Russian Media System: Prospects for the Future

Introduction

The media system which has emerged in the post-Soviet Russia is for the country a new one, but nothing particular in the international context. Therefore foreign experience could be used as a model on the basis of which it would be possible to predict the development of the Russian media system in the future. The way this system now manifests itself is what experts from abroad has already investigated. So the research that has been made can be instructive for Russian media experts and journalists.

The key elements of the contemporary Russian media system are the central role of television, combination of state and private television channels, weak position of newspapers, involving a strong position of regional newspapers in comparison with national ones, plurality of newspapers both at national and regional levels, (their thematic scope greatly ranges), strong status of weekly newspapers compared to the dailies and low level of advertisement revenues.

In the future, the most important developments would be increasing participation of foreign capital in Russian media market, further concentration of ownership and decreasing amount of channels (though this process can go in unforeseen directions), increasing economic thinking in the field of media which is likely to reduce the opinion and political role of the media. It is also likely that more resources would be available to media both because of the increase in advertising revenues and increasing standards of living. On the other hand, costs of producing content would also increase significantly.

Changing Media System

As in many countries of the world, the media system is changing rapidly in Russia and becoming part of a dynamic, competitive marketplace. This transformation includes processes like emergence of aggressive media conglomerates and expanded concentration, liberalization of media industries, strategic alliances between local media companies and foreign multinational media conglomerates and digitalization. In Russia changes have been also caused and accelerated by the collapse of the former political system with many of the values linked with it. Unlike elsewhere, in Russia there are no strong traditions and organizations of media workers and customers which would limit the pressures of the global market. On the other hand, until recently Russia has been protected both by uncertain political development and low level of purchasing power among consumers, but it seems that both of these factors will significantly decline in the future. Therefore the media system might change even more rapidly than elsewhere in the upcoming period. It becomes more and more obvious that the system acquires new functions.

Factors which influence the future of Russian media system during the coming decade or two do already exist. They include unchanging circumstances like the great geographical distances and sparse population in many parts of Russia (excluding only its central area) and factors which are quite permanent, like the level of urbanization (however, one can hardly help noticing that it dramatically grows in developed areas). Also some other factors do not tend to change rapidly like the uneven distribution of income or the relatively high level of education. Some other factors might change rapidly, like the low level of advertising expenditure and the general low level of income.

Among the rapidly changing factors there are also political ones. Politics in Russia is still very much concentrated by the state agencies and this will likely continue in the nearest future, but the importance of civil society is increasing, and if the state is willing to limit its activities to the functions it has resources to cover, it is likely that various forms of civil activity, including enterprises, will cover the gap left by the state. The fact
that anticipation of people for democracy and market economy has been rewarded can be considered as an evidence of that. The importance of business community has been great especially in the second half of the 1990s, but business has so far been combined with the state and divided into politically oriented groups, which has reduced its potentiality. Business enterprises in Russia, especially those functioning as monopolistic structures, are often aimed at making political impact.

Although the state has privatized a large part of the media, some forms of control and interference, more from the corporate level than from the state, have remained (mainly because state and corporate interests have remained close to each other). Elections have made a strong influence on the media, both through advertising and sponsorship revenue and through the partisan content which might have undermined the trust in media in general, and, in many cases, weakened the interest of the audience in analytic broadcasting.

Great geographic distances have usually favored localization of the media, especially the press: in the Soviet Union the dominant part of the press was national, mainly because of political reasons but also because of the lack of influence by the economic factors on the local level. In the Soviet economy, the plan played more important role than costs, which were not calculated as a part of the economy of particular newspapers. The Soviet case was perhaps a kind of anomaly or, at least, deviation from most spread market practices which has now been introduced by regional and local newspapers.

Sparse population in many parts of Russia can be seen as a hinder for the development of media in general, but the comparatively high level of urbanization facilitates their development on the other hand. Major part of the population could be served relatively effectively. A high level of education has been often connected with the development of the media and it is certain that the lack of education would hinder the development of new media. Another problem might be a relatively poor level of knowledge of foreign languages (that implies restricted access to the international flows of information). Yet, as Russia is a large country, services will be easily available in Russian, and this might even make the development of originally Russian content more rapid.

Uneven distribution of income, and especially the low level of income in general, has made a significant part of the population too poor to invest in media technology and to become attractive targets to advertisers. Decreasing purchasing power among consumers has caused difficulties for many media companies (especially for those anticipating for wider subscription and therefore more viewers) during the last decade, even more because these companies entered to the market economy unprepared. Poverty has been one of the reasons for decreasing newspaper circulation and has limited the penetration of the new information technology. For example, in Moscow majority of those, for whom only costly things caused problems, had access to internet, but very few (less than 10 percent) of those for whom clothes or durables were a problem had it. The case was similar in Petrozavodsk, Karelia, where almost half (47 percent) of those for whom only expensive things were hard to acquire had used Internet, while in an industrial town of Kondopoga Internet use was frequent only among those who could afford to buy a car or a summer house (Melin, 2004). In distant regions, the gap between these two groups of people sounds even more dramatic.

