In 1960: Finland's President Urho Kekkonen, translator Kustaa Loikkanen and General Secretary Nikita Khrushchov celebrating Kekkonen's 60th birthday. Photo: Finlands Riksdag/Unknown.

Forum

From Censoring to Self-censorship:

The Work of Finnish Moscow Correspondents 1957–1975

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This essay focuses on understanding how the first Finnish Moscow correspondents did their work during the Cold War. Finnish Moscow correspondents are journalists who are sent to work in Moscow (often 3–5 years) and regularly report to one or more Finnish news media. In the period of 1957–1975, 13 different Finnish correspondents worked in Moscow representing five different news media outlets (*Kansan Uutiset*, *Uusi Suomi*, the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Tiedonantaja*). The essay is based on the author's Finnish dissertation.[1]

The empirical data consists of about 2,000 journalistic stories (1957–1979), 13 in-depth interviews, and nine other interviews (1990–2002). In addition, documents from 12 Finnish public archives and seven private archives were explored for this study.

The Soviet Union was a closed totalitarian system from the 1920s until the death of the dictator Joseph Stalin in 1953. Only a handful of foreign correspondents were able to work in Moscow after World War II.

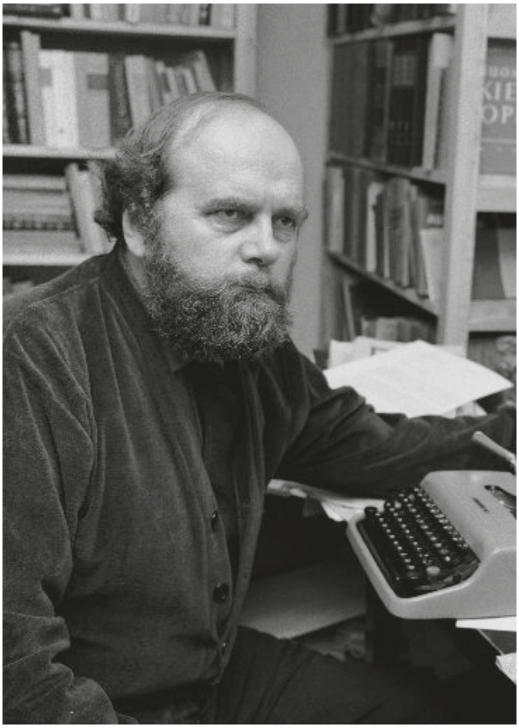
Slowly, during the First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Krushchev's regime (1953–1964), the political climate somewhat softened (détente), which was also the prerequisite for the first foreign correspondents to be accredited to Moscow. The first European newspapers that were able to accredit their Moscow correspondents during the 1950s were communist papers like the French *L´Humanite* and the Italian *L´Unitá*, and the Soviets paid their correspondents' salaries.

The first Finnish journalists

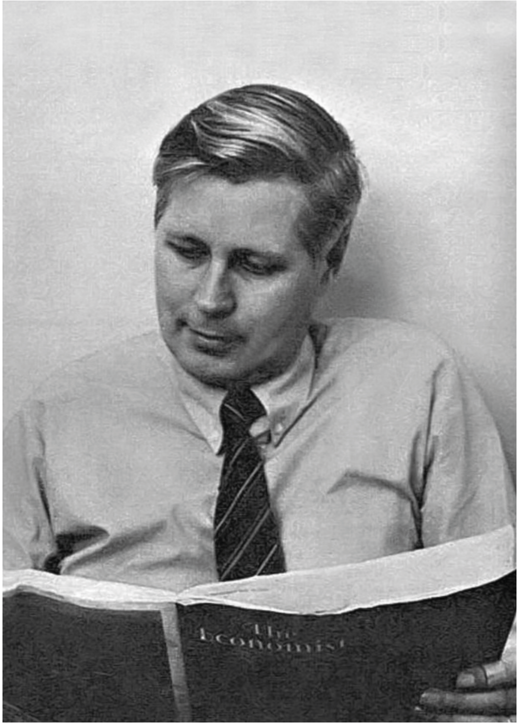
In 1957, it was obvious that the political leadership of the Soviet Union was ready to allow the first Finnish journalist to work in Moscow. Like his counterparts from other European papers, the first Finnish Moscow correspondent, Jarno Pennanen, represented a communist daily, the *Kansan Uutiset*; his salary was paid by the Soviets. Pennanen started his work in October 1957 with a theatre review of a Finnish play. After spending a month in Crimea in a sanatorium, he and his family travelled back to Moscow, and his tenure as a correspondent started in November.[2]

