

REPORT CO-FINANCED BY EUROPEAN REFUGEE FUND,  
PROJECT "EXTENSION OF THE ACCESS TO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION"

# MEDIA IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

JADWIGA ROGOŻA



Country of Origin Information Unit, Office for Foreigners

JUNE 2015





## **DISCLAIMER**

The present report is a public document, and it has been developed as part of the “Extension of the Access to the Country of Origin Information”, project no. 6/12/EFU, co-financed by the European Refugee Fund.

Under the above mentioned project, the Country of Origin Information Unit in the Office for Foreigners commissions external experts to prepare studies presenting detailed analyses of selected problems and issues arising during the refugee/asylum procedure. The information presented in such thematic reports is based mostly on commonly available resources, such as: studies developed by international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, press articles and/or online resources. At times they also include own observations, experience and field studies conducted by the authors.

All the information included in this report has been collected and elaborated with the highest diligence. However, it cannot be excluded that some data, or even the overall picture of the situation presented in the report, are out-of-date, incomplete or inaccurate. Therefore, this report must not be treated as the exclusive and indisputable reference in relation to decisions on awarding or refusing the refugee status or other forms of international protection.

This report is also not any political declaration of the authors or Polish authorities and should not be regarded as such.

The responsibility for the contents of this report lies exclusively with its author. The European Commission shall not bear any responsibility for the way the information made available is used.



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER I .....	7
Russian media: legal aspects.....	7
Law versus practice .....	10
Media versus power.....	13
Main tycoons on the media market in recent years.....	16
Growth of the Internet: a new quality and new challenges for the authorities.....	19
Local media .....	21
CHAPTER II.....	24
THE PRESS .....	24
List of the most important press titles:.....	24
CHAPTER III.....	33
TELEVISION AND RADIO .....	33
List of the most important television stations:.....	33
List of the most important radio stations:.....	37
CHAPTER IV .....	40
WEB PORTALS .....	40
The most important browsers and websites .....	40
The most important news and analytical portals .....	41
CHAPTER V.....	49
OPINION-FORMING SOURCES.....	49
CHAPTER VI .....	51
RUSSIAN MEDIA: PROSPECTS.....	51
Increase in the repressiveness of the politics vs condition of the media .....	51
Influence of economy.....	53



***J. Rogoza; Media in the Russian Federation***  
*Country of Origin Information Unit, June 2015*



## INTRODUCTION

In democracies, the media are dubbed the "Fourth Estate", a social institution that controls the remaining branches of the government, namely: executive government, legislature and the judicial system, as well as the social sphere. The independence of the media and acknowledgement of the freedom of speech are usually included in the constitutions of the majority of countries worldwide. In practice, however, the position of the media in non-democratic countries deviates from the proclaimed one. In the case of the Russian Federation, we can observe a stark contrast between the constitutional and legislative declarations which guarantee the freedom of speech and prohibit censorship, and the actual position and status of the media.

In the Russian political system, the government and economic subjects interfere in the functioning of the media quite profoundly. At the same time, there is a notable difference between the scale and nature of this interference in the 1990s, under the reign of Boris Yeltsin (during the period of strong influence of oligarchs), and under the reign of Vladimir Putin. The main difference is the plurality of the media in the times of Yeltsin, which reflected the pluralism of politics and business. The mainstream media were controlled by business empires; however, the existence of several influential businesses meant that the media they owned presented different viewpoints and hence the audience had a choice. Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that it was throughout the post-soviet period that, instead of playing the role of a civil institution, some media, especially those which enjoyed greater popularity (television), became political tools used by the authorities and investors to justify and support their policies and to attack their opponents, both domestic and foreign.

This instrumental role of the media was most visible last year, following the commencement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, where military maneuvers were accompanied by extensive information warfare, which Russia waged against Ukraine and the West. The armed conflict in Ukraine intensified the processes which had already begun, namely politicizing and gaining control over independent media or commentators on the Internet. The authorities accelerated legislative actions aimed at attacking independent media and bloggers, and applied numerous tools of informal pressure on editorial offices, individual journalists and bloggers, which was supposed to reduce the amount



of criticism against the regime in the public sphere. Over the last few years, several influential Internet media were taken over and the ground was prepared for taking control over others (for detailed information see: Chapter I). The government also took actions to "arrange" a sphere, which theretofore had not been controlled effectively, namely the Internet. Additionally, by creating and successfully imposing the imperial and anti-western narrative in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin significantly narrowed down the boundaries of an acceptable discourse in the media, not only with regard to Russia's foreign policy, but also her development, internal structure and the freedom of speech. Consequently, the media are under extremely strong pressure in today's Russia, and the boundaries of their journalistic freedom are strictly defined by the country's narrative. This has led to the restriction of informative pluralism, also on the Internet, and to the emigration or vocational retraining of many well-known journalists. Consequently, the media have become one of the visible victims of the third term of Vladimir Putin's presidency, the times of escalating authoritarian tendencies and imperial foreign policy.



## CHAPTER I

### **Russian media: legal aspects**

There are many laws in the Russian legislation, which directly or indirectly regulate the activity of the media and journalists in Russia; lawyers say that there are as many as eight hundred of those. This report presents only a few selected and most crucial laws and regulations applied in the sphere of media.

The Russian Constitution, adopted in 1993, contains an outline of the fundamental rules that regulate the freedom of speech and the media. The entries concerning the media are included in article 29 of the Constitution:

1. Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of thought and speech.
3. Nobody shall be forced to express his views and convictions or to deny them.
4. Everyone shall have the right freely to seek, receive, transmit, produce and disseminate information by any legal means. The list of types of information, which constitute State secrets, shall be determined by federal law.
5. The freedom of the mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited.<sup>1</sup>

The most important acts that regulate the media in Russia are:

The Law "On mass media" (adopted on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1991), the main act on the functioning of the media, was passed in the course of dismantling the Soviet law. The act still applies today with some minor changes.

The act introduced basic definitions (of such terms as the mass media) and the rules of governing their activity. It also specified the procedure of mass media registration, which is made by a federal body, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor). All press titles with over 1 thousand copies, and television and

---

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, archived from an official website of the Gov t of the Russian Federation, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/articles/ConstIntro01.shtml>, retrieved on 17th March 2015.



radio channels whose broadcasting range (coverage) exceeds the closed premises of a government office, university or industry, must undergo official registration. Local media are subject to the process of registration in the local departments of the Roskomnadzor. As of this day (15<sup>th</sup> December 2014), there are 87,049 registered mass media in the Russian Federation.

The web-based media have not been explicitly classified as "mass media" and there is no official definition of a "website". Nevertheless, web-based media are rather implicitly treated as "mass media". They can always register and acquire the status of "mass media" if they wish to do so; such registration gives them the rights of full-fledged media, such as judicial protection (this title may be discontinued only by the proprietor or the court), the ability to submit requests to officials and national and public institutions, authorization to take part in important meetings and conferences, etc. In practice, all large informative web portals have undergone the registration in the Roskomnadzor.

Other regulations, applied with regard to the media and journalists, are: Article 152 of the Civil Code concerning the breach of personal rights, including the honour, dignity and reputation, and two articles of the Criminal Code: Article 129 (Slander) and Article 130 (Insult). One of the more recent examples of using these entries with regard to journalists were two cases of lawsuits filed in 2014 by the CEO of Rosneft, Igor Sechin, against *Forbes* magazine and *Vedomosti* journal, in which Sechin claimed that the opinion that he had had a decisive impact on the decisions of the country in the energetic sphere was harmful to his reputation. In both cases the courts upheld Sechin's stance.

Another entry concerning the mass media is Chapter 70 of the Civil Code on the Copyright Law and Article 146 of the Criminal Code (Violation of Copyright and Neighbouring Rights). There are many other federal acts and regulations that govern the functioning of the media. These include: Labour Code of the Russian Federation, law "On Advertising" (2006), law "On Counteracting the Extremist Activity" (2002), resolution of the government of the Russian Federation "On the Obligatory Copy of Documents" (2002) and many others. During electoral campaigns and elections, the media are subject to the provisions of election laws: the law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights of Citizens of the Russian Federation" (2003) and the law "On the Election of the President of the Russian Federation" (2005). Apart from the legislative issues, the journalists themselves have adopted the Code of Professional Ethics of Russian Journalists, endorsed at the Congress of Russian Journalists in 1994.





On the other hand, one of the most significant, but practically dead letters, is Article 144 of the Criminal Code, which introduces punishment for hindering legal professional activity of journalists. This prohibition includes both forcing a journalist to disseminate certain information and preventing them from disseminating information.

Several acts have been adopted in recent years, targeting journalist autonomy and the media with foreign stock ownership that are not owned by the authorities.

In August 2014, an act was adopted that changed the rules of regulating information transfer and dissemination on the Internet. The act imposes some very serious limitations, especially on bloggers: blogs with the daily traffic of over 3 thousand users have to be registered in the Roskomnadzor and their authors need to disclose their personal details. Bloggers are to be covered by the requirements of the electoral law, confidential information protection laws, privacy laws and the law "On Counteracting the Extremist Activity". They bear responsibility for the credibility of the information they publish and for the content of the comments posted by other users. The act obliges bloggers and foreign bulletins to store the transferred content and user data (e.g. IP numbers) for 6 months, disclose this information to law enforcement bodies and even to provide these bodies with access to servers and to keep this fact to themselves. The act may harm the most popular political bloggers, whose blogs are read by hundreds of thousands and even millions of Internet users, and who have raised the subject of corruption (e.g. they disclosed information on the assets of the elite) or who publicised election violations (for more details see: Chapter IV). The act also obliges foreign news bulletins and messengers (such global giants as Google, Facebook, Twitter or Skype) to store the data on Russian Internet users on servers within the territory of the Russian Federation and to disclose this data at the request of Russian national bodies.

In October 2014, the State Duma adopted an act (in an unusually hasty mode) which limits the shares of foreign shareholders in the ownership of Russian media to 20%. This limitation is to apply both in the case of foreign legal and natural persons and in the case of Russian citizens with dual citizenships; it will also concern both direct and indirect ownership (through the Russian branches of foreign entities). The act will enter into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 with a one



year transition period. The act will enforce ownership changes of two most opinion-forming press titles addressed to the economic elites and experts: *Vedomosti* journal (100% of the foreign capital: Finnish fund Sanoma, Dow Jones/Wall Street Journal and FT Group/Financial Times) and the Russian *Forbes* (Axel Springer). These titles lead an independent editing policy and for years have been publishing texts which are critical of the economic policy of the Kremlin (the criticism has increased in the recent months after the annexation of Crimea and the deterioration of the economic situation resulting from the sanctions).

A new law came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, which prohibits commercials in pay-per-view television stations (amendment to the law "On Advertising"). It concerns those cable, satellite and web-based television stations which charge for access to their materials (according to the Roskomnadzor, there are 1.4 thousand such stations in Russia). At the same time, the amendment restores beer commercials on the television and in stadiums. The law can be perceived as a result of lobbying conducted by Video International, a monopolist in the sale of commercials in the main TV stations, controlled by a small group of the ruling elite (associated with Yury Kovalchuk). The introduction of beer commercials will increase the revenue of Video International. On the other hand, the ban on commercials in pay-per-view television stations will negatively influence the independent web-based Dozhd station, which has mostly depended on advertisements and at the same time raised some concerns in the government because of its independent information policy. Admittedly, in February 2015 President Putin adopted a law which partly alleviated the significance of this act (see: Chapter VI of this report); however, the application of the new provisions is discretionary and it will probably not apply to the independent media.

