



# Russia

**Heroes and Henchmen.**

**The Work of Journalists and the Media  
in the Russian Regions**

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Reporters Without Borders

47, rue Vivienne - 75002 Paris

Tél : (33) 1 44 83 84 78 - Fax : (33) 1 45 23 11 51

E-mail : [europa@rsf.org](mailto:europa@rsf.org)

Web : [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)

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When Dmitri Medvedev took office on 7 May 2008 as Russia's new president, many commentators and politicians in the West assumed that the occasion marked a positive turning point in the development of democracy in the country. In fact, the new tone in Moscow appeared to indicate such a possibility. The new head of the Kremlin demanded an independent judiciary and remarked that "freedom is better than repression." Yet, he also expressed his satisfaction with the state of the country's media, which could only be seen as disconcerting by those familiar with the situation. On the other hand, President Medvedev did invite Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of the independent *Novaya Gazeta*, to the Kremlin for talks after the double murder of the Russian human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and the reporter Anastasiya Baburova in early 2009. This and President Medvedev giving his first exclusive interview to *Novaya Gazeta* in April 2009 were encouraging signals.

Freedom of the press is indispensable for the democratic development of a country. If one is to interpret Medvedev's intentions as a desire "to take a chance on greater democracy" in Russia, then this must also be reflected in the media landscape.

In Moscow, the situation is relatively clear. Even representatives of the executive don't deny that the national television stations are subject to control by the Kremlin. This is why they point to the independent role played by the radio broadcaster "Echo Moskvy" and the relatively diverse printed press in the Russian capital. Yet, the information coming from the center of power offers few grounds for optimism. What about freedom of the press in the regions of this far-flung country? In recent years, alarming as well as encouraging information has found its way to the public, although usually just by chance.

Reporters Without Borders aims to depict a more differentiated picture of the situation by providing a systematic description of the state of the media in seven selected regions

of Russia. This picture is not only meant to sharpen our gaze on the plight and difficulties of journalists in particular regions, but also to draw attention to opportunities and room for maneuver.

The goal of this investigation is to draw up an atlas of press freedom in Russia. In the summer of 2009, five researchers with expert knowledge on the country who also work as German correspondents accredited in Moscow – Mareike Aden, Erik Albrecht, André Ballin, Moritz Gathmann, and Florian Willershausen – traveled to seven selected Russian regions to assess the state of the media on site.

The task took them from thinly settled Archangelsk in Russia's extreme north to Sochi in the south, Russia's showcase to the world as the chosen site of the 2014 Olympic games, and from the liberal city of Perm in the Urals to the criminally tainted Vladivostok in Russia's Far East. Research was also conducted in Sverdlovsk and the Moscow region.

We wanted to find out if and to what extent newspaper publishers, editors-in-chief, and journalists in the Russian provinces are subject to pressure or even danger. Where have there been positive developments? What does it mean, for example, when the Glasnost Defense Foundation in its last annually published Glasnost Map judged 19 of 86 Russian regions as being "relatively free?" Is it truly only the Russian state that plagues the media or do economic conditions also play a role? How pervasive is self-censorship among journalists? Are there publishers with clever business methods that can create an economic basis for independent journalism? In addition, there are questions concerning ownership distribution, possible monopolies, the role of politics and business in dealing with the media, and also the effects of the economic and financial crisis.

The result is a report that provides a diverse picture of the limitations as well as the lee-

way room available to Russian journalists. Above all, it becomes clear that economic independence from state authorities in Russia frequently means that the media serves the interests of oligarchs or local businessmen. While many journalists resign themselves to the given circumstances out of growing concern for their jobs, a few of their colleagues manage to stand their ground through independent reporting despite adverse conditions.

*Gemma Pörzgen and Dirk Sager*  
*Reporters Without Borders*



#### Introduction

##### Black box regional journalism

Critical journalists in the Russian Federation live dangerously – this has been general knowledge long before the murder of the renowned journalist Anna Politkovskaya in the autumn of 2006. Since Vladimir Putin assumed power as president in March 2000, more than 20 journalists have been killed. As a result, Russia ranked 141 out of 173 countries in the 2008 World Press Freedom Index. Yet, do these figures and assessments adequately reflect the true situation in this enormous country?

Western journalists and experts are now relatively well informed about the situation of media based in Moscow. The independent *Novaya Gazeta* and the radio station *Echo Moskvy* are regularly held up as the last bastions of press freedom in Russia. Besides the Russian capital, Western attention is primarily focused on hot spots such as Chechnya.

Independent reporting varies from region to region

Critical journalism is subject to political and economic constraints not only in authoritarian governed regions such as Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and the North Caucasus or in regions rich in natural resources such as Tyumen and Norilsk, where oil and gas monoliths like Gazprom and Lukoil control the media, but everywhere in Russia. “The Kremlin allows an independent press to exist in the regions,” says Anna Koshman, the executive director of the Association of Independent Regional Press (ANRI), convinced. In fact, the researchers from Reporters Without Borders hardly found any cases of direct influence by the Kremlin on media in the regions.

The general tendency since the start of the Putin era, however, remains unmistakable. “The threshold for criticism has been raised,” notes Maria Eismond, head of the Russian Independent Print Media Program, a project sponsored by the New Eurasia foundation. Possible room for maneuver varies greatly from region to region. “The situation in Primorye with respect to press freedom is becoming increasingly dramatic,” says Sergey Bulach, Chairman of the Far East Association of Journalism. Conditions are similar in the Olympic venue of Sochi, where local journalists can only dream of what their colleagues in Perm are allowed to write. “When we submit our broadcasts to journalism competitions, people wonder why our critical stance hasn’t led to any problems,” says Anastasia Setchina, former editor-in-chief of *Echo Perm* and still a member of its staff.

