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Analysis

Kremlin Systematically Shrinks Scope of Russian Media

Robert Orttung, Washington

Summary

Since coming to power, the Putin administration has systematically cracked down on Russian press freedoms. After taking control of the main nationwide television networks in 2003, the authorities have now taken over the most important non-state controlled newspapers. The regional media and Internet are next. Ultimately, the silencing of critical voices will undermine Putin's stated efforts to strengthen the Russian state and boost the economy.

Politkovskaya Murder Part of a Larger Chain

The murder of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya in Moscow on October 7 has brought the issue of media freedom in Russia to the world's attention. Politkovskaya was one of the few reporters brave enough to travel to Chechnya and write about the kidnappings, torture, and murders of Kremlin-backed Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov. The assassin's silencing of Politkovskaya leaves a vacuum in the Russian media.

Politkovskaya's murder was not a bolt from the blue. While everyone assumes that the murder was connected to Politkovskaya's work, no one yet knows who ordered her death. Nevertheless, the attack fits into the Kremlin's systematic and long-term policy of smothering media freedom in Russia, a policy that has been implemented consistently since President Vladimir Putin came to power at the beginning of 2000. The results are clear: In its Press Freedom Index 2006, Reporters Without Borders ranked Russia 147 of the 168 countries it examined.

While one can argue about whether there was real press freedom during the Yeltsin era, there was at least a variety of opinions expressed in the media. Then there were many voices critical of Kremlin policy. Today the authorities have chased most alternative points of view from the broadcast and central print media, leaving some freedom in the regional media and the Internet. But even in these areas the ability to speak frankly is increasingly under threat.

The attack on the media is part of a much larger crackdown on the business community, voter rights, non-governmental organizations, and other freedoms that Russians were just beginning to sample after the collapse of Communism. Unfortunately for Russia, the suppression of the media will ultimately undermine the capacity of the state by depriving it of the very information that it needs to rule effectively.

Taboo Topics

Russian journalists who can survive in the current system know what the limits are. The key taboo topics are corruption among the elite and Chechnya, particularly the abuses by the Russian troops and pro-Moscow Chechens, according to Alexei Venediktov, chief editor of Ekho Moskvy, a radio station whose journalists express a wide variety of viewpoints. Like Politkovskaya, Paul Klebnikov may have been looking into corruption in Chechnya before being murdered in July 2004. On October 16, the authorities shut down the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, a Nizhny Novgorod-based non-governmental organization, that published an on-line newspaper considered to be one of the few reliable sources of information from Chechnya.

By maintaining tight control over media coverage, the Kremlin has learned that it can minimize the fallout from events beyond its control, as Masha Lipman has pointed out. For example, there is little public analysis of the hostage-taking tragedy at Beslan and therefore few consequences for the country's leaders. Broadcasters have essentially ignored the topic, while only relatively minor publications with small audiences have sought to investigate the conditions under which so many of the hostages died. In contrast to these problematic areas, generally acceptable topics for the authorities include foreign affairs, sports, entertainment, and business.

Watching TV

The various central television networks are by far the most important information providers in Russian society: 85 percent of Russians claim to use central television as a key source of information, according to an October poll by the Kremlin-friendly VTsIOM polling agency. This figure increased from 76 percent over the course of a year.

Given the enormous role television plays in Russian

society, it is not surprising that it was one of the first targets in Putin's campaign to reassert state authority. At the beginning of his presidency, Putin clashed with Boris Berezovsky and removed his control of ORT, Russia's most important national network, now called Channel One. Then he forced oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky to flee the country and his NTV network, then one of the most critical of authorities, passed into the hands of Gazprom in 2001. At the time, the government described the transfer as a purely business operation since the television network had extensive debts to the natural gas monopoly. However, the political implications were clear. The journalists who were responsible for NTV's coverage were forced out of the station and tried to set up new networks in the form of TV-6 and TV5, but were ultimately driven from the air in 2003. Under Oleg Dobrodeyev, Russian Television (RTR), the second most important state-owned broadcaster, set up a unified network of 80 regional radio and television companies that present a single message from Moscow. By 2003, the Kremlin had established control over national television.

The Russian state now either owns or controls the five most important Russian television networks, Channel One, Russian Television, TV-Center, NTV, and Ren-TV. Of these the first four devote about 90 percent of their political news time to covering the activities of the authorities, almost invariably in positive or neutral terms, according to monitoring performed by the Center for Journalism in Extreme Circumstances in March 2006. These broadcasters devoted 4 percent of their political coverage or less to the opposition, and these broadcasts were generally negative. Only Ren-TV was slightly different, devoting 19 percent of its political news time to the opposition and providing more balanced coverage of both the authorities and the opposition. The study concluded by pointing out that "Our data show that the majority of the media we studied frequently do not give Russians various points of view on specific topics. The media do not serve as a forum for exchanging opinions, public debates, confrontation, investigations, and commentaries which could provide the public with informed, analytical, and well-considered discussion of political topics and the state authorities." In short, the Russian media do not perform the functions required of them in a democracy.

The national networks are not news outlets, but propaganda providers, according to Igor Yakovenko, the secretary of the Russian Union of Journalists. The television news does not reflect reality, but creates a parallel universe, he said. In cases where it is not clear what the Kremlin line is, the networks are often silent.

For example, network commentators had little to say about the abrupt resignation of Procurator General Vladimir Ustinov and what it meant for Russian politics on the day that he resigned in June. At the time, Ustinov's departure was seemingly one of the most important events of the year given the few personnel changes under Putin, so the lack of commentary was strange. Without straightforward guidance, the usual talking heads were at a loss.

In fact, there is nothing spontaneous on the national networks. Since 2004, all talk shows are pre-recorded and unwanted comments are deleted before the show is aired.

More television stations are expected to begin nationwide broadcasts before the 2007–2008 election cycle begins. But all will represent an official point of view. If there is a dramatic split within the elite, each side will have its own station. The St. Petersburg channel, TV5, considered to be close to First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and a potential Putin successor, already has such a license, and Zvezda army television, controlled by Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, another potential successor, is expected to win the rights for national broadcasts later this year.

Crackdown on the Press

After imposing state control over the national television networks, the authorities moved on to the central print media. With the sale of *Kommersant* this year, Kremlin-friendly companies have now taken over the key newspapers in Russia that provided a non-state point of view. *Kommersant*, with a relatively small print run of 115,000 copies and a convenient website, was well respected for its coverage of business and political news that was often critical of the Kremlin. At the end of August, Alisher Usmanov, the owner of numerous steel companies and president of Gazprominvestholding, a 100 percent subsidiary of Gazprom, purchased the paper. Usmanov ranks no. 25 Forbes' list of richest Russians with an estimated fortune of \$3.1 billion. He is thought to be close to Medvedev, the presidential contender who is also the chairman of Gazprom's board of directors.

Berezovsky, now living in London, owned the paper from 1999 until February 2006, when he sold it to his business partner Badri Patarkatsishvili, who resides in Georgia. Both Berezovsky and Patarkatsishvili are wanted in Russia. Shortly after Usmanov bought the paper, Editor Vladislav Borodulin resigned and other journalists have begun leaving the paper. The new editor is Andrei Vasilyev, who had served as editor from 1999 to summer 2005, when he went to launch *Kommersant's* Ukrainian edition.

The purchase of Kommersant is following a model that has become well tested in Russia: Gazprom or businessmen friendly to the Kremlin purchase a newspaper and the publication soon stops providing cutting-edge reporting that is critical of the authorities. When Gazprom took over *Izvestiya* in 2005, the once respected newspaper slowly declined and today is considered to be more of a tabloid than an independent news outlet. Other papers that have been taken over in recent years include *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Novye izvestiya*, and *Moskovskiy novosti*. In 2001, Gazprom took over *Segodnya*, once the crusading paper of Gusinsky's Media Most empire, and closed it down. The gas giant also fired the staff of the newsmagazine *Itogi. Obshchaya gazeta* disappeared in 2002. Currently, Vladimir Potanin's Prof-Media is reportedly preparing to sell *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the most popular paper in the country with a readership of 8.4 million, most likely to Gazprom.