### **Law versus practice**

The Russian way of enforcing the law (especially the differences between the technicality and practice) means that many aspects concerning the functioning of the media are regulated not so much by individual provisions, but rather through informal decisions which reflect the interests of influential decision-makers. The media and journalists are also affected by informal means of



control or pressure, including the so-called "telephone law", and the most drastic forms of pressure, such as murder and assault.

The most telling example of the discrepancy between the law and practise was Boris Berezovsky's status in the media in 1990s. Berezovsky was the actual decision-maker within the information policy in the media controlled by the Kremlin (including the national television), although formally he was not a shareholder of those media. His influence was based on informal arrangements and secret agreements. In those times Berezovsky was known for the motto: "Management, not ownership".

The greatest media scandal in the naughties, namely the takeover of anti-Kremlin Media-Most, belonging to the oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, also passed without the application of the media law. The media belonging to Gusinsky's empire, especially NTV, were critical of the Second Chechen War, Vladimir Putin's coming to power and his policies. In 2001, the actions of the Kremlin resulted in Media-Most's takeover by Gazprom, which was not based on the media law, but on economic reasons (by using the loans taken out by the concern, as Gazprom was a guarantor of part of the credits). At the same time, the Kremlin used a number of public authorities against Gusinsky, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Federal Security Service and treasury service. When asked to comment on the hostile takeover of the opposition media, President Putin stated that it was merely "a dispute of economic subjects". The case of the takeover of Media-Most and NTV was one of the greatest blows to the Russian media pluralism in the last decade. It has set restrictive boundaries to the independent journalism for many years (until the development of the Internet) to such an extent that it practically disappeared from the mainstream media (television and high-circulation press) and it was confined to low-cost magazines, which almost placed it in the "niche".

The pressure on journalists and restricting the scope of information autonomy by the decision-makers was mostly done in a nonpublic way, through pressuring the owners of individual media (who are most often businessmen) and editors. Some examples of such practices between 2013 and 2014 are personnel and informational changes in popular web portals, Gazeta.ru and Lenta.ru, whose major shareholder is one of the wealthiest Russian businessmen, Alexander Mamut. For years, both of these portals enjoyed great autonomy and set themselves as opinion-forming and popular sources of information, read by



millions of Internet users (for more details see: Chapter IV). The first changes affected Gazeta.ru when its chief editor, Svetlana Wowayeva, left in 2013 and the portal gradually started to tone down its criticism of the authorities and upload more official information. In 2014, a long-term (from 2004) chief editor of Lenta.ru, Galina Timchenko, was forced to leave, after making Lenta one of the most popular and opinion-forming portals. Timchenko left Russia and launched another informational portal in Latvia, whereas Lenta.ru explicitly drifted towards pro-Kremlin media, for which the Internet users dubbed it "Lenta.vru" ("vru = I lie").

Direct, brutal pressure on journalists is not rare in Russia. Time and again, Freedom House has called this country "the most dangerous country for journalists in the world". The journalists are under pressure or they suffer violence from the authorities, police forces and criminals. Particular danger accompanied those who worked in the northern portion of the Caucasus, publicising violation of the human rights and pathologies in the power structures and in the Russian forces.

In the 1990s, the most notorious case when it comes to brutality towards journalists was the 1995 murder of Vladislav Listyev, an eminent journalist, head of the ORT TV Channel (currently Channel One) who was assassinated shortly after taking actions aimed at increasing the financial transparency of the station (the responsibility for the murder is assigned to Boris Berezovsky, who was exercising unofficial control over the station at the time).

In the next decade, the most notorious assassination was the 2006 murder of Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist at *Novaya Gazeta* (more information on the assassinated journalists of that newspaper can be found in Chapter IV). Politkovskaya was murdered by a commissioned killer on Vladimir Putin's birthday, 7<sup>th</sup> October. The investigation of the case was concluded and resumed several times and so far there has been no news of the mandator of the assassination. Politkovskaya was known as one of the bravest investigative journalists writing on the violation of human rights in Chechenya and in the whole northern part of the North Caucasus, on corruption and brutal practices in the Russian military and on the repressive policy of the Kremlin.

In the last few years, we can distinguish two (of many) cases of attacks on journalists. In 2008, Mikhail Beketov, an editor of a local newspaper in Khimki, who covered the violation of the law committed by the local authorities during the construction of the Moscow–Saint Petersburg motorway, when the



authorities planned to log the Khimki Forest (in 2008, a whole grass-roots civil movement was formed to protect the forest). As a result of the assault, Beketov's became an invalid and died in 2013. The assailants are still unknown, as is the orderer of the assault. In 2010, Oleg Kashin from Kommersant was also brutally assailed (more on that topic in Chapter IV). Among the potential orderers of the assault are circles connected with the Kremlin's youth organisations, Nashi and the Young Guard. The case has been investigated for years, to no avail.

The conditions in which Russian journalists work often contribute to the formation of "self-censorship", the awareness of the fact that some problems are "sensitive", and whose raising entails negative consequences. In the face of these moral dilemmas, journalists do not have sufficient legal protection from the country. As a result, the role of investigative journalists in sensitive or strategic fields is played by entities which are able to function in the face of a nearly incessant threat. These well-known entities include the already mentioned Anna Politkovskaya, Natalya Estemirova, a journalist and defender of human rights in the North Caucasus, murdered in 2009, or Roman Shleynov, an investigative journalist working for *Novaya Gazeta* and *Vedomosti* in the area of economy.

### **Media versus power**

Russia is a country in which power is gathered in the hands of the president, and the constitutional division of power and the independence of the institutions are not acknowledged in practice. Similarly to the legislative authority or the judicial system, which have become the tools for the implementation of the Kremlin's policy, the Fourth Estate is also used to support or even serve the interests of the Kremlin.

The media have always constituted one of the key tools in the arsenal of the Kremlin. One of the first achievements of Putin after he came to power was the weakening and ultimately taking over of the opposition media holding, MediaMost, belonging to the oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, in 2001. The media of this holding, especially the then popular and fresh television, NTV, reached out to a wide audience with its criticism of the Kremlin. The concern was taken over by the authorities with the use of their control over the Public Prosecutor's Office, treasury service and secret service. By neutralising this influential media opponent, **the Kremlin secured a propagandist "shield" for further actions,**



including control over subsequent spheres of public life, local elites, businesses and the socio-political sphere. Within the next few years, the Kremlin obtained direct control over the popular, high-circulation media (starting with the main television stations and the largest newspapers), which had formed the opinion and attitude of the majority of Russians. Consequently, the state obtained the actual control over subsequent newspapers (such as *Izvestia* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*) and restricted the outreach of independent radio broadcasting stations (in 2006, the retransmission of programmes broadcast by Radio Liberty and Voice of America was prohibited in Russia, much to the dismay of 60 local radio stations). This resulted in the creation of a one-sided portrayal of the Russian political scene by the mainstream media. An investigation of the news broadcast by the most important Russian media, prepared by the Russian Union of Journalists and the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, pointed to a smashing dominance of information concerning civil servants, spearheaded by President Vladimir Putin, and an insignificant presence of the opposition, which appeared only in a negative context.

The media were used by the authorities both internally, to **create a positive image of the president** and his surroundings, as well as internationally. For more than two years now, from the moment of Putin's return to the Kremlin, the narrative in the state-owned or state-controlled media has been distinguished by extreme one-sidedness and **growing aggression towards the opponents**, such as (mostly western) countries whose policies conflict with the interests of the Kremlin, as well as indigenous political and social opponents. This rhetoric exaggerates the image of the enemy, it is distinguished by a high level of aggression and it does not leave any room for discussion or disagreement. The group of the "enemies" includes general opponents of the Kremlin from the circle of political opposition and non-governmental organisations, as well as civil activists and artists. They are described as the "fifth column" and "traitors to the nation" (these terms were used by President Putin in his formal speech before the Federal Assembly on 18<sup>th</sup> March) The NTV Television has been famous for stigmatising opponents since 2012, when it aired a series of exposing coverages, entitled *The Anatomy of Protest* (which allegedly proved that opposition protests were controlled by the agents of intelligence from western countries). Pro-Kremlin politicians also stigmatise the media "fifth column", which includes Dozhd TV, Echo of Moscow radio station and a number of independent web portals. The enemy category also contains external players, such as the authorities in Ukraine (described as "junta" or as "self-proclaimed



authority") US Administration, European and world governments which are not Russia-friendly. The pro-Kremlin media do not hesitate to use the language of explicit confrontation and threat in addressing even the most powerful of those players (a TV anchor of Rossiya, Dmitry Kiselyov, once stated: "Russia is the only country in the world capable of turning the USA into radioactive dust"). At the same time, more and more often the pro-Kremlin media use the term "smashing majority" to describe the social support of the Kremlin. The term is used as a proof of a full consensus in the Russian society, which gives the Kremlin *carte blanche*.

The armed conflicts in which Russia has been involved (and which she initiated) are accompanied by coordinated and widespread media campaigns. The first of those campaigns was carried out **during the war with Georgia** in 2008. Prepared on an exceptionally grand scale and distinguished by an extreme level of aggression, this campaign supported the endeavours of Russian authorities, diplomacy and army.<sup>2</sup> The main task of the Russian media was to prove that Russia was being reborn as a superpower: strong, assertive, aware of its interests and determined to defend them. At the same time, the propaganda of the Kremlin was to stress the weaknesses and divisions of the Western world. Another purpose of the campaign was to discredit Georgia and unmask the failure of its pro-Western aspirations. Inside Russia, the propaganda was to legitimise the war in the eyes of the people, which was not the first time such actions won over approval of more and more aggressive actions of the authorities. Again, the vulnerability of the society to this internal propaganda confirmed that the media constitute the most important tool in the soft power arsenal of the Kremlin, aptly applied to achieve the goals of the Russian ruling elite.

A similar situation arose after the incident on the Maidan in Kiev, the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and **during the armed conflict with Ukraine**. Alongside political and military actions, Russia initiated a widespread media campaign, which can be defined as "**information warfare**", discrediting the social aspect of the Maidan, depicting Ukraine as a puppet country (controlled by the USA and EU) and presenting the events in Kiev as a manifestation of blood-thirsty anarchy. During the campaign, the Kremlin adapted unusually aggressive methods. One such method was **disinformation**, i.e. setting up

---

<sup>2</sup> More on this topic in: Jadwiga Rogoża, "Russian propaganda war: media as a long- and short-range weapon", OSW Commentary, September 2008.



events, bending the truth and falsification of the broadcast materials. One example would be a disinformation campaign in which for a long period of time Russian media and politicians asserted that the troops operating in Crimea were local self-defence only. With a view to create a certain image of the enemy (Ukrainian authorities), the Russian media tried to outdo one another in the description of cruelty of Ukrainian task forces in eastern Ukraine, with the use of falsified materials (e.g. in a coverage aired in May 2014, in order to substantiate the thesis on the atrocities committed by Ukrainian "fascists", Russia-1 used a video clip from a special operation in Kabardino-Balkaria conducted in 2012, which was later admitted by the TV station itself). The Kremlin-controlled media also dissipated reports on the participation of Western military instructors and military corporations in an anti-terrorist operation in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, **semantic manipulation** was also practised, as the Ukrainian authorities and the participants of the Maidan, including ordinary citizens, were called "fascists", "banderivtsi" and "anti-semites". On the other hand, the fighting squads of the separatists in eastern Ukraine were called *levée en masse* or "peaceful participants of the protests". The information conveyed by the pro-Kremlin media was distinguished by an unprecedented level of aggression, unparalleled even with the anti-Western rhetoric from the period of the decay of the USSR. Part of the commentators compared the campaigns of stigmatising the West, Ukraine and Russian opponents to Stalinist campaigns condemning the "enemies of the people". This aggression is dominant in the media and it contributes to the increase in tension and division in the society. One of the social consequences, quoted in numerous reports and commentaries, is the wave of controversy and conflicts concerning the Russian policy (especially towards Ukraine) not only in public debates, but also in families and among friends. At the end of 2013, a Russian journalist, Dmitry Kiselyov, an anchor of the state-owned television Rossiya, who has become the symbol of the new register of the pro-Kremlin media, was appointed head of the new news agency Rossiya Segodnya, and in February 2014 he was distinguished by President Putin with the Class IV Order "For Merit to the Fatherland".

