

# Freedom of the Press

The Swedish 250 years jubilee

Notes for GEAR+ April 2016 by  
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Since the early days of text and book printing there had been regulations on official examination of all prints produced by the printing houses.

In 1645 the Government started to publish the world's oldest still existing newspaper

*Ordinari Post Tijdender*, today called *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar*

This paper was developed into a Internet based paper In 2007



In the early days it was a four page newsletter from the Field Marshall's headquarters.

In these years Sweden was fighting to keep the position as a Great Power in Europe.

This era abruptly came to an end with the death of king Karl XII in 1718 when "The Age of Liberty" started

From this time a "censor librorum" was established with more regulated authority regarding what to look for in printed texts.

"Offensive and indecent" texts were not allowed to be printed

In 1661 it was decided that all printing houses would deliver two copies of the print to the Crown:

One copy for building up the Royal Library

One copy for saving in the Royal Archives

The right of the Crown to suppress the text still existed

The idea to feed libraries with books this way led to a new decision in 1707. This law ordered that four more copies would be delivered in order to build up libraries at the four existing universities in Uppsala, Lund, Åbo (today in Finland) and Dorpat (today Tartu in Estland)

After being discussed for more than thirty years at last in 1766 the "Freedom of the Press Decree" was published

At this time the Swedish King had an extremely weak position with a Parliament using a stamp with his name to sign some of the documents

The Four Estates in Parliament had started to form something quite similar to modern democratic parties called Hats and Caps and unifying members over the Estate borders

If "Freedom of the Press Decree" was the "right hand" to make news and opinions public the "Principle of Openness" was the "left hand" of the original decree.

This principle was decided on in order to encourage a free discussion and exchange of information.

This has been a core privilege in modern journalism in Sweden but since our entrance in the European Union the sources of information have moved to Brussels setting new obstacles for the journalists.

Today the principle of openness and freedom of print is included in the Swedish constitutional law, The Freedom of the Press Act is the modern version of the 1766 decree.

Over the years the constitutional law includes new media but in an other paragraph, The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression

That part of the law regulates film, radio, television, video, audio and most recent publishing on Internet



The Freedom of the Press and The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression have been threatened many times since they were introduced especially during war times.

However the early publishing houses applied for several publishing licences and appointed one responsible editor for each licence. In the 1830ies the newspaper Aftonbladet was withdrawn at least 14 times appearing fresh and new the day after under a title like The Newer Aftonbladet or the 12th Aftonbladet.

I personally find the 250 year jubilee of The Freedom of the Press Decree important as you could count it as the mother of the idea behind all European public service companies that we served for so many ears before being included in GEAR +

## A Post Scriptum

As we have been proposed nick names for this round table discussion I decided to give a short brief of the Swedish meaning of mine – Lucia

In Sweden we celebrate Lucia on 13th December starting early in the morning with a procession where the light bringer Lucia comes with her 12 Maidens and some Star Boys representing the shepards. Lucia could also be followed by Staffan (St Stephanus) with five horses (representing Herod's stable knight) or - in kindergartens - by Ginger Bread Men and small Father Christmases.

The celebration is a full mixture of old religious traditions from December and January. As this is the darkest time of the year people look forward to Lucia day. One week later the light starts coming back giving new spirit to cold Sweden.







These buns with raisins and saffron are being served from Lucia day until Christmas

## Sources

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