There are only a few non-state controlled papers left on the Russian Market. *Vedomosti*, which is owned by foreigners, including the Finnish Independent Media Sanoma Magazines, Wall Street Journal, and Financial Times. The paper mainly focuses on business stories. Papers like *Gazeta*, owned by Vladimir Lisin's Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant, and *Vremya Novostei*, thought to be tied to Aleksandr Voloshin, the chairman of the board of Russia's electricity monopoly and the former Kremlin chief of staff, are considered to be relatively independent, but have small readerships and tiny advertising bases.

Politkovskaya's *Novaya gazeta* seems to be expanding its reach. Its circulation has risen over the last three years from 130,000 to 170,000, putting it well ahead of competitors like *Gazeta* and *Vremya Novostei*. Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and billionaire Duma member Alexander Lebedev purchased a 49 percent stake in the paper in June to support its policy line.

Of the major media outlets, the radio station Ekho Moskvy is unique in that it is owned by Gazprom but its journalists manage to maintain an independent line. Editor Vendiktov claims that his audience has grown by 20 percent over the last year.

Regional Media

Regional and local publications are generally beholden to regional and local governments for subsidies and therefore have to make sure that they do not offend their political sponsors. Such governments spend millions of dollars a year on these publications.

Nevertheless, there are examples of excellent journalists and publications working in the regions.

For example, the newspaper *Vecherniy Krasnotur'insk*, edited by Natalya Kalinina, was the first to report on the disfiguring hazing that Private Andrei Sychoy suffered during his military service. After *Vecherniy Krasnotur'insk*, which publishes in Sychoy's hometown, began reporting on this story, the national media picked up the cause and Sychoy's mistreatment became a major scandal in Russia, shining an unwelcome light on the military's failure to reform, according to an article on the regional media by Maria Eismont.

Paying the Piper

The government is clearly getting ready to use its control of the media during the 2007/2008 campaign cycle. In the draft budget for 2007, the amount of money set aside for the media will increase almost 50 percent to 18.2 billion rubles (\$680 million), up from 12.6 billion in 2006, according to a recent report in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. The specific figures for the media will be discussed in the third reading of the budget set for the second part of November.

Beyond state subsidies, some media have been able to generate a lot of income on their own. Naturally, these money flows have caught the eyes of the authorities. On July 31, President Putin issued a decree that puts the Federal Security Service (FSB) in charge of securing critically important sites in Russia, including television. The FSB has its people working in the media business and will have extensive control over the broadcasters' content and financial flows, an "informed source" told *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. The financial flows are particularly attractive since last year broadcasters made an estimated \$3 billion.

Legislating a Tame Media

The authorities are increasingly using the courts to exert pressure on journalists. The Union of Journalists' Yakovenko said that his organization receives about 10 complaints a month from journalists under pressure. Russian legislation now contains many prohibitions against slandering or insulting the authorities. In July, the president signed legislation that makes insulting a government official in the performance of his duties an act of "extremism," exposing the offending journalist to the possibility of a long jail sentence. With ever greater frequency, the courts are deciding cases against journalists in favor of bureaucrats in cases of defamation. In the 1990s, there were fewer than 10 such criminal cases. Now the number is as high as 45 per year, according to the World Association of Newspapers. In advanced democracies, civil, not criminal, courts deal with such cases.

Safety Last

The courts are not necessarily the greatest menace that journalists have to worry about. Russia is the third most dangerous country in the world for journalists, following only Iraq and Algeria, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Including Politkovskaya, the CPJ lists thirteen journalists who were killed apparently by paid assassins in Russia since the beginning of 2000. The authorities have not been able to identify the murderers in any of the cases, according to Oleg Panfilov, the director of the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations and the CPJ.

Before Politkovskaya's death, the murder of Paul Klebnikov in July 2004 was one of the most well known cases in the west. In May a jury acquitted three men who had been on trial for committing that crime. The procurator-general's office then announced that it planned to file an appeal.

Beyond facing the possibility of death, many journalists in Russia simply are pushed out of their jobs. Prominent examples include television anchor Leonid

Parfyonov, newspaper editor Raf Shakirov, and magazine editor Sergei Parkhomenko. They have either left the profession or gone to work in outlets with smaller audiences.

No News Is Bad News

The Kremlin's crackdown on the free media demonstrates the paranoia of its leaders and their fear of society. Rather than addressing Russia's problems, the country's top politicians have decided that it is simply easier to stop talking about them.

Such tactics are doomed to failure. To rule effectively and over the long-term, leaders must know what the reaction is to their policies. Without a free media to discuss trends and opinions in society, the leadership will have difficulty knowing what the population is thinking and doing. The result will be that they adopt unpopular policies that sooner or later will summon a powerful anti-system opposition. Accordingly, Putin's media policies are likely to have the opposite of the effect intended.

About the author

Robert Ortung is a visiting scholar at the Center for Security Studies of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and an associate research professor at the Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center of American University.

Further Reading

- Reporters Without Borders, Press Freedom Index 2006, http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=639
- Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, "Pervyi otchet ob osveshchenii rossiiskoi politicheskoi zhizni v izbrannykh SMI," April 27, 2006, <http://www.memo98.cjes.ru/?p=3&sm2=on&reports=200603>
- Mariya Olegovna Eismont, "Est' li zhizn' na Marse, ili Nezavisimye SMI v Rossiiskikh regionakh," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 6, 2005, http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2005/6/2005_6_19-pr.html

Documentation

Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2006 (Selected Countries)

No.	Country	Score
1	Finland	0,50
23	Germany	5,50
27	United Kingdom	6,50
53	United States of America	13,00
58	Poland	14,00
105	Ukraine	26,50
147	Russia	52,50
168	North Korea	109,00

Source: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19388 24 October 2006

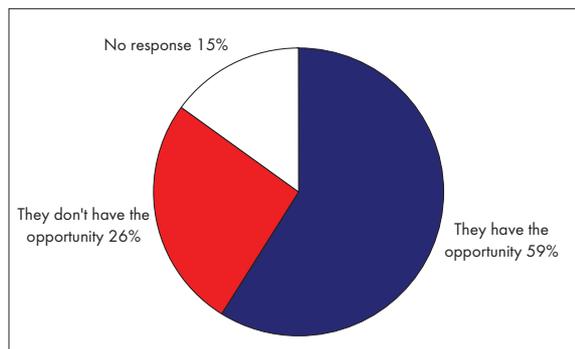
Opinion Survey

(Perceived) Access of the Opposition to the Mass Media

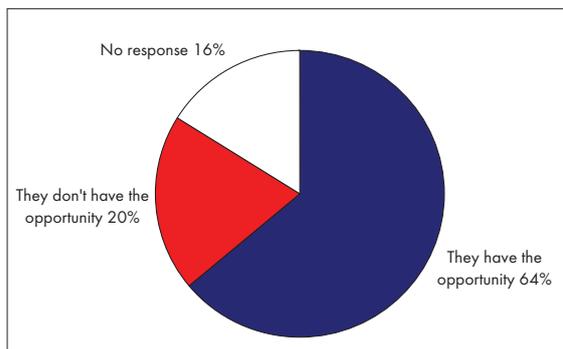
Source: <http://wciom.ru/?pt=42&article=2975> 7 August 2006

In Your Opinion, do the Opposition Parties have the Opportunity of Freely Expressing Their Views ...

... on the National Television Channels?