### **Main tycoons of the media market in recent years**

Both during the reign of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, a number of influential media were **gathered in the hands of large private investors**. In the 1990s, the main competitive media tycoons were Boris Berezovsky and





Vladimir Gusinsky. Berezovsky exercised control over several TV stations (ORT, TV-6) and opinion-forming press titles (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Noviya Izvestia*, *Vlast* weekly, *Ogoniok* et al.), although (as has been stated above) he was a direct shareholder of only few of them. Berezovsky's media actively supported the Kremlin policy. His main rival within the media was Vladimir Gusinsky, whose Media-Most holding company included NTV and TNT, Echo of Moscow radio station, *Segodnya* journal and *Itogi* weekly. Gusinsky's media opposed the Kremlin, criticising its policies (e.g. during the Second Chechen War) and supported a political block called "Fatherland - All Russia", a Muscovite and regional alliance competing with the Kremlin. Apart from these two main players, the then business tandem of Vladimir Potanin and Mikhail Prokhorov also had a substantial share in the media market, as their company, Prof-Media, controlled such titles as *Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Ekspert* weekly, MTV Russia and several other entertainment media. Potanina and Prokhorov's media were involved neither in the Kremlin policy nor that of its opponents, and they had a more or less flexible attitude towards events.

Also in the period of Putin's reign, especially over the last few years, a clear concentration of the Kremlin-supporting media can be distinguished in several large centres. The main difference, which has already been mentioned, is the **lack of informational pluralism in the reign of Yeltsin**. The information space of today's Russia is totally dominated by media which are loyal to the Kremlin, and which are arbitrarily divided into two fractions: state-owned, concentrated in the VGTRK holding, and private, controlled by Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya and by the group of Alisher Usmanov, the wealthiest man in Russia.

The **state-owned VGTRK holding** has gathered state-controlled media since 1990, when it was established; since 2004 it has been managed by Oleg Dobrodyeyev. Some of the media belonging to VGTRK are: Russia-1, Russia-2 and Russia-24 news channel, Russia-K (formerly channel Culture), RTR-Planet broadcasting abroad, channel Moscow-24 and many other themed channels; radio stations such as Radio Rossii, Radio Mayak, Vesti FM, Radio Culture as well as local radio and TV holdings in all regions of the Russian Federation.

On the other hand, **Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya (NMG)** has become the tycoon of the private sector in recent years. Its main shareholder is a banker and



a friend of Putin's, Yury Kovalchuk (another close friend of the Russian president, Gennady Timchenko, also has minority shares in the Group). In 2014, the position of chair of the supervisory board of this media tycoon was given to Alina Kabaeva. The group began to take over influential media around 2008, when it purchased controlling interests in *Izvestia* journal and in Channel 5 in St. Petersburg; in 2011, it bought 25% of shares in the main television programme, Channel 1, from Roman Abramovich, and took over STS TV, Ren TV and Russkaya Sluzhba Novostey radio from other investors; in 2013, it gained control over tabloid-type media associated in News Media holding belonging to Aram Gabrelianov: LifeNews web TV, newspapers *Zhizn* and *Tvoi Dien*. At the same time, thanks to a multi-levelled structure, Kovalchuk and his Rossiya Bank have gained control over Gazprombank, including its media assets: NTV and TNT, Echo of Moscow radio station and a number of other channels. In 2010, it took over the largest operator of the advertising media market in the TV industry, Video International. NMG has an important political ally in the person of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, Alexey Gromov. NMG's media explicitly support the policies of the Kremlin, and last year, especially after the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine, they have created a "war party" camp by carrying out an aggressive campaign supporting the Russian geopolitical booty, and at the same time by attacking the "sixth column" of Russia, the liberals in the national administration, who had opposed the aggressive foreign policy of Russia (of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, Vladislav Surkov, the head of the state-owned Sberbank, German Gref, the General Manager of the State Corporation Rosnano, Anatoly Chubais, and others).<sup>3</sup>

**Alisher Usmanov's group** controls the opinion-forming journal *Kommersant*, *Kommersant-Vlast* and *Ogoniok* weeklies as well as some powerful websites: the largest Russian social networking site vKontakte and a browser and mailing service, Mail.ru. Usmanov's media are not as extreme in their one-sidedness as the media from Kovalchuk's holding, NMG. However, they too more and more often reflect the viewpoint of the authorities. In this respect, the *Kommersant* journal has undergone a noticeable evolution in recent years, marked by a well-known intervention of its shareholder (in 2014, the editor-in-chief of *Kommersant* was dismissed after the intervention of the CEO of Rosneft, Igor Sechin). The CEO and founder of vKontakte, Pavel Durov, was also dismissed

---

<sup>3</sup> See: Tatiana Stanovaya, "Media War of the 'Kremlin towers'", Politcom.ru, published on 17.11.2014 (Russian language only).



under the pressure of the authorities and in scandalous circumstances (more on this topic in Chapter IV).

### **Growth of the Internet: a new quality and new challenges for the authorities**

The development of the Internet in Russia, accompanied by economic growth, technological development and generation exchange, has been the greatest challenge when it comes to the control over the main sources of information which has been exercised by the Kremlin for around a decade. Currently, **around 66% of Russian citizens over the age of 18 use the Internet** (76.3 million people), of which 46% (53.6 million) are every day users.<sup>4</sup> When we look at the almost universal prevalence of the Internet among the youth, these figures are even higher. The Internet constitutes an everyday tool for work, information, entertainment and activity of the most educated, well-off and active part of the society. In 2011, the Internet already outran the press when it comes to the number of people who sought news about their country and the world. Currently, the majority of Russian inhabitants (90%) regard television as the number one source of information (after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine this number increased by 20 per cent), while the second most important source of information for the Russians is the Internet (24%) and the groups who seek information on the Internet are the most dynamic, educated and well-off.<sup>5</sup>

The popularisation of the Internet in Russia has led to **significant socio-political consequences**. A considerable part of socio-political activities which used to be prevented in "real life" by the Kremlin have been transferred to the world-wide web. The Internet has become an alternative to the pro-Kremlin media and a forum for exchanging opinions and supporting public actions; a kind of school of citizenship and a "test-tube" in which specific projects are developing. The election period between 2011 and 2012 was a moment when this activity exceeded the virtual sphere and turned into actions in the "real world", including mass protests against electoral abuse on the streets of Russia.

---

<sup>4</sup> Based on research carried out by VCIOM, data from 4.10.2014, [http://www.bizhit.ru/index/users\\_count/0-151](http://www.bizhit.ru/index/users_count/0-151) (text in Russian).

<sup>5</sup> Levada-Center research from March 2014



Although the Russian authorities are in possession of many tools of technical control over the Internet (such as control over operators) and the activity of its users, the Russian web segment constituted a virtually uncensored information space until around 2012-2013. It spurred some popular information and analytic portals visited by millions of users and blogs dedicated to socio-political matters which received several dozen to hundreds of thousands of views a day. Groups gathering the promoters of civil society and different kinds of grass-roots activities have sprung on social networking sites. The number of users visiting journals of the most popular bloggers often exceeds the circulation of many opinion-forming Russian newspapers: Rustem Adagamov's blog ([drugoi.livejournal.com](http://drugoi.livejournal.com)) has 74 thousand registered viewers (and numerous unregistered ones) and Alexei Navalny's blog ([navalny.com](http://navalny.com)) is visited by about a million people each year.

In fact, the Internet has revolutionised the existing rules of information spreading. Beforehand, the state used to direct specific messages to the society in a top-down, one-sided way by means of loyal media. If certain information did not appear on the television, it did not reach the wider audience and did not become a known event, even in the region. Meanwhile, the Internet offered interactivity, additionally strengthened by widespread mobile devices (such as smartphones). The Internet became a **fully-fledged message generator**. Some of the messages were delivered by the users themselves, for example those who were witnesses to important events. This process broke down the **informational monopoly of the authorities** on creating its message for the whole society. People started to receive many messages which were critical of the authorities. The writers of the news that triggered social resonance included frustrated state officials or people employed in the defence and law enforcement institutions, who used the Internet to unmask the pathology predominant in the government. In 2009, one of the best known "unmaskers" was a militsiya officer, Alexey Dymovsky, who revealed corruption, nepotism, brutality of the superiors and breaking the law by the management (drug trafficking, falsifying statistics) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Internet assumed the role of an **informational alternative** and became a **tool for social control** over the activity of the authorities on different levels.<sup>6</sup> Another function of the Internet was **consolidation and coordination**. Virtual communities joined together by common opinions and interests became a substitute for political parties and the blogosphere turned into a public forum for exchanging information and

---

<sup>6</sup> More on this topic in: Jadwiga Rogoża, "The internet in Russia: the cradle of civil society", OSW Commentary, March 2012.



opinions. The web began to feature investigations conducted by civilians as well as political satire, which had not been present in the traditional media for years. The Internet became a stronghold for the political opposition reaching out to potential supporters by means of social networking sites and blogs, organising various events, both in the Internet and in “real life”.

Following mass protests in Russia between 2011 and 2012, which were largely coordinated with the use of the Internet, the **authorities began to treat the world-wide-web as a significant challenge to their control over the socio-political sphere**. The Kremlin's attitude towards the Internet is best reflected in a statement delivered by President Vladimir Putin in which he declared that the Internet had been created as a "CIA project". After his return to the presidency in 2012, the authorities launched a whole array of actions directed against the freedom of speech on the Internet and the freedom of its users. On the one hand, under the pressure of the government, the investors have altered their information policy on several popular web portals which had previously enjoyed great autonomy, containing information that criticised the authorities (Lenta.ru, Gazeta.ru, Newsru.com). One sympathiser of the Kremlin, the businessman Alisher Usmanov, has taken over the stocks of Vkontakte, a Russian social networking service, and triggered a change in its management team. Several popular opposition portals (Grani.ru, Ej.ru, Kasparov.ru and Alexei Navalny's blog) have been blocked on the Russian territory since March 2014. In 2014, the authorities adopted a law which significantly tightens control over bloggers and obliges them to abide by restrictive legislation (for more details see: p. 7). The Personal Data Protection Act can serve as a tool of control over foreign websites, as it requires them (Google, Facebook, Twitter etc.) to store user data only on the territory of the Russian Federation (see also: p. 7). As a consequence of the policy of the Kremlin towards the Internet, the leading opposition bloggers (Oleg Kashin, Andrei Malgin and Rustem Adagamov) have emigrated from Russia within the last few years and are currently blogging from abroad.