Even within the same region there can be vast differences between individual cities. In the Moscow suburbs of Khimki and Odintzovo, local authorities have the media completely under control, while independent and critical media exist in other cities in the Moscow region, such as Klin, Shukovsk, and Dubna.

What does “independent” actually mean?

Western journalists investigating press free-

dom in the Russian regions will be quickly confronted by the fact that rigid descriptive categories don't apply here. The assumption that media can simply be categorized as "independent" or "dependant," "free" or "not free" is simply inappropriate to the Russian reality. Even descriptions popular in the West, such as "opposition" or "liberal," are frequently misplaced oversimplifications.

Of much greater importance is who owns the media and how great an influence the owner exerts on the political orientation of the media. The following differences must be taken into account:

1. Media owned by the state or influenced by the state through "information contracts"
2. Privately owned media with strong editorial control by the owner
3. Privately owned media without any interference in reporting.

Many regional newspapers and a majority of radio and television stations are wholly or partially owned by the region, district, or city. To this day, many of these media outlets maintain the Soviet tradition of serving as the mouthpiece of state institutions. The regional outlets of the Russian State Television and Radio Company (GTRK), which provide the influential television broadcaster Rossiya with regional reports, do enjoy something of a special status. Although the budget funds come from Moscow, the editors in some regions maintain a certain degree of independence, as can be seen in the case of the Altai region. By contrast, the editor-in-chief of a station in the Krasnodar region was fired after he refused to broadcast stories sent by the press office as they were and instead edited them to a news format.

A media outlet operated without state participation does not necessarily mean it promotes independent journalism. During its research in the regions, Reporters Without Borders found many examples where there was no specific mention of the mayor or governor, although the reporting was clearly biased on the side of those in power. Such was the case with the newspaper Oka-Info in the city of Serpukhov (Moscow region) and Volnaya Kuban from the Krasnodar region.

"Information contracts" as an instrument of control

Information contracts are an instrument used by those in power to ensure the loyalty of formally independent media. The contract between the mayor's office of the city of Klin and the television station Poisk TV sets aside 960 minutes of reporting on the activities of state bodies each quarter. The client is thereby granted the right to "offer recommendations on content as well as artistic and aesthetic quality." In addition, the city has the right to inspect the work of the television station "at any time." The significance of such contracts is immense. Last year, more than 50 percent of the budget of Primamedia, the online market leader in the Vladivostok region, consisted of revenues from state advertising contracts. "If the publisher of a large newspaper makes the claim that he can do without advertising contracts from the state, I just won't believe him," says Alexander Savitzki, the owner of Primamedia.

Even the "opposition," in most cases a group of businessmen in conflict with the authorities, gets involved – they start up their own media outlet to get across their views in the information war. Frequently, the real name of the owner is not mentioned in the imprint of such a newspaper. Instead, it will probably prefer to present itself as the organ of some citizens' initiative (such as the newspaper Soglasie i Pravda in the town of Klin), or it is financed in a completely opaque manner. The paper Pravda Severo-Zapada in Arkhangelsk, for example, is indirectly financed by the oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

Such media groups can only generously be described as "oppositional," as their main purpose is to oppose the current mayor or governor. The quality is also extremely low. There is seldom any adherence to journalistic principles, as the goal of this media is to compromise the political or economic opponent. In some places, such as the city of Serpukhov (Moscow region) and the Altai region, the various groups vying for power use their own media to conduct a downright battle for popular opinion. Viewed superficially, one might think that a diversity of opinion is on display. In reality, however, none of

this media is objective. Only negative information is reported and always directed against the “opposing” side.

It is often the case before elections that tens of thousands of newspapers are distributed to mailboxes in an action financed by local businessmen with articles attacking local government officials. Mayors and governors frequently have only themselves to blame for these “political agitation newspapers,” because of their policy of suppressing truly independent and critical media. In the Moscow suburb of Khimki, for instance, there is no longer any media in which opposition politicians can express their views or where local conditions can be criticized. In the liberal region of Perm, by contrast, hardly any “agitation media” exists.

The third group consists of truly independent media, where the word “independent” refers here to independence from the interests of political players, business leaders, or civil society organizations. Despite hard competition, examples of independent media could be found in all of the investigated regions. Their existence alone puts to rest the claim that there can be no media without state financing. The vast majority of this media has never even received a single ruble from the state through information contracts.

ANRI – The Russian Association of Independent Regional Press

Since 2004, more than fifty regional newspapers have united under the banner of the Association of Independent Regional Press (ANRI). They include the Klinskaya Nedelya (Moscow region), the Svobodni Kurs newspaper (Altai region), and the Sloboda in the city of Tula, which was purchased by the German WAZ Media Group in late 2007. There are also other Russian regional media outlets not associated with ANRI that remain resolute in not letting themselves be “bought” by political or business players despite difficult economic and political conditions.

According to estimates by ANRI director Anna Koshman, there are around 20 further

independent newspapers in addition to her members. Most of these newspapers enjoy a stable financial basis. Usually, a publisher founds a small publishing house, and although the newspaper serves as its flagship, money is earned primarily through “apolitical” printed material such as glossy magazines, advertisement papers, pensioner magazines, calendars and books. In the far north, in the severely economically stricken Arkhangelsk region, Vyatsheslav Byelousov publishes the “Vecherni Severodvinsk” newspaper. He can afford to be independent, because his income is assured from his nationwide apolitical magazines such as “Pensionerskaya Pravda.”