In November of 1957, a Finnish delegate of eight newspaper editors visited the Soviet Union; afterwards, other Finnish newspapers started to find suitable journalists to be sent to Moscow.[3] The first non-communist Finnish – actually Nordic – Moscow correspondent, was Aarne Tanninen from the conservative newspaper *Uusi Suomi*. During the 1950s, *Uusi Suomi* was able to build the largest network of foreign correspondents in Finland. This was due to the strategy formed by Editor-in-Chief Eero Petäjäniemi, who himself had a strong career as a foreign correspondent. *Uusi Suomi* had correspondents in Stockholm, Copenhagen, London, New York, Paris and Bonn. Its main competitor, *Helsingin Sanomat*, did not have its first Moscow correspondent until 1975.[4]

Aarne Tanninen started his work in Moscow at the end of April 1958. His nomination was a big, cele-



Jarno Pennanen (1906–1969). Photo: Unknown/Wikimedia Commons.



Aarne Tanninen (1931–2022), Finnish journalist and long-time correspondent in Washington D.C. (1981–1994). Photo: Unknown/Wikimedia Commons.

brated event at *Uusi Suomi*; when he left for his post, Tanninen was photographed in the Helsinki railway station with representatives from his newspaper and the Soviet Embassy in Helsinki. Tanninen himself said in an interview that it was a big surprise for him to be asked to be a Moscow correspondent as he did not speak a word of Russian. As a young, 27-year-old reporter without any previous political affiliations, Tanninen was a suitable and acceptable candidate.[5]

The pioneering Finnish Moscow correspondents, Pennanen and Tanninen, and their newspapers, represented politically different fronts. When looking at their tenures in Moscow, Pennanen, as a representative of a communist newspaper, ran into bigger problems with the Soviets than conservative Tanninen and was called back to Finland in the summer of 1960. Pennanen was a culturally minded journalist and was not that interested in politics. This led to criticism within the Finnish Communist Party in 1958 and among the Soviet authorities, who closely followed all of their correspondents' works, contacts and attitudes).[6]

Tanninen's last years in Moscow were hard for him, and he clearly suffered from the professional disorder called "corresponditis", which is a sort of depression related to scant feedback from the home newsroom and colleagues and feeling isolated.[7] One antidote for this condition was close relationships with other Moscow correspondents. The network of Moscow correspondents was an important news source and a good fact checking system, but it could also amplify rumours.[8]

Aarne Tanninen was replaced in 1963 by Jaakko Kaurinkoski, who was able to build a large network of local contacts, including political dissidents, which caused him problems later in his tenure, for example official complaints.[9]

Even earlier, in 1969, Jarno Pennanen was replaced by Aarre Nojonen. Nojonen was an obedient and productive communist journalist who did not have any problems following the style and topics of Soviet propaganda. Nojonen was rewarded for his "friendly" reporting with many privileges like special access to events and travels that were limited to only a handful of correspondents.[10] Nojonen was followed by Erkki Kauppila in 1964. Kauppila was the most productive Finnish Moscow correspondent during 1957–1975, with an average of eight stories per week.

A special stamp

All journalistic stories produced by the Moscow correspondents were censored by the Soviet authorities until 1961. Censors worked in the central telegraph house in Gorky Street. Before a news story could be sent outside the Soviet Union via telephone line, it was checked by censor officials. This preventive censorship system caused problems for the correspondents, as it took a lot of time, corrections were often demanded and sometimes the stories were not accepted at all. An accepted story received a special stamp, an arrow in the form of a letter N inside of a circle. Soon, a correspondent learned to write in "censor language" and "between the lines".[11]

Four main methods of "writing between the lines" were detected: 1) using periphrasis (especially through making sources less clear), 2) using quotation marks, 3) writing between the lines, and 4) using harmless headlines and putting the news at the end of the story. An additional technique was using Swedish instead of Finnish.[12]

All journalistic stories produced by Moscow correspondents were censored by the Soviet authorities until 1961

As more foreign correspondents started to flow into Moscow in the early 1960s, it soon became impossible for the Soviet authorities to continue with their old-fashioned and time-consuming censorship practices. The end of this preventive text censorship practice in 1961 was vital for the upcoming "golden era of Moscow correspondents", which lasted approximately five years.

One drawback of ending the censoring, however, was that the correspondents lost one routinized method to test which journalistic topics, sentences or words were sensitive or even prohibited according to the Soviet authorities. This led to the need for self-censorship. Without any outside censors, it was now the responsibility of individual correspondents to draw the line between "accepted" and "not accepted" journalism.[13]

Erkki Kauppila was the most productive Finnish Moscow correspondent during 1957–1975, with an average of eight stories per week. Photo: Finlands Skogsmuseum.