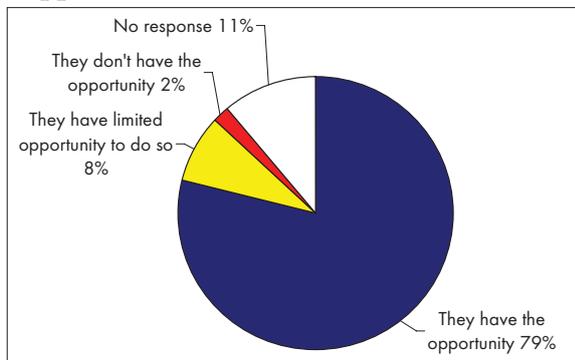


... in the National Press Publications?

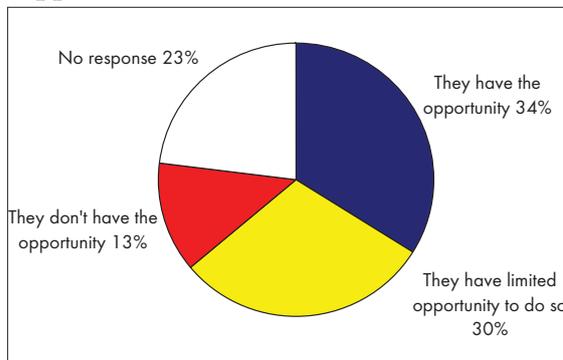


Do Representatives of Leading Parties have the Opportunity to Present Their Position on the National Television Channels?

Supporters of Yedinaya Rossiya

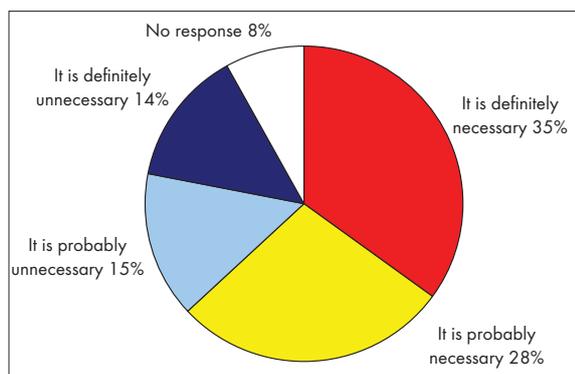


Supporters of Yabloko

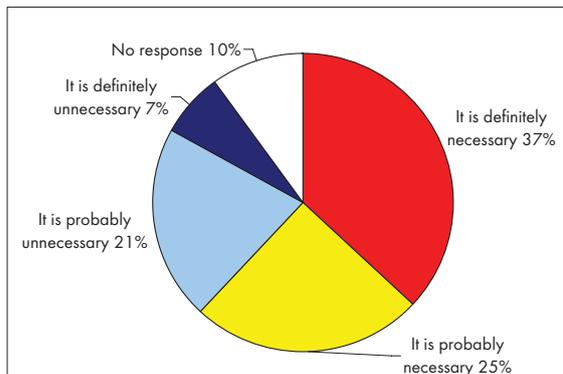


Do You Think that Censorship is Necessary for Russian Television?

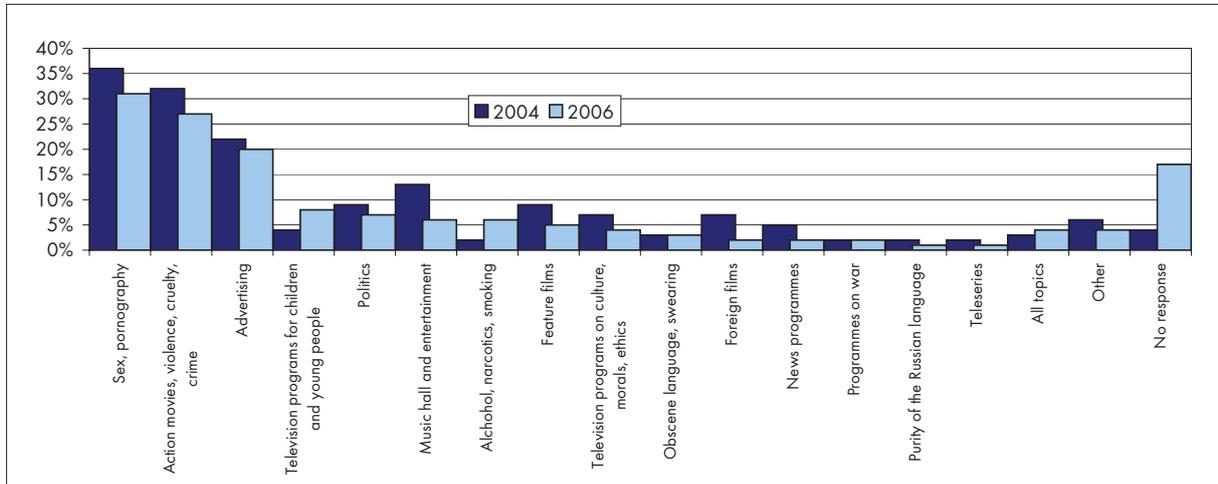
2004



2006



If You Are of the Opinion that Censorship is Necessary, Could You Indicate for which Topics? (Up to Three Answers Possible; Percentage of Those Who Believe Censorship is Necessary)



Commentary

On the death of Anna Politkovskaya

Elfie Siegl, Berlin/Moscow

The October 7 murder of Moscow journalist Anna Politkovskaya, which was presumably politically motivated, coincided with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s birthday. This convergence gave rise to rumors that the murderer had tried to damage the president’s reputation. Politkovskaya’s death has left Muscovites shaken – not least because it was the second spectacular murder in less than a month. In mid-September, the first deputy director of the national bank, Andrei Kozlov, was shot dead. He was regarded as an incorruptible expert who revoked the licenses of banks involved in money laundering.

Anna Politkovskaya, 48, a diplomat’s daughter and the mother of two, had worked for six years as a special correspondent in the Northern Caucasus for *Novaya gazeta*, one of the few independent Russian newspapers. With almost fanatical dedication and little regard for her own well-being, she wrote about the lives of ordinary people in the street or in the countryside. The more she adopted their concerns and hardship as her own, and the more she tried to help them, the more nervous, agitated, and depressed she became. She took on military and intelligence officers and received death threats, prompting her to move to Vienna temporarily. However, unable to bear the life of an exile, she returned to Moscow and for a while was protected by bodyguards.

During the hostage crisis at the Moscow Dubrovka theater four years ago, when Chechen rebels stormed a performance of the musical “Nord-Ost”, she attempted in vain to act as a negotiator to prevent a bloody outcome. She was prevented from covering the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004 because she was poisoned during her flight to North Ossetia.

She also investigated corruption and organized crime in Russia. She blamed the Kremlin chief for misguided policies – but found no publisher at home with the courage to print her book *Putin’s Russia*.

The editors of *Novaya gazeta* regard the murder as a contract killing and assume that it was connected to a series of articles



Photo: Novaya Gazeta

Politkovskaya wrote about Moscow-appointed Chechen prime minister Ramzan Kadyrov. Most recently, she had been conducting research on torture and abductions in Chechnya allegedly involving Kadyrov's military units - research that may have been fatal.

Russia is among the most dangerous countries for journalists. While reporters who do not convey the image of Russia that the Kremlin desires are not necessarily killed, they do experience hardships and harassment. From official warnings, anonymous telephone calls, and subtle threats by the intelligence service to prosecution in court, the methods of intimidation are manifold.

Translation from the German by Christopher Findlay

Black Mark for Journalists

Grigorii Pasko, Moscow

Grigory Pasko is a former Russian naval captain and military journalist for the newspaper Battle Watch. In 1993 he filmed a Russian navy tanker dumping radioactive waste and ammunition into the Sea of Japan. He also exposed the environmental threat posed by the decaying Pacific Fleet and its nuclear submarines. In 1997, the FSB arrested him and charged him with treason for allegedly intending to pass sensitive information to a foreign journalist. Pasko spent 20 months in jail for pre-trial detention and was then acquitted. But then the prosecution reopened his case, this time charging him with abuse of office. He received four years in a forced labor camp. In 2002, he rejected a presidential pardon because it would have required him to admit guilt. He served two-thirds of his sentence and then was released on parole. All but one of the treason charges were dismissed.

