, we may say – the newspapers – discuss people’s political aspirations; the newspapers are the initiators of national politics. /.../ Who is not familiar with the influence of the press as a public voice on the internal and foreign policy of the government?<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the Estonian press, this was, of course, an idealistic perception at that time. Because of strict censorship and other legal and economic restrictions imposed on the provincial press of the Russian Tsarist Empire, these newspapers did not have any political influence. They were, however, influential and important in the cultural sphere and nation-building process.<sup>12</sup>

The first signs of the occupational awareness of Estonian journalists appeared by the end of the 1890s, when the expanding press market offered more new jobs for journalists and the division of labour in the editorial offices developed further. According to our data, 23 journalists were permanently employed in 1896 and 27 in 1897. The first meetings of editors in these years give evidence of the emergence of a new occupational group that clearly identified itself with the field of journalism. As the editors, they were in similar social and occupational positions; they had common problems to discuss (e.g., emerging competition among their publications and ethical matters), and common professional rhetoric. The editors were beginning to realise that journalism was not simply one trade among many. “It is a distinct way of experiencing the world. It is a separate consciousness,” as Schudson argues.<sup>13</sup> From the late 1890s onwards, it is thus possible to observe the gradual emergence and development of various elements of professionalism in Estonian journalism.

The number of fully employed journalists grew relatively slowly until the end of the 19th century. The beginning of the 20th century was a period of rapid modernisation covering all spheres of social life in Estonia, in which the press had a crucial role. This was the period of both ideological and structural diversification and of a rapid expansion of the Estonian press despite continuing censorship. During the first five years of the century, the number of fully employed journalists doubled: 29 journalists in 1900 and 57 in 1905, whereas in 1906 the number was already 77 (see Fig. 1). Alongside the growth of the number of publications, the editorial staffs of the newspapers also grew and the division of labour developed further. For example, the staff of the only daily, *Postimees*, consisted of five journalists in 1900, and in 1909 the number was twelve. These numbers are comparable for example, with respective Finnish data. In Finland, there were 3.2 journalists per newspaper in 1900, and 3.9 in 1910, while the total number of

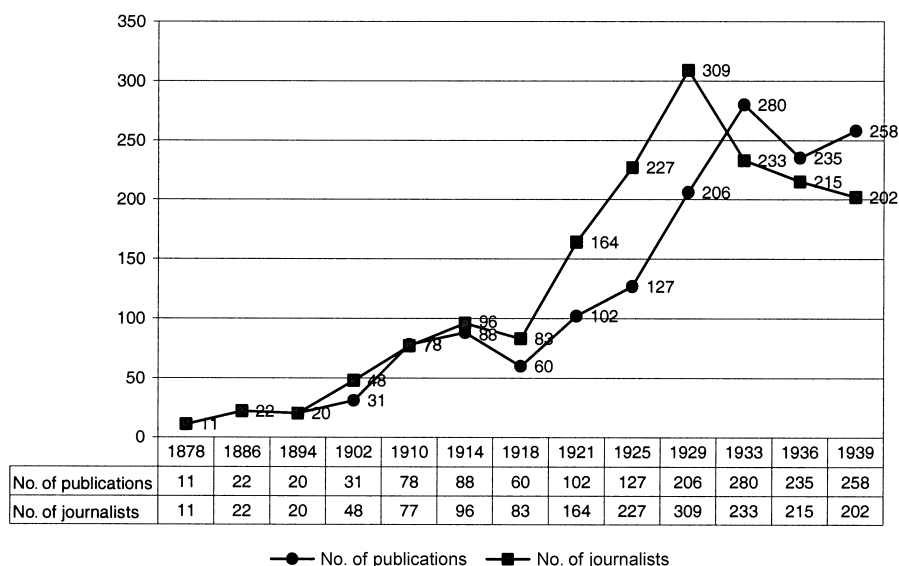
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<sup>10</sup> Ajakirjandus ja õpetus. – Olevik, April 7, 1885.

<sup>11</sup> Ajakirjandusest. – Postimees, November 14, 1887.

<sup>12</sup> See more in: Towards a Civic Society. The Baltic Media’s Long Road to Freedom. Perspectives on History, Ethnicity and Journalism. Eds S. Høyer, E. Lauk, P. Vihalemm. Baltic Association for Media Research/Nota Baltica Ltd., Tartu, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> **Schudson, M.** The Power of News, 99.



**Fig. 1.** Number of Estonian periodical publications and journalists in 1878–1939.

Note: In this chart the numbers of journalists do not correlate to the numbers of periodical publications, but demonstrate only a general tendency of growth. The number of publications includes all titles that appeared during a year (even if only one issue was published). Journalists, in turn, could be hired by several different publications within one and the same year.

Finnish journalists was 283.<sup>14</sup> In all, during different years, in 1905–1918, 210 journalists were employed in the Estonian press (24 women among them), in 1919–1940 their number was 632 (incl. 73 women).<sup>15</sup>

### SEARCH FOR A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

By the early 20th century, with the growth of the number of fully employed journalists, and thoroughly altered working environments, the need for determining commonly shared professional standards, responsibility, methods of training, and employment and recruitment conditions became inevitable. ‘Who should be considered a journalist?’ clearly became a question of establishing the occupational boundaries and the legitimacy of the occupation.