In terms of the Finnish Moscow correspondents' culture of self-censorship, the importance of self-censorship was established early in Finland. For example, before Aarne Tanninen started his Moscow post in 1958, the editor-in-chief of *Uusi Suomi*, Eero Petäjäniemi, had advised Tanninen: "Do not write yourself out!" This request for self-censorship was later repea-

The three main characters of The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 were John F. Kennedy, Fidel Casto and Nikita Krushchev. Photo: Unknown.

ted often in letters Petäjäniemi sent to Tanninen.[14]

The Golden era

The golden years of Moscow correspondence were 1962–66 due to both the end of text censorship and the period of openness related to the power change in the totalitarian Soviet Union.[15]

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, which brought the superpowers to the brink of war, ushered the final days of Krushchev's time in power. The rather exceptional periods of self-criticism in the Soviet news media often hinted at a change in the political leadership of the Soviet Union. This was demonstrated after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, and later at the end of the Brezhnev era in the 1980s. These periods of "glasnost", with all their openness, were political watershed moments that temporarily liberalized the traditional Soviet-style propaganda to the advantage of Moscow correspondents. Soviet newspapers were safe sources for the correspondents in terms of avoiding any difficulties with the authorities.

The image of the Soviet Union was clearly propagandist when looking at films sent by the Moscow correspondents of the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation from the mid-1960s to the 1970s

Both Erkki Kauppila and Jaakko Kaurinkoski enjoyed the golden era, an exceptional time in terms of critical Soviet journalism that did not just publish positive and propagandist stories but also the failures and misuses of political power and other problems in the Soviet Union, including huge problems with agriculture. Because almost all the information was based on the content of official local newspapers, like *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, no sanctions were issued by the authorities.[16]

The golden years of Moscow correspondence started to end with the show trials of dissidents in 1966.[17] However, Kaurinkoski did not receive any official complaints from the Soviet authorities until 1968.[18] After Kaurinkoski, Martti Valkonen (1969–73) and Pentti Sadeniemi (1973–77) followed.[19]

Aarre Nojonen was nominated for his second tenure in Moscow in 1965, when he was chosen as the first Moscow correspondent for the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation. When I analysed Nojonen's story production for radio (N=256) in 1965–1971 and comparing those headlines of the stories to those published by Erkki Kauppila and Jaakko Kaurinkoski, I only found one negative story, about drunk driving in the Soviet Union.[20]

Starting from approximately the mid-1960s, television news became the most important source for foreign news in Finland. Therefore, the news films broadcasted by the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation from the Soviet Union played an essential role for the news audience.[21]

After Nojonen, Juhani Lindström, known as a social democrat, was chosen as the new Moscow correspondent for the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation. The films sent by the Moscow correspondents of the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation from the mid-1960s to the 1970s show a clearly propagandist image of the Soviet Union. It is good to keep in mind that, even if text censorship ended in 1961, the censorship of images and films continued until the 1980s.[22] Lindström had to resign in 1975 because he was accused of doing illegal business deals. It seems that Lindström moved from being a Moscow correspondent into a "grey area" as a business consultant.[23]

Helsingin Sanomat did not get permission for its Moscow correspondent until the mid-1970s for political reasons

During the 1960s, Nordic news agencies (Swedish TT, Danish RB, Norwegian NTB and Finnish STT) started to build their shared foreign correspondents' networks. The Finnish News Agency suggested opening the shared Moscow correspondent's post in 1965. The first shared Moscow correspondent, Hans Björkegren from Sweden, started his tenure in the summer of 1966. Sture Stiernlöf, also from Sweden, followed in 1969, and his countryman Stig Fredriksson started in 1972. In fact, all joint correspondents were Swedish until 1981. From the beginning, there were also Finnish candidates, but the Norwegians in particular argued that it was impossible for a Finnish correspondent to report openly from Moscow. Indeed, it can be argued that the Swedes were able to write more critically than many of the Finnish correspondents from Moscow. Therefore, the Finnish News Agency was also an important channel for the Finnish press for news from the Soviet Union – news about dissidents, for example. The Swedish correspondent had a long and close relationship with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. At least one typewriter with the Cyrillic alphabet and typing paper was smuggled to him via the Finnish News Agency.[24]

The first female Finnish Moscow correspondent, Sisko Kiuru, replaced Kauppinen in 1967 at *Kansan Uutiset*. After the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, it was clear that the work of Moscow correspondents, and especially representing a communist daily, became more difficult).[25] Veli-Kusti Pelkonen replaced Kiuru in 1972, and Uolevi Mattila took over in 1974 until 1979.[26]

Even during the golden years of Moscow correspondents, many obstacles and problems occupied the correspondents daily. For example, travelling was heavily restricted; reporters were only allowed to travel within 50 kilometres of Moscow without any special permits. Even when work trips were possible, they were time-consuming to organize and full of bureaucratic obstacles. Therefore, in practice, most of the correspondents' work trips were group trips organized by the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Press Office. Some correspondents defined these as prize trips awarded to those correspondents that had behaved well enough. Constant surveillance and monitoring were used by the Soviets, starting from special car registration plates to eavesdropping on telephone calls and using interpreters, translators or other staff members as KGB informants.[27]

