

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/russia-office-of-opposition-newspaper-31-01-2012,41789.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Arsonist strikes

Office of opposition newspaper destroyed in firebomb attack

31 January 2012

Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns the arson attack that ravaged the editorial offices of the weekly [Vecherny Krasnokamsk](#) in the Perm region in south-west Russia on 28 January. The premises of the newspaper, published by the local branch of the opposition liberal Yabloko party, were destroyed.

"Such a grave incident must be treated with the utmost seriousness, particularly since it could have caused deaths and injuries," the press freedom organization said.

"The intimidatory shadow cast by this act is all the greater because of the current pre-electoral climate and all the political parties taking part must unequivocally condemn it.

"We hope closed-circuit television footage will permit the police to conduct a quick and successful investigation." About 4 a.m. an unidentified man broke a window in the *Vecherny Krasnokamsk* newsroom and threw a firebomb inside. The premises were destroyed within minutes. There were no injuries but all equipment, files and financial records were destroyed.

The editor, **Olga Kolokolova**, said damage was estimated at 300,000 roubles (about 7,500 euros). Kolokolova, who is also the head of the local branch of Yabloko, linked the attack to a series of investigative reports recently published by the newspaper on corruption, which implicated the Krasnokamsk mayor's office.

The mayor, Yuri Chechetkin, protested that he had no objection to *Vecherny Krasnokamsk* continuing its activities.

The political climate is tense in Perm, where a Yabloko parliamentary candidate was beaten up on 29 November.

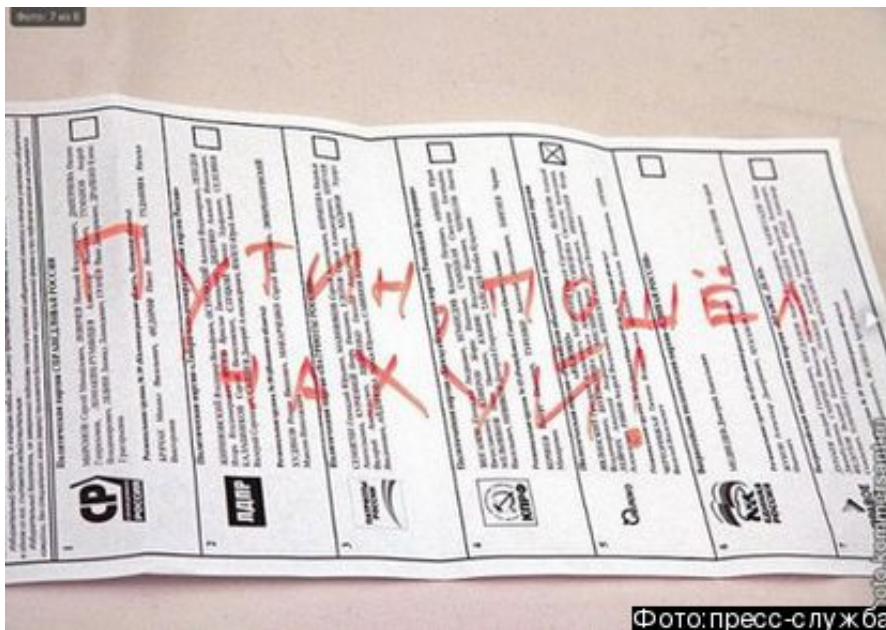
At a national level, the [huge demonstrations](#) after the parliamentary election last month have had repercussions for the traditional media, alternating between restriction and openness as the presidential election on 4 March approaches.

Thanks to the large numbers that took part in demonstrators calling for fair elections in many Russian towns and cities, the opposition has managed to drive a wedge into the media blockade it has had to contend with for years.

This month, the main commercial television stations (which are in fact attached to the Kremlin) such as *NTV* and *Pervy Kanal* have started giving a voice to government opponents at peak viewing times, albeit in a limited and partial manner. In the latest example, on Sunday 29 January, *NTV* gave the liberal opposition leader Boris Nemtsov a platform to highlight electoral fraud.

However, at the same time several critical journalists have been fired or have resigned in protest against internal pressure.

On 13 December, **Maxim Kovalsky**, editor of the independent magazine *Kommersant Vlast*, and the head of its parent company, Andrei Galiyev, were dismissed by the owner Alisher Usmanov for a "breach of ethics" by the magazine.



At issue was the edition published a day earlier in which a story on electoral fraud was illustrated with a photo of a spoiled ballot paper with a rude comment about Vladimir Putin scrawled on it. The headline on the weekly's front page used a play on words linking the name of Putin's United Russia party and an expression meaning "ballot-stuffing".

The few concessions made by the authorities towards the media are far short of genuine political openness. On 27 January, the candidacy of Grigory Yavlinsky, the Yabloko representative in the presidential election, was ruled invalid by the electoral commission.

The independent electoral watchdog organization Golos was told that the power supply to its Moscow office was to be cut off until 6 March because of "renovation work". It was about to unveil a new version of its [interactive map of electoral violations](#) adapted for the impending presidential vote.

[Russia is ranked 142nd of 179](#) countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. In September 2009, Reporters Without Borders published a report on the state of [press freedom in Perm](#) and six other Russian provinces.