### **Local media**

According to the law, apart from the previously mentioned federal laws, the distribution of competences between federal and local authorities in the field of regulating the activity of the local press market is specified in the law "On General Principles of Organisation of Local Self-Government" (2003) and the



regulation of the government of the Russian Federation of 2010 regulating the principles of the distribution of non-fixed retail facilities. Only local authorities may decide on practical issues, such as the procedure of issuing, distribution and sale of the press on the territory of a given region.

Local journalism bloomed in the 1990s, when the collapse of the USSR broke down the uniform "information path" and censorship, along with many nationwide official media. The regions of Russia spawned an abundance of non-public and commercial media, dedicated to local news and (unlike in the Soviet times) incorporating a large sensation and entertainment component. There were several forms of ownership of the new media: state ownership, state-cooperative ownership, stock ownership, private ownership, as well as ownership controlled by one owner or a group of people. Part of the media were controlled by local administrations (the rule is that local authorities issue a newspaper that represents the "line" of a governor or mayor), however most of the media were financed by new business or criminal structures that treated them as tools of promotion or influencing public opinion. Independent newspapers were also appearing, established by groups of journalists. Only some of these media were profitable, due to the small size of local press markets, high production cost and low income of the population which was decreasing in the 1990s. Part of the publishing companies were subsidised by the country (periodicals for children, seniors and the mentally disabled), but in most of the cases the functioning of a newspaper depended on investors, who, in turn, exerted influence on the editorial policy.

The structure of the regional market copies that of the federal market to a great extent: there are media directed at businesses, trade-dedicated publishing houses, tabloids and city newspapers which are free of charge, including free paper announcements. The main difference is that the regional media are less politically inclined and that the main focus of the publishing houses is on matters connected with a given region (e.g. living in the countryside). The national television stations broadcast in the regions air regional commercials, and national newspapers contain regional inserts. The regions which are densely populated by non-Russian nationalities have access to press in their languages, and their regional TV stations usually air programmes dealing with certain sets of topics.

Currently, there are ca. 180 regional TV stations in Russian regions and additional 30 stations whose range covers small towns and villages, and there



are tens of thousands of press titles whose average circulation ranges from 5 to 20 thousand copies.

After the year 2000, in the period of centralisation and reduction of political and informational pluralism, similar processes were also taking place locally. The relationship between Moscow and regional authorities consisted in a distinctive social contract: in return for the region's loyalty and social stability (lack of protests), the regions were practically free to "format" their policy, business and information sphere. Apart from raw materials and armament, which involved large national concerns, **the economy of the regions gradually became dominated by local political arrangements.** Both the federal and regional markets spurred regional replicas of the informational "vertical" authority (властная вертикаль). These changes were particularly averse to independent media that tried to pursue social control over the authorities. At the same time, the media connected to local administrations were strengthened, and private media had to allow for the political restrictions imposed by the authorities in their publications. According to the rule, the regional informational component, appearing both in the local press and television, is developed in consideration of unwritten principles formulated by the regional administration. However, there is a considerable local variation in that aspect, as there are regions whose authorities do not tolerate opposition journalism (the 1998 assassination of a Kalmyk journalist, Larisa Yudina, who had criticised the authorities of the Republic of Kalmykia got a lot of publicity) and there are those which do not impose harsh restrictions on journalists. In Kaliningrad Oblast the opposition newspaper *Novye Kolesa* has been successfully published for years, and in Tomsk Oblast TV2 private television has won numerous prestigious TEFI prizes.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> At the end of 2014 TV2 was almost discontinued. The Roskomnadzor rejected an application for the prolongation of its licence.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PRESS

The press is the most prevalent type of mass media in Russia. In 2009 there were over 50 thousand officially registered paper media and in 2014 their number reached 63.5 thousand.<sup>8</sup> However, there has been a decreasing trend over the past few years when it comes to circulation. In the last year alone, the circulation of the Russian press decreased by 7% on average. One of the examples that illustrate this tendency would be a popular journal, *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, whose circulation has decreased from 2.2 million copies to 700 thousand copies in the last two years. The main reason for this process is digitalisation and access to press through websites, also with the use of mobile devices. The process is accompanied by the development of websites belonging to the printed media, which (with few exceptions) are expected to provide free access to their present and archived texts for the users. The decreasing popularity of the printed media means that the value of the market for printed advertisements is also on the decrease: since last year it has fallen by 10% and is currently worth 37 billion roubles.<sup>9</sup>

#### **List of the most important press titles:**

- ***Parlamentskaya Gazeta***

Journal, official body of the parliament, similar to the Journal of Laws. The journal contains legislative texts and other legislative acts which have been passed by the parliament (they can be viewed in the "Documents" tab on the journal's website, which also allows the user to search for legislative acts). Moreover, the journal publishes "official reports" in the form of texts on the work of the parliament as well as interviews with parliamentarians. Circulation: 56.5 k. Website: [www.pnp.ru](http://www.pnp.ru).

---

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. <http://www.slideshare.net/omukovozov/2014-37350384>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2014/02/26/5927749.shtml>.





▪ ***Rossiyskaya Gazeta***

Journal, official body of the government of the Russian Federation (100% owned by the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation). Publication of laws and decrees: the laws, decrees passed by the president, regulations of the government and legislative texts of the ministries come into force after being published in *RG*. The paper has a circle of influential writers, valued even by independent readers (e.g. Leonid Radzиковsky, Valeriy Vizhutovich and Ariadna Rokossowska, who specialises in Polish affairs). Although the journal is officially owned by the state, it enjoys certain renown and avoids publishing strikingly manipulative content (as e.g. *Izvestia* or *Komsomolskaya Pravda*). Daily circulation: 167 k copies, weekend circulation: 3.5 mn. Website: [www.rg.ru](http://www.rg.ru).

▪ ***Nezavisimaya Gazeta***

Journal; owner: Konstantin Remchukov (businessman with moderately liberal views, in the USSR he was allegedly connected with the Soviet intelligence). It pursues a non-uniform editorial policy. On the one hand, it publishes moderately liberal content, including some elements of criticism. On the other hand, the newspaper has frequently been used to publish "throw-ins" inspired by the Kremlin, including anti-Polish texts (e.g. a far-famed statement of the governor of Kemerovo Oblast, Aman Tuleyev, from 2000, in which Poland was accused of "killing 80 k Red Army soldiers in Polish concentration camps" during the Polish–Soviet War in 1920). During Medvedev's presidency, the paper supported his policies, and after the return of Putin it has been moderately critical of the authorities; it might be considered as representing the views of some of the Russian elites, who are disillusioned by Putin's return and the sharp authoritarian and anti-Western politics. Despite the above, the paper succumbs to the pressure of the authorities from time to time (some hackers have revealed that it published its materials in line with the guidelines received from the authorities concerning the 2013 elections in Moscow). Circulation: 40 k. Website: [www.ng.ru](http://www.ng.ru).



- ***Vedomosti***

Economic journal; the most opinion-forming Russian newspaper, chosen by the elite and businessmen and at the same time one of the last independent titles. 100% owned by the foreign capital (33% by a Finnish fund Sanoma, Dow Jones/Wall Street Journal and FT Group/Financial Times). Pursuant to a law passed in 2014 (see Chapter I), by 2016 it will have to sell 80% of its stocks to Russian entities, which is considered synonymous with the discontinuation of its present form. The newspaper associates the best Russian writers and commentators and is a harsh criticism of the politics of the authorities, especially the economic policy. Printed circulation: 75 k, several times more Internet subscribers (2.5 mn individual users per month). Website: [www.vedomosti.ru](http://www.vedomosti.ru).

- ***Forbes***

Monthly, its Russian version has been issued since 2004. Publisher: German concern Axel Springer. The first editor-in-chief of the Russian *Forbes*, Paul Klebnikov (an American journalist of Russian descent) was shot down in Moscow in 2004 (he had published a number of investigative materials concerning Russian oligarchs and Chechen businessmen). *Forbes* publishes valued economic analyses and texts. It also created the most reliable list of the wealthiest people in Russia. Similarly to *Vedomosti*, pursuant to a law passed in 2014 (see: Chapter I), *Forbes* will have to sell out 80% of its stocks to Russian entities by the end of 2016. Circulation: 100 k copies. Website: [www.forbes.ru](http://www.forbes.ru).

- ***Kommersant***

Journal, owned by Alisher Usmanov, the wealthiest businessman in Russia (investing in the metallurgic industry, also involved in Gazprom). For years, *Kommersant* has been a truly opinion-forming and renowned journal; on the one hand, it published many thorough political and economic analyses and texts, and at the same time (due to its strong relations with the authorities) it published "controlled leaks" from the Kremlin and the government. In the last few years, the editorial autonomy of the paper has been clearly restricted and its political servility has increased. One example of this trend is the dismissal of the editor-



in-chief, Mikhail Mikhailin after publishing a text which was critical of Rosneft. Many opinion-forming journalists have been dismissed from the paper, but Andrey Kolesnikov, known as Putin's favourite journalist, is still publishing. Circulation: 117 k. Website: [www.kommersant.ru](http://www.kommersant.ru).

- ***Kommersant-Vlast***

Weekly, belongs to Kommersant publishing house (owned by Alisher Usmanov). The weekly has lost its renown which it had enjoyed in the 90s and currently it consults its policy with the authorities. What is more, in 2013 independent journalists revealed that it had falsified materials. Circulation: 55 k. Website: <http://kommersant.ru/vlast>.

- ***Ogoniok***

Weekly, one of the oldest Russian periodicals (it has been published, with some intervals, since 1899). Since 2009, it belongs to Kommersant publishing house (owned by Alisher Usmanov). In the declining years of the USSR, the weekly became one of the main *spiritus movens* of perestroika. Currently its cultural, literary and themed articles are directed mainly at the intelligentsia. Its political line may be described as balanced between careful criticism of the authorities and the observance of unwritten norms of loyalty. Circulation: 80 k. Website: <http://www.kommersant.ru/ogoniok>.

- ***Novaya Gazeta***

Issued 3 times a week. 51% of its shares belong to the editorial staff and the remaining 49% to banker Alexander Lebedev (39%), who left for London in the aftermath of the Crimea conflict, and Mikhail Gorbachev (10%). Left-wing and liberal, the newspaper is concentrated around the protection of human rights and at the same time it opposes the authorities. Since its beginnings, it has been critical of President Vladimir Putin and his milieu; during Medvedev's presidency it assumed a moderately friendly attitude towards him (which resulted both from the views and expectations of the journalists themselves, and from the attitude manifested by Lebedev, who belonged to the group of



businessmen that "rooted for" Medvedev). The newspaper specialises in journalists' investigations and publication of materials that unmask the pathology of public authorities. For that, it is subject to continuous pressure from the authorities (including Roskomnadzor's official warnings due to alleged law-breaking). According to Guy Chazan, "Russia is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist. And the most dangerous place to be a journalist in Russia is *Novaya Gazeta*". The investigative journalists or collaborators of *Novaya Gazeta* who have been murdered over the last few years include: Anna Politkovskaya (assassinated in 2006) and Igor Dominikov (assassinated in 2000), Yuri Shchekochikhin (died in 2003 in unexplained circumstances), Natalya Estemirova (assassinated in 2009), Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova (both assassinated in 2009) and others. Circulation: ca. 300 k. Website: [www.novayagazeta.ru](http://www.novayagazeta.ru).

