

SUMMARY

*Representation of the “coup d’état” of
June 21st 1940 in the Soviet Estonian
Press during the Years 1945–1960*

History, as the domain that creates national identity and represents and affects the values that dominate in the society, assumed in the eyes of the authorities the role of an especially important ideological weapon in the Estonia subjected to the conditions of Soviet occupation. In Estonia, as anywhere else in the entire Soviet Union, the previous national conception of history was to be substituted with the Soviet one. As part of the general Sovietization process, the people had to be given a new historical memory which legitimised the Soviet power in order to support the process of moulding the *homo soveticus* loyal to the authorities.

Deriving from this, history teaching in schools and any kind of public conception of history was reshaped. During the first years of the Soviet regime when there were yet no new history books that proceeded from the Marxist history scheme, the press played an important role in the introduction of the new Soviet conception of history; the press, in turn, was cast in the role of the ideological propaganda weapon of the Communist Party. Thus, the newspapers and magazines of the Estonian SSR of the 1940's and 1950's were a good source material in researching the framing and spreading of the Soviet conception of history. The present article looks at the forming of the concept of one such event that received canonical treatment – the so-called *June coup d'état* (the Soviet *coup d'état* in Estonia on June 21st 1940), which later became an illustrative example of the use of the Marxist history model – through the medium of *Rahva Hääl*, the ideologically most important newspaper in Estonian SSR, during the years 1945–1960. When analysing the writings which deal with these events (editorials, articles, memoirs), certain rhetorical devices, e.g. the establishment of canons and dogmas over the years, but also disputes and doubts in employing certain history schemes (those that were unsuitable in Estonian conditions, but which were nevertheless determined by the general framework that was supposed to apply to all of the USSR) become apparent. For instance, when comparing the writings spanning 15 years, it becomes evident how the dogma of the *old-established friendship between Estonian and Russian peoples* was employed or how the term *June coup d'état* together with revolutionary connotations suitable for the scheme of Marxist class struggle was established. In addition, several strategies were implemented – the distorting and forging of facts, especially the construal of the opposition *us vs. them*. This was done with the aim of creating a Soviet identity in the minds of the readers, a perception of *us* as one of the members of the

Soviet peoples (whereas *people* as a concept substantially closer to *class* was supposed to replace the concept of *nation*). Together with the attempts to create the perception of the *us-group* with the help of positive linguistic and discursive means went the creation of the *them-group* with the help of destructive discursive strategies. *They* were portrayed as enemies with the help of negative wording and comparisons, by generally transferring everything bad to *them* and by making *their* negativity concrete with numbers and statistics that were otherwise a taboo in the Soviet rhetoric; this enemy included all possible people, groups, regimes and ideologies both from the present as well as from the past that represented non-Soviet world views and social orders. Such writings of the *June coup d'état*, that were quite similar both in form as well as in content, were regularly published in *Rahva Hääl* (but also in other newspapers) on the anniversary of the event, and gradually the conception of the events in June became more and more similar in the press and since the 1960's we can talk about an established canonical conception. Thus the press as hopefully the party's most powerful propaganda weapon had to not only fill the preliminary void deriving from the lack of history books, but also to intensively and persistently create and spread the Soviet conception of the day when the Soviet government seized power in Estonia.