At the same time, many of these newspapers display a certain degree of “political toothlessness.” A prime example is the Sloboda in Tula, which sees itself as a “quality tabloid with positive news” and which has expanded to four other regions with its economically successful concept. For the most part, publishers are not interested in picking conflicts with the powerful. “They see newspapers as a business,” says Koshman. This is why they promote a type of “grass roots” journalism that does include political coverage, but in which the focus is on people’s everyday concerns. Critical reporting on the regional governor or local mayor is usually taboo. For all that, stresses Natalya Chernyshova from the Russian Association of Journalists in the Moscow region, there is a great deal of room for readers’ opinion in the pages of the independent press – in stark contrast to state media, which usually spouts only the official line.

An additional group consists of the supraregional subsidiaries of Moscow media outlets. These currently exist in many regions and are dominated by the tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda with over 40 regional editions. The Provinziya publishing house presents an interesting model. It publishes newspapers in 25 regions with up to 80 percent regional content. One of their papers is the Krasnodarski Kurier in Sochi (Krasnodar region). Even newspapers critical of the government, such as Novaya Gazeta (in the Krasnodar region) and the Moscow business



journal Kommersant (Perm) have regional spin-offs, but they don't receive any financial support from their "mother papers." Lone warriors in the media

One type of media group consists of "lone warriors." This sort of business model arose for the most part in the early 1990s and has changed little since. The newspaper serves as the sole source of income. Such papers are often financially insecure and rely on the idealism and self-sacrifice of their staff to survive. The Arsenyevskiy Vesti in Vladivostok, for instance, does not take a confrontational stance despite the ongoing political and economic battles in the region, instead choosing to report from a surprisingly neutral position while remaining sharp and critical. Recent regional readership statistics show the paper in third place in its market, doing little to remedy the economic plight in which the paper has found itself for years.

"Independent newspapers have greater leeway than radio or television," says the media expert Eismond. Reporters Without Borders found much less diversity among television and radio, which are more financially intensive media than the printed press. Dominant players are those channels financed from state or regional budgets. In recent years, formerly independent channels in a number of regions have been bought up by those in power. A positive exception is the private and independent 4. Kanal in Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk region). The number of independent radio broadcasters is somewhat higher. Examples include Echo Moskvy Yekaterinburg and Radio Lemma in Vladivostok.

Over the past few years, the Internet in the Russian regions has developed into a much-used medium. However, it still presents little opportunity to make money and, therefore, most media only publish information here from other sources. Online newspapers also enjoy little credibility. Dmitri Polyinin, Chairman of the Sverdlovsk Journalist Association, estimates that up to 80 percent of all articles on the Internet consist of "paid" PR texts. Even though a majority of Russians keep online diaries and are active in web-based social communities, it was impossible to discover any influential political bloggers in

the investigated regions.

The state feeds its own media – and thereby distorts the market

In a massive yet thinly populated country like Russia, in which neighboring cities or districts are often separated by great distances, regional media hold a natural advantage over national media. "People complain about their regional newspapers, but they read them all the same," says Yelena Chernyshova from the journalist association with respect to the newspaper market in the Moscow region. Nonetheless, many regional publishers report that their weekly or daily papers show a deficit. There are two reasons for this.

On the one hand, so-called "advertising newspapers" exist in all regions of Russia. They have practically no editorial content, but are instead filled from top to bottom with advertisements – resulting in lucrative business. With print runs of often more than 100,000 copies, the papers are distributed freely in mailboxes and deprive other media of a large portion of their advertising revenue. The countrywide economic boom in recent years has led to a plethora of such low budget papers sprouting up by the thousands. According to the publisher Alexey Lipnizki (Arkhangelsk), the very existence of advertising papers without editorial content is a sign that the advertising market is still poorly developed. Here are some comparative figures to provide some clarity on the state of the advertising market in the regions: A regional paper such as the Arkhangelsk Business-Class (print run of 10,000) sells a page of advertising for 35,000 rubles (800 euros), while the Moscow business journal Kommersant (print run of 130,000) charges 1.15 million rubles per page (27,000 euros).

On the other hand, the regional power structures distort the market with their subsidies for state and loyal media. The state pays staff wages, allows the paper to work practically for free in state owned buildings, and "invests" in the technical equipment. In addition, private media with close relations to the state are given information contracts. For example, in the second quarter of 2008, the governor of Vladivostok appropriated seven

million rubles (approx. 163,000 euros) from the budget to finance legally binding “information services.” In the Moscow region, the local administration has recently equipped its own media with the latest technologies. Private broadcasters in the cost intensive radio and television market have little chance to compete against state-run competitors or those fed by “information contracts” from the state. “Freedom will only come when the news press becomes a real business,” says the Yekaterinburg based journalist Sergey Panasenko, whose independent newspaper *Podrobnosti* fell victim to unfair competition a few years ago. Georgi Ivanov, editor-in-chief of the independent weekly paper *Sochi* (Krasnodar region), also gave up with frayed nerves in 2003 after no longer being able to compete with free advertising papers and other newspapers financed by the city administration.

The financial crisis, which reached Russia in the summer of 2008, hit regional media hard. By the summer of 2009, Anna Koshman reported an average decline in advertising revenue of around 45 percent in comparison to the previous year. At the same time, she notes that the circulation of newspapers that “provide serious information” have shown a small increase. Independent media have the opportunity of emerging as winners from the crisis. “They aren’t affected by state budget cuts or the economic problems of businessmen, who have until now financed them,” says Koshman. The Moscow region, which in recent years has greatly profited from the economic boom, is now facing insolvency and is forced to drastically reduce its expenses.

