

THE POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN MEDIA REFORM

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Curriculum in Russian and East European Studies.

Chapel Hill
2006

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Robert Stevenson)

This thesis explores the post-Soviet Russian media reform from Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost in 1986 to Vladimir Putin's control of the media in 2005. It traces the trajectory of the Russian media reform after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, follows several typical trends in various periods of transition, analyzes the main actors in the transition and their different strategies, and finally tries to answer the question: why was the Russian media reform a failure?

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SELECTED GLOSSARY

Global Media Culture: In this paper, the global media culture mainly refers to the Western news value, presentation style and also a set of universal commercial media standards.

Nationalization: According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia (Sixth Edition, 2006)*, the term of “Nationalization” refers to acquisition and operation by a country of business enterprises formerly owned and operated by private individuals or corporations. In non-Communist countries it has been common practice to compensate the owners of nationalized properties, at least in part; however, in the Communist countries, where private ownership is opposed in principle, there usually has not been such compensation. In this paper, the “nationalization” is known as public ownership or the act of taking private assets into government or state ownership. Media nationalization insists on the unparalleled leading role of government in media reform.

Privatization: According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia (Sixth Edition, 2006)*, privatization is the reverse process of nationalization. In this paper, privatization is the process of moving from a government-controlled system to a privately run, for-profit system.

Professionalism: The Western theories of professionalism provides a model for groups (like doctors, lawyers, accountants, social workers and other self-defined or publicly recognized “professions”) who control unique bodies of knowledge not shared by the rest of society (Curry 1990). Professionals are defined as being part of occupational groups that have gone through a process involving the establishment of professional organizations and schooling, developing full-time work commitments, and pressing for the right to control their own work and membership (Johnson, 1972). Journalism profession is defined as one of these groups, which are able to claim a significant amount autonomy and self-control. In this paper, the professionalism mainly refers to the professionalism of journalism in Russia.

Professionalization: The ability of any profession to reach the point where it can build and maintain a large amount of autonomy within a bureaucracy is a result of both the process of individual professionalization and the process of professionalization for the group itself (Curry 1990). In this paper, the media professionalization emphasizes on the self-independence and media freedom. Professionalization makes the media more independent and improves standards in collecting, editing, reporting and disseminating objective and balanced information.

Shock therapy: In economics, shock therapy refers to the sudden release of price and currency controls, withdrawal of state subsidies, and immediate trade liberalization within a country. During the early 1990s economist Jeffrey Sachs recommended to the newly emerging economies of the former Soviet Union that they too release all price

controls, subsidies, sell off state assets and float their currencies in order to shake off the economic lethargy of the communist era. The shocks took the form of sudden radical changes to the structure and incentives within economies.

LIST OF TRANSLATIONS

1. Newspapers:

Argumenty i Fakty—Arguments and Facts
Dengi—Money
Economicheskaya Gazeta—Economic Newspaper
Izvestiya—News
Kommersant—Businessman
Komsomolskaya Pravda—Komsomol Truth
Literaturnaya Gazeta—Literary Gazette
Megapolis-Ekspress--Metropolitan Express
Moskovsky Komsomolets—Komsomol of Moscow
Nezavisimaya Gazeta—Independent Newspaper
Novaya Gazeta—New Gazette
Obshchaya Gazeta—Communal Newspaper
Parlamentskaya Gazeta—Parliamentary Gazette
Pravda—Truth
Vlast—Estate
Rabochaya tribuna—Worker's Tribune
Rossiyskaya Gazeta—Russian Gazette
Rossiyskie Vesti—Russian News
Sevodnya—Today
Smena—Change
Trud—Labor

2. Magazines:

Avtopilot—Automatic Pilot
Domovoi—Goblin
Itogi—Summary
Novyi Mir—New World
Ogonyok—Little Fire
Sem Dney—Seven days
Znamia—Knowledge

3. TV and Radio Stations:

Ekho Moskvy—Moscow Echo
Kultura TV—Culture TV
Nezavisimoe Televidenie (NTV)—Independent Television
Obshchestvennoye Rossiyskoye Televideniye (ORT)—Russian Public Television
Prometei TV and Radio Company—Prometheus TV and Radio Company
Russkoe Video—Russian Video
Sistema—System
TV Tsenter—TV Center

LIST OF TRANSLATIONS

4. TV Programs:

Itogi—Summary

Nashe Vremya—Our Time

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
GKI	Management of State Property
GUOT	Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Mass Media
KGB	The former Soviet State Security Committee
Media-Most	Media-Most Holding Company
NKVD	Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs
NTV	Nezavisimoe Televidenie (Independent Television)
ORT	Obshchestvennoye Rossiyskoye Televideniye (Russian Public Television)
RTR	Russian State TV
RUJ	Russian Union of Journalists
VGTRK	All-Russian State Television and Radio Company

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union was hailed by the West as a victory for freedom, a triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, and evidence of the superiority of capitalism over socialism. Despite the enthusiasm and euphoria that accompanied the anticommunist earthquake in the early 1990s, the anticipated societal changes proved to be many formidable tasks in Russia. Media reform was the most essential and complicated one among them. At the same time when it was so deeply transformed by the sweeping process of change in Russian society, media also help to shape society in a very profound way. It was media that contributed much to the disintegration of the USSR. It was media that brought the idea of marketization into the ailing Russian economy. It was media that aroused the Russian people to seek independence and freedom. However, as an important part of the democratic process, the liberalization of media in Russia remains far from complete. From the early 1990s when Russia embarked on revamping media legislation—a process that brought more control and restrictions on media—until the present when Vladimir Putin commands and directs the whole country, Russian media have been enduring a severe winter. It can be said that media reform has failed.

For Russian media professionals, since the demise of the Soviet Union life has not been easy and they have had to struggle to survive between the scissor-blades of

two opposing forces. One blade is the threat coming from the gigantic financial moguls. Another blade is the threat coming from various political figures. Given this circumstance, it is difficult for the media professionals to preserve a high level of professionalism and independence. Compared with media professionals in other democratic countries such as the United States, they are relatively weak and uninfluential. Professional solidarity is also very low among Russian journalists. There is little sympathy for the journalists themselves among the public at large. Russian media professionals were trapped in an awkward predicament of prosperity without freedom.

This thesis is written following a timeline from Gorbachev's glasnost to 2005. Chapter II provides the historical background of the post-Soviet Russian media transition. The traditional communist media theory prevented the Russian media from being independent. The media situation of the entire country at that time was dismal and suffocating. Journalists and editors were only trained as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party. Fortunately, healed by the Gorbachev's glasnost, during the last few years of the Soviet empire media started to gain more freedom and independence.

The following chapter mainly focuses on the first tenure of President Boris Yeltsin from 1991 to 1996. The theme during this period was media privatization. Media privatization strongly supported the independence of the Russian media. As a milestone of media independence, the Russian media professionalism also reached a new level, which culminated with the campaign against the first Chechnya war. During that period being a journalist was on the frontline for the struggle for

democratization and change. Nevertheless, the Russian media were also confronted by two challenges. One was the pressure from a dismal economic situation; the other was the pressure from the rising power of Yeltsin who frequently intervened into media affairs.

Media professionals in the beginning of the nineties saw their social place in terms of the “Fourth Estate” concept that placed them on an equal level with other branches of power—the executive, legislative and judicial. However, the 1996 presidential campaign marked a turning point. It started the collusion between the media tycoons and the Kremlin.

In chapter IV, the prosperity of Russian media empires is analyzed. The government’s flattering attitude towards the financial groups offered shrewd businessmen an opportunity to put their feet in the door of media. The earliest and most influential media groups were Gusinsky’s “Media Most” and Berezovsky’s “LogoVAZ Holding Company.” With Russian media empires thriving, the oligarchs and the Kremlin began to collude with each other. In fact, by the end of 1997 it was difficult to find a Moscow-based newspaper that did not have direct or indirect link with financial factors or political power.

The period from 1998 to 1999 is marked by the split of oligarchs and the government. Russia’s deepening economic crisis in 1998 not only caused the split, but also made it difficult to maintain a diverse, free and independent media. During the process of the split, the media gradually shift from privately-controlled to state-controlled. From other viewpoints, the split among the financial elites, to a

substantial degree, reflected the long-standing rift in the central government. The Russian cabinet was divided into different camps then: Yeltsin; the “young reformers”, represented by First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov; Victor Chernomyrdin and Yuri Luzhkov. However, beyond all expectation, Yeltsin won this contest finally by choosing an iron-handed heir, Vladimir Putin, the former KGB (the former Soviet State Security Committee) officer. His appearance not only crushed the hope of the oligarchs, but also reshuffled the Russian media, leading to the dismal current state of Russia in media.

Chapter V concentrates on the Putin era. In Putin’s Russia, authoritarianism became the keynote of the Russian media once again. Soon after Putin became the president of the Russian Federation, Russian media were again tamed without any independence and freedom. His ascendancy to power greatly increased the influence of state-owned media and enhanced the state’s power over private media. Moreover, his policies against the oligarchs could also be described as a deliberate attempt to reduce pluralism in media and to strengthen the dominance of state. Besides, the pattern of violent attacks on journalists continued. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Russia as one of the 10 most dangerous places to be a journalist.¹

The conclusion part offers an explanation of why Russian media transition was a failure of democracy and speculate on the future of Russian media.

¹ Robert Coalson BBC News Online business reporter, “We have definitely Moved backwards: An Overview of Media in Russia” [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp), June 18, 2004 <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp>>

The post-Soviet Russian media transition is a much broader topic. It is hard to cover the all aspects of this great and complicated course that has lasted for more than 20 years. Therefore, this thesis only traces the trajectory of the Russian media reform after the disintegration of the USSR, follows several trends in various periods of transition to analyze, follows the main actors in the game and their different strategies, and finally tries to answer the question: why was the Russian media reform a failure?

CHAPTER II

COMMUNIST MEDIA THEORY AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MEDIA TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

This chapter provides the historical background of the post-Soviet Russian media transition. There are two parts in this chapter. The first section summarizes communist media theory and briefly describes the role of mass media in the Soviet era by comparing print and broadcast media. The second section mainly focuses on the contribution of the media to the demise of the Soviet Union during the period from 1985 to 1991, which was marked by glasnost and the rise of independent journalism.

2.1 The Panorama of Soviet Mass Media

On November 9, 1917, the Soviet government's second day in office, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) signed one of the most important laws, the Decree on the Press, which set the basic tone of the communist press. The core of the decree was to ban all the bourgeois newspapers that resisted and potentially threatened the new authorities. The text of the decree described measures for shutting down all the anti-revolutionary newspapers permanently and immediately. The impact of the decree was so great that it soon became the cornerstone of Soviet policies towards the press in the following 70 years.

The usual role of media includes forming and reflecting public opinion, communicating the world to individuals, and reproducing modern society's self-image.

Nevertheless, the Soviet media went far beyond this definition. The media in West European and North American countries functioned as a “Fourth Estate,” the guardian of the public interest and a powerful watchdog on the activities of government, revealing abuses of state authority and defending the democratic rights of citizens. However, compared with their counterparts, the Soviet media acted as servants subordinated to the government and party, the engine of ideological production and the propaganda tools to educate the public to support the policies of these two bodies.² From this viewpoint the Soviet media did form public opinion, albeit by monopolizing information, by transmitting information to the whole society and by indoctrinating the public into the doctrine of communism and socialism. However, also limited by these functions, the Soviet media could not fully fulfill its function as “Fourth Estate.”

If the Soviet media could be described as the puppet Pinocchio, then the party pulled the strings behind the curtain. Agitprop, the Central Committee’s Department of Agitation and Propaganda, and Glavlit, the main watchdog within the party’s Agitprop Department, firmly and strictly controlled the mass media. They had absolute authority to subject all publications to prior censorship. Any publication at any level was to be checked and approved by a Glavlit representative before final printing. Under these circumstances, the role of the editors ceased to be influential. Even though an editor might have felt uncomfortable about the content of a story, he

² John Murray, The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain (England: Edward Elgr Publishing Company, 1994) 39

or she could not change Glavlit's decision. Therefore, it can be said that the Soviet editors and journalists were not professional editors and journalists in the Western sense. They were trained as propagandists in universities, and in practice they consequently became the mouthpiece of the party. The major skills they learned were to formulate messages to influence the audiences in certain ways—to persuade, to elicit a particular response, and sometimes to deceive.³ There were two methods of media control. One was the censorship control; the other was nomenklatura control of personal. The close relationships between the party and media were just maintained by the nomenklatura system. “Nomenklatura” is a Russian word invented in the Soviet era to refer specifically to a small group of elite among the huge population of party members who enjoyed privileges as a ruling class. The nomenklatura system allowed the party to control the selection of candidates for administrative positions through stringent procedures. Accordingly, the press, as one of the organs of government, did not have rights to select editors. In each newspaper there were some important administrative positions, such as the editorial staff and the chief-editor that were filled by party appointments. For example, all editors of *Izvestiya (Informations)*, the second most authoritative paper, and the two directors of two national news agencies, *TASS* and *Novosti (News)*, were appointed this way. That was one major approach of government to control the news coverage.

2.1.1 The Print Media: Newspapers

³ Joseph Gibbs, Gorbachev's Glasnost: The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika (College Station : Texas A & M University Press, 1999) 4

Newspapers were traditionally the preferred medium of the Communist Party to promote the Soviet ideology. From the first day of the USSR, Lenin and his successors clearly knew how to make full use of newspapers as one of the most powerful instruments to protect and consolidate their authority. In 1990 there were more than 8,500 newspapers with combined circulations of 200 million copies and 5,200 magazines with annual printings of 3,700 million copies published in the Soviet Union, with an average of 400 copies per 1,000 of people.⁴

The content of the newspapers was dominated by communist slogans, ideological doctrines, and a large amount of official party news that was written in a strict, unattractive, and staid style. Censored by those loyal party members who always kept an eye on the newspaper articles, Soviet newspapers first had to be politically right. In the meantime, working within the frame of government, Soviet newspapers were also characterized by a firm hierarchical structure. All the newspapers were divided into three groups: central, republic and local. The central newspapers (See table 2), such as *Pravda (Truth)*, an organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee, and *Izvestia*, which emanated from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, were the bellwether for all important events, and the lower level newspapers had to follow them in reporting news. Before Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost the thousands of newspapers were not allowed to develop independent identities. The entire printing press was one of the ideological products in

⁴ Data source: Maria Agranovskaya, Yelena Bazhenova, Mikhail Valyayev and Yuri Veslinsky, ed. USSR Yearbook 1990 (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1990), 200.

the pipeline of the huge communist machine.