<sup>14</sup> **Nygård, T.** Poliittisten vastakohtaisuuksien jyrkentyminen sanomalehdistössä. Sanomalehden toimittaminen. – In: Suomen Lehdistön Historia, II. Suurlakosta Talvisotaan. Ed. P. Tommila. Kustannuskiila Oy, Kuopio, 1987, 92–122.

<sup>15</sup> **Pallas, A.** Harrastusest elukutseks: Eesti ajakirjanikkonna kujunemine aastail 1878–1940. MA thesis. Manuscript in the Department of Journalism and Communication of the University of Tartu. Tartu, 2000, 26.

One indicator of a journalist's occupational identification is the extent of his formal and informal social ties with other journalists. Like most other trades, journalists started to organise themselves in the late 19th century. Associations appeared both on the national and local level: in several European countries and the United States in the 1860s, in Scandinavia in the 1880s–1890s, in the Baltic countries in the 1900s–1920s. Estonian journalists made their first attempt to establish an association in 1909, when the first Congress of Estonian Journalists was held in Tallinn. The Congress brought together two thirds of all Estonian journalists (40 of 65 employed in 1909) from most newspapers and magazines. There were also four female journalists among the participants and three guests from Finland.<sup>16</sup>

The agenda concentrated around the core questions that determine the framework of the occupation: journalist's professional role and status, ethical problems, educational requirements, employment conditions, establishing an organisation.

The most important question concerning occupational identity was: what are the parameters that distinguish a journalist from other occupations? At that time in Estonia, however, unlike the situation in some other countries, the role and status differences inside the occupation were not yet distinct enough. Thus, the staff members, permanent contributors and publishers were all considered journalists. There was not always a clear distinction between an editor and publisher either. These roles were still often played by the same person. In Germany, for instance, publishing had already become an independent occupation by the 1840s<sup>17</sup> and in Sweden, Norway and Finland, publishers had established their associations before the journalists.

Nor was a distinction made between active freelance contributors from other occupations and the full-time journalists. Most often, the regular contributors came from among schoolmasters, clergymen and authors (around the turn of the centuries about 40% of later staff members of Estonian newspapers and magazines came from these professions). Historically, in many countries the authors were the most productive and regular contributors for the press, and at times also the staff members. As for instance, Sverre Høyer<sup>18</sup> tells us, 46% of all authors mentioned in the history of Norwegian literature (between 1742 and 1888) had been editors and 11% permanent contributors. The share of the authors-editors increased by the middle of the 19th century up to 58% in the Norwegian press. By the early 20th century, when journalism became a career in itself, the amount of authors among journalists diminished. A similar tendency can be observed in the Estonian press. The first congress of journalists even passed a resolution

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<sup>16</sup> **Lauk, E.** Eesti ajakirjanike kutsealane organiseerumine. Eesti Ajakirjanikkude Liit (1919–1940) ja selle tegevus. – In: Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi aastaraamat. Annales Litterarum Societatis Esthonicae 1988–1993. Ed. J. Linnus. Õpetatud Eesti Selts, Tartu, 1995, 206–246.

<sup>17</sup> **Koszyk, K.** Deutsche Presse im 19. Jahrhundert. Geschichte der deutschen Presse.

<sup>18</sup> **Høyer, S.** Pressen mellom teknologi og samfunn. Norske og internasjonale perspektiver på pressehistorien fra Gutenberg til vår tid. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1995, 326–327.

about establishing a common organisation for both journalists and authors. The idea of a special journalists' organisation, however, became a reality only in 1919, when an Association of Estonian Journalists was founded.

Defining occupational identity was also complicated because of the high mobility within the journalistic field. Journalism was not regarded as a life-long independent career, but more frequently as a mission (in the earlier periods) or as a temporary but respectable source of income for a poor student or author (in the later periods). Journalism was a field that was easy to join and easy to leave, since it did not require a long and costly preparation and at the same time, it afforded some of the prestige of an intellectual profession. In Estonia, the duration of a journalistic career became gradually longer by the 1940s, although it was a very slow process. The average duration of an uninterrupted career as a journalist until the early 1920s in Estonia was about four years, during the 1930s it extended to six years. For example, during 1898, 31 journalists were employed as staff members. Ten of them joined the field in the same year and eight left the field. In 1905, there were more people to leave journalism than those who joined the profession (23 and 18 respectively), because at the end of the year, many publications were closed by the authorities. The 1920s-1930s was a more stable time for the press and the careers also lasted longer. By 1939, there were already 10% of journalists with a life-long career (more than 20 years).

Identification with the occupation and the definition of its membership became clearer by 1925, when the journalists' association was reorganised into the Estonian Journalists' Union (EJU) and new statutes were adopted. The statutes determined the membership of the Union in two ways: 1) active members – those who had been regular staff members for at least two years and 2) associate members who actively contributed to the newspapers or magazines. The Union had about 120–130 members during the 1930s, which made approximately 70% of all journalists in these years.