Farce of the “Clowns”

Once, I drew up a project for a publication that would have been something new for Russia: an ecological magazine, in color, with a lot of illustrations, published in large print runs, with a lot of columns that in my opinion would have been interesting to a broad readership... As everyone knows, the publication of a magazine is expensive, which is why, when sounding out possible participants in such a project, I consulted mainly with a member of the State Duma. After he had listened closely to my plans, he said: “This is a good idea. However, if it is going to be realized, your name must not be mentioned anywhere; potential sponsors will be frightened off if the editor of such a publication is someone who is out of favor with the present authorities.”

We left it at that.

Of course, I am upset that at the age of forty-five I have not even earned the right to my own name in present-day Russia. It does not even matter that for some people my name provides cause for cowardice and for others, irritation. (There are, after all, also other people—I hope...)

In Russia journalists have for a long time been divided—into those who are close to the authorities (it is not important of which level—federal, regional or small town), and those who are in opposition to the authorities. Opposition journalists are not liked, and sometimes they are pitied as if they were lepers, although their only “fault” is that their point of view concerning the events happening around them is dif-

ferent from the point of view of the powers-that-be. The authorities do not like journalists who have their own point of view. The authorities like journalists who listen spellbound to them and write favorably about them.

Sometimes, court journalists remember (apparently at a subconscious level) that their mission is to inform their readers. Then, they spill the beans, write the truth, and provide literal quotes of the authorities' statements. Then, everybody sees that both the emperor and his retinue are “naked.”

Answering questions from Russian citizens on October 25, Russian President Vladimir Putin had this to say about such journalists: “They were sent to spy, and they eavesdrop. This is dirty.” The journalist Yevgenia Albats reacted to the president's statement thus: “If the servant was sent to clean golden toilets, then she cannot EAVESDROP on what men of state have to say to each other in between using the urinals. This is dirty. Really dirty.”

The Russian authorities today act as if “The only good journalist is a dead journalist.” Vladimir Vysotskii comes to mind as well: “Along the way there is a dense forest full of witches, and at the end of the way there is a scaffold with axes.”

In one of Anna Politkovskaya's articles, published after her death, there is the following passage: “Almost the entire present generation of Russian journalists and the existing mass media are ‘clowns’. Taken together, they are a farce of ‘clowns’. Their mission is to entertain the public; if they do write about serious

matters, then they only say how great the ‘power vertical’ is in all its manifestations.”

Today, the authorities have defined the role of journalism in Russian society once and for all: to be a servant of the authorities. Everybody who does not agree with playing this role is an enemy of the authorities. It is common knowledge that enemies are sooner or later dealt with. It is unimportant in whose hands the weapon used to mete out punishment turns out to be—as long as the offending journalist is silenced. Anna Politkovskaya was dealt with in a radical way: she was killed. Others are treated differently, and on a daily basis: the well-known journalist and human-rights activist Vasilii Melnichenko was brutally beaten up in Sverdlovsk *oblast* while carrying out public duties and missions; in Vladivostok, the editor of the newspaper *Chestnyi detektiv* Viktor Bulavintsev is being threatened, while the editor of the opposition paper *Arsenyevskie vesti* Irina Grebnyova was locked up [for 15 days] in a vagrants’ shelter; in Perm, the photographer (!) of the only opposition newspaper in town Vladimir Korolyov was jailed on a charge of disclosing state secrets; not long ago, court proceedings began in Moscow in the case of Boris Stomakhin, author of the website “Kavkaz-Tsentr” and editor of the newspaper *Radikalnaya politika...*

We could keep adding examples. There are however other ways of fighting disagreeable journalists: many of them are unemployed, they are not published anywhere or they are forced to publish under pseudonyms. This is freedom of speech *à la* Putin. Thus, people whose profession in developed and civilized countries is important and necessary for democracy are social outcasts in Russia, where their profession almost carries a stigma, a peculiar “black mark”.

The Korolyov Affair

The case of the *Permskii obozrevatel* photographer is in my view very typical of these persecutions. In the opinion of the lawyer Karen Nersisyan, Korolyov was chosen by the militia in order to get at his newspaper, considered to be the sole island of independence in Perm. “They need the paper,” Nersisyan said at a press conference in Perm. “All the security agencies of the *krai* have the aim of destroying the paper at any price, with the tacit consent of the governor’s administration.”

So that the reader has a clearer idea of what is going on in Perm, I will give an example. *Permskii obozrevatel* began collecting signatures calling for the resignation of the current governor of Perm *krai*, Oleg Chirkunov. Chirkunov’s answer to a question by a reporter of the local television station on the so-called Korolyov affair

was almost a Freudian slip: he did not say “Korolyov affair”, but “Grinberg affair”. However, Igor Grinberg, businessman and founder of the *Permskii obozrevatel*, is in no way involved in the Korolyov affair, not even as a witness. Clearly the authorities are interested in stopping Grinberg’s activities.

Officially, Vladimir Korolyov, a former local police officer, is charged with violating rarely used articles of the criminal code: collecting information on citizens’ private lives without their consent and collecting and disclosing state secrets—representatives of the prosecution, police and FSB had found data about local dignitaries on computers confiscated in the newspaper’s offices. A journalist’s dossier thus was presented as information on the private lives of people. Korolyov was jailed. Why Korolyov? Because he is the only employee of the newspaper who at one time, maybe ten years ago, worked as a police man. It was the prosecution’s idea that it would be easier to break him and force him to slander Grinberg.

This is what the lawyer Karen Nersisyan said: “[Korolyov] is being offered a deal, unofficially and illegally: he is supposed to slander Igor Grinberg with the intention of destroying the paper, in return he will be offered freedom and other benefits. The fact that he refused to do this honors my client; he wrote a petition because of this. He understands that one cannot live like this: he has a daughter, he is not only thinking of his future, but also of the future of his children.”

Korolyov has been in jail since September. He is not being interrogated. The papers of the investigation are stamped “top secret”—the foremost indication that the case was fabricated and is, from a legal point of view, rotten.

From articles published by *Permskii obozrevatel*: “... In our articles and comic strips, we criticize our not-always-innocent Perm officials and destroy the inflated “attractive image” of the region, by not showing the far-fetched reality of the supporters of the authorities, but by showing reality as it is, even if this is not always pleasant. The publication of the newspaper hampers the shady commercial deals of the governor, the mayor of Perm and the people surrounding them. The present authorities in our region are tough pragmatists who live according to the laws of wild capitalism. One of their foremost laws reads as follows: ‘In business there are neither friends nor enemies, there are only temporary relationships.’

We have reason to believe that Governor Chirkunov is backing the officials of the security agencies attacking our newspaper.”

From statements by Governor Oleg Chirkunov on local television on October 8, 2006: “Only the Lord

God can say what happens and where. What are the mass media? In my opinion, ... they are a means to freely distribute information... The point of contention is something else. All of them (independent mass media—the *author*) moreover try to shape public opinion. By so doing, they are not mass media anymore, but political instruments.”

From the statements of Vladimir Korolyov addressed to the state prosecutor’s office, FSB and the Main Administration of Interior Affairs of Perm *oblast*, as well as to the penal chamber of the Perm *oblast* court: “... My being held in custody is not justified by the requirements of the investigation, but is an instrument to force me to slander the owner of the newspaper *Permskii obozrevatel* I.A. Grinberg ... The investigators working on my case are trying to persuade me with the methods of ‘stick and carrot’ to make such a statement. The fact of the matter is that *Permskii obozrevatel* is the only independent source of truthful information on the state of affairs in Perm *krai*. This is the real reason for the many absurd criminal charges brought against me ... you know as well that I served loyally in the Interior Ministry for more than a quarter of a century, and attained the rank of major.