Table 2: Circulation of Leading Central Newspapers in 1985-1989
(in million copies)

Newspaper	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Argumenty I Fakty	1.4	1.9	3.2	9.1	20.5
Trud	16.7	18.2	18.2	19.0	19.8
Izvestia	6.7	6.9	8.0	10.4	10.1
Pravda	10.5	10.8	11.1	10.7	9.7
Komsomolskaya Pravda	13.2	14.6	17.0	17.6	17.6

Source: USSR Yearbook 1990 (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1990)

2.1.2 Broadcasting: Radio and Television

From the early days of the Soviet Union, the development of the broadcasting system was considered by the Soviet leaders as priority. Before TV came into popularity, radio monopolized the broadcasting arena. Like all the other ideological tools, radio attempted to instill in the population a sense of duty and loyalty to the party and state. In 1990, radio broadcasts covered all of the Soviet territory and totaled more than 1,400 hours daily. The All-Union Radio broadcasted an average of 132 hours a day in eight main channels and in 67 languages of Soviet nationalities. Radio broadcasting was completely controlled by the state.⁵

On the other hand, television, also completely state-owned, had quickly grown during the 1970s. In 1988 approximately 75 million households owned television sets, and an estimated 93 percent of the population watched televisions.⁶ Moscow, the base from which most of the television stations broadcasted, transmitted some 90 percent

⁵ Maria Agranovskaya, USSR Yearbook 1990, 201.

⁶ Maria Agranovskaya, 202.

of the country's programs, with the help of more than 350 local stations and nearly 1,400 relay facilities. Until the end of the 1980s, television broadcasts were conducted in 45 different languages for a total of 4,000 hours a day. Central Television broadcast in 13 channels an average of 150 hours each day.⁷ Television began to replace the press as the main source of news and information for the Soviet population. However, almost every television program tried to include an ideological theme. Televised propaganda bombarded viewers in many forms. TV programs, like "Winner in Socialist Emulation" and "How to Put Your Heart into Your Work," encouraged the audience to improve the construction of socialism. Patriotic films that portrayed Soviet victories during World War II, such as "Ballad of a Soldier" and "Six o'clock in the Evening after the War," were also very popular. The Soviet leaders took great advantage of television's popular appeal to achieve their own political aims. Gorbachev was an example. He always used television as a useful channel to reach the population with his speeches and public relations campaigns. This trend accelerated during the final five years of the 1980s, which was the high point of a famous reform: glasnost. Gorbachev's glasnost loosened the original ideological control to television from the party and the government. From another angle, television, to a large extent, promoted the glasnost campaign, which began the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

2.2 The Contribution of the Media to the Demise of the USSR

In retrospect, when the hammer and sickle flag was lowered over Red Square, a

⁷ Maria Agranovskaya, 202

previously mighty empire passed into history and left a question that continues to generate debate: What role did media play in the collapse of communism? Two main trends interacted with each other in the process. One was the Gorbachev's glasnost; the other was the awakening of self-identification of Soviet media professionals.

In 1985, Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the CPSU, which marked the beginning of perestroika and glasnost and the collapse of the Soviet Union. At 54, Gorbachev was considered a young man full of potential and eager to revitalize the sluggish Soviet system, especially the economy and society. He presented his country with two main reform ideas: perestroika and glasnost. The former referred to restructuring the economy and social institutions and the latter referred to the policy of openness or transparency. Just as the economic reform—perestroika—aimed to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a so-called decentralized market-oriented economy, glasnost tried to cure the “tumor” that existed for a long time in the Soviet media. The main goals of this policy were to make the country's management transparent and open to debate, and to change the former situation in which major political and management decisions were made by a narrow circle of apparatchiks and were beyond criticism. To a large extent, Gorbachev's policy of using the media to make information available on some controversial issues, in order to provoke public discussion, did challenge government and party bureaucrats, and mobilize greater support for his policy of perestroika.

The first signal of the beginning of the glasnost campaign was the 1986 Chernobyl crisis, which overtook the official announcement of glasnost, scheduled for

the mid-1986. On April 26, 1986, a reactor explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, located in northern Ukraine, covered Belorussia, the Baltics, parts of Russia, and Scandinavia with a cloud of radioactive dust. Unexpectedly, Gorbachev, the outstanding proponent of glasnost, chose to be silent for eighteen days before addressing the nation about the nuclear disaster. There are many conjectures about the reasons of Gorbachev's silence. Several books written in the early years of glasnost provide modest insight into the Chernobyl catastrophe. Among those are *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), by Scott Shane, a Moscow correspondent for Baltimore Sun; *Uncovering Soviet Disasters: Exploring the Limits of Glasnost* (Boston: Little Brown, 1988), by James Oberg, a space scientist. Zhores Medvedev's chapter "Chernobyl: A Catalyst for Change," in *Milestones in Glasnost and Perestroika*, edited by A. Hewett and Victor H. Winston, argues that Gorbachev's relatively weak position in the Politburo at the time prevented him from acting forcefully or quickly. Brian McNair also supported this point of view in his book *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991). Nevertheless, without considering those guesses, if the short silence of Gorbachev could be described as the brief darkness before the dawn, then the Chernobyl explosion was just the fuse for the explosion of glasnost, which Gorbachev for months had been preaching in his nation's affairs. Before Chernobyl, the world still wondered how serious Gorbachev was about glasnost. Undoubtedly, the explosion at Chernobyl was a clear turning point. The disaster was too big to deny. The causes too clearly pointed to the fundamental failures of the Soviet system of

government—the bureaucracy, the incompetence, the technological inferiority.

Gorbachev seemed to have recognized this and decided that it was time to admit the country's shortcomings—not all of them, but at least the ones it couldn't deny.

Therefore, after May 6, 1986 when the Kremlin held a news conference to officially reveal the causes and the consequences of the explosion, the initial silence was broken, followed by complete honesty and unparalleled information of the likes of which had never been seen in the USSR before.

Then, as its name implies, glasnost gave new freedoms to the people, such as the freedom of speech. Criticizing the government and the party was no longer a “mission impossible.” Meanwhile, there was also greater speech freedom within the media. In the domain of broadcasting, television began reporting more openly the socio-economic processes taking place in Soviet society. It moved from an informative approach towards problem reports, “round-table” formats, commentary, and phone-in programs. The programs in the series “Problems-Questions-Solutions” held discussions between ministers and heads of government departments and a multimillion audience of viewers. They discussed ways of improving the Soviet economy and of solving topical social problems. After such discussions there were tens of thousands of letters and thousands of phone calls from viewers all of which were left unanswered.

Another sign of more openness was the rewriting of the party history with greater fidelity to the facts. Getting rid of the veil of propagandists and agitators, the Soviet media challenged the distortion of history and presented the true face of the

Communist Party to the public. Naturally, many ideological issues previously off limits could be openly discussed. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, the previously sacrosanct idol highly adored in Soviet society, was questioned and challenged for the first time. In June 1988 a leading Soviet journalist, writing in the monthly magazine *Novyi Mir*⁸ (*New World*), pointed out that Lenin personally justified the use of state terror in managing the Soviet system. To some degree, the reappraisal of Lenin reflected the extent to which Soviet media could tell the truth about the past. And in the following years criticizing the previous leaders in newspapers and magazines became more and more common. On January 4, 1990 the literary bimonthly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*)⁹ asserted that Stalin ordered Trotsky's murder in 1940. One month later, on February 3 *Argumenty i Fakty* (*Arguments and Facts*)¹⁰ published Roy Medvedev's estimate of 40 million victims under Stalin, including 20 million dead.

In late 1987, the new head of the Soviet Writers' Union, Daniil Granin visited the United States, to promote Gorbachev's glasnost. During his visit, he argued that "One fine day after Gorbachev came to power, censorship was abolished." He also

⁸ *Novyi Mir* (*New World*), one of the most controversial and often original literary reviews, attracted widespread readership among the intelligentsia. The monthly publication reached nearly 2 million readers and concentrated on new prose, poetry, criticism, and commentary.

⁹ The literary bimonthly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*) disseminated the views of the Union of Writers and contained authoritative statements and perspectives concerning literature, plays, cinema, and literary issues of popular interest.

¹⁰ *Argumenty i Fakty* (*Arguments and facts*, commonly abbreviated "AiF") is a weekly newspaper based in Moscow and a publishing house in the Russian Federation and worldwide now. It was founded in 1978 by the Russian organization "Knowledge" to provide propagandists with statistical and other hard-to-find information. In 1980 *AiF* was transformed into a weekly but was not in wide circulation. It was available only by subscription to a closed circle of political people. After 1985, it was one of the leading publications in the glasnost campaign.

added, “It is the first time in the history of Russia, not only the Soviet Union¹¹”

Although Granin exaggerated the real effects of Gorbachev with an intention to narrow the gap between Soviet and Western conceptions of news values, the relaxation of information censorship under glasnost resulted in the Communist Party’s losing its absolute status in Soviet media. For example, to challenge the foundations of censorship, Gorbachev first began to undermine the authority of the Union of Writers to determine which works were appropriate for publication. Officials from the Union were required to place works directly in the open market and to allow these works to be judged according to reader preferences, thereby removing the barrier between writer and reader and marking the beginning of the end of the party censorship. Moreover, many long-banned works were published in popular magazines. A literary commission was set up to oversee Boris Pasternak’s publications, which effectively gave the green light to his famous novel *Doctor Zhivago*, banned since 1957. The leading journals, such as *Novyi Mir*, *Znamia (Knowledge)* and Moscow’s illustrated bimonthly magazine *Ogonyok (Little Fire)*,¹² became the beacon of cultural independence.¹³ In October 1990 *Novyi Mir* even serialized works by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.¹⁴

¹¹ Lucy Komisar, “One Fine Day After Gorbachev Came to Power,” [Christian Science Monitor](#), 29 December 1987: 3

¹² *Ogonyok (Little Fire)*, a weekly that became more popular in the late 1980s because of its insightful political exposes, human interest stories, serialized features, and pictorial sections, had an audience of over 2 million people.

¹³ Neil Cornwell, “Soviet Literature – Glasnost,” [The Literary Encyclopedia](#). University of Bristol, 25 Feb. 2021. <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=1592>>

¹⁴ On July 3, 1990, *Litturnaia Gazeta* reports that Union of Soviet Writers had reinstated Aleksandr

The declaration of glasnost also led to a fundamental change in the content of the media. After the standard control mechanisms of Glavlit and Agitprop were eliminated by glasnost, journalists started to enjoy independent authority; the editors gradually secured greater discretion over the “sensitive content.” Before the glasnost campaign, the functions of the Soviet media were to provide official truths, to channel criticism in an appropriate way and to motivate people to participate in government-initiated campaigns and development plan. Thus, it determined that media should only be allowed to report on the positive news of the social life, the achievements of the social construction. Any “bad news,” which reflected the dark side of the Communist Party and Soviet society, was cleansed by the censorship agency from the public eyes. However, the seemingly peaceful and thriving world created by the self-deceiving party leaders was like a sea with a quiet surface carrying a powerful emotional undercurrent that inspired soviet people to ponder the frailties of communism ideology. For instance, in the 1960s the Soviet planners had ignored the fact that Central Asia represented a closed, finely balanced watershed and arbitrarily diverted the rivers to turn steppes and deserts into a huge cotton plantation, draining away so much water that the rivers were nearly dry on their lower courses. With the implementation of the glasnost policy, the debates about this huge ecological disaster, which had taken place only in journals or in closed meetings, were exposed to the public. In general, problems such as poor housing, alcoholism, drug abuse, pollution,

Solzhenitsyn, whom it expelled in 1969. For details, see Alan Pollard, ed., USSR: Facts and Figures Annual, vol. 14, (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1990) 350. On August 16 1991, President Gorbachev restored citizenship of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and 20 other Soviets exiled between 1996 and 1988. For details, see Alan Pollard, ed., USSR: Facts and Figures Annual, vol. 15, (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1991) 404.

outdated Stalinist-era factories, and petty to large-scale corruption, all of which the official media had ignored, received increased attention. At the same time the trust in mass media among the population also increased relevantly. Newspaper and magazine circulation exploded. The magazine *Ogonyok* more than doubled its subscribers from 1.35 million to over 3 million.¹⁵

On August 1, 1990, the main body responsible for censoring the press, Glavlit, was formally abolished. It was replaced by the short-lived “Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Mass Media (GUOT).” With the Soviet media opening up without strict ideological censorship, more and more secret political events that had been long denied by the government were also brought into the spotlight. Media reports openly attacked the CPSU as a whole, criticized the military, and exposed crimes committed by Stalin and the Soviet regime, such as Gulags and the Great Purges ignored by the official media. On March 22, 1991, *Izvestia* reported that historian Natalia Lebedeva concluded from documents in the Soviet central and military archives that Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (Peoples’ Commissariat of Internal Affairs, commonly abbreviated NKVD) murdered up to 15,000 Polish officers in Katyn Forest in April-May, 1940. She implicated dozens of Soviet police, army and government officials, including Stalin and Beria. Three prison camps were emptied of Poles to make room for Baltic deportees.

These reports not only damaged the credibility of the Soviet government

¹⁵ Paul Quinn-Judge, “Outspoken Soviet Publication Pusher for Independence,” [Christian Science Monitor](#), 23 December 1988: 9.

incrementally but also at the same time increased the dissatisfaction among the population. The ingrained faith of the public in communism and Soviet society was undermined and the Communist Party's social foundation was also eroded gradually. With all these unbelievable truths coming out piece by piece, the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable.

In fact, glasnost proved to be a double-edged sword¹⁶. At the beginning of glasnost, Gorbachev tried to reform the institutions within the frame of Communist theory. Nevertheless, the outcome of the reforms was far beyond the anticipation of its inventor. Gorbachev probably never forecast that the haphazard use of glasnost finally would threaten his own ability to command and direct the whole country. That was also why the most Westerners puzzled over whether the Kremlin leader really hoped to open the Soviet society to the outside world.¹⁷ In fact, Gorbachev himself was ambivalent. He was first a leader of the Communist Party, who was educated and trained to be loyal to his belief. Thus, when he felt the situation would be out of control, he tried to slow down the speed of reforms. On October 14, 1990, Gorbachev met with the representatives of Soviet editors. At a meeting where he complained about press criticism, Gorbachev singled out Vladislav Starkov, editor of the newspaper *Aegumenty i Fakty*, which had published a popularity poll on members of the Supreme Soviet. On the same day CPSU ideology chief Vadim Medvedev ordered

¹⁶ Joseph Gibbs, Gorbachev's Glasnost: the Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika, 90

¹⁷ Thomas M. Magstadt, "Gorbachev and Glasnost—a New Soviet Order? Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy," Cato Policy Analysis No. 177 (March 20, 1989)

the dismissal of Starkov. Starkov was one of millions of Soviet media professionals. Before the reforms they were “Puppet Pinocchios,” who were manipulated by the party and government. Nevertheless, Pinocchio was more than a puppet. He was trying to leave the realm of puppetry, to escape from its emotional manipulation and control, and to become a truly free soul. So were the media professionals in USSR. Inspired by Gorbachev’s glasnost, their potential consciousness to be a “Fourth Estate,” or a powerful watchdog in liberal democracy, revealing abuses of state authority and defending the democratic rights of citizens, was gradually awakened.