## CHANGING SOCIAL ROLE AND IMAGE OF JOURNALISTS

Traditionally, up to WWI, Estonian newspapers and their editors enjoyed high social prestige being considered leaders, teachers and enlighteners of the society. The editors were active and well-known public people who led the popular and later also political movements and promoted their ideologies in the newspapers. While Estonia was a province of the Russian Empire, the political public sphere with various ideologies and organisations could not develop before 1905, when a revolutionary movement shook the whole Empire.<sup>19</sup> By the end of the 19th century, Estonian newspapers had become a certain embryonic political public

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<sup>19</sup> About the development of public sphere in the Baltic countries see: **Ruutsoo, R.** Modernisation of the National Public Sphere in the Baltic States in the First Period of Independence. – *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2003, 7, 126–161.



sphere: they expressed and discussed national and political aspirations, doing it rather cautiously before 1905 because of censorship, but more freely during the revolutionary movement in 1905. This also explains why the first Estonian political parties were formed within the newspaper circles in 1905–1906. Thus, editors were seen almost as national heroes:

It is a newspaper man who stands in the centre of our education history. He teaches and explains, comforts in the days of anguish and guides out of trouble, *Päevaleht (The Daily)* wrote in 1910.<sup>20</sup>

During about half of a century, the social role of Estonian journalists changed from enlighteners and educators to the one of a popular leader. From 1905 onwards, this development put journalists on the road to political leadership, e.g., the editor-in-chief of the most popular national daily *Postimees* became the leader of the first political party, the conservative *Estonian Progressive Peoples' Party*. During the struggle for an independent statehood and the development of a civic society from 1918 to the late 1920s, many well-known journalists became politicians, while some of those simultaneously continued their journalistic activities. In the process of developing the Estonian nation state, journalism became tightly interwoven with politics. It was often difficult for journalists to distinguish between partisan and politically independent journalism. Several less experienced journalists became manipulated by politicians and used in political power games. Against this background, the question of journalistic objectivity became a topic of discussions. A leading political columnist and author of that time, Eduard Laaman wrote:

A political journalist cannot be neutral, but the ideal of a journalist must be independent from anything but his own conscience.<sup>21</sup>

Simultaneously, the ethical and responsibility issues were raised. For example, a well-known journalist and foreign correspondent Harald Vellner pointed out that the responsibilities and obligations of journalists are far higher than of ordinary people, because through the newspaper a journalist speaks “louder than a politician, more powerfully than a deputy and mightier than a priest”.<sup>22</sup> Faith in the press as the Fourth Estate was clearly present and also articulated in many discussions on the professional issues during the 1930s.

On the other hand, industrialisation and the internal specialisation of the press caused two important changes that began to erode the high status and prestige of journalists. A hierarchy of positions with different professional status and reputation emerged. A gradual ‘proletarianisation’<sup>23</sup> of journalistic work was also a part of this development. Journalists were hired and fired at will by publishers, they were paid for volume of work and not for quality. People with comparatively modest

<sup>20</sup> **K.R.P.** Ajakirjandus ja seltskond. – *Päevaleht*, October 22, 1910.

<sup>21</sup> **Laaman, E.** Erapooletus ja ärarippumatus. – *Vaba Maa*, February 2, 1930.

<sup>22</sup> **Vellner, H.** Pro ja Contra. – *Õitsituled*, 1929, VIII, 119.

<sup>23</sup> **Kaul, A. J.** The Proletarian Journalist: a Critique of Professionalism. – *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1986, 1, 2, 47–55.

education and journalistic skills gradually began to replace the respectable omniscient newspaperman. The reporter's function was different, the task was not to enlighten or instruct, but search for the news and sensation and transmit them as fast as possible. A shift had occurred "from an individual with a mission to an individual with a role of the detached reporter".<sup>24</sup> Reporters, however, formed a group within the profession that had a rather low reputation. The publishers hired them on the 'line is money' basis, which was much cheaper than a permanent contract with an experienced journalist. The reporters lacked competence, professional skills and often also a sense of responsibility. Thus, they made many mistakes, published false facts and sometimes even rumours. For example, in 1938, during a major discussion in the press about the problems of the Estonian oil shale industry, 86 out of 102 articles contained false facts. This caused court cases for a number of newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

Sensation hunters also damaged the prestige of the profession in general. Sometimes 'decent' journalists even tried to distance themselves from the reporters. In 1924, the national daily *Päevaleht* on the occasion of moving into a new building published a list with the names of its staff. A journalist who was named reporter in the list, felt so insulted that he went into a pub and got drunk.<sup>26</sup> Thus, unlike for example, in England, in Estonian journalism, the 'muckraker' appeared later than the prestigious man of calling.

### EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF EARLY ESTONIAN JOURNALISTS

The high prestige of the 19th century editors was clearly connected with the vast difference in the educational level between the editors and their audience. As mentioned, they belonged to the first generation of Estonian intelligentsia while their readers were mostly peasants with a village school education of some years. Among the journalists of the period of 1878–1904, 34% had completed university studies (they had studied law, theology, medicine, natural sciences) and 18% had a lower special education, mostly teachers' seminary.<sup>27</sup>

Typically, in many countries, the increase in the number of jobs together with changes of the working environment brought about the decrease of the average educational level of journalists. This has been demonstrated, for example, in Norwegian and Finnish studies. While in the second half of the 19th century,

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<sup>24</sup> **Schudson, M.** The Power of News, 109.

<sup>25</sup> **Harro, H.** Ajakirjanduse õiguslik regulatsioon Eestis aastail 1918–1940 ja 1990–1993. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 1994, 58–59.

<sup>26</sup> **Lauk, E.** Eesti ajakirjanduse arenguhooni XX sajandi esimesel poolel. – In: Peatükke Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost 1900–1940. Ed. E. Lauk. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2000, 37.