“Those who pay the piper call the tune”

The extreme conditions under which Russian journalists work can hardly be compared with the situation of their colleagues in Western Europe. Editorial content independent of ownership is quite simply unknown in media that is dependent on the state or business. Why should a Russian businessman or politician subsidize a media outlet if he can’t use it to promote his own interests? “Media exists to exert influence,” says the Arkhangelsk businessman Dmitri Danilow, who has built up a small media holding, which

he claims keeps as far away as possible from politics. “Those who pay the piper call the tune.” Most Russian journalists have long been accustomed to this rule.

The situation of journalists during election campaigns is particularly precarious. Many politicians set up their own newspapers, which are then massively distributed for free in mailboxes the year before an election. Others attempt to compromise their opponents through paid PR in existing media. This has little in common with the type of election advertising found in Western Europe.

Journalists willing to take on politicians can easily find themselves in physical danger. One example is the case of Pyotr Lipatov, editor-in-chief of the “opposition newspaper” *Soglasie i Pravda* (Harmony and Truth). At a demonstration in the city of Klin (Moscow region), Lipatov called upon the mayor to resign. A short time later, he was attacked and injured by unknown assailants. Similarly, the journalist Maxim Solotaryov from the city of Serpukhov (Moscow region), who fought against the city administration for two years as an “assignment journalist” was beaten up by unknown men in May 2009.

#### Repression against journalists

In November 2008, Mikhail Beketov, editor-in-chief of *Khimkinskaya Pravda*, an opposition paper published in a suburb of Moscow, was brutally beaten in front of his home. He lay in a coma for many months, while fingers and one leg had to be amputated. Yet, such cases of violence tend to be the exception, even in regions not known to be liberal, such as Krasnodar and Vladivostok. State methods in suppressing press freedom are much more subtle in everyday life.

In accordance with Russian and Soviet tradition, most representatives of state institutions regard the media as an “element in a system of societal control,” says Olga Tretyakova, head of the Faculty of Journalism in Arkhangelsk. The notion that the media serves as the Fourth Estate, a supervisory authority that looks over the shoulder of the powerful and that can decide the fate of mayors and governors, is completely foreign

to state officials.

All independent media told of frequent threats by authorities as soon as they reported on any scandal within a sphere under the responsibility of a government official. Government representatives rarely take such media to court. On the one hand, journalists already practice self-censorship before publishing their articles, and, on the other hand, state organs have developed their own methods to punish any press that steps out of line. Critical journalists are simply not invited or allowed entry to news conferences and official inquiries remain unanswered. Koshman says that ANRI members frequently report on the use of “administrative resources” by state organs, such as tax inspections or fire department checks of the press rooms to find alleged violations of fire regulations.

Court cases against regional media are, by contrast, usually pursued by entrepreneurs or factory directors. Politicians “only threaten on the telephone,” says Alexander Sacharov, the former editor-in-chief of the Arkhangelsk newspaper *Pravda Severa*. In 18 years of journalism, his paper fought 200 court cases against businessmen – and lost two thirds of the cases.

In Perm, by comparison, liberal journalists have frequently been brought to court for slander by government officials or the mayor. In the majority of cases, judges decided in favor of the journalist, which serves as proof of the powerful position of the media in that region. Anna Koshman from ANRI holds the view that in most cases, judicial prosecution of journalists is the result of a lack of professionalism. “The journalists simply don’t adhere to Russian law,” says Koshman. ANRI member take their work seriously, and this is why they win the majority of cases against them, even those instigated by state officials.

Who helps journalists in trouble?

Journalists in trouble rarely receive support from their local journalist association. In many places, the local association is closely affiliated with the state and does not fulfill the functions of a trade union. In many

regions, such as Perm and Yekaterinburg, there are association chairmen who regard the protection of members as more important than good relations with local authorities.

Transregional media occasionally report on limits to press freedom in the regions and, in this manner, offer a certain degree of media protection. Oftentimes, however, such reports come too late, as the case of Mikhail Beketov shows. Large media organizations, including state television stations, only reported on the difficult situation in the Moscow suburb of Khimki after the journalist had already been beaten and lay in a coma.

In such cases, an important role is played by the Moscow organizations the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situation and the Glasnost Defense Foundation, which work closely with Reporters Without Borders and document cases from all over Russia. They have at their disposal correspondents in many regions that send in weekly reports on the state of local press freedom. In particularly difficult cases, the organizations provide lawyers.

Image advertising and self-censorship – Russian journalists led astray from professional ethics

In the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reputation of journalists has suffered greatly among the Russian population. In personal conversations, journalists confirmed that they have sold their services to politicians, businessmen, and even criminal organizations in times of financial difficulty. Dmitri Polyanin from the journalist association in the Sverdlovsk region even claims that “the most acute problem is not a lack of press freedom, but rather the corruption of the press.” Regional representatives of the journalist association, in particular, complain that many of their colleagues exhibit a lack of professional ethos. “Newspapers publish material for money. And no one denies that fact,” says Olga Goubzova, an experienced journalist from Arkhangelsk. Image advertising and “zakazuka” (from the Russian zakaz = order) are a typical part of Russian media. In Russia, image advertising consists of public relations



material written by journalists for politicians or businessmen, the intention being for the public to believe that these are genuine news articles. The zakazuka genre represents a further step lower on the moral scale. Journalists are thereby paid to write articles compromising a political or economic opponent. An especially ugly example of this phenomenon took place in March 2008 in an advertisement in the newspaper Shelkovchanka, published in the vicinity of Moscow. The paper belongs to a local oligarch and has a distributed circulation of 50,000 copies. The ad was for “a professional journalist ready to conduct a systematic and detailed investigation into the activities of the local deputy Natalia Yeremeyzeva.” At the same time, the Shelkovchanka appealed to all its readers to provide any information they may possess on the politician in exchange for a reward paid by the paper. The job advertisement featured an illustration of a pig with Yeremeyzeva’s face reading a newspaper. Yeremeyzeva, a deputy in the local parliament for the Communist Party of Russia and who publishes her own newspaper, sued the paper. The case has yet to be heard before a court.