From the time when Gorbachev first introduced the vanguard reforms into Soviet society until the date when the Soviet empire disappeared from the planet, it was only six years. For different people, six years could be very short or could be very long. But for the Soviet people, its meaning cannot be measured by time units. The impact was huge; the outcome was incredible. The glasnost, the openness of information, played the significant part as the key catalyst in the whole process of the USSR’s collapse. It not only accelerated the demise of the rotten system, but also, to a large extent, hastened the maturing of the Soviet media professionals. Different from the Western counterparts who could fully enjoy democracy and the freedom of speech, Soviet media practitioners had to deal with the pressures both from the party and the government. However, their potential to be professional media practitioners, their potential ability to assume the responsibility of the “Fourth Estate” never faded as time passed. Like the winter seeds hibernating underground waiting for the coming spring to sprout, the Soviet media practitioners also expected to be freed from the

fetters of Soviet doctrines. Glasnost was just their chance of renaissance.

Overall, the traditional communist media theory prevented the Russian media from being independent. And Soviet journalists and editors played a role as the propagandist organs of the Communist Party. Fortunately, healed by the Gorbachev's glasnost, during the last few years of the Soviet empire the Soviet mass media began to enjoy the independence and freedom. This period lasted until 1992. The following chapter will first describe this short period from 1991 to 1992.

CHAPTER III

POST-SOVIET MEDIA

The key words of the period from 1991 to 1996 were “Opportunities” and “Challenges.” For the Russian media, “Opportunities” meant that it was time to become independent and it was time to take its position as the “Fourth Estate,” with executive, legislative and judicial powers. However, “Challenges” to media came, on the one hand, from economic difficulties and, on the other hand, from the increasing power of the president. This chapter describes the formation and the development of the Russian media, and the major difficulties confronted by the Russian media during the first five years of the Russian Federation. It includes two sections. The first presents the short golden age of the Russian media from 1991 to 1992. The second concentrates on the next four-year period, which emphasizes the growth of the sustainable prosperity of the Russian media and the challenges from the economic difficulties and political powers at the same time.

There are also two major cases to be analyzed: one is the first Chechnya war; the other is the 1996 presidential election. The former case demonstrates that the professionalism of the Russian media professionals attained a high level as its Western counterparts did. The latter case indicates the decline of Russian media independence.

3.1 The Short Golden Age of the Russian Media (1991~1992)

In the era of the Soviet Union access to information was severely restricted. Aiming to manipulate the mass media as the most important ideological weapon, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) established full-scale political guidelines for media and successfully controlled the public this way for 70 years. However, in early 1990s, with the regime changing from the original communist dictatorship to the so-called capitalist democracy, a revolution in the media industry was triggered by the glasnost.

Firstly, at the federal level press law emphasized the independence of the Russian mass media. The Russian media law signed by President Boris Yeltsin on December 27, 1991, significantly guaranteed the media freedom and prohibited censorship. This law was regarded as one of the greatest achievements in Yeltsin's position. It provided for the registration of newspapers or broadcasting media, although with a right of appeal to the courts if registration was refused. It forbade censorship or the establishment or financing of any censorship agency. The law also forbade the closing down of any media outlet except by order of a court after due warning. Simultaneously, because property rights were not clearly mentioned in the law, the new Russian media seemed to be completely free from any power.¹⁸ The sudden and unprecedented freedom gave the Russian media practitioners multiple paths to the future, such as imitating the Western media system and cultivating their own Russian-portrait media. Ivan Zassoursky pointed out that from the year 1991 to

¹⁸ Kaarle Nordenstreng, Elena Vartanova and Yassen Zassoursky, Russian Media Challenge (Helsinki: Kikumora Publication, 2001) 74

1992, “Russian media landscape started to change and global media culture was introduced to Russian audience.”¹⁹ During this short period, the theme was the privatization of media, accompanied by the trend of learning from Western journalism.

The commonly accepted definition of privatization is the process of moving from a government-controlled system to a privately run, for-profit system. Privatization of the Russian media clearly reflected some ideas listed above. The media organs started to operate as commercial enterprises. The changes in the operation mechanism from state-owned to privately-owned determined the changes in the contents and style of news reporting. The whole industry of mass media, which had been basically an ideological propaganda organ, began to deal more with diversified information rather than the dull predictable articles. At the same time the global media culture also infiltrated into Russian society following by the media privatization. It directly and delicately influenced the Russian media practitioners by teaching them about the markets of news and advertising.²⁰

Media privatization first happened in the arena of print. The first independent newspaper—*Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Newspaper)*, which was launched in 1990 by chief-editor Vitaliy Tretyakov and a group of young journalists—fostered the first wave of media privatization. It was followed by the establishment of several

¹⁹ Ivan Zassoursky, “Russian Media in the Nineties: driving factors of change, actors, strategies and results,” *The Project: Transformation and Globalization: Driving Actors and Factors of Post-Soviet Change*, (Berlin: Freie University, 2000)

²⁰ Ivan Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2004) 35

national daily newspapers—such as *Obshchaya Gazeta (Communal Newspaper)*²¹, published in 1991—which were forced to close in the Soviet era, and some new formats of newspapers like weekly business newspaper *Kommersant (Businessman)*, *Economicheskaya Gazeta (Economic Newspaper)*, and tabloids *Megapolis-Ekspres (Metropolitan Express)*. Take *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* as an example. Inspired by the French newspaper *Le Monde*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was characterized by its emphasis on exhaustive reporting, by its presentation of different viewpoints, by its diversified editorial board and also by its pure independence not only from those people in power, but also from the political opposition.²² Its staff mainly consisted of journalists and editors who came from the small-circulation and even underground publications in the former USSR era. Therefore, they were more courageous in news coverage than the journalists trained by Soviets media theory were. After its first issue appeared on December 21, 1990, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* immediately became popular in many Russian cities. The emergence of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* implied two things: first, media privatization created a good environment for Russian media practitioners to cultivate their responsibility to the public as the “Fourth Estate;” second, the Russian media embraced the opportunities and challenges of the global media culture. Another

²¹ *Obshchaya Gazeta* was created in August 1991, bringing together the editorial teams of several newspapers that were banned during the abortive coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Throughout the Boris Yeltsin era, it maintained a reputation for principled liberal criticism, reporting aggressively on the controversial issues of Chechnya, state corruption, and privatization. During the 1996 presidential election campaign, when virtually all the country’s media—including NTV and the rest of Gusinsky’s empire—thoroughly disgraced themselves in their eagerness to support Yeltsin’s re-election, Yakovlev’s *Obshchaya Gazeta* quixotically endorsed Yabloko leader Grigori Yavlinskii. More details see Robert Coalson, “*Banditry as usual?*” (RFE/RL Newswire, 12 June 2002)

²² Ivan Zssoursky summarizes the four major traits of the newspaper: 1. Full information; 2. Free commentary and presentation of all points of view; 3. “No” to editorials with a “united opinion”; 4. Independence, and not only from those in power. (Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, 38)

example reflecting the openness of the Russian media is that in 1992 Dutchman Dirk Sauer began publishing the *Moscow Times*, the first independent English-language newspaper in Russia, laying the foundation of the future Independent Media Publishing House.

In the broadcasting system, although the trend of privatization was not as notable as it was in the printing media, there were still some breakthroughs. In the first place, both TV and radio learned to operate in a market economy. The advertisements became a major source of revenue and investment. In December 1991, Sergey Lysovski and Vladimir Zhechkov registered the Premier SV Advertising Association. The other twelve advertising firms, including RO (Advertising Association) Aurora, LIS'S, and TISSA, joined the association as partners.²³ Secondly, several gigantic state-owned television centers were also established. In May 1991, the All-Russian State Television and Radio Company (VGTRK), established in 1990, began full broadcasting. On December 27, 1991, by presidential decree, the government established the Ostankino State Radio and Television Company. In May 1992, Mikhail Lesin, Oganeg Sobolev and some powerful political figures founded the national advertising agency Video International Production Company. The establishment of state-controlled television centers and advertising agency implied that from the beginning Russian media reform could not get rid of the influence of the state and the government. It also implied that Russian media could

²³ Andrei Knyazev, "Who owns Russia: Russian Mass Media 1991-2000," Kommersant, 18 December 2001 <<http://www.compromat.ru/main/top50/smi01.htm>>

not be entirely independent from any political power, even though during the best period of their development.

Undeniably, the earlier years of the 1990s were significantly different from any period of the Russian media history. Released from the strict control of the old regime, journalists for the first time fully enjoyed independence and the media professionalism was awakened, and finally reached an unparalleled level. Moreover, with the first wave of media privatization thriving, the Russian media were also inclined to embrace the global media culture, particularly Western news values and presentation style. Nevertheless, the emergence of the state-controlled broadcasting organs, to some extent, counteracted the privatization's positive contribution to media freedom.

3.2 The Continuing Prosperity of Russian Media and the Challenges confronted by the Russian media (1992~1996)

During this period, the country continued to experience the precious media freedom. Although the economic realities severely hit the newly born media, the Russian media were still independent from government and state. The media practitioners maintained the high level of media professionalism, which culminated with the campaign against the first Chechnya war. At the same time, when the Russian media experienced a metamorphosis from the communist propaganda to the Western-style new media, it also struggled to live between "scissors-blades." One was the pressure coming from the dismal economic situation. The other was the pressure from the rising power of Yeltsin who intervened into the media affairs by using

political power. In fact, Russian media themselves were contradictory. On one hand, they wanted to be independent from any power. On the other hand, Russian media had to compromise with a complicated political situation. The 1996 presidential election was a good example of this awkward position of Russian media.

3.2.1 The Persistence of Media independence

The media privatization continued to deepen not only in the press, but also in broadcasting. Media independence was still the theme of this period, which was strongly strengthened by the diversification of media structure, media operation and media ownerships.

According to Dr. Ivan Zassourasky, the central press was split into three camps: democratic press, opposition press and new publications.²⁴ All of them had their own viewpoints about media responsibility to society. At the regional level, due to the rising cost of delivering the central newspaper to the region, the original hierarchy relation between the central and the regional press was loosened. The regional authorities started to develop their own newspapers and journals that more concentrated on the key economic and ethical local issues. The regional press also kept a distance from political issues. The clear differences between the center and periphery created a good environment for maintaining media freedom.

In the broadcasting system, television channels and radio stations had initiated their privatization process in the year 1993. In October 1993, the independent

²⁴ The representatives of democratic press are the long-traditional newspapers, like *Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. The oppositional press mainly refers to *Pravda* and *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. The new publications are *Nezavisimaya gazeta* and *Kommersant*. (Zassoursky, Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia, 24)

commercial television company NTV (Independent Television) made its debut with a broadcast of “Itogi” (Summary) on the fifth channel in St. Petersburg. The creation of the TV company was financed by a consortium consisting of Most Group, the Stolichny (Capital) and National Credit banks. NTV became the first private national channel in Russia. At the end of 1993, the radio station Ekho Moskvyy (Moscow Echo)²⁵ obtained a credit line from Most Bank in exchange for 51 percent of its shares. One year later, Yeltsin signed a decree privatizing the formerly Ostankino National Broadcasting Company and transforming it into a shareholding company jointly owned by the state and the private sectors.²⁶ Simultaneously, this new company was renamed as Obshchestvennoye Rossiyskoye Televideniye (Russian Public Television, commonly abbreviated “ORT”). In November 1994, the controlling block of shares was assigned to the state represented by the State Commission for the Management of State Property (GKI). And the remaining shares were divided among four banks—MENATEP, Stolichny, Russian Credit, and Inkombank—and two other companies, AO Aeroflot-Russian International Airlines and AO AvtoVAZ²⁷. The rapid development of private commercial television and radio companies infused new blood into the original mainly state-controlled broadcasting system and offered media practitioners more opportunities to consolidate the media independence. The media

²⁵ Ekho became famous in 1991 after reporting on events in Vilnius, i.e., the storming of the TV tower, and the August putsch in Moscow.

²⁶ Terhi Rantanen, The Global and the National—Media and Communications in Post-Communist Russia (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002) 28

²⁷ Andrei Knyazev, “Who owns Russia: Russian Mass Media 1991-2000,” Kommersant, 18 December 2001 <<http://www.compromat.ru/main/top50/smi01.htm>>

practitioners still maintained a high level of media professionalism that culminated with the campaign against the first Chechnya war.

3.2.2 First Chechnya War

If the golden period from 1991 to 1992 was the honeymoon of the media and the government, then the first Chechnya war was the symbol of their “divorce.” After Yeltsin launched the war in Chechnya, the alliance between the press and the government fell apart.

The Chechnya war started in 1994. Yeltsin had hoped to use the victory to defeat political opponents and to win the 1996 presidential election. However, the reality disappointed him. On the contrary, the Chechnya war became a stain in his political affairs and almost made him lose the 1996 election²⁸. Although the Russian forces maintained the overwhelming military superiority, they were unable to control Chechnya efficiently. Widespread demoralization of the Russian forces and the deaths of thousands of civilians compelled Yeltsin to declare a unilateral cease-fire in 1995 and to begin withdrawing troops a year later.

During the entire two-year period, the Russian media played a leading role in presenting the real face of the war to the public. For the most part, the Russian media operated freely in reporting on the Chechen conflict despite government pressure. Although the government produced its own information as it did in other wars such as Afghanistan, this kind of information was not suitable for the rapidly developed and

²⁸ The president’s rating early in 1996 stood in the region of 6 to 10 percent, the lowest at any time up to the 1996 election. (Zassoursky, Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia, 62)

highly competitive new information market.²⁹ Moreover, the independent media such as NTV and ORT questioned official information and figures.³⁰ Journalists tried to provide balanced coverage for both sides. That was why many Russian journalists went to report from the Chechen side. They told the public that Chechens were not only bearded fighters with green headbands, but also the main victims of the attacks. However, officials were outraged by this kind of reporting. They considered journalists who contacted with the Chechen rebels to be accomplices of terrorists. NTV was a case in point. Its bold coverage and the influence of its pictures established its creditability and a “counter-authority” image among the Russian people. As a result, NTV almost lost its broadcasting license over its unflattering coverage of the Chechen war.³¹ The gap between the government and the mass media was deepening as the war stretched on.

In a word, the first Chechnya war was a sign. On the one hand, it showed the media responsibility to the public as the “Fourth Estate.” As a result, according to Ellen Mickiewicz, the conflict in Chechnya finally spelled the end of the old Soviet media system.³² On the other hand, the First Chechnya war also presented the

²⁹ Ellen Mickiewicz, Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 244

³⁰ Rafail Ovsepyan, authoritative historian of the Soviet press, pointed out that the official reports concealed the heavy losses suffered by the Russian army in military engagements with Chechen armed formations. However, the mass media used their right of free expression to the fullest. For more, see Rafail Ovsepyan, Istoriya noveyshey otechestvennoy zhurnalistiki: perekhodnyy period (seredina 80-k- 90-ie gody) [The History of the New National Journalism: Transition Period (the Mid-80s to the 90s)] (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1996) 100.