▪ ***The New Times***

Weekly, belonging to an editorial staff, edited by Yevgenia Albats, partly financed by crowdfunding (created on the basis of the transformed *Novoye Vremya* weekly). Liberal, in opposition to the authorities, particularly critical of President Putin and *siloviki*. It is well-known for investigations concerning the funding of governmental projects (one of the authors of such articles, Natalia Morari, was deported from Russia by the FSB in 2009). During Medvedev's presidency, the weekly offered him its cautious support and expressed hope for liberalisation. Currently, it publishes articles which are explicitly critical of the Kremlin (e.g. it condemned the annexation of Crimea) and it enjoys high reputation, although it is faced with financial problems at the same time. Circulation: 50 k. (+ several dozen thousand subscribers on the Internet). Website: [www.newtimes.ru](http://www.newtimes.ru).

***Izvestia***

Journal; owned by the businessman Yury Kovalchuk (through Sogas company), a close friend of Vladimir Putin's. Issued by the holding company News Media, belonging to a controversial media tycoon, Aram Gabrelianov, who also publishes *Zhizn* tabloid and owns LifeNews web portal. The newspaper is considered a propaganda mouthpiece of the Kremlin, with such controversial (fascist-esque) commentators as Alexander Prokhanov and Eduard Limonov. In



recent years, especially after Putin's return to presidency, anti-president protests in 2011-2012 and especially after the annexation of Crimea and Russian intervention in Ukraine, *Izvestia* has assumed an aggressive, pro-Kremlin stance. Once a pro-Kremlin, albeit revered newspaper, it has become a collaborative rag. In 2014, hackers disclosed information on publishing articles for money, also in *Izvestia*. Circulation: 150 k. Website: [www.izvestia.ru](http://www.izvestia.ru).

### ***Zhizn***

Journal, the most tabloid newspaper in Russia. It belongs to News Media, a media empire created by Aram Gabrelianov, one of the most controversial media tycoons, who cooperates with the oligarch Yury Kovalchuk, a close friend of Vladimir Putin's. The newspaper mainly publishes sensational and primitive celebrity materials, but it also "smuggles" messages of support for the ruling regime in Russia. Circulation: 2.1 mn. Website: <http://zhizn.ru>.

### ***Komsomolskaya Pravda***

Journal and tabloid; owner of the controlling interest: ESN group (structure similar to the Russian Railways, run by Putin's close collaborator, Vladimir Yakunin). The newspaper is a media tool in the hands of the Kremlin, and at the same time it raises a lot of controversies, including ethical ones. Daily circulation: 655 k, weekend circulation: 2.7 mn. The newspaper is published in 48 countries abroad, with the total circulation of 1 mn. Website: [www.kp.ru](http://www.kp.ru)

### ***Moskovskij Komsomolets***

Journal combining tabloid elements with elements of serious political writing and analytics. For almost 30 years, the major shareholder and editor-in-chief is Pavel Gusev, known as "systemically liberal" and an opportunist: he previously supported the then mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, and today he pursues the policy of careful criticism of the Kremlin, speaking for the liberals (at the same time he sits in the Russian Human Rights Council). The newspaper gathers publicists with various political views; on the one hand, there are journalists that criticise the authorities, like the economist Vladislav Inozemcev and publicist



Aleksandr Minkin, and on the other hand there is Aleksandr Khinshtain, a controversial investigative journalist (allegedly associated with the FSB), who is also a deputy of the State Duma on behalf of the pro-Kremlin party United Russia. In 2013, the newspaper caused a scandal by publishing a pungent article criticising the "political prostitution" in United Russia, for which it was exposed to persecution on the part of representatives. Circulation: 700 k. Website: [www.mk.ru](http://www.mk.ru).

### ***Snob***

Political, social and lifestyle monthly, addressed to the middle class, presenting liberal and moderate opposition views. It was established in 2008 as a mouthpiece for the views of the metropolitan middle class. Owned by ONEKSIM group, belonging to the billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov. The articles in the paper-back edition and on the Internet are written by some of the best Russian journalists, publicists, writers and experts (such as Boris Akunin, Vladimir Sorokin, Valery Panyushkin, Oleg Kashin and Anton Nossik). Circulation: 90 k. [www.snob.ru](http://www.snob.ru).

### ***Argumenty i Fakty***

Popular weekly, taken over by the Government of Moscow in 2014 (previously owned by Promsvyazbank belonging to "the orthodox bankers", brothers Dmitry and Aleksey Ananyev, close to Vladimir Yakunin). The most widely-read weekly in Russia (current circulation: 2.2 mn copies), in 1990 it earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records as a newspaper with the highest circulation in history (33.5 mn). Its editorial policy is confined to pro-social populism and loyalty to the Kremlin. Website: [www.aif.ru](http://www.aif.ru).

### ***Profil***

weekly, published in cooperation with *der Spiegel*. Published by Rodionov Publishing House, owned by the banker Sergey Rodinov (probably associated with the Soviet intelligence in the past). In the years 2007-2009, the editor-in-chief of *Profil* was a controversial pro-Kremlin journalist, Mikhail Leontyev. The editorial policy of the magazine can be described as "a pro-Kremlin vision of the economy". The weekly publishes interviews with important politicians and CEOs of state corporations. Circulation in 2008: 83 k (no data on the present circulation, but it is probably significantly smaller). Website: [www.profile.ru](http://www.profile.ru).



### ***Expert***

Weekly owned by the businessman Oleg Deripaska, who is biased in favour of the Kremlin. Moderately pro-Kremlin, it sympathises with "systemic liberals", combines liberal views with support for the elements of state-regulated economy. Its editor-in-chief, Valery Fadeyev, is a member of the higher leadership of United Russia. Circulation in 2008: 60 k (no current data). Website: [www.ekspert.ru](http://www.ekspert.ru).

### ***Russkiy Reporter***

Weekly, belonging to Ekspert Group (Oleg Deripaska). Weekly that publishes ambitious coverages and photo coverages (many of its published photos were awarded by World Press Photo). Partnered with WikiLeaks, it published materials about Russia revealed by the group since 2010. After the armed conflict on the east of Ukraine, the editor-in-chief of the weekly, Vitaly Leybin, openly declared his support for the separatists fighting for the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Circulation: 170 k. Website: [www.rusrep.ru](http://www.rusrep.ru).

### ***Pravda***

Issued 3 times a week. Press "body" of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Circulation: 100 k. Website: [www.gazeta-pravda.ru](http://www.gazeta-pravda.ru).

### ***The Moscow Times***

English-language journal, published in cooperation with *International Herald Tribune*. Published by Independent Media Sanoma Magazines concern (Finnish stock ownership). The newspaper is directed towards foreigners who live in Russia, especially businessmen and journalists, as well as Russians who wish to read articles in English. The readers of the newspaper belong to the wealthiest and youngest (30-35 years) group among the readers of Russian papers. *The Moscow Times* provides high quality information and analyses, often critical of the Russian authorities. It also has an expanded website. Circulation: 35 k. Website: [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com).



***Literaturnaya Gazeta***

Weekly. In circulation since 1929. Its subject areas are culture and literature, although it also touches upon politics, especially in the pro-Kremlin spirit. Its editor-in-chief, Yury Polyakov, has proven to be an apologist for the USSR many a time, and before the 2012 presidential elections he had been Vladimir Putin's returning officer. In 2014, Polyakov caused a scandal in Russia by opposing "the cult of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn" in his open letter, claiming that the writer's works had little literary value and that Solzhenitsyn himself had urged the US to attack "his motherland, USSR". Circulation: 148 k. Website: [www.lgz.ru](http://www.lgz.ru).





## **CHAPTER III**

### **TELEVISION AND RADIO**

Television is the most popular mass medium in today's Russia, whose scope is incomparable with any other information channel. In 2014, 90% of Russians declared that they drew their knowledge about Russia and the world from television (compared to 70% in 2011 according to data provided by Levada Center). At present, there are 16 nationwide TV channels, 117 satellite and cable stations, 7 stations broadcasting outside the Russian territory, around 180 regional channels and around 30 channels limited to small towns and villages.

#### **List of the most important television stations:**

##### **Channel 1**

The most significant channel on the Russian television, owned by the Russian government and business circles centered around Vladimir Putin (51% stocks belong to the federal agency Rosimushchestvo, 25% to Yury Kovalchuk's structures and 24% to Roman Abramovich's structures). The channel has the largest and most effective tools in propagandist campaigns of the Kremlin: main news bulletins, particularly evening news, *Vremya*, which is widely viewed and which shapes the opinions and awareness of a major part of the Russian society, similarly to the weekend news and analytic programmes. The most popular political journalists of the station are Ekaterina Andreeva, Pyotr Tolstoy as well as a controversial pro-Kremlin journalist Mikhail Leontyev (currently also Rosneft's spokesman). The channel also broadcasts many popular (or, as the critics say, "stupefying") entertainment programmes. It has the widest coverage in Russia: 98.8% viewers; ratings of 87%. Website: [www.1tv.ru](http://www.1tv.ru)



## **Russia-1**

State-owned television, belonging to VGTRK holding. It presents the point of view of the Kremlin and, after the annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine, it was frequently accused by Ukrainians and Western observers of being biased and even publishing falsified materials. The station employs a controversial journalist, Dmitry Kiselyov, who hosts his own programme, Vesti Nedeli, and is considered the most important Kremlin propagandist in recent years (taking a particularly radical stance after the annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine and delivering hate speeches etc.) Another known pro-Kremlin journalist of Russia-1, hosting Sunday Night, is Vladimir Solovyov. Coverage: 98.2% of population; ratings: 83%. Website: [www.russia.tv](http://www.russia.tv).

## **NTV**

Television owned by Gazprombank (the actual control is in the hands of the structures of businessman Yury Kovalchuk, who is one of the close friends of Vladimir Putin). Established in 1993 by the oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, it used to be the most advanced and professional news broadcasting channel in Russia until its takeover by the Kremlin in 2001. During Putin's presidency its reputation deteriorated and various criminal, sensational and tabloid programmes dubbed it "the most criminal station in Russia". It was frequently used by the Kremlin in its political campaigns, including the 2010 campaign against the mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov. After 2012, it became a tool for attacking liberal opponents protesting against the authorities; it has been known for its series of documentaries called The Anatomy of Protest, aimed at compromising liberal opposition. Since the annexation of Crimea and during the conflict in Ukraine it has been taking a one-sided pro-Kremlin stance and has been accused of falsifying facts by several observers. Coverage: 43% population; ratings: 72%. Website: [www.ntv.ru](http://www.ntv.ru).