Russians view journalists as corrupt. “Journalists are very unpopular among the population,” says Olga Tretyakova from the Arkhangelsk Faculty of Journalism. The phenomenon of self-censorship is also quite common. Journalists keep away from critical issues because they fear the reaction of the concerned party. It is a matter of debate among Russian colleagues as to what extent this fear is justified or whether it is merely a phantom anxiety. Alexander Kireyev, editor-in-chief of the Yekaterinburg online portal El.ru, shrinks back from publishing reports on the condition of streets or how dirty the city is – because this could be taken as general criticism of the mayor.

The Perm civil rights activist Igor Averkiyev finds this incomprehensible. “It is possible to test the limits a little further without encountering huge problems,” he says. Svetlana Kravchenko, an independent journalist from Sochi, sharply criticizes her colleagues. “There are very few journalists willing to stand by their principles. Instead, many

prefer to ingratiate themselves with those on top than to articulate the interests of their fellow citizens,” she says.

Media “fed” by the state, politicians, or businessmen cannot afford to have its journalists swerve from the dictated course. “You don’t bite the hand that feeds you,” can be heard from the editorial staff of the Yekaterinburg radio broadcaster Gorod FM, which has its studio in city hall. In most regions of Russia, however, the following applies: Those who work in a financially and politically independent media outlet that obeys the laws and also has good lawyers at their disposal have nothing to fear from threatening phone calls, judicial persecution, or other sorts of repression. Yet, there are simply too few such outlets.

Nonetheless, there remains a certain degree of leeway for high profile journalists, who frequently characterize the image of independent journalism. Similar in nature to the murdered Moscow journalist Anna Politkovskaya, there are committed publishers and journalists in the country’s regions. Now known throughout Russia, for instance, is Yuri Purgin, the publisher of the newspaper Svobodni Kurs in Altai, who maintains objectivity in a politically turbulent region and yet does not avoid conflict. Less well known, but just as fearless, is Maria Savadskaya, the political correspondent of the newspaper Arsenyevskiy Vesti in far eastern Vladivostok. She serves as an important role model, especially for younger colleagues still seeking orientation and who have yet to develop a professional ethos. Such high profile journalists therefore require double support – first with respect to their personal safety and also in terms of their role model function for independent journalism in Russia.

Remark:

It might seem to the reader that the euro equivalents of the salaries of journalists, prices for advertising, etc. are quite low. This is partially to do with the fact that the course of the ruble against the euro fell since summer 2008 from 34 to around 43 rubles for one euro.

#### **The Moscow Region: Strong state media power, yet good economic conditions for private competition**



The Moscow region is not only under the shadow of the Russian capital in terms of its geography. The approximately 150 kilometer wide ring around Moscow was for many years terra incognita for media experts interested in press freedom. Now, reports by media monitoring organizations provide monthly information on conflicts with journalists in the Moscow region. In December 2008, Mikhail Beketov, the editor-in-chief of an opposition newspaper in the city of Khimki, was so severely beaten that he fell into a coma and even today has not recovered from the attack.

The state media are well positioned in the Moscow region. Within the framework of media reform in 2005, the regional ministry of the press integrated over 50 regional newspapers in a new publishing house, equipped it with modern technology, and paid staff wages. In terms of television and radio, as well, the regional government has at its disposal a network of stations and local studios that it helps to finance. Media loyal to the state obtains additional financing through so-called “information contracts” with district and city administrations.

Notwithstanding the state-fed media, the economic and advertising boom of recent years in the Moscow region has resulted in the creation of an extensive media landscape. Many cities are home to independent media, such as the Ploshad Mira newspaper in the city of Dubna and the Klinskaya Nedelya in the city of Klin. The Klinskaya Nedelya is, in itself, not financially sustainable, but its publishers have founded a publishing house that earns money by supplying Klin and other

neighboring districts with papers filled exclusively with advertising. Readers won't find harsh criticism of the mayor in its pages, but the newspaper has managed to maintain its neutrality in a tense political environment. In the city of Serpukhov, where a political struggle over resources is currently raging, all of the media have officially or unofficially become mouthpieces for one or another political or economic group. By contrast, in cities located in the vicinity of Moscow, such as Khimki and Odintsovo, there are practically no independent media at all. The state financed media serve as pure information organs of the mayor's office.

#### **Media in Sochi and in the Krasnodar region: Between adaptation and financial difficulties**



For some years now, everything in Sochi, the most well-known Russian spa on the Black Sea, has centered on just one thing – the Olympic Winter Games to be held in the city in 2014. This is a prestige project of national significance and it therefore affects the local political situation. The controversial election for mayor in April 2009, in which the opposition politician Boris Nemzov took part, was won by Anatoly Pakhomov, the candidate favored by the Kremlin. During the election campaign, practically all of the media in the Krasnodar region reported as if the opposition candidates did not exist.