³¹ There were also threats by First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets to pull the license without legal bias. (Ellen Mickiewicz, Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia , 246.)

³² Ellen Mickiewicz, 244.

conflicts between the government and media, which will be analyzed in detail below.

3.2.3 Difficulties Undermined Media Freedom

Although the theme of this period was media independence, many severe problems also challenged media freedom.

To begin with, the Russian economy underwent stress as it transformed from a centrally planned economy to a free market system in the earlier years of the 1990s. Shock therapy, one of the most radical economic policies, to some extent, speeded up the Russian economic transition by allowing prices to balance off supply and demand pressures. However, it also shook the economic foundation of Russian society and led to the first financial crisis after the collapse of the USSR. As one part of the social transition, the Russia media reform also suffered economic difficulty. For instance, by the end of 1992 most publications operated at a loss and a sharp decline in circulation (For details, see table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Newspaper Circulation Changes 1991~1992
(in thousand copies)

Name of Publication	Number of Copies as of 1 Jan. 1991	Copies as of 1 Nov. 1991	Percentage Change in circulation, Jan.-Nov. 1991
Newspapers			
Izvestiya	3,872.9	2,781.1	-29%
Komsomolskaya Pravda	17,249.8	12,118.7	-30%
Nezavisimaya Gazeta	70.0	27.0	-61%
Moskovskiye Novosti	1,296.8	336.8	-74%
Sovetskaya Rossiya	1,321.4	780.1	-40%
Trud	18,291.9	12,320.0	-33%
Argumenty i Fakty	23,840.7	22,598.9	-5%
Magazines			

Novyi Mir	953.0	200.5	-79%
Ogonek	1723.0	1492.4	-14%
Znamya	397.3	183.8	-53%

Source: *Izvestia*, 18 Nov 1991, 2; *JPRS-UPA*, 10 Dec 1991, 50-51

A general problem faced by the newspapers and magazines was that they were unable to operate only by their own strength. To avoid shut down, they had to seek outside financial support, which came from two sides: One was government subsidies; the other was financial magnates. According to Andrei G. Richter, most publications willingly accepted state help, except for very few publications, such as *Moskovskiy Novosti* and *Kommersant*.³³ The newspaper *Izvestia* even received a huge building on Pushkin Square as a present from the Gaidar government. The few publications that rejected the government subsidies were all supported by powerful business groups (this point will be explained below). Supported by the government, the print media, though, could not survive the financial catastrophe. Because of the economic crisis, the government was unable to provide enough subsidies. The large amount spent on media subsidies strained the government budget. Therefore, the print press was gradually eclipsed by television, which became far more popular and attracted more investment. From the end of 1993 to the middle of 1995, the Russian information market was divided by the different business groups such as Media-Most, headed by Vladimir Gusinsky, and *Kommersant* Publishing House led by Yakovlovs, who created the daily newspaper *Kommersant* and *Moskovskiy Novosti*. Now it is not

³³ *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Kommersant*, and *Kuranty* have from the beginning categorically rejected any state help on the grounds that “the free press must save itself by its own means” (*Kommersant*, 11-18 June 1992). The others who have accepted government subsidies regarded themselves as “an indispensable informational and psychological support weapon of the reforms” (*Trud*, 21 January 1992). For more details, see Andrei G. Richter, “The Russian Press after Perestroika,” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 20 (1995).

difficult to understand why *Moskovskiye Novosti* and *Kommersant* from the very beginning rejected any help from the government. They had private financial magnates supporting their operation.

It is no doubt that due to the economic difficulties, it was hard for the Russian media to avoid political influence by the government when receiving its financial help. In the meantime, the government also learned that economic pressure provided as effective a tool for control over editorial policies as the ideological and political dictate exercised by communists. However, this effort was not strong enough to threaten the media freedom. Therefore, during this period the press could still criticize the government. On the other hand, the rising power of financial magnates limited the government's influence in media. They appeared as the opposite team that balanced the state-controlled media system. Media independence and the professionalism of journalist were valued by newly privatized media companies at that time.

Moreover, President Boris Yeltsin was also a potential threat to the Russian media freedom. Pushed by Yeltsin, the constitution passed in 1993 created a powerful presidency and endowed the president with sweeping powers to issue decrees. From then on, the President's ambition to intervene in media affairs was becoming far more obvious. Two edicts in December 1993 clearly showed Yeltsin's attempt to strengthen his own power in media. In only one month, Yeltsin finished a complete restructuring of state media in order to consolidate his authority over state television, to expand private access to television broadcasting, and to create a potentially powerful new media arbitration court.

The first decree was signed on December 22, 1993. According to it, the Federal Television and Radio Service of Russia³⁴ was founded. At the same time the Federal Service of Russia for Television and Radio Broadcasting was also created, which was directly led by Yeltsin himself. The Federal Television and Radio Broadcasting Service was responsible for both federal and regional broadcasting systems, and a Committee for the Press, which dealt with periodicals, publishing houses and the state inspectorate.³⁵ The aim to establish these two national media management bureaus was obvious. From then on the central government could effectively dominate the state-control media resource, including television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. And it meant that all the media resources were also relevantly collected in the hands of the President.

A December 29 edict from the Court of Appeals for Information Disputes under the President of the Russian Federation was linked explicitly to Articles 29 and 80³⁶ of the new constitution. The December 29 edict granted citizens the right to media freedom, made the President the guarantor of that freedom and created a new arbitration body under the President to resolve disputes over television coverage and access.³⁷ This decree gave the president a potentially great advantage over the other

³⁴ Monroe E. Price, Andrei Richter, and Peter K. Yu, "Russian Media Law and Policy in the Yeltsin Decade: Essays and Documents," Kluwer Law International 2002: 302-304

³⁵ "Yakovlev to Head Ostankino, Media Institutions Reshuffled," Post-Soviet Media Law & Policy Newsletter (Howard M. Squadron Program in Law Media & Society, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University and the Moscow media Law & Policy, 22 December 1993) Issue 3.

³⁶ According to Article 29, Freedom of mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited. According to Article 80, the President of the Russian Federation shall be a guarantor of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the rights and freedoms of the individual and the citizen.

³⁷ Monroe E. Price, 302-304

branches of government in determining the political slant and content of television programming.

Although the media practitioners still kept their independent position and the spontaneous privatization gave more opportunities to practice professionalism, the economic difficulties and political pressures, more or less, eroded Russian media independence. The complete media freedom from 1991 and 1992 was gradually weakened. According to the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization Freedom House's Annual Press Freedom Survey, the numerical rankings of Russia from 1992 to 1995 were 57, 46, 40, and 55, all in the "partly free" range³⁸.

3.2.4 1996 Presidential Election

The 1996 presidential election was a good lesson for Russian media professional to remember. Although there were many reasons that could explain the Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 such as the public fear the restoration of communism and the success of Yeltsin's campaign strategy, media support was widely regarded as the crucial factors in Yeltsin's re-election.

It is worth recalling how hopeless Yeltsin's candidacy appeared just six months before the presidential election. In December 1995 parliamentary elections,

³⁸ According to this annual survey, the examination of the level of press freedom in each country currently comprises 23 methodology questions divided into three broad categories: the legal environment, the political environment, and the economic environment. For each methodology question, a lower number of points is allotted for a more free situation, while a higher number of points is allotted for a less free environment. The diverse nature of the questions seeks to encompass the varied ways in which pressure can be placed upon the flow of information and the ability of print, broadcast, and Internet-based media to operate freely; in short, this survey seek to provide a picture of the entire "enabling environment" in which the media in each country operate. Each country is rated in these three categories, with the higher numbers indicating less freedom. A country's final score is based on the total of the three categories: a score of 0 to 30 places the country in the Free press group; 31 to 60 in the Partly Free press group; and 61 to 100 in the Not Free press group.

the pro-government movement “Our Home Is Russia” only gained 10 percent of the votes, but the Communist Party gained more than 22 percent.³⁹ Opinion polls showed Yeltsin’s approval rating in the single digits, and many Russian professional journalists at that time even ridiculed his prospects for the re-election. Nobody thought Yeltsin would be re-elected, even the President himself. However, a miracle happened. Yeltsin recognized that he would need media support in order to overcome these obstacles. Simultaneously, journalists were also understandably alarmed by the strong showing of the Communist Party in the parliamentary election. Yeltsin fully took advantage of the pessimistic mood of journalists who conceded to Yeltsin simply in order to prevent the loss of press freedom likely to follow communism’s return to power. Yeltsin also sought support from financial oligarchs who saw the media as a useful passport to politics and power in Russia under Yeltsin. Therefore, the oligarchs positively participated in the Yeltsin’s campaign and used the money and their influence in the public to “buy” the election for Yeltsin. It seemed that the straightforward pro-Yeltsin and anti-communist news coverage prevailed everywhere in the country overnight. Most criticism of the president disappeared entirely. Yeltsin’s heart problems were almost ignored in news reports, although journalists in Moscow were clearly aware of the worsening in the president’s health. However, on the other side, the coverage about the main communist competitor Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of Russian Federation, was highly critical and

³⁹ “Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1997 <<http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media/paper.asp>>

misleading. The Russian Public Television network even refused to air the final campaign advertisement produced by the Zyuganov campaign.⁴⁰

NTV is a useful example. As one of the biggest private television networks, NTV had a high reputation for credibility and accuracy with the viewers. Especially during the Chechen war, NTV was credited with reporting graphic from both sides of the conflict. Before the campaign, it was honored by its opposition to the authorities. At the beginning of the presidential campaign, the NTV's attitude towards Yeltsin's administration was negative. Not only did the commentators criticize the presidential administration for denying an NTV correspondent's access to a Kremlin press conference, but Igor Malashenko, president of NTV, even predicted that the authorities would not dare to embark on a "suicidal" course of threatening the media.⁴¹ However, less than a month later, Malashenko began working in close contact with Yeltsin's team. He explained that if the private media provided "unbiased, professional and objective" campaign coverage, Zyuganov would win the election, and journalists would lose their freedom permanently.⁴²

According to the report of European Institute for the Media, "the media bias was so pervasive that the 1996 presidential election was free, but not fair."⁴³ Given

⁴⁰ "Politicization and Self-Censorship," [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](#), 1997

⁴¹ "Politicization and Self-Censorship," [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](#), 1997.

⁴² "Politicization and Self-Censorship," 1997.

⁴³ For more details, see "Final Report on the Presidential Election," European Institution for the Media, 1996. Numerous specific examples of media bias can be found in OMRI Special Reports on the presidential election, May-July 1997<<http://www.omri.cz/Publications/RPE/Index.html>>

the special situation, the goal of media freedom could never be achieved as before due to the influences of competing powers. The media independence and freedom were too much treasured by the former propaganda workers of the Soviet Union, where the media was tightly controlled as a fundamental mechanism of ideological control. Thus, the Russian media professionals were much more inclined to compromise with the Yeltsin's administration which was expected to protect the media independence and freedom. This can also explain why the media became close allies with the Russian authorities from the start of Russian Federation.⁴⁴

In conclusion, this period from 1991 to 1996 was the most important time for the formation and the development of the Russian media. The Russian media experienced their one and the only one golden age after the collapse of the USSR. Although they were faced with the double pressures from the economic and political sides, the media independence and freedom were well protected by most of media practitioners. However, the Yeltsin victory in the 1996 election demonstrated that Russian media professionals could be mobilized to advance a particular political viewpoint. To a large extent Russian media professionals played a role as a truant. They shirked their duty as one of the "four powers." Nevertheless, at the same time, they also deserve sympathy. Since then the Russian mass media entered a new era that is marked by the prosperity of Russian media empire and the wane of the Russian media professionalism. The following chapter will describe how the big business

⁴⁴ Kaarle Nordenstreng, Elena Vartanova and Yassen Zassoursky, Russian Media Challenge, (Helsinki: Kikumora Publication, Series B: 20, 2001) 74.

moguls became powerful and how they worked with the politicians to prevent the emergence of the media as an effective independent force for the reform.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW MOGULS

During four years after the 1996 presidential election, Russian media changed dramatically. Yeltsin's election victory was a watershed. Before the election the Russian media were mostly independent and free. However, after the election they stepped into a new phase, which was defined by collusion of big business moguls and the Kremlin. This chapter includes three parts. In the first part, the rise and boom of the major media empires are described in detail. The second part focuses on the relationships between the major media empires and the government. The final part presents the split between them and considers the behind the scenes reasons.

4.1 The Boom of Russian Media Empires

Russian media had been faced with a dilemma since the demise of the Soviet Union. On one hand, they were thirsty for independence. Technically speaking, they were mature enough to be independent because of the high level of professionalism that they already attained. However, the problem was that this kind of professional, Western-style journalism in Russia had a very limited audience. As a result, few newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television networks were profitable. Given these circumstances, journalists who initially owned shares in these companies were forced to seek outside funding from banks, corporations and financial groups. This process accelerated after the 1996 presidential election. The government's flattering

attitude towards the financial groups offered shrewd businessmen a chance to put their feet in door of media. The earliest and most influential media groups were Gusinsky's Media-Most Holding Company (Media-Most) and Berezovsky's LogoVAZ Holding Company.

4.1.1 Gusinsky and his Media Most Holding Company

On January 27, 1997, Media-Most, the first Russian media empire was born. Its emergence was a significant step in the era of oligarch-controlled Russia. Its founder was the most famous banking and media magnate Vladimir Gusinsky, who personally owned about 70 percent of shares of this media company. The other three shareholders were Igor Malashenko, Yevgeny Kiselyov and Oleg Dobrodeyev, all of whom were the creators of the first private television network—NTV television network. Gusinsky, like other Russian oligarchs, came from the underground economy of the Soviet era. Grasping the chance of the USSR's demise, Gusinsky established his own media empire on the ruins of the old empire. Since 1989 when he opened Most, a consulting cooperation for foreign investors in Russia, he aimed to become the Russian version of Australian mogul "Rupert Murdoch."

Gusinsky's Media-Most was the flagship of the Russian media privatization. In February 1993, the first issue of the newspaper *Sevodnya (Today)* was published by Most Bank. During the same period, with the help of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, he successfully gained control of the television station Channel Four, an educational channel formerly controlled by the government. This television station later became NTV. The Most Bank also infused capital into the radio station Ekho Moskv

(Moscow Echo) to obtain 51 percent of its shares in the same year. In 1994, a new entertainment weekly, *Sem dnei* (*Seven days*) was created. And a publishing house with the same name was also founded. In March 1996, Gusinsky began to publish the magazine *Itogi* (*Summary*), with Sergei Parkhomenko as editor-in-chief. During the first Chechnya War from 1994 to 1996, NTV gained much more popularity among the population because of its probing coverage of the real situation in the battles, its caustic commentaries and its criticism of the Russian government.

