

Handeln nicht mit der Presse abgestimmt hatte. Die Ereignisse, die dem Referendum über den Verfassungsentwurf des EVKL vorausgingen, sowie das Ergebnis selbst, gaben dem Teil der Öffentlichkeit, der sich gegen die Freiheitskämpfer positionierte, ein starkes Signal: Ohne Zusammenarbeit untereinander wird es nicht möglich sein, diesen entgegenzutreten. Neben dem veränderten Grundgesetz, das Päts ausnutzen konnte, war dieses Signal einer der Gründe dafür, dass der Staatsstreich am 12. März 1934 gelang und die mit dem Putsch in Kraft tretenden Veränderungen, welche die demokratischen Freiheiten beschränkten, für lange Zeit ihre Gültigkeit behielten.

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SUMMARY

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*The “Public Sphere” before the  
Silent Era in 1933 Estonia*

During the Interwar period, Estonia was a republic with an unprecedented ultra-democratic constitution. Such a governing system created an unstable internal political situation and was increasingly considered to be inefficient in the context of the global economic crisis since the late 1920s. This historical background formed the framework for Estonia’s authoritarian turn in the 1930s. It is exceptional in the historical context of the Baltic region that the Estonian radical-right movement, the Estonian Veterans’ League, could have come to power legally. The Veterans’ constitutional amendment, which provided for a strong presidency was overwhelmingly approved by a national referendum in 1933. At the last minute, just before elections in spring 1934, interim Prime Minister Konstantin Päts carried out a coup d’état in order to “defend democracy”. However, most democratic freedoms under Päts’s regime gradually diminished “silently”.

The role of journalism during the events that led to the approval of the Veterans’ constitutional amendment by the referendum have not yet been sufficiently studied. A lack of necessary historical sources and of a suitable methodology could be one reason for this. Studying Estonian newspapers of this time by using Jürgen Habermas’s notion of “public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*) could provide a solution to understand the perspectives of the contemporaneous protagonists.

Thus it is argued in this article that the main reason why the Veterans’ constitutional amendment succeeded in the referendum was a lack of consensus in the “public sphere”. Those who opposed the Veterans’ proposal were not able to coordinate their strategies. Furthermore, the topic of this

decisive referendum was not even the main concern of the newspapers. The censorship measures introduced by the government on the eve of the referendum proved to be inefficient to shut down the Veterans' and to diminish their growing influence. This step by the government, moreover, created a general dissatisfaction among the "public sphere" that eventually overshadowed the issue of the referendum.