## **RT (until 2009 known as Russia Today)**

The station is controlled by the Russian authorities (it was founded in 2005 by the state-owned news agency RIA Novosti), and it broadcasts in English, Arabic, Spanish and German. The editor-in-chief is Margarita Simonian, who publicly declares her support for Vladimir Putin and who was a member of his campaign before the 2012 presidential election. The station is directed at foreign



viewers as an alternative to the main English-speaking news stations and its message is focused on news from the world rather than Russia itself. The station raises the problems and reveals the pathology present in the social, political and economic life of western countries, it gives the floor to radical western publicists and commentators who are critical of their own governments or who believe in conspiracy theories (such as the ones concerning 9/11), those who oppose the liberal discourse and address Russia and its policies with understanding. Implementing the latest technology and mostly composed of journalists and managers from the younger generation, it has attracted a number of famous journalists (such as Larry King, Max Keiser, Peter Lavelle and previously Julian Assange). In 2011, RT was the most willingly viewed foreign news broadcaster in five main cities of the United States (Washington, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago according to Nielsen agency). In 2012 it became the third (after BBC News and Sky News) most popular news broadcaster in Great Britain and the number of its monthly viewers amounted to 1.3 million people (data of BARB and Kantar Media research agencies). In 2012, Pew Research recognised RT as the most popular news channel on YouTube (altogether, the videos uploaded by RT have reached over one billion views). RT is one of the most effective soft power tools of the Kremlin. It is available in over 100 countries of the world and its signal reaches 700 million viewers. Website: <http://www.rt.com>.

### **Channel 5**

TV station from St. Petersburg, since 2006 federal (nationwide) channel owned by Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya, controlled by businessman Yury Kovalchuk, a friend of Vladimir Putin's (72.4%). Loyal towards the Prime Minister and the President, its message is focused on the so-called middle class and more sophisticated viewers. However, in the last few months, under the pressure of its shareholders and in the new geopolitical circumstances, it has been more and more "tabloidised" and airs aggressive anti-Western and pro-Kremlin programmes. Website: <http://www.5-tv.ru>

### **Ren-TV**

Popular TV station, its majority shareholder is Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya owned by Putin's friend, businessman Yury Kovalchuk (68). For a long period



of time Ren-TV managed to maintain several independent news programmes, presenting information critical of the authorities and hosted by journalists from the former Vladimir Gusinsky's media. In 2014, the management of the station decided to discontinue an informative and analytical programme called The Week with Marianna Maksimovskaya, hosted by a popular journalist who had managed to maintain informative autonomy, despite its high popularity. At present, Ren-TV is an entertainment TV without any distinct character. Website: <http://www.ren-tv.com>.

### **TV-Centr**

Regional television (mainly Moscow and surroundings), owned by the Mayor of Moscow. For years, it has been the main media tool in the hands of the Mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, and currently it serves the needs of the present mayor of the capital, Sergey Sobyenin. For a dozen or so years an analytical programme called Post Scriptum has been aired by TV-Centr, hosted by a controversial journalist and politician Aleksey Pushkov (State Duma deputy, head of the foreign-affairs committee) famous for his pro-empire and anti-American sentiments. Coverage: 8% population. Website: <http://www.tvc.ru>

### **Dozhd TV**

"Next gen" web-based television, founded in 2010, also available through cable and satellite (frequently viewed on mobile devices including mobile phones). The founder and owner of Dozhd TV is a media manager, Natalya Sindeyeva, known for her liberal views. Dozhd has become a real alternative to traditional television, dominated by pop music and political propaganda. It airs dynamic and uncensored news programmes, live feature programmes and modern programmes created by a young and innovative team. The station speaks openly of the problems faced by Russia: corruption, bureaucracy and electoral falsification, it publicised and even participated in anti-Kremlin protests between 2011 and 2012. It has gained popularity among the urban middle class (in 2012 its scope reached ca. 5 mn viewers and in 2014 ca. 11 mn, TNS). Its criticism of the authorities resulted in pressure from the Kremlin and in 2013 several largest cable operators withdrew from sending the station's signal. The Kremlin also passed an act that prohibited advertisement in pay-per-view TV stations, which deprived Dozhd of part of its income. In 2014, real property



owners started to withdraw from rental agreements and since 2014 the channel has been aired from a private flat. Dozhd TV has also been faced with financial problems for some time now, which is forcing the station to introduce a paid subscription and collect money. Despite numerous problems, Dozhd remains the best independent TV station in Russia. However, some recent events make its discontinuation more and more likely. Website: [www.tvrain.ru](http://www.tvrain.ru).

### **RTVi**

Russian-speaking satellite TV broadcast from Israel. Founded and owned by an anti-Putin oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, in 2012 bought by a Russian businessman, Ruslan Sokolov, director of TV Zvezda (connected with the Russian Ministry of Defence). Many of the programmes are prepared in cooperation with the Echo of Moscow radio station and constitute the "video" version of Echo's radio broadcasts. These broadcasts feature the best known Russian experts. Website: <http://www.rtvi.ru>.

### **Spas**

Orthodox television; formally private, but in practice controlled by the authorities (founded by pro-Kremlin activists). Its range and significance are marginal. Website: <http://www.spastv.ru>

### **List of the most important radio stations:**

#### **Radio Mayak**

National radio broadcasting company and part of the VGTRK holding. Dedicated to news and entertainment. The most popular radio station in Russia. The auditorium of the station in Moscow is estimated at 670 k people (data of Synovate Comcon, 2012). In 2013, due to VGTRK's disconnection of some of the transmitters, the radio ceased to broadcast in low and medium frequency and could not be received in remote towns and villages, as well as en route outside the city. Website: [www.radiomayak.ru](http://www.radiomayak.ru).

#### **Radio Rossii**

National radio broadcasting company and part of the VGTRK holding. Financed by the state budget. Many political, journalistic and feature programmes. Coverage: 45%. Website: [www.radiorus.ru](http://www.radiorus.ru).



## **Vesti FM**

National radio broadcasting company and part of the VGTRK holding. Dedicated to news, political programmes and live coverages of the most important events. One of its anchormen is a well-known journalist Vladimir Solovyov. The station is loyal to the authorities; in 2011 a journalist was dismissed for his criticism of Valentina Matviyenko, the then governor of St. Petersburg. Its scope covers ca. 30 largest cities in Russia. Expanded website. Website: <http://radiovesti.ru>.

## **Russkaya Sluzhba Novostey**

Private radio station dedicated to news, owned by Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya (belonging to Yury Kovalchuk, Putin's ally. The chair of the supervisory board is taken by Alina Kabaeva). In 2013, the position of the editor-in-chief was given to Aram Gabrelianov, the founder of scandalising pro-Kremlin media: *Zhizn* tabloid and LifeNews web portal. Its scope covers 4 Russian cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. The auditorium of the station in Moscow is estimated at 555 k people (data of Synovate Comcon, 2012). In 2014, the RSN was the most cited radio stations in Russia. Website: <http://www.rusnovosti.ru/>.

## **Echo of Moscow**

Opinion-forming news broadcasting station. The owner of the controlling interest of the station is Gazprom (66% of shares, ca. 28% belongs to employees). For years the station has managed to retain its programme independence and critical approach to the authorities. In 2014, the Kremlin made attempts to replace the founder and editor-in-chief, Alexei Venediktov, but to no avail. It is the most popular news station in Moscow with an audience estimated at over 1 mn people (data of Synovate Comcon, 2012). Expanded website, numerous blogs of opinion-forming commentators, available podcasts of all programmes. Website: [www.echo.msk.ru](http://www.echo.msk.ru).



## **Radio Liberty**

Russian branch of Radio Free Europe, broadcasting station financed by the United States Congress. Liberal and democratic, explicitly critical of the Russian authorities. The station itself is frequently criticised by the Russian authorities and pro-Kremlin commentators, who accuse it of being anti-Russian. The main seat is located in Prague, but the station also has its editor's office in Moscow. It is aimed at the intelligentsia, critical of the present Russian authorities. Its programmes are high quality, mainly concerned with news, analytics and culture. Expanded website, available podcasts of all programmes. Website: <http://www.svoboda.org>.

## **Russkoe Radio**

Private radio station centred around entertainment, plays Russian pop music only. Owner: Russkaia Media Gruppya (authorities' ally, Sergey Kozhevnikov). Very popular in the whole post-Soviet area, including the Baltic States, also among non-Russian citizens, it constitutes one of the most effective tools of Russia's soft power. Website: <http://www.rusradio.ru>.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **WEB PORTALS**

Due to the technical convenience and low cost of creating web-based media, they are the most numerous among all the media listed in Russia. They are also distinguished by their high internal diversification and dynamism on the whole media market, where new websites are continuously created, several "mirror" sites often belong to one owner and some web sites change their profile or are suspended. The list presented below covers only the most important news and analytical websites.

#### **The most important browsers and websites**

##### **Yandex**

The most popular Russian Internet search engine. Its actions are controlled by the management spearheaded by the founder, Arkady Volozh, and by foreign investment funds. The so-called golden share belongs to the state-owned Sberbank. Over the last few years, Yandex has been subject to political pressure: it was forced to change its search algorithms (the authorities were displeased with numerous information critical of the Kremlin in news lists and with placing opposition blogs at the forefront of Yandex's blogosphere) and to demote Arkady Volozh from the position of general director. In October 2014, Yandex's services were used by 58.5 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.yandex.ru](http://www.yandex.ru).

##### **Google.ru**

Russian-speaking version of the American browser. In October 2014, Google's services were used by 48.3 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.google.ru](http://www.google.ru).





## **Mail.ru**

Multifunctional portal, combining the functions of a browser, e-mail provider and numerous services. Owned by Mail.Ru Group, whose main shareholder is Alisher Usmanov, a businessman connected with the Kremlin, currently the wealthiest person in Russia. In October 2014, Mail.ru's services were used by 58.2 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.mail.ru](http://www.mail.ru).

## **vKontakte**

Main Russian social networking site, also popular in other countries of the CIS. The founder of the portal was a young computer scientist, Pavel Durov, known as the Russian Mark Zuckerberg (vKontakte is often called "Facebook clone"). For years, vKontakte owned its large popularity in the whole post-Soviet area to its flexible approach to copyright; it allowed downloading and exchanging music and film files, which was criticised by the western regulatory bodies. Although the portal's main focus is social networking and entertainment, it has been facing political pressure since 2011. In 2011, the Federal Security Service (FSB) ordered the management of the portal to close 5 groups concerned with the ongoing street protests or those critical of the Kremlin and United Russia (Durov refused). In 2013, the FSB demanded that the management team provided personal data of the members of "Euromaidan" group (once again, Durov refused). As a result, in April 2014, under the pressure of the authorities, Durov resigned his post of the general director of the portal and left Russia shortly after. The controlling interest was bought by Mail.Ru Group, whose main shareholder is Alisher Usmanov, a businessman connected with the Kremlin, currently the wealthiest person in Russia. The portal is visited by ca. 60 mn people every day (data: LiveInternet). Website: [vk.com](http://vk.com).

## **The most important news and analytical portals**

### **RIA Novosti**

One of the largest Russian news agencies, owned by the state (founded in 1941). Since December 2013, part of Rossiya Segodnya holding. Until 2014, the



agency was considered relatively reliable, even though it was controlled by the state; as a result of modifications in the management team, its current informative policy is completely in line with the authorities. In October 2014, RIA Novosti's services were used by 11.4 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.ria.ru](http://www.ria.ru)

### **Interfax**

Large news agency, formally privately owned (major shareholder: Mikhail Komissar, ex-serviceman, probably linked to the Russian military intelligence), factually controlled by the state. In October 2014, Interfax's services were used by 4.8 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru)

### **TASS (until 2014 ITAR-TASS)**

Official state-owned news agency, founded in 1904. Out of all Russian agencies, it has the vastest network of correspondents in the world and in Russian regions. In October 2014, TASS's services were used by 4.1 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [tass.ru](http://tass.ru).