Political influence on the media in the Krasnodar region is very great. The former largest regional private broadcaster, NTK, was bought by the regional administration and has since kept its reporting in line with government positions. “There are practically no independent media left in the Krasnodar region,” says Vadim Belyayev, the former director of the state broadcaster GTRK

Sochi. For years, the so-called “media register” has served as an instrument to regulate and subordinate the media. All of the media listed in the register enjoy certain financial advantages and tax concessions. The price to pay is political loyalty.

The only papers that can still be described as independent are the tabloids *Komsomolskaya Pravda na Kubane* and the *Krasnodarski Kurier*, as well as the *Novaya Gazeta Kubani*, a regional edition of the well-known Moscow newspaper critical of the government. Sochi itself is home to the *Chernomorskaya Zdravnitsa* newspaper, but with a print circulation of only 3000, it is not a significant player. Independent news is provided to the whole of the north Caucasus region by the Internet newspaper *Kavkazki Uzel* ([www.kavkaz-uzel.ru](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru)), which was founded by the Memorial human rights organization.

In recent years, there have been no cases registered of violence committed against journalists in the Krasnodar region. Those that report on controversial stories, however, can quickly find themselves before a judge. The regional journalist Svetlana Kravchenko reported in the since closed *Delovoy Sochi* newspaper on the moving of cemetery graves to provide a neighbor with a more convenient road access to his house. She was subsequently charged with libel and fined 50,000 rubles (then around 1500 euros). According to the Moscow Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, libel cases are an instrument used by many government officials and business people to combat journalists who get in their way.

#### **The Perm region: Press freedom with scratches**



The Perm region, located west of the Urals, has a reputation in Russia as being liberal. This was confirmed in 2006 during the last elections to the regional parliament. The Kremlin party, United Russia, received only 36 percent of the vote, while the opposition Union of Right Forces (SPS), which hardly has any parliamentary representation in other regions, achieved 16 percent.

A study by the Moscow Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations in 2000 confirmed that the media in Perm enjoyed a “high degree of independence,” as it was financed primarily by advertising revenues and was hardly dependent on government subsidies. To date, the situation has not fundamentally changed. Threats against or legal confrontations with journalists occur very rarely, while targeted attacks have not taken place in recent years.

In the city of Perm, at least, there are a wide variety of newspapers covering the spectrum from liberal-conservative views to socialist-communist positions. Unusual for Russian circumstances, neither the city nor district administration has much of a financial interest in the media. According to the local journalist association, however, authorities do exercise their influence in certain media through information contracts. For example, the largest regional newspaper, *Mestnoye Vremya*, received 106,000 euros from the district administration for its “information services,” while the largest television station, RIFEI TV, was paid 280,000 euros. This is why *Mestnoye Vremya* and RIFEI TV enjoy the reputation among Perm journalists as being the prime vehicles the powerful have to propagate their positions.

In the small cities beyond the regional capital of Perm, though, there is far less variety to be found. Media there is usually in the hands of the local administration or large companies.

Despite its small circulation (2000 copies), one of the most influential independent newspapers is the regional edition of the Moscow daily *Kommersant*. In addition, there are a number of independent weekly papers, such as the *Permskiye Novosti* and *Zvezda*. In the area of television, there are no truly cri-

tical stations. The independent “voice” of Perm is the radio station Echo Perm, which includes programs from the well-known station Echo Moskvy for part of its schedule and it produces six hours of its own daily programming.

Apart from a few cases of refusal to provide information by state authorities, there have hardly been any examples in Perm of pressure on the media or journalists in recent years. The media situation is, in fact, as good as its reputation. The human rights activist Igor Averkiyev even says, “It is possible to test the limits a little further without encountering huge problems.” The current advertising crisis, however, has forced even independent media such as Kommersant to turn to financing from the district administration via information contracts.

#### **The Sverdlovsk region: Much media, little variety**



The Sverdlovsk region, located adjacent to the Perm region, is a center of Russian heavy industry and arms manufacturing. The region continues to be political and economic battlefield, and this struggle is also a determining factor in the media landscape. For many years, it was characterized by the competition between two politicians. On one side stood media that supported Arkadi Chernetski, the mayor of the regional capital of Yekaterinburg, providing him with cover in his political fights. His rival, Sverdlovsk Governor Eduard Rossel, had his own media that he could employ against Chernetski. The wide variety of print media available was deceptive – upon closer examination it became clear that the papers and their reporting were tied to their respective financial backers. The elimination of elections for

governor in September 2004 brought an end to the political power struggle. A state of truce has existed since then – also reflected in the media.

The region boasts two showpiece independent media – the radio channel Echo Moskvy Yekaterinburg and the TV channel 4. Kanal. The existence of a truly independent television station is particularly unusual for Russia. The station belongs to the Moscow media holding company MediaOne.

Two strong online media have also established themselves in the Sverdlovsk region. Readers can find stories there about corrupt politicians and businessmen that other media would be afraid to publish. The credibility of these portals, however, is quite low. According to estimates by the local journalist association, some 80 percent of the stories on the Internet are commissioned and paid to be published.

In recent years, there have been very few cases of violence committed against journalists in the Sverdlovsk region. Many journalists report, however, of attempts to influence their reporting by regional and city administrators or other authorities. “Government officials once again feel their power,” says a journalist from 4. Kanal. Although there continue to be court cases against media representative, the position of journalists here seems to be relatively strong in comparison to other regions. The vast majority of cases in local courts have been decided in favor of journalists.

Independent media can be found in the region’s smaller cities as well, such as the Vecherni Krasnoturinsk newspaper in the city of Krasnoturinsk and the Kachkanarsky Chetverg in Kachkankar. According to the journalist association, their position is so strong that after the regional elections on 1 March 2009, those mayors who had conflicts with the local press had lost their posts.