I am sure that the investigators working on my case and the prison administration know this as well. My stubborn refusal to slander Grinberg, the news-

paper and myself mean that I, a former official of the Interior Ministry, have been placed in a cell with persons accused of committing common crimes. I spent four days in this cell with underage prisoners. One does not have to be blessed with an exceptional imagination in order to understand what I had to endure...”

Postscript

In my time I had to go to jail because of a case fabricated by the FSB. I also know the arsenal of means employed by the FSB, SIZO and other so-called security agencies to exert pressure on prisoners very well. When the machinery to crush a certain person is set into motion, it acts in the name of the state, with great coordination, and irreversibly. This means that even if you assume the impossible, namely that there is an honest and decent person involved in the case, who would oppose the illegal persecution of an innocent person, the machinery will not stop. The honest person will be replaced by a dishonest one, and the “accusatory juggernaut” will continue to rumble on.

It will be very difficult to get Korolyov out of jail. The main hope is resistance by journalists and support from society.

So far, however, resistance is only gaining momentum.

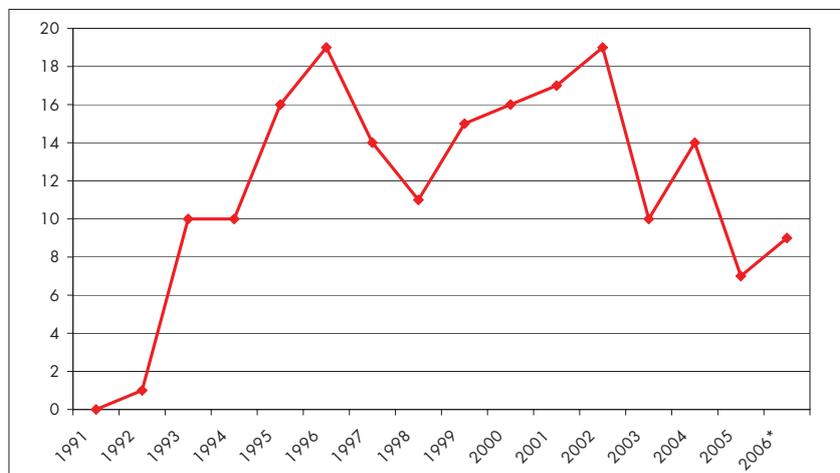
Translation from the Russian by Matthias Neumann

Documentation

Violations of Freedom of the Media in Russia. Statistics of the Glasnost Defense Foundation

Source: <http://www.gdf.ru/monitor/index.shtml>

Number of Journalists Dying of Unnatural Causes 1991 – 2006



* up to 7 October 2006

Violence Against Journalists 1991 – 2006

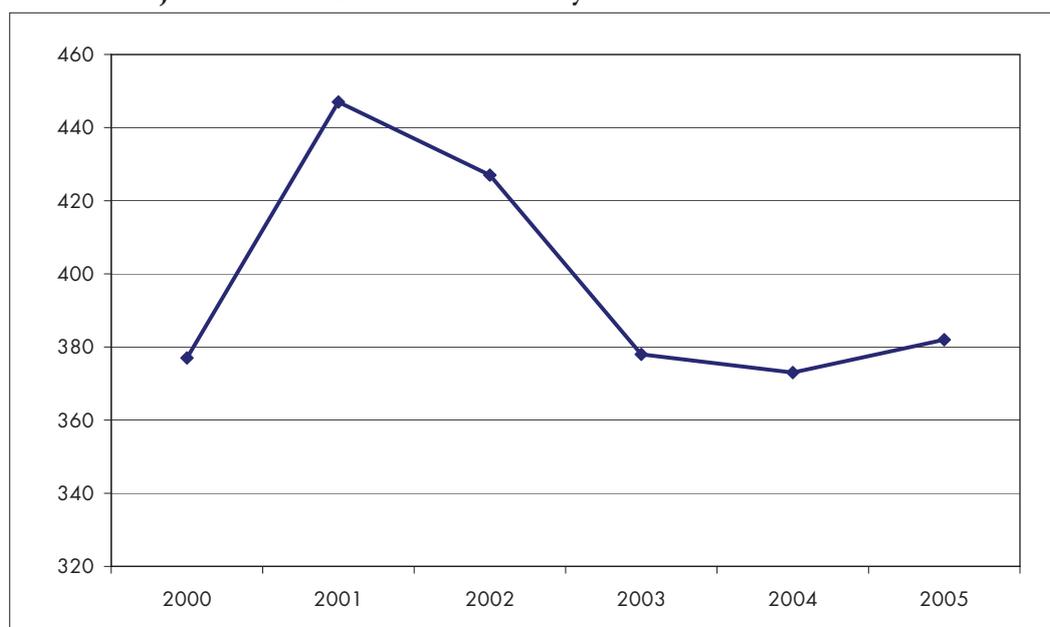
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Journalists dying of unnatural causes	0	1	10	10	16	19	14	11	15
Violence against journalists and editorial offices	no data	91	91						

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 (up to 7 October)
Journalists dying of unnatural causes	16	17	19	10	14	7	9
Violence against journalists and editorial offices	73	102	99	120	83	75	58

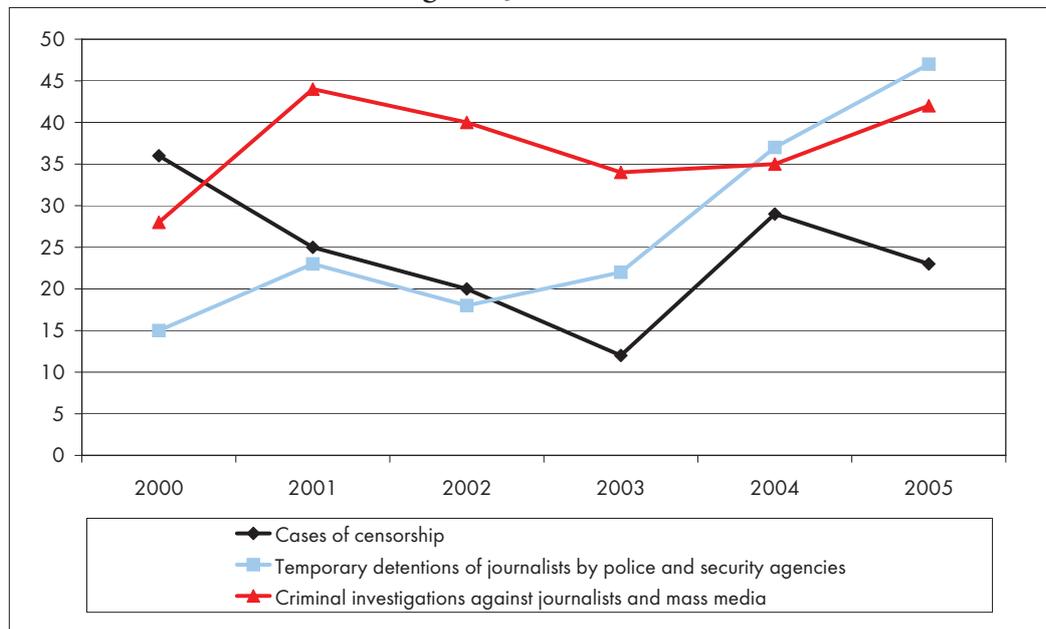
Action Taken by the State Against Journalists and the Media 2000 – 2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Cases of censorship	36	25	20	12	29	23
Temporary detentions of journalists by police and security agencies	15	23	18	22	37	47
Searches of journalists and editorial offices by court order	377	447	427	378	373	382
Criminal investigations against journalists and mass media	28	44	40	34	35	42

Searches of journalists and editorial offices by court order 2000 – 2005



Other Official Measures Taken against Journalists and the Media 2000 – 2005



Analysis

Russian Internet Remains an Island of Free Speech and Civil Society

Dmitry Vinogradov, Moscow

Summary

With freedom of the press under pressure in the traditional media, the poorly developed party system, and the authorities' desire to block street demonstrations and other public acts, the Internet remains a small island of political freedom and freedom of speech and self-expression. Now the authorities are thinking about how to exert their control over this sphere of Russian life. In part, they are justifiably worried about the growth of extremist tendencies among Internet users and the fact that radicals are actively using the Internet for propagandizing their ideas and attracting new supporters.