### **RBC (Rosbusinessconsulting)**

Highly valued economic news agency. Controlling interest belongs to Mikhail Prokhorov's group, Oneksim. The agency is one of the last popular agencies which manage to retain their editorial independence. It publishes many competent economic analyses and operative information, oftentimes critical of the authorities. However, it follows from various reports that Mikhail Prokhorov plans to sell his shares in the portal, which will probably translate into limiting its independence. In October 2014, RBC.ru's services were used by 11 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.rbc.ru](http://www.rbc.ru)

### **Gazeta.ru**

One of the most popular Russian news and analytical agencies. It belongs to Rambler&Co (previously SUP holding), owned by Alexander Mamut, who is



loyal to the authorities (his holding is the proprietor of a popular blog, [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com)). Previously it had gained popularity thanks to its independent editorial policy, interesting analytics and opinion journalism, often critical of the authorities. Over the last few years, the owners have made several changes to the management of the portal, and the editorial policy has begun to change to more biased towards the authorities (in 2014 it was even announced that Gazeta.ru would cooperate with the main channel of the Russian television, Channel 1. In October 2014, gazeta.ru's services were used by 7.4 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru).

### **Newsru.com**

Popular news portal. It belongs to a media holding of Vladimir Gusinsky, an anti-Kremlin oligarch who lives in Israel. The portal has a Ukrainian and Israeli version. Plenty of updated news, user-friendly archive. Previously explicitly opposed to the authorities, the portal seems to be easing its criticism lately, as well as slightly censoring the uploaded content. In October 2014, newsru.com's services were used by 3 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.newsru.com](http://www.newsru.com).

### **Slon**

Opinion-forming commentatorial portal, uploading comments of well-known Russian journalists on politics, society and economy. Owned by the proprietor of Dozhd TV, Natalya Sindyeva, and her husband, businessman Alexander Vinokourov. It pursues an independent editorial policy, uploads plenty of materials which are critical of the authorities. In October 2014, slon.ru's services were used by 2 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.slون.ru](http://www.slون.ru).

### **Rosbalt**

Popular news and analytical agency. Managed by Natalia Cherkasova, wife of Viktor Cherkesov, a HGB general and previously a close friend of Vladimir Putin's, who has been excluded from his closest circle in recent years. The



agency is said to be relatively loyal to the authorities, but reliable. In 2014, it became a subject of persecution from Roskomnadzor, which tried to have it discontinued. In October 2014, Rosnalt's services were used by 1.8 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.rosbalt.ru](http://www.rosbalt.ru).

### **Grani**

News and analytical portal. It is financed by Leonid Nevzlin, an x-manager of the Jukos concern, who used to live in Israel (his arrest warrant has been issued in Russia). The portal is explicitly oppositional and anti-government. It publishes texts of well-known opposition journalists and former Soviet dissidents. In March 2014, on the application of the Prosecutor General's Office, the portal was blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation (similarly to several other opposition websites: [ej.ru](http://ej.ru), [kasparov.ru](http://kasparov.ru) and the website of an oppositionist, Alexei Navalny), accused of exhorting people to illegal protests. Grani.ru's appeal was rejected and the access to the site remains blocked. Nevertheless, the portal is still operating and the Russian users can access it through so-called anonymizers. Website: [www.grani.ru](http://www.grani.ru)

### **Polit.ru**

News and analytical portal Owned by a collective of editors spearheaded by Dmitry Ickovich. Portal with liberal views, oppositional to the authorities. It conducts many educational projects, such as "Public lectures", a series of lectures delivered by the most prominent Russian and foreign scientists and experts. The transcripts of the lectures are uploaded to the website. Website: [www.polit.ru](http://www.polit.ru)

### **Lenta.ru**

News portal. Owner: Rambler&Co holding (Alexander Mamut, loyal to the authorities) In March 2014, the owner replaced the editor-in-chief, a long-term editor Gennady Timchenko (since 2004), who made Lenta one of the most popular and opinion-forming portals, with a "propagandist", Aleksey Goreslavsky (former head of a pro-Kremlin website, [Vzglyad.ru](http://Vzglyad.ru)). Along with



Timchenko, a large part of journalists left the editorial office, and Lenta.ru lost its reputation of an independent and credible source of information. In October 2014, Lenta.ru's services were used by 8.2 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.lenta.ru](http://www.lenta.ru)

### **Meduza**

A new news portal founded by Galina Timchenko (see: Lenta.ru). The name of the portal's investor is kept secret (initially the investor was supposed to be Mikhail Khodorkovsky, but eventually there was disagreement between him and the editors). The editor's office of the portal is located in Riga; it is the first popular medium to move out of Russia in the heat of persecution of independent journalists. The portal consists of a part of the former Lenta.ru team. Website: <https://meduza.io/>

### **Compromat**

A portal containing digests of Russian press articles and texts written by its own agencies, concerning Russian politicians, businessmen and other public personae, often of a compromising nature. The choice of texts suggests that the party is controlled by the Federal Security Service. Website: <http://www.compromat.ru/>

### **LifeNews**

A news portal which also serves as an on-line TV station. It belongs to News Media, a media empire created by Aram Gabrelianov, one of the most controversial media tycoons, who cooperates with the oligarch Yury Kovalchuk, a close friend of Vladimir Putin's. The portal is of a tabloid and sensational nature, and at the same time it constitutes a tool of the Kremlin, employed against political opponents and used amid the Ukrainian crisis. It often publishes leaks from the secret service. The portal's journalists frequently exceed basic ethical standards, which gives rise to scandals. In October 2014, LifeNews' services were used by 3.4 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.lifenews.ru](http://www.lifenews.ru)



## **Anti-compromat**

Oppositional news and analytical agency counterbalancing Compromat.Ru, which is controlled by the Russian forces. Created by an analytic centre based in St. Petersburg, Panorama, spearheaded by a former dissident, Vladimir Pribylovsky. In 2007, the website was closed down by the authorities; however it was reactivated later on in the .org domain. It has an extensive archive (partly payable), containing comprehensive biographies of Russian politicians, including members of the ruling elite. Over the last few years, it has not been updated that much, but it still offers an access to extensive archives. Address: <http://anticompromat.org>

## **Regnum**

News agency. Formally privately owned (the name of the investor is kept secret), factually closely connected to the authorities (its founder and long-term editor-in-chief was Modest Kolerov, former employee of the Presidential Administration). The agency focuses on events that take place in Russia and in the CIS area; many of its publications have an imperial and nationalistic tinge and in historic situations (as the war with Georgia, attack on Ukraine) it takes up an aggressive, pro-Kremlin stance. It is treated (e.g. by the Baltic States) as a tool of the Russian soft power. In October 2014, Regnum's services were used by 4.3 mn Russian users aged 18 and above (Data: Gemius). Website: [www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru)

## **Znak**

Popular news and analytical agency from Yekaterinburg. Founded by a well-known Ural journalist, Aksana Panova. The portal writes both about the Ural region and nation-wide events; it has gained popularity in the whole Russia due to its independent editorial policy and exposure of a number of issues which are not brought to attention by other media, including problems connected with the Russian ruling elite. Panova was subject to persecution in the region several



times. She even had a criminal case initiated against her (its actual cause is said to have been her critical attitude towards the local authorities). Website: [www.znak.com](http://www.znak.com)

### **Ej.ru**

Analytical portal created by independent journalists and experts, uploading analytical texts on a daily basis. Most of the writers working for the portal have liberal views and are explicitly critical of the Russian authorities. In 2010, the portal initiated a campaign called "Putin must go". Since March 2014, the portal has been blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation on application of the Prosecutor General's Office (along with several other oppositional portals: [grani.ru](http://grani.ru), [kasparov.ru](http://kasparov.ru) and the website of an oppositionist Alexei Navalny), having been accused of exhorting people to illegal protests. Nevertheless, the portal is still operating and the Russian users can access it through so-called anonymizers. Website: [ej.ru](http://ej.ru)

### **Navalny.com**

Website of the most important Russian oppositionist, Alexei Navalny, who uses it to publish anti-corruption investigations and important news from the sphere of politics. Many of these investigations are then quoted by the most significant independent media in Russia and the world. Along with several other oppositional websites, the access to Navalny's blog on [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com) was blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation in March 2014. Since then, Navalny has moved his blog outside the Russian domain, to [www.navalny.com](http://www.navalny.com). According to data from July 2014, the website was visited by 750 thousand users (data: Gemius).

### **Malgin**

Blog of Andrei Malgin, a Russian journalist who lives in Italy. Malgin's views are explicitly anti-Kremlin and his journal is actually an alternative news agency, which publishes important news along with the author's comments on a daily basis. It is read by 200 to 350 k people every day (data: Yandex). Website: [avmalgin.livejournal.com](http://avmalgin.livejournal.com).

### **Kashin**

Web portal founded by Oleg Kashin, one of the best Russian journalists, who emigrated to Switzerland in 2013. Kashin's articles are distinguished by sharp



tongue, well-developed intuition, quick response to events and criticism of the Kremlin (particularly repressive internal policy) as well as explicit imperial and anti-Ukrainian attitude. Kashin also publishes his texts on other portals, such as svpressa.ru. Website: <http://kashin.guru/>

### **Sputnik & Pogrom**

Analytic and news portal, connected with the young generation of Russian nationalists. The founder of the portal is Egor Prosvirnin, author of many manifests and quasi-philosophical articles. The portal was quick to gain popularity and renown, also among Russian journalistic circles and experts, as well as people with liberal views. From the very beginning of the portal's existence, its authors expressed nationalistic and at the same time anti-Kremlin views, accusing the authorities of corruption and fostering immigrants. After the annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian conflict, the portal's writers supported the policies of the Kremlin. It is an important source when it comes to the climate in the circle of young nationalists who are not controlled by the state. Website: [sputnikipogrom.com](http://sputnikipogrom.com).





## CHAPTER V

### OPINION-FORMING SOURCES

The centres, institutions and people mentioned in this chapter constitute a credible source of information about the state of media and the freedom of speech in Russia.

1. **Foundation for the Protection of Publicity** (Фонд Защиты Гласности): foundation dealing with observing the situation in the sphere of journalism and freedom of speech in Russia, providing journalists with legal and professional assistance, conducting extensive scientific research concerning the media, giving opinions on legislative proposals related to the media. Publisher of professional literature, free informers and guidelines for journalists. Website: <http://www.gdf.ru>.
2. **Russian Union of Journalists**: independent, non-political association for protecting the interests of journalists. Declared number of members: 100 k people. The management of the RUJ publicises cases of violation of the rights of journalists. The website contains updated information concerning the sphere of journalism, contacts to local journalists' associations, information on Russian media etc.  
Website: <http://www.ruj.ru>.
3. **Levada Center**: the only independent public opinion polling centre in Russia, which regularly publishes polls concerning such matters as the popularity and access to media, ways of handling information by Russians etc. Website: [www.levada.ru](http://www.levada.ru).
4. **FOM**: public opinion polling centre in Russia, which monitors the scope of the Internet on a regular basis. Website: [www.fom.ru](http://www.fom.ru).
5. **Medialogia**: Russian company specialising in monitoring and analysis of the activity of the media. It publishes ranking lists of the popularity of federal and regional media, both analogue and electronic, on a regular basis. Website: [www.mlg.ru](http://www.mlg.ru).