#### **The Arkhangelsk region: Press freedom on a bumpy path**



The Arkhangelsk region in Russia's far north is one of the country's least populous and economically weakest regions. These are also determining factors for the media landscape. Only the two large cities of Arkhangelsk and Severodvinsk enjoy a lively media landscape, whereas the inhabitants of the region's other areas receive their information from district "rayonki" (rayonniye gazety), which for the most part are state financed.

The economic crisis has hit the media in this otherwise economically weak region quite hard. The state media have been integrated into a single publishing house and two independent newspapers were bought by a Moscow media holding. The national television broadcaster 5. Kanal closed its local correspondent bureau and since then only sporadically reports from Arkhangelsk.

There exist two large independent newspapers – Business Class and Vecherni Severodvinsk. Vyatcheslav Byelousov, the publisher of Vecherni Severodvinsk, also publishes Common Interest Magazine, which he markets throughout the whole of Russia, thereby enabling him to finance the weekly regional newspaper. The publisher Alexey Lipnitski finances his Business Class newspaper with revenues from freely distributed advertising papers such as Avtogazeta.

There have hardly been any cases of violence against journalists in recent years. The political elite, however, still regards the media from a strong Soviet perspective. They see the media as an "instrument of social control," says Olga Tretyakova, head of the local Faculty of

Journalism, critically. Local authorities limit the freedom of the press with "soft" methods. Journalists are simply denied information or are not allowed access to press conferences. Authorities frequently phone up journalists and threaten them with consequences after a critical report. They rarely press charges in court, though. Most court cases against journalists for libel are not initiated by politicians, but rather by businessmen.

#### **The Primorye region: Media on a tight leash**



The Primorye region is called Russia's "Far East" for good reason. Moscow and Vladivostok, the region's capital, are over 9000 kilometers apart by rail. The population of Primorye has close economic links with the neighboring countries of Japan and China. One third of Vladivostok residents earned their living directly or indirectly through the import of used cars from Japan and Korea. This has been an economic engine of the region, which has come to a halt since late 2008 with the imposition of higher import duties.

At first glance, city newspaper kiosks seem to stock a rich variety of media. There are more than two dozen daily and weekly newspapers on sale here that are exclusively published in the Far East region. Even smaller provincial cities have their own newspapers.

Very few journalists in Russia's Far East, however, devote themselves to investigative journalism. A large part of the media is intricately entwined with the region's business or state structures. Either they are controlled through information contracts with state institutions or they simply belong to leading politicians. Mayor Igor Pushkaryov, for instance, is the



majority shareholder of Vladivostok, the largest daily paper in the region. Local radio and television programming comes, for the most part, directly from Moscow with the addition of some local news reporting. Primamedia is a much-used online news medium, yet more than 50 percent of its revenues come from advertising financed by the city and regional administration budget.

Yet, there is a whole range of “hot” topics that could be the focus of reporting – the close links between business and politics, illegal trade on the Chinese border, and the violently suppressed protests of December 2008 against the imposition of import duties.

Exceptions to this largely “toothless” media landscape can be found in newspapers such as the weekly *Arsenyevskie Vesti*, which refers to itself as the “newspaper that defends citizens’ rights and freedoms.”

One reason for the reticence of journalists to report is the fear of persecution. In the past, Primorye witnessed numerous court cases as well as violent attacks against journalists. The most famous case is that against the military expert Grigori Pasko, who uncovered cases in Vladivostok of trade in nuclear materials and the illegal disposal of nuclear waste by the navy. This resulted in his being sentenced in 1999 to three years imprisonment.

#### **The Altai region: The political power struggle splits the media establishment**



The Altai region is located in the south of Siberia bordering on Kazakhstan. The region is economically weak and has no natural resources or industry. It is instead characterized by agriculture.

For years, the media landscape has been marked by a power struggle between Governor Alexander Karlin and the regional oligarch Anatoly Bannykh. Both sides have used their media empire to drum up support for their political positions or to damage their political opponent with negative reporting. Professional standards such as independence, neutrality, and balance are usually left to one side. Radio and television are likewise divided between Karlin and Bannykh. Only the regional studio of Russian state television attempts to maintain its neutrality. The Internet as a medium for information plays a minor role in this predominantly rural area. There is hardly any diversity of opinion at the district level in rural areas as the most important and often only local source of information is the district or city newspaper, which is largely financed by the state.

At the same time, the Altai region is home to the Altapress, a private publishing house known throughout Russia for its success. Yury Purgin, general director of Altapress, publishes 13 newspapers and magazines. The publishing house has its own radio station, an Internet portal, its own printing company, and a network of newspaper kiosks. Altapress publishes the independent and high-quality weekly newspaper *Svobodni Kurs* with a print circulation of 23,000 copies. In addition, the publishing house operates Radio 22, an information radio station.

Despite its critical journalism, Altapress has not encountered any serious problems with state authorities, although it must struggle with the usual problems. In order to make work difficult for journalists it dislikes, state officials frequently bar them from attending press conferences and government meetings.

On 31 January 2008, Valery Savinkov, the editor-in-chief of the Bankfax Internet news agency, which was often critical of the governor, was violently attacked in broad daylight in the city center. An unidentified assailant hit him over the head with a baseball bat, leaving Savinkov unconscious. He lay for a long time in hospital with a concussion. The assailant was never apprehended.

#### Concluding remarks and recommendations

As the report presented by Reporters Without Borders shows, the current situation of the media in the Russian regions provides grounds for hope as well as for concern.