<sup>27</sup> **Pallas, A.** Ajalehe kirjutajast ajakirjanikuks. Ajakirjanikuameti kujunemisest aastail 1878–1918. – In: Peatükke Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost 1900–1940. Ed. E. Lauk. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2000, 152.

about 50% of Finnish editors had an academic background, by 1905 their share in the total number of journalists had decreased to 25%.<sup>28</sup> In Norway, the share of the journalists with an academic background reached 22% by the turn of the centuries, but decreased to 14–15% by the middle of the 1920s. However, by the late 1930s the share of academically educated journalists increased again to 31%.<sup>29</sup>

The educational level of Estonian journalists at the end of the 19th century is comparable with the Norwegian journalists (22% of journalists in both countries had academic education in 1890). However, in Estonia, the share of journalists with higher education continued to grow as well, as did the average level of education (see Fig. 2). At the same time, the educational level of the readers also gradually increased (during the 1920s–1930s, general compulsory education was six years, and secondary school lasted 12 years). The audience also became more heterogeneous.

The changes in the social characteristics of journalists also reflect the emerging social stratification and social mobility from bottom to top, and also the urbanisation process. A study of the social backgrounds of journalists reveals that

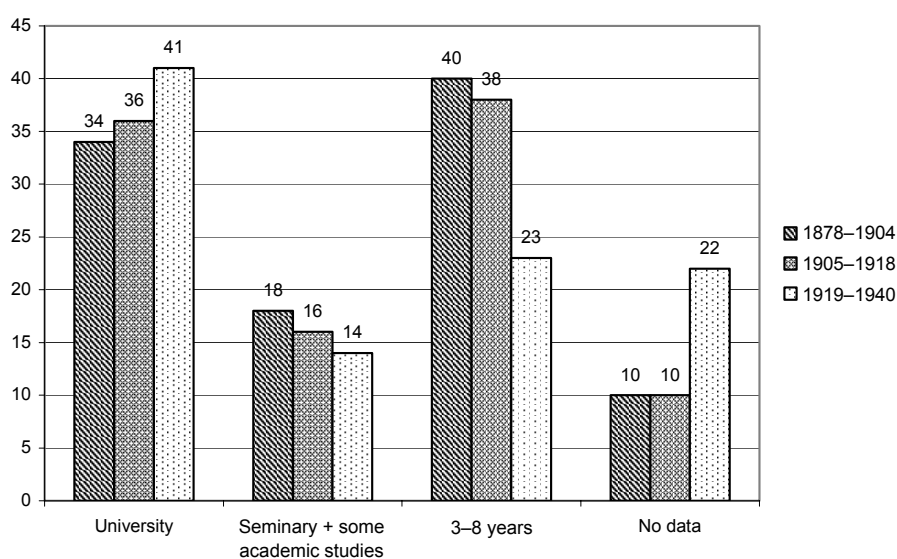


Fig. 2. Education of Estonian journalists (1878–1940).

<sup>28</sup> **Tommila, P.** Suomen sanomalehdistön kehityslinjat. – In: Suomen Lehdistön Historia, 3. Sanomalehdistö sodan murroksesta 1980-luvulla. Ed. P. Tommila. Kustannuskiila, Kuopio, 1988, 483–520.

<sup>29</sup> **Høyer, S., Ihlen, Ø.** Journalistens utdanning og yrkeserfaring. Et historisk tilbakeblikk. Manuscript. Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon, Oslo, 1998.

during 1878–1904, 52% of journalists came from peasant families; in 1919–1940 the respective number was nearly twice smaller – 28%.<sup>30</sup> It was a matter of honour and prestige among the wealthier Estonian peasants to give at least one of the sons (and later on also the daughters) an education higher than that of the village school. Often high school or university students started to contribute to the press and became employed by the newspapers during their studies: in the late 19th century – 20% of newcomers to the field were students and during 1920s–1930s, 31% of journalists came from students' circles. While most of the journalists had been born in villages in 1878–1904 (92%), in 1919–1940, already 20% came from the cities.<sup>31</sup>

### WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Journalism has historically been regarded as a man's job and it was very difficult for women to establish themselves among them. Until the 1920s, there were very few women journalists employed in the Estonian press.

In the late 19th century, however, several female correspondents can be found who contributed to newspapers and magazines. During the period from 1861 (when the first female journalist appeared) to 1904, ten women were fully employed and in addition, there were at least 33 female contributors.<sup>32</sup> Many contributions at that time appeared anonymously and it has not been possible to disclose the names of all anonymous writers. Thus, the number of female contributors could probably be even higher.

Among the first generation of Estonian female journalists there were only three who had been editors for a while, the others performed less demanding tasks in the editorial offices (translated from foreign languages, picked up news from other newspapers, did proofreading, worked as secretaries). Women journalists and contributors mostly published literary pieces (poems, short stories) or articles about house-holding, family, child-care and related issues.