The Internet as a Form of Mass Media and Business

Seven percent of Russia's adults use the Internet every day, according to ROMIR Monitoring. Over the course of a month, 22 percent of Russians over the age of 16 access the information superhighway. Over the last three years, these figures have doubled.

Somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 people visit the sites of political parties and movements everyday, according to the Rambler search engine site. These sites provide alternative information since the main television broadcasters devote 90 percent of their political news coverage to the activities of the authorities and their United Russia party.

News sites and Internet media play an important role on the Russian Internet. For example, gazeta.ru positions itself as a newspaper on the Internet: it has analytical articles, interviews and all the usual features of a typical newspaper. The site lenta.ru special-

izes in reprinting reports from new agencies and other sources. [Newsru.com](http://newsru.com), the former site of NTV, focuses on posting numerous photographs.

Internet sites that have developed a strong reputation in the virtual world are now moving off-line. For example, the business news agency Rosbizneskonsalting (RBK, www.pbc.ru) and the portal Rambler have launched their own television stations. Additionally, RBK is producing a daily business newspaper, a relatively expensive project. The most expensive Russian Internet project is considered to be the Yandex.ru portal, with a capitalization of approximately \$1 billion. Yandex has yet to start investing in off-line projects.

The Internet is the only sphere of the Russian media where opposition-minded oligarchs, pushed from the political sphere by President Putin, have managed to maintain their position. Boris Berezovsky, currently based in London, owns the analytical site Grani.ru. Vladimir Gusinsky, now living in Israel, owns

newsru.com and several Israeli Russian-language sites, which are also read in Russia. [Gazeta.ru](#) is considered to be close to Leonid Nevzlin, one of the partners of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is currently sitting in a Siberian jail. Nevzlin is hiding from the Russian authorities in Israel.

Oligarchs loyal to Putin have not been active in the Internet and have not expressed an interest in news sites. However, they have been involved in providing Internet access to customers and Internet television.

Successor to Samizdat and the Soviet Kitchen

The Russian Internet today is performing the functions of the institutions of democratic society, which are sorely lacking “off-line.” These functions include those of civil society as well as the media. While most of the population remains indifferent, politicians and human rights defenders have found shelter in blogs and Internet forums, where they exchange opinions on current events and find allies and opponents.

“Politics is not leaving for the Internet, it has been chased there,” according to Yabloko press spokesman Aleksei Naval’nyi, who keeps his own blog.

“The Internet is becoming stronger and more influential. Nevertheless, it does not represent all social groups, but just the most advanced part of the population,” according to Dmitry Oreshkin, the head of the Merkator Group. Maksim Kononenko, a blogger and Internet-journalist with close ties to the Kremlin, claims that all political discussion in contemporary Russia today takes place on the Internet and particularly in blogs. He points out, however, that the Internet is still a poor tool for introducing ideas to the masses. He claims that one can influence the opinions of 2 percent of the voters through the Internet, and these people are mainly located in the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Some have compared today’s blogs to the Soviet kitchen. In the former USSR, it was impossible to discuss political issues in the media or public gatherings, so the intelligentsia addressed these problems at home, effectively underground. Now those times are returning. Others have compared blogs to the political and literary salons held in Petersburg and Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Current blogs represent views across the entire political spectrum: liberals, Putin supporters, nationalists and leftists. However, there is little constructive interaction between them, a reflection perhaps of the lack of a Russian tradition for political dialogue. Typically, discussion of an important issue quickly turns into a stream of insults and denunciations that one is a stooge for the Kremlin, fallen oligarchs, America, or the global Zionist conspiracy, depending on the lean-

ings of the accuser.

One obvious difference between today’s blogs and the Soviet kitchen conversations is that the kitchen conversations were conducted at a much higher level. Another difference is that the blogs and Internet forums are a network of kitchens. Sociologists have pointed out that the blogs and specialized Internet forums have produced an unforeseen effect. Isolated radicals, whether leftist, nationalist, or ecological, have begun to actively find each other. Earlier they were alone or had to recruit new members among their friends, using traditional, rarely effective methods of agitation, that were easily detected by the police. Now, through the Internet, they can find ideologically like-minded individuals who are ready to act.

For example, the August 21 bomb blast at the Cherkizov market in Moscow, which killed 10 illegal migrants from Asia and wounded an additional 40, was prepared by nationalists who met each other on the Internet. All three organizers were students at prestigious Moscow universities, including one who was training in chemistry. They used their knowledge to make the explosives, which were the equivalent of 1.5 kilograms of TNT. The chemist found the plans for the bomb on the Internet.

Vladimir Lenin once called the party press an “agitator and organizer,” arguing that a newspaper could become an organizing center for a party. Thanks to the appearance of blogs, there are now youth democratic movements such as Oborona, Da!, and Ya dumayu. The young opponents of Putin who organized these groups found people who think the same way through their blogs. Organizers have used blogs to turn out crowds for a variety of oppositional public demonstrations: supporting Private Andrei Sychev and against Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov; against the persecution of Russian citizens of Georgian nationality; backing the leftist march of the Anticapitalism organization (held October 1) and facilitating the right’s “Russian March” (November 4).

Another interesting initiative is “Debaty” - once a month members of this group meet in a Moscow club to discuss a current political topic. Usually, the participants in the discussion, the jury, and members of the audience are all bloggers. Members of the jury are the authors of blogs with 1,000 “friends” (readers).

From time to time, blogs replace the traditional media, which is either heavily censored or simply not timely enough. Bloggers who live next to events become witnesses, or even participants, much faster than journalists. (A similar process is taking place in the west, as in the case of blogs about New Orleans or soldiers fighting in Iraq or Israel.) In Russia the most famous case when blogs began to function like the media was the ethnic conflict in the city of Kondopoga at

the end of August. The first reports and photographs about this event appeared in the blogs of citizens of this city and on the Internet forum of the city's web site. Expert observers claim that in this case the blogs are functioning like the traditional Soviet samizdat, the underground and self-published editions of forbidden literature.

The Death of "Live Journal"

The most popular site for blogs in Russia is livejournal.com because of its user-friendly interface and, as an American company, the fact that it does not fall under Russian control. Russians call the site "Zhivoy zhurnal" and it is much more popular than Russian blog sites, such as diary.ru, liveinternet.ru, and the section for blogs on mail.ru.

There are more than 300,000 Russian blogs registered at livejournal.com, about half of all the blogs in Russia. As the founder of the site Brad Fitzpatrick explained during a trip to Moscow, in the US, the main users of the site are teenagers and young people. He was surprised that in Russia the site is popular among adults, many of whom are famous far beyond the confines of the Internet. Livejournal bloggers include the writers Sergei Lukyanenko and Viktor Shenderovich, politicians Nikita Belykh, Valeriya Novodvorskaya and Irina Khakamada, many members of the State Duma, Institute of Globalization Studies Director Mikhail Delyagin, and others. Sometimes people have to delete their blogs when they receive an official position.

In October scandal rocked Russia's livejournal community when the company sold the rights to service the Cyrillic segment of the site, which affects Russia, Bulgaria, and Mongolia. Now the Cyrillic livejournal will be used for commercial purposes by Sup, a company established by the oligarch Aleksandr Mamut and Andrew Paulson, a Russian businessman of American background.

The owners invited Anton Nosik, a well known Russian Internet entrepreneur and blogger who has created many Russian and Israeli news sites, to head the new company. He announced that he will create a special Russian Abuse Team that will stop any legal violations on the livejournal.com site. He will particularly crack down on extremist propaganda.