After the 1996 presidential election Gusinsky altered his strategy subtly: he began to cooperate with politicians who could help him achieve his ambitious economic goals. Everything developed as Gusinsky predicted and arranged. NTV was even granted the right to broadcast nationwide⁴⁵ because of its “notable” contribution to Yeltsin’s victory in 1996 presidential election. What is more, Gusinsky also launched a satellite to increase the size of the audience and enlarge the influence of the NTV network. Until early 1999, the estimated audience of NTV was around 102 million. The station covered about 70 percent of Russia’s territory and it was received in other former Soviet republics including Belarus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and the Baltic states.

Table 4.1: the Business of the Most Media Empire (1993~2000)

Television	
NTV	The group controlled some 70 percent of NTV shares, including the satellite cable network NTV Plus. NTV was the most influential private television network that broadcasted nationwide. Its news

⁴⁵ Floriana Fossato and Anna Kachkaeva, “Russia: The Origins of Media Empires”, [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/03/F.RU.980313140126.asp), 18 March 1998

	broadcasts were more popular than those on other networks.
Radio	
Ekho Moskvyy	The group held a controlling stake.
Newspaper	
<i>Segodnya, Itogi, Sem Dney</i>	The publishing house named <i>Sem Dney</i> was fully controlled by the group. The daily newspaper <i>Segodnya</i> , the weekly <i>Itogi</i> and the entertainment weekly <i>Sem Dney</i> were all published by this publishing house.
<i>Obshchaya Gazeta</i>	The group invested in this weekly newspaper.
<i>Novaya Gazeta (New Gazette)</i>	The group invested in this weekly newspaper.
<i>Smena (Change)</i>	The group gave subsidies to this St. Petersburg daily.

Source: Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998⁴⁶.

4.1.2 Berezovsky and his Media Empire

Paul Klebnikov described Boris Berezovsky as the Godfather of the Kremlin.⁴⁷ He probably exaggerated the influence of the tycoon and his clan. However, the fact is that Russia’s decline was accompanied by Boris Berezovsky’s rise. Who is Boris Berezovsky? He held a PhD in mathematics and physics. He was the chief executive officer of the LogoVAZ industrial-financial group. He was one of the most dangerous rivals, who even made Gusinsky retreat. He was a close friend of Yeltsin and his family. He was a key member of a handful of insiders who controlled an unpredictable machine named Russia. And finally, he is just Boris Berezovsky, a

⁴⁶ Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998< <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media3/> >.

⁴⁷ Paul Klebnikov, Godfather of the Kremlin: Boris Berezovsky and the Looting of Russia (New York: Harcourt, Inc. 2000)

symbol of Russia's oligarch era.

Berezovsky founded his empire from scratch, beginning in business selling and importing automobiles. His company LogoVAZ owned the exclusive dealer contract with the state auto manufacturer AvtoVAZ, which helped him make his first millions. In the meantime, he also entered on the air and oil industry, with the large stake of the Russian airline Aeroflot and the oil company Sibneft. However, he was never satisfied with his role as a successful entrepreneur. He wanted to be more powerful and influential. He diversified his holdings not only in the area of natural resources but also expanded them into media. Due to the close relationship with the national leader Yeltsin, he gained the ownership of ORT, the state's largest and most influential television network. With voting control of 36 percent of ORT's shares, he effectively ran ORT.⁴⁸ At the same time, he took the control of other media outlets, such as the private TV6 channel, the weekly magazine *Ogonyok (Little Fire)* and the prestigious daily newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Newspaper)*. In 1997 Berezovsky also allegedly negotiated to acquire a controlling stake in the Kommersant Publishing House that produced the daily *Kommersant (Businessmen)*, the weeklies *Vlast (Estate)* and *Dengi (Money)* and the entertainment magazines *Domovoi (Goblin)* and *Avtopilot (Automatic Pilot)*.

Table 4.2: The Business of LogoVAZ Industrial-Financial Group (1993~2001)

Television	
ORT	The group owned 8 percent of ORT and also maintains control over some top ORT managers, who formerly were top

⁴⁸ Paul Klebnikov, 169

	LogoVAZ managers. Obedinionny Bank, which was affiliated with LogoVAZ, is part of a consortium of four banks that own 38 percent of ORT.
TV6	The group owned 37 percent of shares.
Magazine	
Ogonyok	The group owned the controlling shares in this weekly.
Matador	An entertainment magazine
Newspapers	
<i>Novye Izvestia (Latest News)</i>	The group helped finance the creation of this new daily.
<i>Obshchaya Gazeta</i>	The group financed this weekly newspaper.
<i>Nezavisimaya Gazeta</i>	The group had a controlling stake in the daily through Obedinionny Bank.

Source: Floriana Fossato, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998⁴⁹.

4.1.3 Gazprom Media Holding Company

Faced with the thriving of Gusinsky’s and Berezovsky’s empires, other gigantic industrial companies also threw their attention to the media industry. Gazprom was among them. This Russian joint-stock company was founded in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on November 5, 1992 and the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation on February 17, 1993. It came into the spotlight when it announced the creation of a new subsidiary, Gazprom Media Holding on December 27, 1997.

After Viktor Ilyushin, previously in charge of relations with the media for Gazprom, was appointed to his new post as the head of Gazprom Media Holding, Gazprom started to accelerate the process of building the largest media holdings in

⁴⁹ Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998< <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media3/> >.

Russia. At the time when the company was set up, Gazprom owned the Prometei TV and Radio Company (Prometheus TV and Radio Company), a controlling block of shares in the newspaper *Rabochaya tribuna (Worker's Tribune)*, 3 percent in ORT, 30 percent of the shares of NTV and shares of a large number of regional media.

According to incomplete statistics⁵⁰, until 1997 Gazprom had subsidized or invested in 29 newspapers and television stations. During Yeltsin's era, Gazprom was not as prominent and flamboyant as Media Most or Berezovsky's empire, but it still exert a great influence in re-mapping the Russian media landscape. The existence of Gusinsky and Berezovsky, to some degree, eclipsed the prosperity of Gazprom Media. However, due to this media situation Gazprom Media Holding could save its strength and avoided becoming the target of the new President Vladimir Putin in later years. From this point of view, Gazprom was one who got the last laugh.

Table 4.3: The Major Business of Gazprom Natural Gas Monopoly in Media (1992~1999)

Television	
NTV	Gazprom owned 30 percent stake.
ORT	Gazprom owned 3 percent shares
Prometei	Prometei was a TV production project Gazprom promoted based in Moscow. Gazprom also developed a regional project based on gas sector resources in the regions.
Newspapers	
<i>Pabochaya Tribuna</i>	Gazprom had the controlling stake in this daily newspaper.
<i>Trud (Labor)</i>	Gazprom gave the subsidies to this daily.
<i>Komsomolskaya Pravda (Komsomol)</i>	Before March 1997, the company gave

⁵⁰ David Hoffman, "Powerful Few Rule Russian Mass Media," Washington Post Foreign Service, 31 March 1997: A01.

⁵¹ Former Oneximbank or Rosbank (after) which founded economics weekly magazine *Expert*,

<i>Truth</i>)	subsidies to this daily ⁵¹ .
Various	Gazprom owned more than 100 regional publications.

Source: Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998⁵².

4.1.4 Luzhkov and his Moscow Power Group

The final heavyweight is the Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Luzhkov had been the mayor of Moscow since 1992. During the period from 1996 to 1999 he was able to wield unprecedented power over the capital city’s government. Klebnikov mentioned that in a country where everything was collapsing, there was an oasis of prosperity and success.⁵³ It was Moscow, Luzhkov’s Moscow. He had his own television channel, TV Tsenter (TV Center) and famous newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* (*Komsomol of Moscow*). He was backed by a widely diversified telecom investment conglomerate called Sistema (System). Unlike other moguls who tried to step into the political arena, Luzhkov was already a political star. He himself was a combination of media and politics. It reflected a special phenomenon in Russia: the Russian media could never cut off their relations with politics. Media politicalization and politics medialization have been entangled with each other since the collapse of the USSR. It is extremely hard to draw a line between these two in Russia.

Table 4.4: The Media Business under Control of Moscow City Government (1996~1999)

Television	
TV Tsenter	The government owned 67 percent of

intercepted Gazprom’s 20 percent share in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in 1997.

⁵² Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III,” 1998

⁵³ Paul Klebnikov, Godfather of the Kremlin, 150

	shares in the TV Tsenter consortium. The consortium included Center TV, which aimed to become a network with nationwide broadcasting capabilities; a pool of Moscow cable networks; and the satellite cable project, METEOR TV.
TV6	The city government owned shares in this private television network before it was closed down.
REN TV	The creation of this private network was financed by the Bank of Moscow, which was controlled by city authorities.
Newspapers	
<i>Metropolis</i>	This new publishing house, reportedly linked to the Moscow city government, was created in April 1998 ⁵⁴ .
<i>Obshchaya Gazeta</i>	Moscow city government owned shares in this weekly
<i>Moskovsky Komsomolets</i>	The city gave subsidies to this large-circulation daily.

Source: Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998⁵⁵.

4.2 The Collusion of the Media Empires and Kremlin

As noted before, financial troubles immediately threatened the existence of most media outlets in the 1990s.⁵⁶ Although the direct state subsidies helped many Moscow-based media outlets survive during the early 1990s, the large amount spent on media subsidies strained the government budget. Nevertheless, the Kremlin didn’t want to lose its control in media. Hence, the Kremlin appealed for the financial aid

⁵⁴ Metropolis chairman Lev Gushchin said in interviews published by Russian media that the publishing house has links to the Moscow city government, but did not seek financial credits from it. Gushchin said Metropolis is financed by a number of banks, but declined to say which ones. Metropolis is purchasing the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literal Gazette*) from Menatep and its publications already include the weekly *Rossiia* (*Russia*), a publication launched by Mayor Luzhkov in March 1998. For more details, see Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1998 <<http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media3/government.asp#2>>

⁵⁵ Floriana Fossato and Anna, “Russian Media Empire III,” 1998

⁵⁶ Laura Beline, Russia after Communism (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd., 2002) 139

from super bank groups. That was the origin of the collusion between the media empires and the Kremlin which led to the rise of a special group of people, who are known as “Oligarchs.” They probably could not exert the same influence as the moguls in Wall Street, but they were tougher and more impressive.⁵⁷ They played a crazy game without rules, in which everyone could be a winner overnight, but could also be killed without warning. The secret to survive was to find a mighty politician as a protector. Looking at the super rich, it is easy to find that almost behind every media baron stood a strong and influential political figure: Gusinsky and Luzhkov were very good friends. Berezovsky was not only the intimate confidant of Yeltsin, but also a close friend with president’s family. Victor Chernomyrdin, the former soviet minister and Yeltsin’s longest serving prime minister, took Gazprom private.

The oligarchs and the political powers started to enjoy their honeymoon with the media empires developing at an unprecedented speed. When the government gave away the prized state companies to tycoons, the collusion process was formalized. After the 1996 presidential election, the collusion became much more brazen. In August 1996, right after Yeltsin was sworn in as president, Vladimir Potanin, who founded the Oneximbank/Interros Group, was named first deputy prime minister. Two months later, Berezovsky was appointed deputy head of the Security Council. Gusinsky’s NTV was also granted permission to start round-the-clock broadcasting and go nationwide during the same period. Evidently, all of these oligarchs made

⁵⁷ Chrystia Freeland, Sale of the Century: Russia’s Wild Ride from Communism to Capitalism, (New York, 2000) 111

special contributions to Yeltsin's victory. In 1997, Viktor Ilyushin, a former assistant to President Yeltsin, became head of the Gazprom Media Holding. His appearance in the leadership of Gazprom-Media was regarded as a sign of the formation of a media company to support Chernomyrdin in the presidential elections in 2000. At the beginning of March, 1997, Luzhkov issued a resolution on a tender among Moscow advertising agencies for the right to conclude direct rental agreements for advertising space with the Moscow government. In September 1997, Yeltsin invited to the Kremlin some of the country's biggest financial and media magnates. Yeltsin told them to stop "fighting" with each other through the media. Floriana Fossato and Anna Kachkaeva emphasized this in their report "Russia: Financial Interests Continue to Control Media Outlets"⁵⁸: Judging from his words, Yeltsin indirectly acknowledged that financial interests controlled the editorial line of Russia's media outlets, at least of the central ones, based in Moscow. In fact, by the end of 1997 it was difficult to find a Moscow-based newspaper that did not have direct or indirect link with financial factors or political power.

Given this social environment, it was more difficult to maintain media independence and media freedom. It was challenged by the new financial dependence on super industry and bank groups in collusion with the central government. The Russian media practitioners were unable to maintain their purity and professional ethics when their survival mostly relied on economic and political super powers. The

⁵⁸ See "Russia: Financial Interests Continue to Control Media Outlets," Radio free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, < <http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/03/F.RU.980313140318.asp>>

newspaper *Segodnya* was a case in point. The creation of the newspaper *Segodnya* in 1993 aimed to create “a respectable, professional media outlet that everybody in the Kremlin and in government would read.”⁵⁹ However, as circulation of the paper declined *Segodnya* was unable to make a profit through advertising in Russia’s under-developed advertising sector. Confronted by the new goal of making profits, which was required by the owners, several sections of newspapers were cut, including culture and entertainment. The majority of editors, feeling it would be impossible to maintain previous levels of professionalism while trying to target the audience of sensationalist publications, did not want to remain in the new *Segodnya*. So they left. The decline of professionalism was also embodied in consolidating the censorship. In February 1996 Yeltsin fired Oleg Poptsov, chairman of the All-Russia Television and Radio Company (VGTRK), reportedly for publishing a critical book, *A Chronicle of the Times of Tsar Boris*, and also because of outspoken reporting on Chechnya.⁶⁰

In the meantime, a series of media policies that strengthened the state control of media were also brought into effect. For instance, on August 25, 1997, a presidential decree intended to improve state TV broadcasting in the Russian Federation was issued.⁶¹ Relying on this decree, the Kultura TV (Culture TV) was established. The goal in creating this state-owned channel was to strengthen the role

⁵⁹ Tatyana Malkina, a former political editor at the daily *Segodnya (Today)*, controlled by Gusinsky's Media-Most, tells RFE/RL in an interview on September 27, 1997.

⁶⁰ See Marina Shakina, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 17, 1996: 1-2.

⁶¹ “Text of Decree Establishing Kultura TV” *Post-Soviet Media Law & Policy Newsletter* (Howard M. Squadron Program in Law Media & Society, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University and the Moscow media Law & Policy, 30 September 1997) Issue 39.

of the state in electronic mass media, to develop a single comprehensive national information sphere, and to restore the cultural and educational role of state TV in the Russian Federation. On December 19, 1997, a State Duma decree on the state regulation of the activities of the NTV Television Company and other non-state television and radio companies was also issued⁶². This decree required domestic televisions, especially the private TV stations, to reflect the opinion of political, religious, ethnic and other groups of the population and create the requisite conditions for the preservation of ethnic culture, for stabilizing the social and political situation in the Russian Federation.