Like the male journalists, their female colleagues came from peasant families; only eight of them were born in the cities. Unlike men, however, the average educational level of these women was significantly higher. The earlier female journalists and contributors, with a few exceptions, had trained in the (German language) higher girls' schools to work as governesses. Among the female journalists of the 1900s and 1910s several had university education. Before 1905, it was impossible for women to attend Tartu University and they went to study abroad. In 1905, five Estonian women studied at the University of Bern. Two women who later became journalists obtained their doctoral degrees in the same

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<sup>30</sup> Pallas, A. Harrastusest elukutseks: Eesti ajakirjanikkonna kujunemine aastail 1878–1940, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>32</sup> Mälik, M. Eesti naisajakirjanike esimesed põlvkonnad. – In: Peatükke Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost 1900–1940. Ed. E. Lauk. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2000, 167, 169.

university in the 1910s. Some women studied at universities in Helsinki, Moscow, St. Petersburg and London. The first female journalists with a Tartu University education appeared in the early 1930s. They had studied history, literature, Estonian language, agronomy, law and medicine.<sup>33</sup>

The data about the duration of the career of women journalists are rather incomplete. It can be stated, however, that the average career in the first decades of the 20th century lasted about 2.5 years, in the 1920s, about 4 years. Two female editors of women magazines, Helmi Mäelo and Ella Treffner, had the longest careers, 17 and 14 years respectively. The women were mostly employed by weeklies and magazines, especially magazines for women and children. Only five women had been employed by the daily newspapers before 1940.<sup>34</sup> Few female journalists became members of the journalists' union – only 21 names of women appear on the members' list during the twenty years of existence of the organisation.

As the women who worked in journalism in the 1920s and 1930s were well educated and socially active, they did not limit themselves with 'female' issues only. They also dealt with topical political news and problems, published columns and commentaries on cultural themes and even on foreign politics. The most exploited fields, however, were still issues of women's education, health care, housekeeping, literary criticism, fiction, and translations. Gradually, feminism appeared in the public discussion as a new field where women became very active. It was their ambition to achieve better possibilities for education and career for women.

To establish themselves in the intellectual spheres a woman must demonstrate very high competence, because usually an average man is always preferred to a talented woman. A number of fields still exist to which the women do not have access even in the most democratic societies, an activist of a feminist movement and journalist of a women's magazine Vera Poska-Grünthal wrote in 1936.<sup>35</sup>

## CLAIMS FOR SETTING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Journalism diversified and specialised very fast at the beginning of the 20th century. The 19th century universal journalist who was able to write about everything from music reviews and cattle breeding to the editorials was a creature of the past. Growing competition in the newspaper market (the number of newspapers increased from 14 in 1901 to 22 in 1905 and to 29 in 1910)<sup>36</sup> brought

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 170–172.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>35</sup> **Poska-Grünthal, V.** Naine ja naisliikumine: peajooni naisliikumise ajaloost ja probleemistikust. Eesti Kirjanduse Selts, Tartu, 1936, 31.

<sup>36</sup> **Lauk, E.** On the development of Estonian journalism from 1900 to 1914. – In: The Baltic Countries 1900–1914. Ed. A. Loit. (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia, 1990, 5, Part 2, 541.)

along changes in news presentation and journalistic methods. Newspaper content gradually diversified and also required more specific skills of newsgathering and presentation.

The relatively good general education of Estonian journalists did not, however, compensate for the lack of journalistic knowledge and skills. Journalists had not received any special education, only in other fields of knowledge. They learned newspaper work in the editorial offices. In the 1930s, there were only two Estonian journalists with journalistic education: one graduated from Columbia University and the other had studied journalism at the University of London. No special journalistic education was available in Estonia until 1954.

Developing specialisation within journalism and diversifying journalistic methods made it vital to improve journalists' professional skills and knowledge. In the 1900s, these issues were still primarily discussed in terms of general competence and education. From the 1920s onwards, the focus was on journalistic qualifications. This was directly connected with the aspirations of gaining social recognition as an independent occupation and raising its prestige. Professional competence became also a key issue of the developing occupational ideology. It was argued that "professional schooling and culturally educating journalists is as important as the schooling of diplomats".<sup>37</sup> The issue of competence and education was emphasized within the context of social and professional responsibility of journalists:

The importance of the tasks of Estonian journalism must raise the self-esteem and responsibility of every Estonian journalist,

an experienced journalist and politician Jaan Tõnisson wrote in 1923.<sup>38</sup>

The EJU took several initiatives to improve journalists' education (scholarships for journalists for study trips abroad, reporter's courses etc.). In 1932, journalist and editor Harald Vellner published a textbook about reporting, called "Reporter. Technique of newspaper writing". The book was a synthesis of various Anglo-American textbooks, a German one and a London-based journal *Press News*, all published in 1914–1931. The book presented briefly the whole knowledge of contemporary news reporting techniques such as news gathering and sources, focusing and lead, the 'five Ws and H' (what, where, when, who, why, how), court reporting etc. As examples, Vellner used Estonian newspaper texts and was rather critical towards the quality of Estonian journalism.<sup>39</sup>

In 1936, the EJU established a foundation for study grants for journalists. Proposals were also made to open a faculty of journalism at the University of

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<sup>37</sup> **Lintrop, J.** Avalik arvamine. – Õitsituled, 1926, V, 48.

<sup>38</sup> **Tõnisson, J.** Iseseisev ajakirjanik Eesti rahvariigis. – Õitsituled, 1923, II, 19.

<sup>39</sup> See also: **Harro, H.** Ajakirjandusžanride areng. – In: Peatükke Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost 1900–1940. Ed. E. Lauk. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2000, 79–107; **Harro, H.** Changing Journalistic Conventions in the Press. Empirical Studies on Daily Newspapers under Different Political Conditions in 20th Century Estonia. University of Oslo, Oslo, 2001.