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was organized in Helsinki in 1975, indicating a milder international political climate. Two Finnish newspapers sent their first correspondents to Moscow in 1975, the politically independent *Helsingin Sanomat* and the communist *Tiedonantaja*. Although *Helsingin Sanomat* did not get permission for its Moscow correspondent until in the 1970s for political reasons, it was prepared, having educated Erkki Pennanen to hold the first Moscow post from the beginning of the 1970s. *Tiedonantaja*'s first Moscow correspondent was Matti Pykälä. When Pykälä was starting his 13-year tenure in Moscow, the longest in the history of the Finnish Moscow correspondents, the paper published a photo of a farewell committee at the Helsinki train station.[28] When Aarne Tanninen was leaving for Moscow in 1958, an identical photo had been published in *Uusi Suomi*.

In conclusion, the most influential factor for starting a Finnish Moscow correspondence was the Soviet Union's political willingness to accredit foreign correspondents. The first decades of the Finnish Moscow correspondence can be divided into several periods: 1) the era of the pioneers (1957-62), 2) the regularization of Moscow correspondence (1962–64), 3) the years of growing competition (1965–66), 4) the shadow of occupation in Czechoslovakia (1968–74) and 5) the effects of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe CSCE (1975). These periods correspond to three waves of Finnish correspondents to Moscow: 1) *Kansan Uutiset* and *Uusi Suomi* (1957/58), 2) the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation and the joint Nordic News Agencies (1965/66) and 3) *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Tiedonantaja* (1975).

Soviet totalitarianism wanted to keep negative issues related to the Soviet Union secret and only publish positive news in the form of political propaganda. However, during certain exceptional times, following the reorganization of power, Soviet newspapers were also able to print critical journalism on certain issues, which helped the work of foreign correspondents. This golden era for Moscow correspondents lasted from 1962 to 1966.

The individual level

The study of media history has traditionally neglected the influence of a single journalist and paid more attention to the institutional or organizational levels. In this essay, based on my dissertation, I argue that the individual level also matters. The history of foreign correspondents illustrates how correspondents' work differed from that of others working at the same time. Work skills, cultural skills and political background explain these differences. This could be seen as a continuum with critical non-communist correspondents at one end and non-critical communist correspondents at the other. However, the time of the correspondence also mattered. During the golden years of Moscow correspondence, 1962–66, the journalistic information delivered by the Finnish Moscow correspondents from the Soviet Union was surprisingly polymorphous. Interestingly, during that time, the communist Finnish Moscow correspondents were also able to report critical stories about the Soviet Union.

Finally, during the dissertation process I developed a research strategy called a hermeneutical drill. This refers to a method that tries to obtain information and knowledge from areas that could be defined as secret or sensitive for foreign reporting. The strategy follows the idea of the hermeneutical circle in which understanding grows over a long time with the introduction of new sources and research methodologies. The harder it is to get information about certain areas of the study, the more one needs to conduct research and use different source materials and methodologies (as different drill bits) to dig deeper to effectively understand the subject matter. The most important observation, in terms of the interviews, was that when studying sensitive issues, interviews that lasted at least three hours offered more information about sensitive topics than shorter interviews. Interviews lasting more than three hours are defined as deep interviews. Furthermore, when an interviewee was retired, he/she offered more information about sensitive questions than those still building their careers.

Notes

1 Uskali, Turo. 2003. "Älä kirjoita itseäsi ulos". Suomalaisen Moskovan-kirjeenvaihtajuuden alkutaival 1957–1975. ["Do not write yourself out". The beginning of the Finnish Moscow-correspondence in 1957–1975]. University of Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä. https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/13417

2 Ibid., pp. 129–133

3 Ibid., p. 117

4 Ibid., pp. 135–138

5 Ibid., pp. 135–136

6 Ibid., pp. 176–178

7 Ibid., pp. 181–183

8 Ibid., pp. 151–155

9 Ibid., pp. 213–219

10 Ibid., pp. 184–190

11 Ibid., pp. 147–151
12 Ibid., p.438
13 Ibid., p. 150
14 Ibid., pp. 139–142
15 Ibid., pp. 200–202
16 Ibid., pp. 202–210
17 Ibid. pp. 210–213
18 Ibid., p. 211
19 Ibid., p. 458
20 Ibid., pp. 247–248
21 Ibid., p. 433
22 Ibid., pp. 359–360
23 Ibid., pp. 237–253; 299–310
24 Ibid., pp. 256–263, 365–373
25 Ibid., pp. 265–284
26 Ibid., p. 458
27 Ibid., pp. 150–151, 310–316
28 Ibid. pp. 322–328, 347