In the last year of his tenure, Yeltsin signed a decree on July 6 to dismiss Russia's State Press Committee and the Federal Service for Television and Radio Broadcasting⁶³. It was replaced by a Ministry for Press, Television, Radio Broadcasting and Mass Communication. Commenting on the measure, Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin said at a cabinet meeting held that day: "I would not say that we want to create a propaganda ministry. But we are starting to create a federal strategy which would consolidate all of the state's capabilities in—pardon the old-fashioned word—ideological work."⁶⁴ Although the Kremlin did not admit its attempt to consolidate the role of the state in mass communication, yet, from his word, the

⁶² "Official Reacts to Duma Decree on TV Regulation" Post-Soviet Media Law & Policy Newsletter (Howard M. Squadron Program in Law Media & Society, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University and the Moscow media Law & Policy, 15 January 1998) Issue 42-43.

⁶³ "Yeltsin Sets up Press Ministry", Monitor, Volume 5, Issue 131, (July 18, 1999)

⁶⁴ "Yeltsin Sets up Press Ministry", Monitor, Volume 5, Issue 131, (July 18, 1999)

conclusion was evident that the Russian media under the Yeltsin's era were still not free as defined in the West. It was, more or less, influenced by the authority of the government and the state.

Moreover, the most serious problem faced with the Russian media was physical violence against journalists. On February 26, 1996 Felix Solovyov, a free-lance photographer who published a portfolio on the Russian mafia in *Bild am Sonntag* in Germany, was shot in Moscow.⁶⁵ On March 11 of the same year Victor Pimenov, a cameraman for a pro-Moscow Chechen TV station, was killed in Grozny while filming aftereffects of the Chechen's March 6-9 raid on the city.⁶⁶ On May 9, 1996 Nina Yefimova, a contributor to *Vozrozhdeniye*, was killed in Leninsky District of Grozny, reportedly because of stories on crime in Chechnya.⁶⁷ On June 18, 1998 Larisa Yudina, editor-in-chief of *Sovetskaia Kalmykia Segodnya* (the only opposition paper in Russian Republic of Kalmykia), was killed in Kalmykian capital Elista.⁶⁸

4.3 The Split between the Oligarchs and the Kremlin

On the surface, the oligarchs and the Kremlin were so close that they were willing to share everything. However, driven by the different interests their seemingly intimate relationships were desperately brittle. In fact, the conflict always existed.

⁶⁵ Monroe E. Price, Andrei Richter, and Peter K. Yu, "A Brief Chronology of Russian Media Law and Policy During the Yeltsin Years", Russian Media Law and Policy in the Yeltsin Decade: Essays and Documents, (Published by Kluwer Law International, 2002) 306-307

⁶⁶ Monroe Price, 306

⁶⁷ Monroe Price, 306

⁶⁸ Monroe Price, 307

Before 1998 the frictions among them were not serious enough to affect their cooperation. But Russia's deepening economic crisis in 1998 escalated the conflict, which ultimately caused the split between oligarchs and the government. Their breakup was also a signal that the Russian media started to shift from the privately controlled to the state-controlled. The key figure during this split process was the former Russian President Boris Yeltsin who had wanted to be the tsar of Russia for a long time.

On May 27, 1998, at the opening ceremony of the conference of the International Press Institute, Yeltsin expressed his concern over the influence some of Russia's leading business tycoons had over media assets they controlled. He asserted that media owners were sometimes the worst censors and they were the biggest threat to Russia's press freedom.⁶⁹ At the same time he argued that he was the only guarantor of the free press in Russia.⁷⁰ In the same month Yeltsin also signed a decree to create a production and technical media-holding company, including all state-owned electronic media on the basis of VGTRK. His aim was apparent: according to this decree, the fully state-owned VGTRK, which also managed the channel Kultura and Radio Russia, would replace ORT as the main channel of Russia's television. The creation of this media-holding also aimed to allow government to re-establish control of the media assets in which money and managers

⁶⁹ For more details, see "Russia: Kremlin Steps up Pressure on the Media," [Radio free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/05/F.RU.980527140021.asp), May 27, 1998<<http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/05/F.RU.980527140021.asp>>

⁷⁰ "Russia: Kremlin Sets up Pressure on the Media," 1998

were controlled by influential businessmen.

The deepening cleavage was caused not only by the consolidation of state's influence in media arena, but also by the economic crisis in 1998. Hit by the global recession, the media owners underwent a severe winter. They seemed not to have sufficient financial resources to support the development of their media outlets. Because many media assets were involved in the financial investments of media owners, it is not surprising to see the big loss of privately controlled media when the economic crisis came. On one hand, the advertising dropped sharply. The dramatic decline in advertising revenues had severe consequences on the normal operation of most Russian media. Many TV networks could not afford the production costs of the programs. Just as Oleg Dobrodeev, general director of NTV, pointed out that the economic situation obliged television networks to produce cheap programs for survival⁷¹. On the other hand, since many banks went bankrupt, it became much more difficult for the media to withdraw money from their bank accounts, even for those controlled by financial holdings. According to a Radio Liberty analysis, "the financial pressures on Russia's privately owned media both from without and within had the effect of shifting the balance between privately owned and state-owned media in the direction of the latter."⁷² Naturally, confronted with the economic crisis, editors and journalists were also forced to compromise with the government or their patrons by

⁷¹ Floriana Fossato, "How Russia's Financial Crisis Hurts The Media -- An Analysis" [Radio free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media4/analysis.asp), 1998< http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media4/analysis.asp>

⁷² Paul Globe, "Analysis From Washington -- The Economics Of Press Freedom," [Radio free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/10/f.ru.981014124920.asp), November 14, 1998<http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/10/f.ru.981014124920.asp>

neglecting their journalism ethics and standards on many issues.

Besides the economic crisis, the information war between the media owners also weakened the privately owned media and offered an opportunity to Yeltsin and his administration to take back the control over the media. The information war exploded in the summer of 1999 mainly between two media tycoons Berezovsky and Gusinsky. The origin of this “war” was the disagreement on the common candidate for 2000 president candidates. Gusinsky’s NTV apparently supported the populist—Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. However, Berezovsky who was on the side of Yeltsin had another plan. So during the whole summer, the Russian audiences had to watch what Radio Liberty called “a not-very-understandable information war that few people outside Moscow care about”.⁷³ Since then the original partially independent Russian media became the propaganda tools of a handful of powerful people. For most ordinary Russian people, media freedom and independence became a reachless dream once again.

From other viewpoints, the split among the financial elite, to some degree, reflected the long-standing rift among the central government. At that time the Russian cabinet was divided into different camps: (1) Yeltsin; (2) the young reformers, represented by First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov;

⁷³ In July 1999, the television networks ORT and NTV waged an unprecedented open battle. ORT opened the television chapter of the media war by garbling facts. ORT’s weekly analytical program “Vremya” (Time) alleged that Media Most debts reach \$1.3 billion. ORT described NTV as a bankrupt company trying to exploit its political influence. In turn, NTV portrays the Kremlin as the main force fighting “disloyal” Gusinsky’s Media Most. NTV says Media Most is unfairly reproached by the Kremlin for its support of Moscow mayor and top presidential contender Yuri Luzhkov. Luzhkov is reportedly deeply disliked by President Boris Yeltsin’s entourage, including Berezovsky. For more details, see “Russia Media Empires V,” [Radio free Europe/Radio Liberty](http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/05/F.RU.980527140021.asp), May 1998<<http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/05/F.RU.980527140021.asp>>

(3)Victor Chernomyrdin and (4)Yuri Luzhkov. However, beyond all expectation, Yeltsin won this powerful bout eventually by choosing an iron-handed heir, Vladimir Putin, the former KGB officer. His appearance not only crushed the hope of the oligarchs, but also reshuffled the Russian media, leading to a most dismal and world-shaking outcome. The next chapter will mainly focus on Putin's media policy and the media situation under him.

CHAPTER V

PUTIN'S THREATS TO THE RUSSIAN MEDIA REFORM

When Yeltsin left the Kremlin and handed the power as a New Year gift to Vladimir Putin, when a name “Putin” began to appear in daily newspapers and TV programs, Russia moved closer to the collapse of media freedom. Just as Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ)⁷⁴ General Secretary Igor Yakovenko said, “Over the last few years, we have definitely moved backward both in terms of human rights and the freedom of the press.”⁷⁵ Unlike Yeltsin, who had been accustomed to partnership with media tycoons, Putin preferred subordination and loyalty. Unlike Yeltsin, who had offered media opportunities to maintain their independence and dignity, Putin demonstrated an open desire to keep tight control over media.

In this chapter, five separate elements of Putin’s drama will be considered in detail. The first section is the 2000 presidential election. The second section focuses on how Putin seized the private media. The third section analyzes the limitation on the coverage of second Chechnya war. The fourth section presents Putin’s media policy in the terrorists’ incident and analyzes the laws that followed. And the final section

⁷⁴ RUJ was created in November of 1990. According to its Statutes, the RUJ is a professional, independent, self-ruled, non-governmental organization. The RUJ is a full member of the International Federation of Journalists.

⁷⁵ Robert Coalson BBC News Online business reporter, “We have definitely Moved Backwards: An Overview of Media in Russia” [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp), 18 June 2004 <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp>>

describes how Putin consolidate legal power on media.

5.1 The 2000 Presidential Election

On August 9, 1999, Yeltsin dismissed the short-lived Sergey Stepashin's government and appointed Putin as the acting premier. One week later Putin was appointed as the prime minister of Russia. Putin, a political unknown, made his debut on the national stage. This was Russia's sixth change of prime minister in the 18 months since Yeltsin replaced Victor Chernomyrdin with the young and little known fuel and energy minister Sergey Kiriyenko in March 1998. Many people assumed that Putin's cabinet could not avoid being dismissed during Yeltsin's permanent cabinet reshuffles. No one realized that he was the true heir. Some people even thought that his appointment was something of a joke.⁷⁶ However, Putin, Mr. Nobody, finally defeated the suspicions. Sharp and crafty as Yeltsin expected, Putin succeed in winning popularity among the people through his impressive political keenness and unrelenting approach to the renewed crisis in Chechnya. Although the strong presidential candidates Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov tried their best to prevent Putin becoming the Yeltsin's heir, yet, Putin won victory in the 2000 presidential election.

Compared with the 1996 election, in which Yeltsin and oligarchs colluded closely in the camouflage of anticommunism, the 2000 election was even more brazen. During the campaign, the Russian media no longer existed as an independent institutional body, but played as real weapons of different camps. On the eve of

⁷⁶ Lilia Shevtsova, Putin's Russia, trans. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 30.

election, the main forces were clearly distributed into two blocs. Ivan Zassoursky described these two blocs as two parallel parties⁷⁷: one was led by Primakov, Luzhkov and a number of regional governors. The other was the central government, the Kremlin, secretly manipulated by Yeltsin and Berezovsky. Each of them controlled substantial media resources. (See the table 5.1 and 5.2)

The Kremlin supported Putin as the presidential candidate.

Table 5.1: Media Resources Controlled by the Kremlin

(On the Eve of 1999 Duma Election)

Television	
Channel II network	The state fully owned the nationwide Channel II Network of VGTRK, commonly known outside Russia as RTR.
ORT	As was introduced in previous chapter, ORT (Russian Public Television) was Russia's main channel. State controlled 51 percent share, but Boris Berezovsky was considered as the real owner and ruler of this media company at that time.
TV6	The company was controlled by the Berezovsky.
Radios: Radio Rossiya, Radio I, Radio Mayak	
Newspapers	
<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i> (<i>Russian Gazette</i>)	The government's official daily
<i>Rossiyskie Vesti</i> (<i>Russian News</i>)	Until 28 April 1998 this publication was the presidential administration's official daily.
<i>Parlamentskaya Gazeta</i> (<i>Parliamentary Gazette</i>)	Since May 1998, this publication became the Federation Assembly's (State Duma and Federation Council) official daily.
News Agencies: Itar-Tass, RIA Novosti, All-Russian Technical	

Source: Floriana Fossato and Anna Kachkaeva, "Russian Media Empire V", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1999⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ivan Zassoursky, Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2004) 119-120

⁷⁸ Floriana Fossato and Anna, "Russian Media Empire III", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1999< <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media5/> >

From the regional side, they supported Primakov as the presidential candidate.

Table 5.2: Media Resources Controlled by the Regional Bloc

(On the Eve of 1999 Duma Election)

Television	
NTV	NTV was the backbone of Media-Most controlled by Gusinsky
TV Tsenter	TV Tsenter was controlled by Luzhkov's media holding company.
Radio: Ekho Moskvyy	
Newspapers: <i>Metropolis, Movskovskaya Pravda, Obshchaya Gazeta</i>	

Source: Floriana Fossato and Anna Kachkaeva, "Russian Media Empire V", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 1999⁷⁹

Two familiar names stood out in the tables: Berezovsky and Gusinsky. Both of them were oligarchs; both of them were confidants of powerful political figures; both of them could exert enormous influence on Russia's politics and economy. They mobilized all their media resources to influence the outcome of the election.

In the case of Putin, television was an important element of his campaign. By virtue of his position as prime minister and acting president, he was assured coverage of his daily activities. Although Putin received the lion's share of news coverage on all television networks, he was treated especially favorably on Berezovsky-controlled Russian Public Television (ORT), the Channel I broadcaster, and on fully state-owned Russian Television (RTR), the Channel II broadcaster. According to RUJ, supported by the European Commission in Russia, the entire coverage of Putin on RTR in the 2000 presidential election accounts for 26 percent, which was much higher than the coverage of other president candidates such as Gennady Zyuganov (15 percent),

⁷⁹ Floriana Fossato and Anna, "Russian Media Empire III," 1999 < <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media5/> >.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (9 percent), Grigory Yavlinsky (8 percent).⁸⁰ In addition, Sergei Dorenko, a very famous news anchor on state television, was assigned to demoralize Luzhkov and Primakov in his TV program. Behind Dorenko stood Berezovsky.⁸¹ On the last day when campaigning was allowed, Putin gave a three-minute address urging citizens to turn out to vote. That address was broadcast in full at the beginning of every ORT and RTR newscast on March 24.⁸²

Above all, Putin's victory profited from the massive coverage of Chechnya. On the election day an ORT newsreader even made the connection in an unusually explicit manner during an afternoon newscast: "Today's reports from Chechnya yet again confirm that as soon as possible, the country needs to elect an active president who can cope with [Chechen] fighters and bring the anti-terrorist operation to its conclusion."⁸³ The subtext of his comments was clear: Putin, the only one who had the policies directly associated with the Chechnya war, was the best choice as the next president.

At the same time, the journalists who were in the fear of being fired also pushed the media bias reach to the unprecedented pitch. Kirill Byelyaninov, a

⁸⁰ All these figures are gained from the public presentation of Dr. Mikhail Fedotov at University of Wisconsin at Madison, who is the Executive Secretary of RUJ. The RUJ is a full member of the International Federation of Journalists. RUJ monitored the 2004 presidential election with European Commission.