Tartu or to establish a vocational school for journalists. These ideas were, however, never realised. The only place in the Baltic countries at that time, where journalism was included in the university curriculum was the University of Kaunas in Lithuania.

The EJU also took several steps to establish certain minimum requirements in order to qualify as a journalist, and to get legal right to licensing.

If nobody can become a lawyer, doctor or even an artist without fulfilling certain criteria, why then everybody who has for a short while performed some simple editorial tasks, can call himself a journalist?<sup>40</sup>

The lack of professional standards and training became especially obvious during the economic crisis of the early 1930s when experienced journalists who demanded reasonable salaries and good working conditions competed with casual labourers ready to accept anything.

Losers and unemployed people who have no idea about journalistic work, but are only able to write, offer their service for 50% below the minimum that the publishers ought to pay for professional journalists,

a well-known editor and author Rudolf Sirge wrote in 1933.<sup>41</sup>

In connection with the preparation of a new law on publishing, the EJU suggested twice, in 1933 and 1938, that a regulation be included that allowed the employment as editors, sub-editors or permanent staff members only those people who had a qualification approved by the EJU. This proposal was rejected.

In the 1920s–1930s, no law existed to regulate the employment and working conditions of journalists. The journalists fully depended on the will of publishers and owners. They did not have any written contract let alone collective agreement. The EJU made a survey among Estonian journalists in 1935, which revealed big differences in the employment conditions and incomes. Salaries were highest at the dailies and Tallinn-based editorial offices and the lowest at provincial newspapers. About 12% of journalists were highly paid but nearly half of all reporters earned no more than ordinary print workers.

The EJU initiated the preparation of a Press Law that would regulate work and pay terms, lay down rules for contracts, fix the minimum rates of wages and salaries, etc. No such law was ever adopted. By contrast, in Latvia, a collective contract had been used in the press since the 1920s that determined wage and salary rates, overall working conditions and terms of employment.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> **Nurk, M.** Hoolitsegem järeikasvu eest. Mõtteid ajakirjaniku kvalifikatsioonist. – Õitsituled, 1939, XVII, 13.

<sup>41</sup> **Sirge, R.** Ajakirjanik ja paragrahv. – Õitsituled, 1933, XI, 13.

<sup>42</sup> **Lauk, E.** Journalism in the Republic of Estonia during the 1920s and 1930s. – In: Towards a Civic Society. The Baltic Media's Long Road to Freedom. Perspectives on History, Ethnicity and Journalism. Eds S. Høyer, E. Lauk, P. Vihalemm. Baltic Association for Media Research/Nota Baltica Ltd., Tartu, 1993, 137.

A code of professional conduct is regarded as an important attribute that distinguishes a profession. Until 1939, there did not exist any formal ethical code for Estonian journalists. In 1930, a Court of Honour was founded to handle ethical conflicts. The statutes of the Court contained some general ethical principles for journalists, but these were compulsory only for the members of the EJU. In the same year, the EJU joined the International Federation of Journalist (Fédération Internationale des Journalistes – FIJ). In 1939 Estonian journalists adopted the ethical code of the FIJ. An ethical code of their own was adopted by Estonian journalists only as late as in 1997.

### **POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE EJU**

In addition to professional, economic and social issues the EJU was also involved in certain political activities, particularly representing Estonian press abroad and organising international relations. Establishing relations with the journalists' organisations in other countries, especially around the Baltic Sea, was of greatest importance. Here, the activities of the EJU coincided with the aspirations of Estonia's foreign policy in the creation of the so-called common Baltic public opinion in order to contribute to the unification of the foreign political positions of the Baltic countries. At the Assembly of the Baltic journalists' unions in Tallinn in June 1933, it was emphasised that by developing mutual co-operation, the journalists would be able to serve the interests of their countries with dignity and create a favourable ground for the idea of a Baltic Entente (Baltic League).<sup>43</sup> For this purpose, the Assembly founded the Baltic Press Association, in which each of the three Baltic countries was represented by their National Committee. After the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was concluded in Geneva in September 1934,<sup>44</sup> three conferences of the Association took place: in 1935 (Kaunas), 1936 and 1937 (Riga). The EJU also had co-operation and friendship contacts with the journalists' organisations in Finland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden and Russia.

Concerning the official press policy in the 1930s, when the authorities first established censorship for several months in 1933 and in 1938 adopted a Publishing Act with numerous restrictions and bans for the press, the EJU did not have any common strategy or well-defined opposition. Indeed it was quite the opposite, because during the authoritarian regime, from 1934 onwards, the leaders of the Union were actively seeking co-operation with the authorities. Celebration

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<sup>43</sup> **Lauk, E.** Eesti ajakirjanike kutsealane organiseerumine, 231. See also: **Ilmjärv, M.** The Baltic States military and their foreign and defence policies 1933–1938. – *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2003, 7, 70–125.

<sup>44</sup> **Ilmjärv, M.** The Baltic States military and their foreign and defence policies 1933–1938, 96.



of the Union's 15th anniversary in 1934 became a demonstration of loyalty. The leaders of the Union expressed the journalists' readiness to work "for securing the better future for Estonian state and nation".<sup>45</sup> The EJU refrained from any comments or critical opinion concerning the measures that the authorities took about the press, including the activities of the State Propaganda Service (established in 1934) and adoption of the Publishing Act in 1938, which essentially restricted the freedom of the press. As a matter of fact, the press became severely curtailed and silenced before the Soviet occupation in the summer of 1940.