This announcement was viewed as a threat to impose censorship. Nosik is famous for his consistent liberalism and opposition to the nationalist and pro-Kremlin camps. For example, during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict he, in contrast to many bloggers who sympathized with Lebanon, defended Israel where he lived for many years.

Several nationalist bloggers have already removed their diaries from livejournal.com in a sign of protest.

Their fears are understandable because there is already an example of the American Abuse Team intervening: Last year at one point it closed dozens of nationalist journals for posting material against NATO.

Many observers have pointed out that if it is deprived of its typical freedom of speech (including for radicals), livejournal.com will lose its value, many bloggers will leave, and Mamut and Paulson will lose their money. The famous Russian fantasy writer Sergei Lukyanenko (blogger doctor_livsy on livejournal.com) argued that "if the new owners make the conditions for using livejournal.com worse, either in terms of service, fees, or censorship, the Russian sector of livejournal will die. And it will be resurrected in a new form in a new place. Livejournal is its users, not the server, programs, or the political views of specific people." Thus livejournal.com is risking losing its popularity in Russia.

The Kremlin Comes to the Internet

Last year the Kremlin realized the importance of the Internet for influencing young people and the middle class working in offices and located "on-line" most of the time. Accordingly, they set up Internet media loyal to the Kremlin, above all the newspaper *Vzglyad* (vz.ru), Expert-online (expert.ru), and several others. There are also new sites for young people, designed especially as counterpropaganda against young oppositionists, particularly yoki.ru.

Pro-Kremlin youth groups Nashi, Rossiya molodaya and Molodaya gvardiya have set up their own sites. Against this background, the site of Molodaya gvardiya, the youth wing of United Russia, stands out. In addressing the opposition, it does not avoid using slang and curse words. Additionally, activists in this group received instructions from their leaders to set up Internet diaries and actively participate in blogs where only oppositionists participated before.

Additionally, the authorities have increased the pressure of censorship and the law enforcement agencies on the Internet. The first scandals took place this year. Earlier, the authorities did not know how to deal with the Internet. The bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies had little access to the Internet and little understanding of what was happening there. In the special services, there was no subdivision to deal with it.

The situation changed during the "cartoon scandal" at the beginning of the year, when cartoons insulting Islam were published in Denmark and other countries, provoking violent protests in Muslim countries. The Russian authorities, traditionally fearing Muslim unrest, adopted a strict policy of blocking any publication which could be seen as insulting the religious feelings of Muslims.

For example, at the request of the FSB in St. Petersburg, a provider closed one of the humorist sites that had republished the Danish cartoons. Additionally, the FSB asked the caricature site [caricatura.ru](#) and the news site [Pravda.ru](#) to remove the cartoons from their pages. [Pravda.ru](#) agreed to the FSB's request, but in a act of protest, did not work for two days. The editors of [caricatura.ru](#), in contrast, answered the FSB that they would only remove the caricatures following a court order. Nothing happened as a result.

The news site [gazeta.ru](#) received a warning from the Federal Service for Oversight in Observing Legislation in the Sphere of Mass Communications and Preserving the Cultural Heritage (Rosokhrankultura) for publishing the cartoons. According to Russian media law, a publication that receives two warnings is deprived of its license and must stop publishing. Additionally, Rosokhrankultura appealed to the court to close an Altai site, Bankfaks, because a user posted material insulting Muslims on one of the forums of the site. The Altai court declined the motion.

Over the course of the year, the authorities' interest in the Internet has not dropped. In Kaliningrad a local journalist posted on his blog on [Livejournal.com](#) an article about corruption among the police leadership. The newspaper where this journalist works refused to publish the article. A scandal ensued when the police tried to find the journalist and force him to remove the material. The police even interrogated several journalists from other publications, however, they were not able to identify the author of the scandalous material.

In October, the Ivanovo city court fined Vladimir Rakhmankov, the editor of the [Kursiv](#) site, 20,000 rubles for insulting President Putin by calling him the "phallic symbol of Russia." In an article under that name, Rakhmankov described Putin's annual address to the parliament in which Putin sought to solve Russia's demographic problem by increasing the birthrate. One day after the article appeared, the Ivanovo Oblast procurator filed a case against Rakhmankov for insulting a representative of the authorities, a violation of article 319 in the criminal code. The authorities confiscated the computers from the [Kursiv](#) editorial offices and the site stopped working.

During Russia's political row with Georgia, the Yekaterinburg Internet service provider [Garanthost.ru](#)

stopped providing services to clients from Georgia at its own initiative. Immediately, several Russian providers announced that they were ready to provide services to these clients free.

In the most recent scandal, in Novosibirsk a court case has begun against Taras Zelenyak, a business man of Ukrainian descent. He posted a message to a Ukrainian forum insulting ethnic Russians while arguing that Ukrainians were their superiors. One of the readers of the forum complained to Zelenyak's internet service provider, Pervaya milya, which in turn passed the material on to the Novosibirsk FSB. The fact that Zelenyak had posted the message to a Ukrainian server did not stop the Russian police.

In recent times, various people have called for preparing clear rules for the Internet sphere which would regulate what is permitted there. Members of the State Duma are currently preparing a bill that would make placing material on an Internet site the same as publishing it in the media. If such a law is approved, the criminal and administrative codes would apply to the Internet and any critical remark there could be defined as an insult or slander.

On October 26, the leadership of the Interior Ministry and General Procurator, under the guise of fighting extremism, appealed to the upper chamber Federation Council to hold the owner of Internet sites legally responsible for the information posted on their sites. Deputy General Procurator Viktor Grin told the senators that "there is an extreme need to develop legislative norms, making it possible to block the activity of Internet sites propagandizing terrorism and violent extremism."

Human rights defenders are also concerned about the unregulated situation in the Internet. Aleksandr Brod, director of the Moscow Bureau of Human Rights, agrees that amendments to the law on extremism aimed at combating the Internet sites of extremists is necessary. "This is not censorship or the violation of democratic norms, but guaranteeing the security and unity of Russia." He pointed to the sites set up by organizers of the November 4 Russian March, which contained information about the event. "These sites include radical nationalist materials and we must think about regulating them." According to his data, there are more than 800 nationalist sites on the Russian Internet.

Translated from the Russian by Robert Ortung

About the author:

Dmitry Vinogradov is a journalist for [gazeta.ru](#) and the editor of [tayga.info](#).

Further reading:

Henrike Schmidt, Georg Butwilowski, Katy Teubener, "From Club to Mass Medium? The Russian Internet as a Place of Intellectual Debate and Political Commitment", pp. 9-15, *kultura* 1/2005

http://www.forschungsstelle-osteuropa.de/con/images/stories/pdf/kultura/kultura_1_EN.pdf