6. **Freedom House:** American non-governmental organisation, publishing annual ranking lists of civil and political liberties, including ranking lists of the freedom of the media. The place Russia holds in these rankings is close to the last: in 2012, it came in 172<sup>nd</sup> (out of 197 countries) and in 2013 it was 176<sup>th</sup> (out of 196 countries). In Russia the organisation is accused of acting in the interest of the American administration and interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and it is believed that its assessment of Russia is carried out "to order".  
Website: [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).
7. **Reporters without Borders:** international non-governmental organisation based in France, dealing with the monitoring of the state of freedom of speech in the world. It publishes annual ranking lists concerning the freedom of speech. In 2014, Russia came in 148<sup>th</sup> (out of 180 countries) in such ranking and in 2015 it was 152<sup>nd</sup>. Website: <http://index.rsf.org>.
8. **TNS Gallup Media** (also as TNS): global sociological and consulting business, carrying out detailed research of the media market. The data gathered by TNS Gallup Media is one of the most reliable sources of information on the range and circulation of individual media, on the structure of the audience etc. The access to the materials is not free, but the findings are frequently quoted by the media. Website: <http://www.tns-global.ru> (Russian branch).
9. **Gemius:** global consultancy specialising in the sphere of digital technology. It provides a detailed and specialised Internet register (hit rate of individual websites, web user structures and dynamics etc.). Website: [www.gemius.ru](http://www.gemius.ru) (Russian branch).
10. **Synovate Comcon:** part of the international market research company Ipsos, which also deals with the media (and also conducts detailed consumer research). It is a provider of high quality media research, including the Internet, widely quoted by the Russian media. Website: <http://www.comcon-2.ru> (Russian branch).



## CHAPTER VI

### RUSSIAN MEDIA: PROSPECTS

The state of the Russian media in the years to come will be largely influenced by two trends: anti-Western and repressive shift in the policy of the Kremlin, resulting in further restriction of the freedom of speech, and deepening economic difficulties, worsening the financial position of the Russian media.

#### **Increase in the repressiveness of the policy vs. condition of the media**

Along with the intensification of authoritarian tendencies in the internal policy and the increase in the aggressiveness of Russian foreign policy, the scope of freedom of expression and the conditions of Russian media are constantly deteriorating. The persistence of tension in international relations, the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West (even with her traditional western allies, such as Germany) and the lack of prospects for the solution to this conflict will result in the **continuous use of the media as propaganda tools or even weapons**. The media will also be used by the authorities as an important **instrument for counteracting the increase in social dissatisfaction** due to the deteriorating economic conditions resulting in an increase in prices, businesses problems, lay-offs etc. Consequently, the media will escalate the anti-Western rhetoric, which is already unprecedented, by accusing the West of attempts at weakening Russia, both in the area of economy (economic sanctions and the "conspiracy" to lower the price of oil) and politics (interference in Ukraine, which has led to the revolution in Kiev and destabilisation of the Russian influence).

The political climate created by the Kremlin will require **full and undisputed support of its policy** from the media. Censorship will continue to be applied both to the liberal, pro-Western agenda and the mere possibility to pursue discreet editorial policy. The media, although previously already controlled, are



becoming a mechanical tool for transmitting aggressive propaganda, and very frequently even demagogy and blatant lies. Even the media which until recently were "relatively pro-Kremlin" are radicalising their message and undergoing the process of "tabloidisation". One example of such phenomenon is Channel 5, based in St. Petersburg, which used to be considered as moderate, directed at the middle class, but in the recent months it has started to air aggressive, anti-Western materials and programmes presented with the use of vulgar language (including anti-Polish materials).<sup>10</sup>

The status and position of the media will also be influenced by the observed limitation of the governing group to a close group of people with imperial sentiments and to the supporters of "ruling with iron fist".<sup>11</sup> It is a symptom of a drastically decreasing political competition in the the Kremlin camp, which used to associate other groups ("systemic liberals", business and others), whose influences were balanced-out. The media used to reflect this diversification of the elite, providing a variety of information and leaks, constituting an attractive tool for these groups' lobbies. Due to the present monopoly on power, the media cease to be an attractive tool of soliciting the interests of the investors, but rather they are becoming a burden which requires considerable expenditure. This will result in the withdrawal of investors and the sale or discontinuation of titles (one example of this phenomenon might be rumours of Mikhail Prokhorov's plan to dispose of his media, including rbc.ru).

Finally, the limitation of the freedom of speech in Russia will be brought about by the law demanding to **decrease the share of foreign entities in media to 20%** (more on this topic in Chapter I). As one may expect, in 2015 the authorities will put pressure on the two main press titles, having 100% of foreign shareholders, *Vedomosti* and *Forbes*, extorting their discontinuation or sale of stocks to entities which are loyal to the Kremlin.

---

<sup>10</sup> Programme about Minister Grzegorz Schetyna  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vHmTsGA1DI> and "intellectual provocation" concerning Russian plans to attack Eastern Europe  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OU4PScLOu8>.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. *The Chilly Fallout Between Putin and His Oligarch Pals*, Bloomberg, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-22/putin-said-to-shrink-inner-circle-as-ukraine-hawks-trump-tycoons](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-22/putin-said-to-shrink-inner-circle-as-ukraine-hawks-trump-tycoons).



## **Influence of economy**

Another trend, which will have a serious influence on the economy and society, but also on internal and foreign policy of the Kremlin, is the deepening **recession, turning into economic crisis**. According to economists, in 2016 the GDP will fall by 3% (predictions of the Ministry of Economic Development) to 5.5% (Moody's agency) and the inflation will reach 20% (experts from the School of Economics). This is accompanied by low prices of oil, maintained at the level of USD 50-60 (whereas USD 96 was assumed to be the required sum in order to balance out the budget in 2015), which is taking its toll on the Russian budget. The government has already announced cuts in expenditure by 15%.

The cuts have already affected the state-owned media, forcing them to **decrease their expenditure and lay off personnel**. In 2015, the budget for RT TV (former Russia Today) and Rossiya Segodnya news agency was decreased by 10%. Moreover, due to a twofold fall in the rate of the rouble to the dollar last year, the financing of RT has been more than halved based on the dollar (from USD 445 mn in 2014 to USD 236 mn in 2015). The budget of Rossiya Segodnya has been decreased even further based on the dollar: from USD 250 mn in 2014 to USD 99 mn in 2015). RT's management has already announced substantial redundancies. Lay-offs are also being announced by the state-owned news agency, TASS.<sup>12</sup> The cuts in media expenses are also being made in regional budgets.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all that, the state-owned media are in a relatively good position compared to private media, even those loyal to the authorities. Private media will face a particularly hard year when it comes to finances, due to the **financial crisis on the advertising market**. Compared to 2014, the value of advertising in nationwide media fell by 24% in January 2015 (during the previous crisis of 2008-2009 it was only 3%). This trend was accompanied by a decrease in the number of advertisers (by 4%) and the advertised brands (by 7%).<sup>14</sup> This

---

<sup>12</sup> See: *Журналистов гонят первыми*, gazeta.ru, <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2015/01/23/6385481.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> [http://dostup1.ru/comment/Rifat-Abdrashitov-Ekonomiya-byudzheta-na-2015-god-kosnulas-v-tom-chisle-rashodov-na-SMI\\_71177.html](http://dostup1.ru/comment/Rifat-Abdrashitov-Ekonomiya-byudzheta-na-2015-god-kosnulas-v-tom-chisle-rashodov-na-SMI_71177.html).

<sup>14</sup> More on this topic in: *Федеральные телеканалы потеряли четверть рекламы в январе*, RBC, [http://top.rbc.ru/technology\\_and\\_media/10/02/2015/54d8a43b9a7947578cdbea4e](http://top.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/10/02/2015/54d8a43b9a7947578cdbea4e).



translates into decreased income from advertising, which will be even smaller due to lower rates for TV advertisements (up to 25% depending on the advertiser). The largest advertising agency (factual monopolist when it comes to the sale of advertisements in nationwide television), Video International, predicts that the advertising budgets will decrease by 25-30% in the first quarter of 2015.

**Table with the revenue from advertisements in January 2015**

**Размещение рекламы в федеральном телеэфире в январе 2015 года**

Вещатель	Среднесуточная доля аудитории*, %	Изменение к аналогичному периоду 2014 года, п.п.	Реализованный рекламный инвентарь, тыс. GRP**	Изменение к аналогичному периоду 2014 года, п.п.
<b>Каналы, обслуживаемые группой «Видео Интернешнл» (Vi)</b>				
«Россия 1»	13,2	-1	16,579	-33
«Первый канал»	13,3	0,3	14,332	-22
«Пятый канал»	5,6	-0,3	7,251	-23
ТВ-3	3,5	0,4	6,045	-14
РЕН ТВ	5,1	—***	5,129	-44
«ТВ Центр»	3,5	0,1	4,402	-32
«Россия 2»	4,2	0,7	3,045	4
«Пятница!»	2,5	0,2	2,831	-3
«Звезда»	2,4	0	2,513	-30
Disney	2,2	0,4	2,496	-14
«Ю»	2,3	-0,9	2,290	-53
«2x2»	1,7	-0,2	1,107	-44
<b>Каналы, консультируемые группой «Видео Интернешнл» (Vi)</b>				
СТС	9	-1,6	11,145	-20
«Домашний»	3,2	0,1	5,613	0
«Перец»	1,9	-0,6	2,504	-33
<b>Каналы, которые возвращаются на обслуживание в сейлз-хаус «Газпром-Медиа» и агентство «Алькасар»</b>				
НТВ	10,8	-2	18,262	-30
ТНТ	12,2	0,1	10,687	-30

\*Выраженное в процентах соотношение количества зрителей канала от всех, у кого был включен телевизор. Для каждого вещателя приведены данные в его целевой аудитории, по которой продается реклама в его эфире.

\*\*Пункт рейтинга (GRP) – условная единица в продажах телерекламы. Отражает количество зрителей, увидевших стандартный 30-секундный ролик. Для каждого вещателя приведены данные в его целевой аудитории.

\*\*\*В 2015 году РЕН ТВ сменил свою целевую аудиторию с «россиян в возрасте 25–59 лет» на «россиян в возрасте 25–54 года», поэтому сопоставление не корректно.

**Источники:** TNS Russia, Media Logics

(source: [http://top.rbc.ru/technology\\_and\\_media/10/02/2015/54d8a43b9a7947578cdbea4e](http://top.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/10/02/2015/54d8a43b9a7947578cdbea4e)).



Another problem for private media will be the ban on broadcasting commercials in cable TV, introduced by the law of 2014 (see Chapter I). Although the law was amended in February 2015<sup>15</sup> and its overtone was partly alleviated (the prohibition will not apply to TV stations whose production is 75% family-friendly), this requirement will force many stations to resign from attractive foreign products (or products made on foreign licences).

Private media investors are already forecasting serious cuts in expenses, especially redundancies, salary cuts and limiting benefit packages. The lay-offs have affected even those media empires which are close to the authorities, such as NewsMedia (LifeNews TV and portal), Komsomolskaya Pravda publishing house and Echo of Moscow radio station, belonging to the Gazprom-Media concern. Cuts will also be made in foreign concerns publishing numerous magazines, such as Burda, Conde Nast etc.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> More on this topic in: <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/47616>.

<sup>16</sup> See: *Журналистов гонят первыми*, op. cit.