### SOVIETISATION OF THE ESTONIAN JOURNALISTS' UNION

Development of Estonian journalism and profession was entirely ruined in 1940 by the Soviet occupation and World War II.

Sovietisation of the Estonian Journalists' Union in 1940 clearly demonstrated whom the new authorities trusted and what they expected from the journalists. The Soviets did not close the EJU as they did with most of the organisations of the independence period, but reorganised it into a Soviet type trade union. To be legitimate, the organisation had to carry out the reorganisation formally on its own. Therefore, at the extraordinary general meeting in July 1940, the EJU 'unanimously' withdrew from the IFJ and joined the Central Association of Trade Unions. At the general meeting on August 18, 1940 the whole Board of the EJU withdrew and a new Board was elected by 'open and entirely unanimous' voting. The new leadership consisted of communists and some journalists loyal to the new regime. At this meeting, the editor-in-chief of the daily *Kommunist (Communist)*, comrade Nikolai Karotamm pointed out the correct directions for the future work of the organisation. The most important task was to educate journalists politically and training 'new journalistic staff'. He also emphasized that a journalist must be "loyal to the working people. He must enthusiastically fight against the enemies of the working people and disclose the enemies' hostile intrigues. Those who do not follow these principles may find themselves among the enemies of the working class" with respective consequences.<sup>46</sup>

Among the 'old guard' of journalists there were not many voluntary co-operators, and the Soviet authorities actually did not trust even those who expressed their readiness to co-operate. Journalists who had worked in the 'bourgeois' press during independence were fired. New people amongst those who demonstrated loyalty to the new regime, but had no journalistic experience whatsoever were employed. Those journalists who did not want to co-operate

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<sup>45</sup> **Lauk, E.** Eesti ajakirjanike kutsealane organiseerumine, 231.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted as in **Lauk, E.** Eesti ajakirjanike kutsealane organiseerumine, 243.

were arrested in 1940–1941 and deported in June 1941 – as punishment for their ‘anti-Soviet activities’. Journalists who had been involved in politics during the independence era were treated as especially dangerous enemies. 37 journalists were executed by the Soviet authorities in 1940. Several journalists were also deported to the concentration camps by the Nazis during the consequent German occupation, and died there. There is still no information about the fate of 211 journalists who disappeared during 1940–1946.<sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the historical development of journalistic occupation in Estonia, we can see that the professionalisation in Estonian journalism fluctuated to a great degree. The first ‘peak’ came during the revolutionary years in the first decade of the 20th century together with the struggle for the democratisation of society and expansion of the press market. Questions of occupational identity and the role of journalists in society were raised into the focus of attention and also new qualities such as specialisation of the editorial tasks appeared. Another period – primarily the 1920s and the early 1930s – concerns changes in the political regime towards a more open and decentralised society with extensive freedom of the press and its growing impact on the societal issues. Questions of the responsibility and quality of performance of the press and journalists became topical and were also publicly discussed. The journalists’ organisation functioned simultaneously as a professional body and a trade union attempting to be a standard setter in journalistic practice (Code of Ethics, methods of reporting, education) and a representative of the interests of journalists as employees. In this, Estonian journalism caught up with other European countries in approaching the status of professionally controlled journalism. Estonian journalists defined themselves as members of certain occupational community with its rules and commitments. The third period coincided with the crisis of liberal democracy in Estonia. For the press, it began with the temporary introduction of pre-publication censorship in the summer of 1933 and the consequent restrictions of press freedom, and peaked with the Publishing Act of 1938. Restricted freedom of the press hampers the professional advancement of journalism, because it excludes certain topics from the public agenda (such as objectivity of reporting, occupational dignity, independence from the political agenda etc.). Development of Estonian journalism as an independent occupation was interrupted in 1940 for nearly half century when the Soviet authorities physically destroyed almost the entire occupational group and staffed the editorial offices with people having little or no journalistic experience and education, and introduced strict censorship.

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<sup>47</sup> Pallas, A. Eesti Vabariigi ajakirjanik 1919–1940. – Keel ja Kirjandus, 2001, 7, 477.

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## EESTI AJAKIRJANDUSE KUI ELUKUTSE VARAJANE ARENG (19. SAJANDI LÕPUST KUNI 1940. AASTANI)