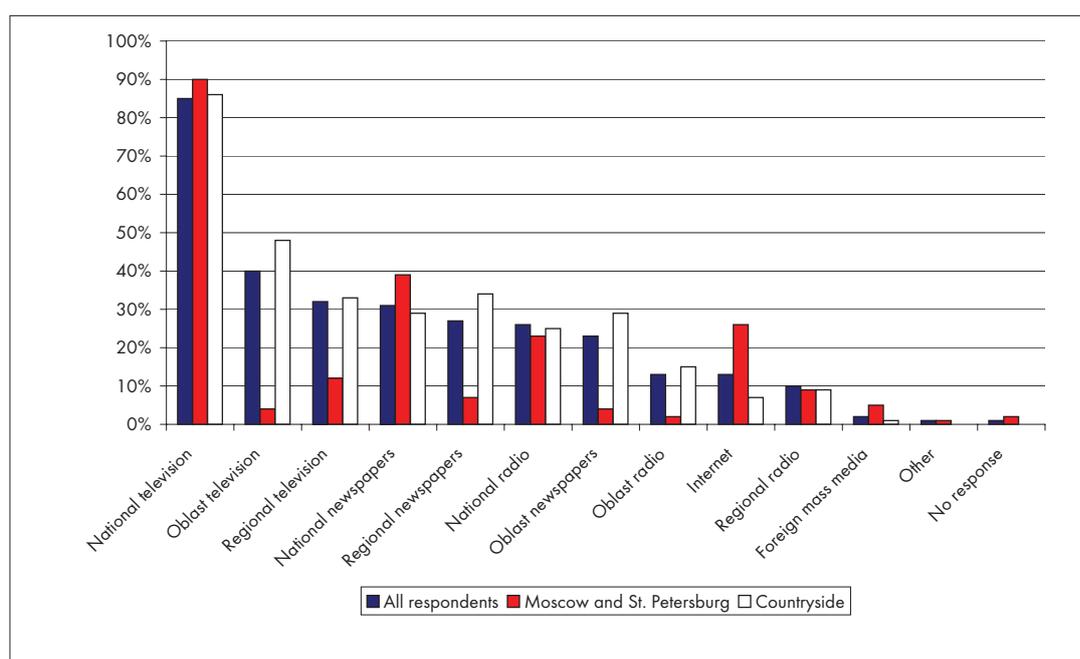
Opinion Survey

What Russians Think About the Internet and the People Who Access the Internet

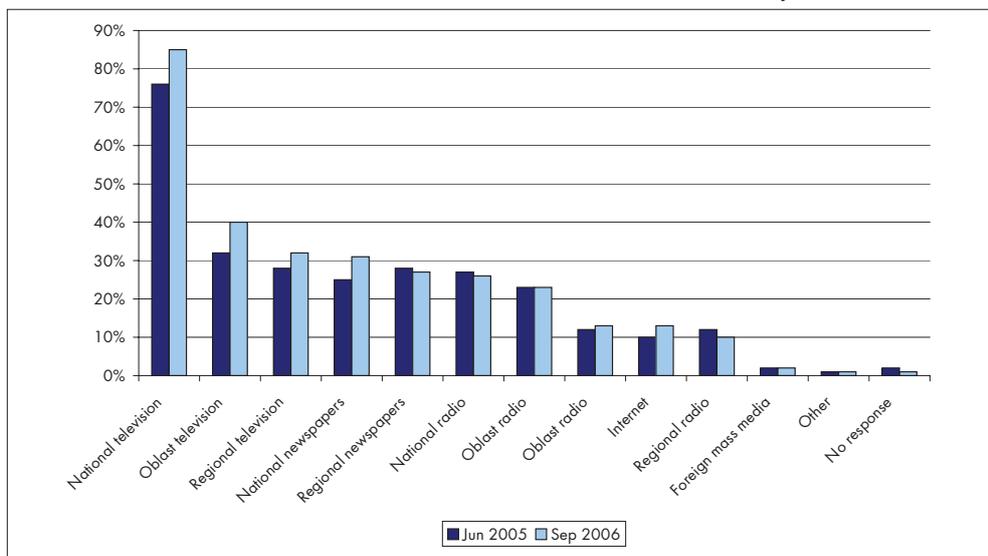
Source: http://wciom.ru/novosti-analitika/press-vypuski/press-vypusk/single/3329.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=1&cHash=50f5a2681e, 9 October 2006

Which Sources of Information Do You Use Most Of All? (Any Number of Answers)

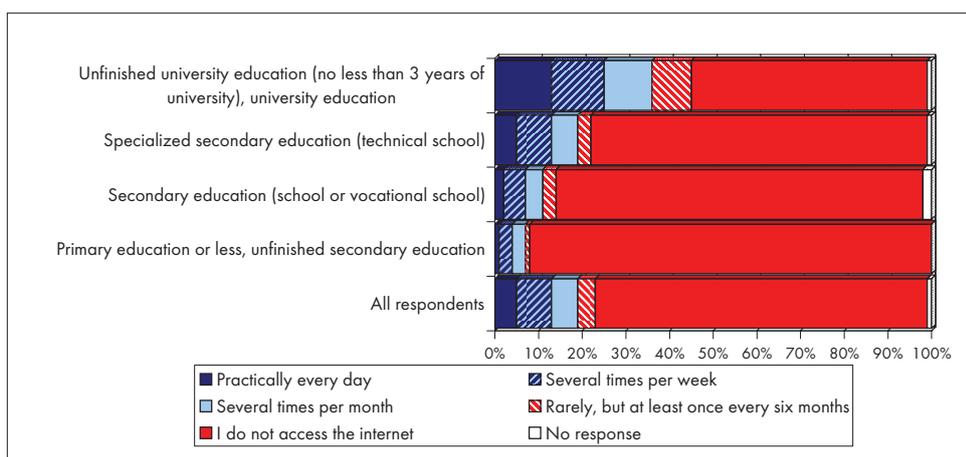
	All respondents	Type of settlement				
		Moscow and St. Petersburg	Population more than 500,000	Population 100,000 - 500,000	Population less than 100,000	Countryside
National television	85%	90%	83%	81%	86%	86%
Oblast television	40%	4%	47%	33%	42%	48%
Regional television	32%	12%	34%	34%	34%	33%
National newspapers	31%	39%	24%	31%	35%	29%
Regional newspapers	27%	7%	16%	27%	33%	34%
National radio	26%	23%	26%	37%	19%	25%
Oblast newspapers	23%	4%	22%	20%	28%	29%
Oblast radio	13%	2%	12%	16%	15%	15%
Internet	13%	26%	16%	18%	10%	7%
Regional radio	10%	9%	8%	12%	11%	9%
Foreign mass media	2%	5%	1%	5%	1%	1%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
No response	1%	2%	1%	0%	2%	0%



Which Sources of Information Do You Use Most Of All? (Any Number of Answers)



Do You Access the Internet; if Yes, How Often?



Why Do You Need Access to the Internet?

(any number of answers, percentage of those who access the internet)

	All respondents	Income for each family member, in rubles			
		Up to 1,500	1,501 - 3,000	3,001 - 5,000	5,001 and above
In order to keep up with news and events in the world and in Russia	44%	19%	29%	41%	52%
For work and education	77%	69%	71%	78%	78%
In order to use e-mail	44%	44%	31%	50%	54%
In order to listen to music and watch films	20%	25%	13%	17%	19%
For computer games	11%	—	10%	4%	9%
In order to access sites with erotic content	3%	—	—	2%	5%
For contact with other users in chat rooms, forums, etc.	20%	13%	8%	17%	27%
In order to find friends and people with similar interests	9%	—	6%	4%	15%
Other	1%	—	2%	2%	3%
No response	1%	—	2%	—	—

About the Russian Analytical Digest

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle-osteuropa.de) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich). It is supported by the Otto Wolff Foundation and the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language Russlandanalysen (www.russlandanalysen.de), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.res.ethz.ch), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

To subscribe or unsubscribe to the Russian Analytical Digest, please visit our web page at www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad

Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen

Founded in 1982 and led by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Eichwede, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to socialist and post-socialist cultural and societal developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Research Centre possesses a unique collection of alternative culture and independent writings from the former socialist countries in its archive. In addition to extensive individual research on dissidence and society in socialist societies, in January 2007, a group of international research institutes will be assembled for a collaborative project on the theme "The other Eastern Europe – the 1960s to the 1980s, dissidence in politics and society, alternatives in culture. Contributions to comparative contemporary history" which will be funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and identity formation. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email service with more than 10,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.

With a collection of publications on Eastern Europe unique in Germany, the Research Centre is also a contact point for researchers as well as the interested public. The Research Centre has approximately 300 periodicals from Russia alone, which are available in the institute's library. News reports as well as academic literature is systematically processed and analyzed in data bases.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) is a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, teaching, and information services in the fields of international and Swiss security studies. The CSS also acts as a consultant to various political bodies and the general public.

The CSS is engaged in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners. The Center's research focus is on new risks, European and transatlantic security, strategy and doctrine, state failure and state building, and Swiss foreign and security policy.

In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS), offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students, and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

Any opinions expressed in Russian Analytical Digest are exclusively those of the authors.

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