⁸¹ Lilia Shevtsova, Putin's Russia, trans. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 40.

⁸² Laura Belin, "How State Television Aided Putin's Campaign," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Russian Election Report, 7 April 2000: 6-9.

⁸³ Laura Belin, "How State Television Aided Putin's Campaign," 6-9.

Moscow-based journalist who worked both for a Luzhkov television program and Berezovsky newspaper, acknowledged:

It's clear to all of us which camp the owner belongs to, and what information is allowed. I cannot write anything concerning Berezovsky himself, or his business partners or ventures, and of course I cannot touch the Kremlin. With Luzhkov, I cannot write about Moscow or the city authorities...I dig up dirt on both. If it's dirt on Berezovsky I put it in the program, and if it's dirt on Luzhkov then it goes in the newspaper.⁸⁴

Unquestionably, Berezovsky played an indispensable part in Putin's 2000 election victory. He not only convinced Yeltsin that Putin was a completely reliable, loyal member of the President family⁸⁵, but also made use of the national television channel ORT and influential newspapers to create the image of Putin as "a man of action," capable of protecting people in the time of war, and to remold Putin from nobody into a widely known political heavyweight. However, life was unpredictable. When Berezovsky was proud of himself as a king-maker, he probably never thought that he would become the target of Putin, the new king of Russia.

5.2 The Triumph of Putin in Fighting with the Oligarchs

Since he was the acting prime minister, the business-minded Putin realized the

⁸⁴ For more details, see Emma Gray, "Putin's Media War," [CPJ Press Freedom Report](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2000/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html), <http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2000/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html>

⁸⁵ Paul Klebnikov, [Godfather of the Kremlin: Boris Berezovsky and the Looting of Russia](#), (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2000) 297

sacramental significance of controlling media resources. The 2000 presidential election confirmed idea once again. Putin was not like drunk, old and tired Yeltsin. On the contrary, he is aggressive, iron-handed and power thirsty. He prefers obedience, rather than power sharing. Therefore, right after he became the President, he embarked on seizing up private media.

5.2.1 Gusinsky's Downfall

The first target was another Vladimir. During the presidential campaign, Vladimir Gusinsky firmly stood with Putin's rivals, Primakov and Luzhkov. NTV's main analytical weekly program, "Itogi" (Summary), even presented the presidential administration as a threat to freedom of expression.⁸⁶ It probably enraged Putin and gave him an excuse to start a fight with the oligarchs. Only four days after Putin was sworn in, police raided Media-Most's headquarters. The most influential media mogul Gusinsky was arrested because of the embezzlement charges. It was reported that Gazprom extended direct or indirect loans totaling at least \$380 million to Media-Most⁸⁷. Some of those loans had already come due. However, things were not as simple as it represented publicly. To a large extent, Gusinsky was punished by Putin's government for voicing opposition rather than the embezzlement.

By 1999, Gusinsky reversed to his critical attitude towards the Yeltsin government and carried on his network a series of reports about the Yeltsin family and

⁸⁶ For more, see Floriana Fossato and Anna, "Russian Media Empire IV—Media-Most Holding," 1999 < <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia/media6/part2.asp> >.

⁸⁷ Floriana Fossato, "Russian Media Empire IV—Media-Most Holding," 1999.

friends running the Kremlin. The newspapers under Gusinsky published many articles on official corruption, notably in the security services. For instance, his *Novaya Gazeta* (*New Gazette*) was a muckraking Moscow newspaper known for controversial exposes of official corruption and other scandals. Yeltsin did nothing to force Gusinsky off air, but Putin was another story. He was not only unsatisfied with Gusinsky's arrogant attitude, but also outraged by the lack of respect shown him in NTV's broadcasting. The popular NTV program "The Puppets" even made Putin a caricature.⁸⁸ Especially when NTV was critical of Putin's policies during the second Chechnya war, the new king took action.

In the case of Gusinsky's downfall, the entire process occurred as a result of well-planned operation. Its aim was to establish state control over the privately owned media resources. First of all, the Kremlin exerted some financial pressures on Media-Most Holding by refusing to grant a state credit to NTV. Moreover, the advertising company Video International that had exclusive rights to run commercials on NTV also refused to continue its cooperation with NTV in December 1999. Hit by a series of financial crisis, Gusinsky's media empire gradually became a chronic money loser and was deeply indebted, surviving only on loans from Gazprom and the Luzkhov-controlled Bank of Moscow. Then the Kremlin took its second step in using force. Exactly a month after the raid a new attack took place. Vladimir Gusinsky was arrested on June 11. He was accused of embezzlement of state property in connection

⁸⁸ Journalists from NTV, accustomed to saying whatever they wanted under Yeltsin without fear of the Kremlin's wrath, did the same thing to Putin. However, they forgot that Putin had no intention of tolerating the free-for-all. For more, see Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, trans. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 104.

with the privatization of a television production company in St. Petersburg, Russkoe Video (Russian Video). After that, through a series of deliberately manipulated court trials, Gazprom took over NTV by assuming the debt owed by Media-Most to Gazprom. Within a year after Putin's election, Gusinsky went from being a would-be kingmaker to living in self-imposed exile. His once-influential media conglomerate Media-Most dissolved into bankruptcy because of a cut-off in credits by state-owned and state-allied businesses, and under the weight of criminal and civil court decisions.

The whole process of taking control NTV took place when Putin was out of Moscow. Putin could simply claim that he had nothing to do with the controversy over NTV's incident. However, the move towards NTV was widely regarded as the Putin's government's repression against the media freedom of Russia. After Gazprom controlled NTV, all the other Gusinsky's media entities such as daily newspapers, magazines and radio-channel were also shut down.

5.2.2 When Godfather of Kremlin Met with Czar of Kremlin...

Although Berezovsky was widely regarded as the one of the main contributors to Putin's rise to power, yet he still could not escape from being arrested. Soon after Gusinsky's downfall and the collapse of Vladimir Potanin who was also accused of underpaying for the privatization of Norisk Nickel Company, Berezovsky became the next target of Putin's anti-oligarch policy. With the tax officers starting to investigate the business of automaker AvtoVAZ which had links with his car dealer LogoVAZ, Berezovsky was brought into spotlight once again. But this time he was retreated as not a hero, but a villain.

The main conflict concentrated on the ownership of the Public Russian Television, ORT. ORT is the biggest TV channel in the country with total penetration of 98 percent of the Russian territory or 140 million viewers. Due to its reputation and the nationwide influence, ORT had a high propaganda value. It would become the backbone of the Putin's comprehensive state media empire. However, the only obstacle in front of Putin was Berezovsky, who was the real runner and reportedly owned the 49 percent of ORT shares. Therefore, while grabbing the ownership of ORT, Putin would absolutely challenge the authority of Berezovsky. The colossal property of Berezovsky was welcome, but not Berezovsky himself. As a result, Putin always looked for chances to crackdown this so-called Mr. Untouchable. In the meantime, Berezovsky also realized that taming Putin was more difficult than taming Yeltsin. He even made a conclusion in an explicit manner that if Putin did not stop from gathering all power to himself soon, he would leave no room for any independent political actors.⁸⁹ Hence, after 2000 election the interests of the Putin's government and Berezovsky developed in different directions.

Berezovsky was in open defiance criticizing Putin for his slow response to the deadly sinking of the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk. He was also critical of the administrative reforms Putin implemented. Meanwhile, changing his role in provoking anti-Chechen public opinion during the election, Berezovsky was against continuing the war in Chechnya and called for the conflict to be settled politically as

⁸⁹ Lilia Shevtsova, Putin's Russia, trans. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 112.

soon as possible.⁹⁰

From the other side, Putin started a counterattack. On July 8, 2000, Putin announced in his address that Russia would no longer tolerate “shady groups,” which intently alluded to Berezovsky. Faced with this, Berezovsky soon announced his plans to create an opposition party led by regional governors and other influential figures who were threatened by Putin’s drive for power. At the end of 2000 the prosecution declared Berezovsky the main suspect in the misappropriation of large sums from Aeroflot—Russia’s national airline, in which he owned large stakes. Berezovsky left Russia in the same year. In March 2003, he was arrested in London but released on bail. In October he was granted political asylum in the United Kingdom. His stake in ORT (now First Channel) was sold and his own TV6 channel was closed.

Following the war between Godfather of the Kremlin and Czar of the Kremlin, media freedom was one of the major victims. Initially, TV6 was an independent television channel, inheriting the mission of NTV. After the Kremlin took control over NTV, many of NTV’s best journalists moved to TV6, where they hoped to work as media professionals. However, only one year later a Russian court shut down TV6 as well, using the same juridical process as taking over the NTV. The closure of TV6 sent a warning message to other journalists: criticizing the Kremlin can be bad for business, or even worse for journalism.

After Putin closed the TV6 in 2002, the last network independent of the

⁹⁰ Vladimir Volkov, “The Battle for Control of State Television: Russian President Putin Tries to Break Berezovsky’s grip”, trans. World Socialist (Published by the International Committee of the Fourth International, 28 September 2000).

government, Russians around the country had access to only three major networks, ORT, RTR(Russian State TV) and NTV, all controlled in various ways by the state. Since 1999 ORT gained a market share of about 50 percent, RTR became the second (about 20 percent of the market), followed by NTV (12 percent).⁹¹ Following the dismantling of two media empires, the previous seven oligarchs were also challenged. Other oligarchs also felt the hand of the state on their shoulder. In parallel with Berezovsky, there was metal magnate Potanin with a lawsuit challenging the privatization of his Norilsk Nickel Company. Vagit Alexperov, president of Lukoil, was charged with tax fraud later in July 2000. Auto giant AvtoVaz and Roman Abramovich's Sibneft were both subject to tax inspections. However, none of these threats led to any arrest or legal actions, but they served their purpose of warning the oligarchs. The recent one was Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the leader of Russian biggest petroleum company YUKOS, who was convicted on fraud and tax evasion, and was arrested in 2003.

In summary, we can see that attacks on the oligarchs followed a similar pattern:

- (1) To audit the financial situation of these media groups;
- (2) To trap the oligarchs in the crisis of financial lawsuits;
- (3) To lift the business license of these companies;
- (4) To let the state-control industry company take over these oligarch's media empires,

⁹¹ Gillian McCormach, Media in the CIS-A study of the political, legislative and social-economic framework (N.P.: European Commission, 2002) 226

to reappoint the leaders, and to re-employ the unemployed professional journalists of these bankrupt companies.

5.3 The Second Chechen War (1999~ present)

Another case that showed Putin's attack on the media freedom is the coverage of second Chechen war.

As early as the presidential campaign, the massive coverage of Chechnya worked to Putin's advantage. Due to lopsided majorities of Russians as a just war against "terrorists," Russia's brutal assault on Chechnya was just as enthusiastically hailed by the whole country. Almost every television network devoted substantial coverage to Chechnya, which was usually the most newsworthy story of the day. The state television networks were extraordinary.⁹² However, compared with some networks such as NTV, which were not optimistic about the way the military campaign was progressing, ORT and RTR were quite upbeat. They often emphasized the bright side of the story: the village was captured, the "bandits" suffered greater losses.⁹³ To some degree, the war coverage was a trump card of Putin in 2000 election.

What is more, Putin was also described by these media as a "man of action," who was strong enough to protect the country from the threat of Chechnya. In contrast

⁹² The response on state television networks was twofold. First, reports depicted the war as a winnable, limited military operation. Second, reports on state television depicted as disloyal both critics of the war and media that devoted more attention to civilian casualties and prospects for protracted guerilla fighting. For more, see Laura Belin, "How State Television Aided Putin's Campaign," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Russian Election Report (April 7, 2000) 6-9.

⁹³ Laura Belin, "How State Television Aided Putin's Campaign," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Russian Election Report (April 7, 2000) 6-9.

to the first Chechen war, a strong mood of patriotism was widespread. Putin benefited from the rise of the patriotic sentiment caused by the war and played a prominent role in leading and coordinating the fighting with what he called Chechen “terrorists.” His language was brutal and his means was cruel. He was uncompromising in his determination to exterminate what he saw as a terrorist nest in Chechnya, stating that Russian forces would “be following terrorists everywhere. If we catch them in a toilet, then we will bury them in their own crap.”⁹⁴

However, the enemies of Putin were not only Chechen “terrorists,” but also those insubordinate journalists. Having failed to dominate the news agenda during the first war in Chechnya, the Russian authorities managed to minimize criticism of the second military campaign in Chechnya. In order to prevent correspondents from gathering and reporting information that contradicted official statements about the fighting, the authorities tightly controlled journalists’ movement in Chechnya and imposed special accreditation requirements.⁹⁵ In Chechnya journalists are mainly located at two locations: the Russian military base in Khankala and the complex of buildings of the Moscow-backed Chechen government in Grozny. Without special permission they were restricted to these two places to produce their reports and they were also closely watched by the government. Any movement around Chechnya was possible only in the presence either of soldiers or officials, or as a part of some

⁹⁴ ITAR-TASS 24 September 1999. This is the text which appears in the translated version of Sergey Kovalev’s essay “Putin’s War” New York Review of Books, 10 February 2000.

⁹⁵ Rick Fawn and Stephen White, Russia after Communism, (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd., 2002)
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delegation.⁹⁶ Although a great number of them were professionals, dangers were real, and several journalists were kidnapped or even killed. In July 1999 Vladimir Yatsina, an ITAR-TASS photographer and correspondent, was kidnapped and then, in 2000, killed in Ingushetia.⁹⁷ On October 29, 1999, TV-Tsenter correspondent Ramzan Mezhidov and Grozny TV cameraman Shamil Gigayev were killed.⁹⁸ On May 12, 2000, the TV program “Nashe Vremya” (Our Time) photographer and correspondent Alexander Yefremov was killed.⁹⁹ On November 20, 2000, TV cameraman Adam Tepsurgayev was killed.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, Putin also opened a government briefing center dedicated to eliminating independent journalism about Chechnya. Some critical journalists were even detained by the government. Andrei Babitsky was one of the victims. A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent, he was detained in January 2000.¹⁰¹ He was widely known for challenging the Kremlin’s restrictions on Chechen war coverage. Nevertheless, his activities were regarded by Russian authorities as treason. He was accused of as conspiracy with Chechen terrorists just because he reported

⁹⁶ Ilya Maksakov, “Russian Journalists in Second Chechnya War,” trans. Prague Watchdog, 12 September 2002 < <http://www.watchdog.cz/index.php?show=000000-000003-000002-000016&lang=2> >

⁹⁷ Ilya Maksakov, 2002.

⁹⁸ Ilya Maksakov, 2002.

⁹⁹ Ilya Maksakov, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Ilya Maksakov, 2002.