Epp LAUK ja Anu PALLAS

Lähtudes professionaliseerumise kontseptsioonist, on artiklis käsitletud ajakirjanduse kui elukutse arengut Eestis selle algusest kuni 1940. aastani. Uue elukutsega kaasnesid täishõiveline töö, ametiidentiteet ja kutseorganisatsioon. Eestis oli esimeseks täishõiveliseks ajakirjanikuks 1860. aastate algul Johann Voldemar Jannsen Eesti Postimehes. Kriitiline mass ajalehetegijaid, kes end ajakirjanikuna identifitseerisid, kujunes välja kolmkümmend aastat hiljem. Kutseorganisatsiooni asutamiseni (1919) kulus veel üle poole sajandi. Selle ülesanne oli määratleda ajakirjandus kui amet, tegelda erialaste probleemidega, suhelda riigivõimu esindajate ja teiste maade ajakirjanike organisatsioonidega. Kõige sellega tegeles Eesti Ajakirjanikkude Liit 1920.–1930. aastatel, mil ajakirjanikuamet professionaliseerus kiirenevas tempos, kuni see areng katkes järsult seoses Nõukogude okupatsiooni algusega 1940. aastal. Aastail 1919–1940 tegutses eesti ajakirjanduses 632 ajakirjanikku, nende hulgas 73 naist. Sarnaselt meestega olid ka naisajakirjanikud pärit valdavalt talukeskkonnast, ainult kaheksa neist olid sündinud linnas. Erinevalt oma meeskolleegidest olid naisajakirjanikud aga haritumad: kaks neist olid omandanud doktorikraadi Berni ülikoolis, mitmed olid õppinud Helsingi, Moskva, Peterburi ja Londoni ülikoolides. Esimesed Tartu ülikooli haridusega naisajakirjanikud hakkasid tegutsema 1930. aastatel. Nende erialaks olid agronoomia, keeled, juura, ajalugu, kirjandus ja meditsiin. Põhiliselt töötasid naisajakirjanikud nädalalehtede ja ajakirjade, eriti lasteajakirjade juures, ainult viis neist töötasid päevalehtede juures. Ajakirjanike liidu liikmete hulgas oli kõigi aastate jooksul kokku vaid 21 naist.

Eesti ajakirjanike probleemiks jäi kogu vaadeldava perioodi jooksul hariduse, eriti erihariduse vähesus. Ajakirjanikke hakati koolitama alles 1954. aastal Tartu ülikoolis. Seni tuldi ajakirjanduse teistelt erialadelt ja õpiti ametit töö käigus. Siit ka ajakirjanduse kvaliteedi probleemid: palju eksiti faktidega, sageli rikuti eetikareegleid. Eesti Ajakirjanikkude Liit püüdis ajakirjanike enesetäiendamisele välismaal stipendiumiga kaasa aidata, samuti korraldati mõned reporterite kursused. 1932. aastal ilmus Harald Vellneri kirjutatud käsiraamat reporterile, mis jäi aastakümneteks ainsaks ajakirjandusalaseks õpperaamatuks.

1920.–1930. aastatel ei olnud ühtki seadust, mis oleks reguleerinud ajakirjanike tööd ja töötingimusi. Ajakirjanikud sõltusid täielikult tööandja suvast, kirjalikke töölepinguid sõlmiti vähe ja kollektiivlepinguni neil aastakümnetel ei jõutudki. Ajakirjanike liit tegi valitsusele ettepaneku töötada välja ajakirjandusseadus, mis reguleeriks palga- ja töötingimused ning kus oleksid kirjas kvalifikatsiooninõuded, kuid sellist seadust vastu ei võetud. 1930. aastal võeti EAL Rahvusvahelise Ajakirjanike Föderatsiooni (FIJ) liikmeks ja 1939. aastal ühines EAL föderatsiooni eetikakoodeksiga. Eesti ajakirjanduse esimene eetikakoodeks võeti vastu alles 1997. aastal.

Eesti Ajakirjanikkude Liit sekkus ka Eesti poliitilisse ellu, püüdes valmistada pinda nn Balti avaliku arvamuse kujundamiseks, mida peeti tähtsaks Balti riikide ühise välispoliitilise tegevuse arendamisel. Kolme Balti riigi ajakirjanike organisatsioonid sõlmisid omavahelised sõpruse ja koostöö lepingud, samuti korraldati regulaarseid konverentse ning vastastikuseid külaskäike. 1933. aastal loodi ühine Balti Pressiliit, milles iga riik oli esindatud oma rahvuskomiteega. Pärast Eesti, Läti ja Leedu vahelise sõpruse ning koostöö lepingu allakirjutamist Genfis 1934. aastal peeti kolm pressiliidu konverentsi (1935. aastal Kaunases, 1936. ja 1937. aastal Riias).

Vaikiva ajastu tingimustes ei kujundanud Eesti Ajakirjanikkude Liit valitsuse sammude suhtes opositsiooni, vaid pigem otsis aktiivselt koostööd poliitilise eliidiga.

Erinevalt Lätist ja Leedust ei sulgenud Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimud 1940. aastal EAL-i, vaid juulis toimunud üldkoosolekul muudeti see “ühehäälselt heakskiiduga” nõukogulikuks ametiühinguks ning liideti Ametiühingute Kesknõukoguga. Kogu juhatus astus üksmeelselt tagasi ja uus juhatus valiti juba uue korra toetajate hulgast, kellest olid üleöö saanud ajakirjanike liidu liikmed. “Suurpuhastuse” ajakirjanikkonnas viis nõukogude võim läbi juuniküüditamisega, kui võeti kinni ja saadeti välja nii neid, kes olid veel toimetustesse jäänud, kui ka neid, kes ametist juba kõrvale olid tõmbunud. Nende “süü” oli töötamine “kodanliku” Eesti ajakirjanduses, mida uus võim määratles nõukogudevastase tegevusena. Need ajakirjanikud, kes olid olnud Eesti Vabariigis poliitiliselt aktiivsed, olid uue võimu silmis aga veelgi ohtlikumad ja nendega käituti kui vaenlastega. Üksnes 1940. aastal hukati teadaolevalt 37 ajakirjanikku. Kaotusi ajakirjanikkonnas tõi ka järgnenud Saksa okupatsioon. Tänapäevani puudub info 211 ajakirjaniku kohta, kes kadusid aastail 1940–1946.