One positive sign is the development of economically viable models for media in the regions. This is especially the case for print media, which despite the increasing significance of the Internet has been able to maintain a solid position as an information resource. An important contribution in this respect has been made by the Russian Independent Print Media Program of the New Eurasia Foundation. The program, which is financed by the American government organization USAID, has networked independent regional newspapers throughout the whole of Russia. It offers training and consultation, and also presents annual awards to the best regional newspapers. The formation of the Association of Independent Regional Press (ANRI) in 2004 with the assistance of the program was an important step for print media.

In terms of content, however, the development of some newspapers is a cause of concern. Most publishers shy away from politically charged topics in order not to endanger their business. Maria Eismund, director of the program, even speaks of a “Slobodisation” of the press, a reference to the spread of the model promoted by the Sloboda newspaper in Tula. In late 2007, the WAZ Media Group reported that it purchased 75 percent of Sloboda and intended to establish newspapers in 20 other Russian cities according to the Sloboda model. To date, the WAZ Group has realized its plan in four large Russian cities. On the one hand, this allows for the establishment strong, economically independent media, yet, on the other hand, papers of this sort are largely passive in the political process.

A similar structure to that in the sphere of print media exists in radio. The Foundation for Independent Radio Broadcasting (FNR), initiated by the British BBC in 1999, has pro-

vided a network for regional radio broadcasters. Its goal is to promote balanced, professional radio journalism and reporting for the benefit of civil society. With this aim, the FNR organizes training sessions and competitions, and, together with Podstantsiya ([www.podst.ru](http://www.podst.ru)), has set up an Internet forum in which radio journalists can publish reports that their often strictly formatted radio stations refuse to broadcast. The most important project is a series of radio festivals ([radiofestival.ru](http://radiofestival.ru)) in all of the federal districts of Russia. The prizes awarded at the all-Russian closing festival in categories such as features, reporting, and news are regarded as the Russian “radio Oscars.”

The Internews program (later known as the Educated Media Foundation – EMF), which was financed in part by the now imprisoned oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, has also left a positive mark in the regions. Its Russian office was closed in April 2007 after its director Manana Aslamazyan was arrested at the Moscow Airport. The EMF was particularly active in the area of television and radio. According to the EMF, in its 15 years of existence, the organization trained over 15,000 journalists, producers, media managers, web designers, and media lawyers throughout the whole of Russia.

Regional journalists from all branches of the media are united in the Club of Regional Journalists, which also used to receive financial support from Mikhail Khodorkovsky through his Open Russia Foundation. The club has organized topic-related training seminars for journalists in Moscow. Recently, however, these seminars are held only virtually – over the Internet or via telephone – due to financial constraints.

In addition, there have been local initiatives at the regional level deserving of support, such as the Club of Liberal Journalists, which, for a long time, was organized by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Yekaterinburg. It provided journalists with a regular opportunity to meet with important politicians or business representatives for background discussions. The organization Barents Press International networks independent journalists in Russia’s north with their colleagues in

Scandinavia. A rewarding perspective is also offered by the formation of alternative journalist associations in regions where the official regional association is too closely allied to the state. Such was the case in the Krasnodar region, where the association of independent journalists founded the Voice of Kuban, which provides its members with additional training and legal assistance within modest limits.

Many publishers and representatives of journalist associations praise exchange programs and journalist traineeships with foreign media as being valuable to their work. Others see such visits abroad as being less helpful. Even Dmitiri Polyanin, Chairman of the Sverdlovsk Journalist Association, explained with some resignation that although many journalist sent to complete a traineeship in the West are full of enthusiasm when describing working conditions there, “once they get home, they continue to work just as they did in the past.” In addition, many regional journalists suffer the problem of insufficient language skills. Few of them speak a foreign language well enough to actively work abroad at a media outlet. This is why it seems to make the most sense to send journalists to English-speaking countries.

In discussions with Reporters Without Borders, even a number of publishers and editors-in-chief expressed the desire to gain experience through contact with foreign media outlets. They were particularly interested in the business concepts used by foreign regional media, as they could offer an accessible way to greater independence from state financing.

By contrast, Maria Eismond from the Russian Independent Print Media Program sees it as far more sensible to promote better networks and exchanges within Russia. “After all, they all have to work under similar conditions,” says Eismond. She does, however, support inviting foreign experts and renowned regional journalists as speakers at forums and seminars hosted by Russian organizations. “This expands the horizon,” she says, convinced. What is most important is good coordination in measures to support and assist journalists and media, while taking into

consideration the very different situations in the various regions.

In light of the vastness of the Russian Federation and the enormous regional differences, we as Reporters Without Borders wanted to sharpen awareness of the difficult conditions for media and journalists in the Russian regions. They are thereby more dependent on the fact that the weaknesses and strengths of their journalistic efforts come under increased scrutiny, even from abroad. Those journalists in the Russian provinces who are prevented from doing their research, who find themselves under political pressure from the authorities, or who are even physically threatened require our support and solidarity to a far greater extent than their colleagues in the Russian capital.

For organizations such as Reporters Without Borders, this entails the responsibility of maintaining a good network, even down to the level of small cities, with the help of our Moscow correspondents and our Russian partners – the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations and the Glasnost Defense Foundation. We feel that foundations, scholarship programs, and media projects should make stronger efforts to consider Russian regional journalists when selecting candidates. As our investigations have shown, many colleagues require more encouragement in fulfilling their journalistic activities, as well as a more intensive exchange of views and experience. They need greater information on alternative financing models and on regional journalism in other countries, as well as improved networking with each other. The future of the Russian media landscape will be decided in the wide expanses of the country and not merely in Moscow, the country’s capital.