¹⁰¹ Monroe E. Price, Andrei Richter, and Peter K. Yu, “A Brief Chronology of Russian Media Law and Policy During the Yeltsin Years,” Russian Media Law and Policy in the Yeltsin Decade: Essays and Documents, (N.P.: Kluwer Law International, 2002) 308-309

from Chechen side. His case was not an isolated one. On January 17, 2000, the Police apprehended Alexander Khinshtein, a *Moskovesky Komsomolets (Komsomol of Moscow)* journalist, who had published critical articles on the Chechen War. They attempted to take him to a psychiatric clinic outside of Moscow.¹⁰² Their treatments sent a message to other Russian journalists that those who challenged the authorities could expect to be branded as “enemies of the state.”¹⁰³ On October 9, 2001, Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist specializing in the Chechen problem for *Novoya Gazeta*, announced that she was forced into leaving Moscow for Vienna, Austria, following death threats because of her reporting, in particular an article talking about the fact that a military helicopter with General Anatoli Psdniakov on board was shot down on September 17, 2001.¹⁰⁴

One of major goals of the government information policy was to hide the true figures of Russian military casualties. Afraid that the public mood would directly influence the popularity of the President, Putin’s administration did not want this issue to inflame the Russian people. Outwardly, the administration seemed to be successful in controlling the war coverage in Chechnya. Nevertheless, as the war continued, different kinds of bombings suicides and hostage incidents emerged endlessly in Moscow and other Russian major cities. It caused huge panic among the

¹⁰² Monroe Price, 308

¹⁰³ Emma Gray, “Putin’s Media War,” [CPJ Press Freedom Report](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2000/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html), 27 March 2000<http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2000/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html>

¹⁰⁴ For more details, see the “Russia: Annual Report 2002,” [Reporters without Borders Online](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=1799&var_recherche=Russia+annual+report), 2002 <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=1799&var_recherche=Russia+annual+report>

population.¹⁰⁵ How did President Putin cope with these terrorist acts, particularly, how was news reporting distorted in those hostage takings? In the next section these two questions are addressed.

5.4 The Putin's Media Policies in the Hostage Crisis

Two dates linked to terrorism remain fixed in Russian memory. One is Moscow theater hostage crisis on October 23, 2002. The other is the Beslan school siege on September 1, 2004. Putin and the controlled media played an ignominious role in dealing with these tragedies.

During the Moscow theater hostage, the major Russian media, especially the television covered the crisis coverage aggressively. They used comprehensive live coverage of the hostage incident. Some journalists even helped the operational staff establish contact with the terrorists. However, the Kremlin was apparently not satisfied with coverage. They criticized the reporting by some Russian news media, saying coverage favored the rebels' cause and threatened counter-terror operations. The Russian Media Ministry issued warnings to several Russian news providers, and even shut down the Moskoviya Television Station (Moscow TV Station) for its violations of the existing legislation by broadcasting an interview with a hostage who called for an end to the war in Chechnya¹⁰⁶. Putin claimed he was denying hostage access to the media:

¹⁰⁵ For more, see Gregory Feifer, "Russia: Hostage Crisis Reveals Desperation over Chechen Conflict," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, 24 October 2002.

¹⁰⁶ See more on "Putin Vetoes on Anti-Terror Measures," PBS Online News, 25 November 2002 <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/media/media_watch/july-dec02/putin_11-25.html>

The main weapon of terrorists is not grenades and submachine guns and bullets, but blackmail, and the best means of such blackmail is to turn a terrorist act into a public show.¹⁰⁷

The hostage-taking tragedy in the town of Beslan in North Ossetia also demonstrated the determination of the Putin's administration to control information. From the beginning of the crisis on September 1 until its violent end two days later, the Kremlin, Putin and the major media outlets in Russia conducted a campaign of disinformation regarding the extent of the catastrophe and its dreadful consequences. They understated the number of hostage. The official figure of 354 hostages was repeated by television channels and in the public appearances of government representatives.¹⁰⁸ They kept the secret that the hostage-takers' demand for an end to the Chechen war and the withdrawal of Russian troops.¹⁰⁹ Eventually, the school hostage ended in the bloodbath. However, even after the catastrophe took place the government and the media continued to minimize the number of casualties.

5.5 Putin's Consolidating Legal Power on media

Since Putin became the Russian president in 2000, press freedom has been

¹⁰⁷ "Putin Vetoes on Anti-Terror Measures," 2002

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Volkov, "The Beslan Hostage Tragedy: The Lies of the Putin Government and its Media" trans. World Socialist, in September 2004.

¹⁰⁹ Also according to Vladimir Volkov, on 6 September 2004, the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* (*New Gazette*), reported that as early as the afternoon of September 1 and not far from the school, "Parents of children being held in the school had addressed the Russian president in a video. They called upon him to fulfill all the demands of the terrorists in order to save the lives of the children." However, all the major television and other media outlets kept this information secret for a considerable period. For more, see Vladimir Volkov, "The Beslan Hostage Tragedy: The Lies of the Putin Government and its Media," trans.

regularly and strongly challenged by his administration. In January 2000, Putin signed a new law transferring control of government subsidies for regional newspapers from local politicians to the press ministry.¹¹⁰ The law affected 2000 subsidized newspapers across Russia and acted as a further mechanism for central government control.

In September 2000, Putin approved the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation. The doctrine developed the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation as applied to the information sphere and also highlighted the four components of the national interests of the Russian Federation in the information sphere.¹¹¹ One of the components is “the information support of the Russian Federation state policy, delivering to Russian and international publics trustworthy information about state policy and the official position of Russia on socially significant events of internal and international life.”¹¹² The highlight implies that the state policy and the official position of Russia are the foremost national interests. As a result, the objectivity of trustworthy information is doubted. To protect national interests, any trustworthy information includes more than the literal meaning. It refers to the information that is not contradicted with the official statement of government and the information that can also help the government to intensify its authority.

The government also continued to invent new rules to muzzle journalists such

¹¹⁰ Emma Gray, “Putin’s Media War,” CPJ Press Freedom Report, 27 March 2000<http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2000/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html>

¹¹¹ More information and details about the Doctrine can be found in Daily News Bulletin at the official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MFA), 18 September 2000. <<http://www.in.mid.ru/bl.nsf/0/0249fa400056cb2f4325699c003b636f?OpenDocument>>

¹¹² Daily News Bulletin of MFA, 18 September 2000.

as the anti-terrorist bill approved by parliament on December 17, 2004. It allowed Putin to impose Chechnya-style emergency measures anywhere in the country.¹¹³ On the pretext of anti-terrorist operations, the government is able to ban journalists from reporting on events or even mentioning them.

One of Putin's successes is having quietly and steadily gained control of the entire media since he came to power in 2000. After the fights with anti-Putin oligarchs, the main conflicts, faced by Russian current media, lie between the media nationalization and the media professionalization. The "nationalization" is known as public ownership or the act of taking private assets into government or state ownership. Media nationalization insists on the unparalleled leading role of government in media reform. This idea was exactly what Putin promoted in his media policy. By contrast, the media professionalization emphasizes on the self-independence and media freedom. Professionalization makes the media more independent and improves standards in collecting, editing, reporting and disseminating objective and balanced information. So the conflict between the media nationalization and the media professionalization is apparent and also cannot be reconciled. Therefore, whether to choose the nationalization or the professionalization is just a dilemma that Putin's administration has to face. In looking at Putin's media policies, he has made a pro-nationalization shift. In one aspect, he supported the super state-control gas and oil companies to take over the previous oligarchs' media groups to achieve the goal of media nationalization. However, after pro-oligarchs such as

¹¹³ For more details, see the "Russia: Annual Report 2005," Reporters without Borders Online, 2005 <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=13449&Valider=OK>

Gazprom and Lukoil controlled NTV and ORT, Putin didn't encourage them to appoint their own confidants to operate the companies. On the contrary, the previous journalists of these bankruptcy media companies were re-employed to conduct the normal operation. This group of journalists and editors are the representatives of the Russian media professionals. As a result, the conflict between the media nationalization and professionalization is reflected in the delicate relations between the pro-Putin oligarchs and the media professionals. The action of re-employment implied that Putin attempted to accomplish the goal to establish his own empire under the camouflage of media professionalization.

Nevertheless, no matter which path Putin chose, Russia has been undergoing the serve winter without media freedom. Putin extended control over the media both through legal seizure of several powerful media moguls and through passage of laws that restricted critical coverage, particularly of the war in Chechnya. As a result, Freedom House's press freedom rating¹¹⁴ for Russia dropped to 148 in 2005, a ranking that put it deeply into the category of "not free" press. Likewise, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Russia as one of the 10 most dangerous places to be a journalist.¹¹⁵ For instance, in 2004, two journalists were

¹¹⁴ According to this annual survey, the examination of the level of press freedom in each country currently comprises 23 methodology questions divided into three broad categories: the legal environment, the political environment, and the economic environment. For each methodology question, a lower number of points is allotted for a more free situation, while a higher number of points is allotted for a less free environment. A country's final score is based on the total of the three categories: a score of 0 to 30 places the country in the free press group; 31 to 60 in the Partly Free press group; and 61 to 100 in the Not Free press group.

¹¹⁵ Robert Coalson BBC News Online business reporter, "We have definitely Moved Backwards: An Overview of Media in Russia" [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online](http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp), June 18, 2004 <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/mm/2004/06/11-180604.asp>>

killed; two were kidnapped; eighteen were arrested, seventeen were threatened and physically attacked, and three were deported.¹¹⁶ In 2005, two journalists were killed and one was kidnapped.

¹¹⁶ For more details, see the “Russia: Annual Report 2005,” Reporters without Borders Online, 2005 <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=13449&Valider=OK>

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Media freedom is essential to the health of democracy because open access to information serves as “checking function” by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. Sometimes an antagonistic relationship between media and the government represents a vital and healthy element of fully functioning democracies. Given this, the goal of media transitions should be to move the media from those that are directed or even overtly controlled by government or private interests to those that are more open and have a degree of editorial independence that serves the public interest. The public interest is reflected by representing a plurality of voices not only among the different media outlets, but also within one outlet. However, the Russian media transition is another story.

In the post-communist transitional years, although the discourse on media reform focused on the necessity of importing the Western democratic concept of free media, the inadequate political and economic development established huge obstacles in the way of media transition. On the one hand, under the super presidency created by Boris Yeltsin and developed by Vladimir Putin, Russia failed to truly liberalize the media market and free the press from the constraints it experienced in the communism era. On the other, the failure in changing the economy from one that was plan-oriented to one that was market-oriented, as well as the worldwide economic

crisis, to a large extent, destroyed the financial viability of the Russian media. Therefore, in Russia, the goal to create a media sector supportive of democracy was difficult to achieve. After almost twenty-year transition from Gorbachev's glasnost to the present, the Russian media had only been reformulated from the propaganda machine of communist government to an authoritarian product which was influenced both by Western ideology and leftovers of communist ideology. Many facts presented in previous chapters simply prove that the Russian media reform is a failure of democracy.

According to William Hachten and James Scotton, the different perceptions about the nature and role of journalism and mass communication are rooted in divergent political systems and historical traditions and are broadly reflected in five political concepts of the media found in the world today: (1)Authoritarian, (2)Western, (3)Communist, (4)Revolutionary, (5)Developmental.¹¹⁷ Based on this classification, the Russian media can be categorized in the Authoritarian group, the basic principle of which is that the media is always subject to direct or implied control by the state or sovereign.

In Yeltsin's first tenure, the authoritarianism was not as marked as it was in the later years. In the early 1990s the Russian media even experienced a short golden age in its development. It supported the process of resuscitating the state organs of censorship. It struggled to keep the media dependent on state subsidies and struggled

¹¹⁷ William A. Hachten and James F. Scotton, The World News Prism: Global Media in an Era of Terrorism, (Iowa: Iowa State Press, 2002) 146.

to force private media outlets into the hands of the state. Nevertheless, influenced by the different interest groups, the voice of the Russian media was weak and low. Faced with the economic difficulties and the strong willingness of Yeltsin to personally control media resources, the Russian media compromised ultimately.

In Yeltsin's second tenure, the hope of freeing media from various powers was smashed by the collusion of oligarchs and the President. From then on the Russian media seemed to be back to the communist ashes. It not only became the oligarchs' passport to power, but also became the President's candies to please the oligarchs and the powerful weapons to achieve his own political ambitions. Russian media practitioners no longer assumed their responsibility to the public. They could not be referred to journalists, editors, or commentators any more. To some extent, they were businessmen. They sold their opinions, their views and even their dignity to the President and oligarchs for survival.

In Putin's Russia, the media situation has been completely disappointing and suffering. Soon after he was appointed as an acting prime minister in 1999, Putin started with establishing his own empire. To some degree, Putin has been a lucky person. He emerged when Russia was stuck in a financial deadlock and secessionist conflicts. An old Chinese idiom goes, "a hero is nothing but the product of his time." Ironically speaking, Putin might be seemed as a "hero" who has risen from the chaos of Russia. His success in reconstructing the nation economy and improving the economic situation prompted him and his administration to win much more popularity support. With the aim to boost the Russian image in the world, Putin acquired

incredibly high political power. He turned this power against both the journalists and the oligarchs who controlled most media resources in the country. Sensitive political issues such as the Chechnya War became the information strategies of the President. In addition, journalists and editors working in the media outlets which were against the government were faced with the threat of being arrested or even killed.

In March 2004 Putin dominantly won in the presidential reelection, which proved that Putin's media strategy in his first tenure gained the apparent success. He not only had a fixed population who strongly support him, but also continued to win popularity in a broader sphere. Accordingly, in Putin's second tenure, it is unlikely for him to change the media policies. However, with democracy developing as the economic situation is recovering and improving, one thing is certain: the Russian people will be no longer satisfied with the government's authoritarianism over the media in the long run. Therefore, the last two years of his second tenure will be a big challenge for him. Compared with the iron-hand policies towards media, Putin will become mild in dealing with the media issues and even make a compromise with the public. His reaction to the Moscow theater crisis was probably a sign. On November 25, 2002, Putin vetoed amendments to the press and anti-terrorism laws that had been under consideration for nearly a year and would have imposed new restrictions on the media. The State Duma passed the amendments in a second reading the morning of Oct. 23, just hours before Chechen rebels took control of the theater.¹¹⁸ Although journalists had doubts about what new legal restriction for reporting on crises would

¹¹⁸ "Attacks on the Press in 2002: Russia," CPJ Press Freedom Online, 2002<
<http://www.cpj.org/attacks02/europe02/russia.html>>

follow, the media generally welcomed the veto.

Overall, the future of a prosperous Russia requires a free and independent media. When public opinion and public policies are shaped by news reports delivered by editors, reporters and publishers who assume their responsibility to society as the “Fourth Estate,” who answer to a calling rather than personal enrichment, who are completely independent from any powers, true democracy will be realized in the new Russia. Therefore, for the Russian media professionals, there is still a long way to go.

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