Russia has elements of both a center and a periphery. For regions of the former Soviet Union, Russia remains a center and it is an important importer of cultural products to these countries. Also the role of the Russian language remains important, not least because of the significant role of Russian speaking minorities in new independent states (that is, however, prone to be underestimated by the local governments). On the other hand, Russia is clearly a part of a periphery to which the media flows come from the European centers and from Northern America. This double role (which makes the region peculiar amongst those independent states) will be preserved in the future.

**Television and Radio**

During the post-Soviet era, and even before that, television has become the most important media in Russia and it will certainly preserve its leading role. The three leading channels ORT, RTR and NTV have preserved their position but among less popular channels the ratings have changed. TV-6, according to some authors, the last independent television company in Russia, was closed in 2002 (Freedom Forum, 2003) and STS and also TVS, to which many TV-6 journalists moved, have gained popularity after that (TVS
was, however, closed in June 2003). REN-TV, at which some TVS journalists found refuge, is currently getting the reputation of the only large television channel that is not under the control of the government. The gains have remained rather minor and in general the popularity of television channels has changed only slowly (GallupMedia 2002, 2003).

Number of television companies is growing, but most of the new ones remain small in terms of audience ratings. At the end of there were six companies which reached over 5 percent of television audience on an average day in the whole Russia (only cities with over 100 000 people). Among these companies, ORT (First Channel) and NTV are losing its audience while new companies (STS, REN-TV, TNT) and RTR are increasing (GallupMedia, 2003). Still, those channels are recognized leaders of national broadcasting.

The audience of television companies is structured according to the age so that youngers watch more NTV and cable television, while the older generation prefers ORT and RTR. In television watching (on the general level) the differences in channel choices are smaller than, for example, in the choice of newspapers.

Are there too many television companies in Russia? In terms of population and geographic distances, perhaps not, but in terms of available finances the case is opposite. It is likely that some forms of concentration will happen in the future. Currently, television advertising is profitable and increasing and TV journalists earn much in comparison with newspaper journalists but in general production costs are still low in Russia and might increase in the future, possibly to a considerable extent. Increasing competition for television advertising might be based on reaching some wealthy segments of population rather than mass audience. In the international context, this trend seems rather universal for the today’s reality.

Prospects for the development of genuine public television are not good although some kind of public television may be formed on the basis of cultural or educational channels. It seems that these channels are well aware of the general situation with international media of today. Currently the Kultura channel is the only one which does not transmit advertising but gets its finances completely from the state. The public television might be founded either by the state or with the help of advertisement tax. It is not likely that a licence television fee could be intro-

duced in the television market in which the share of a new public service channel would be a minor one (currently the Kultura gets only 2 percent of television watching time in Russia). Public service channels have been in difficulties everywhere and the crisis has been caused by decreasing audience in comparison with private, commercial and financed by advertising channels. In this exact situation the expenses of the state are not refundable to any extent. Several channels combine local and national programming and this kind of activity might increase in the future. The most important of national channels is so far the RTR which has ‘windows’ for local programming almost in all regions of Russia, (installed into the central broadcasting network mainly in the prime time period).

The increasing amount of television channels has reduced the audience of each channel and this is visible even in comparison between Moscow and Russia in general. Especially the rating of the First channel (ORT) is lower in Moscow than in Russia as a whole. Regional differences are also large: 12 of the economically weakest regions had no private television channels at all, while in the most affluent regions number of private channels varied from 15 to 57 (Vartanova, 2002: 41). It is likely that these discrepancies will decrease if the economic differences diminish and increasing competition may reduce the number of television channels most preferred in the most affluent regions.

In comparison with the late Soviet era television programming has changed significantly. The Soviet television gave a lot of time to culture, current affairs, economy and topics, while post-Soviet television gives much time to feature, television series and entertainment. So here in this area the genre shift is especially evident. A number of news and sport programs have remained at the former level (based on data concerning the First channel, but other channels do not differ significantly) (Rantanen, 2002: 97).

Russian television broadcasts much more foreign-made programs than was the case of the Soviet television although it had a great share of foreign programs, imported from socialist countries and Western Europe. Currently, increasing share of foreign programs is coming from the United States and Britain, as it is the case in most parts of the world. While almost 50 percent of the films which have been shown in Russian television channels in late 1990s – early 2000s were Russian (or Soviet), more than one third were American (Vartanova, 2002: 44).
Foreign observers have paid much attention to the conflicts between state authorities and oppositional news and current affairs broadcasts, however the main development has been going on in the entertainment field. One of the most successful new channels is STS owned by the foreign American StoryFirst company (Zassoursky J., 2001b: 253).

Radio has been privatized more significantly than television but Russian state owned Radio Rossiji remains one of the main channels and the most popular and widely spread channel, Mayak, is also state owned. Some other channels are linked to major companies like Europa Plus supported by Unexim Bank. Most of the new radio channels are based on popular music (altered by chat shows on wave) ranging from more traditional Russian to more international. The most popular radio channels include Mayak, Radio Rossiji, Europa Plus, Ekho Moskvy, and Russkoe Radio, many of which did not exist before the year 1990. Listening of different radio channels is strictly divided between age groups as well as other target audience groups like women, drivers, religious people or sport fans (Vartanova, 2002: 50).

So far, radio industry has demonstrated more success stories than other Russian media. Explanations for this success are numerous but among them the improved professionalism of radio journalists and especially of DJs and advertising sales managers should be mentioned first. (Vartanova, 2001: 57). As radio is already close to the standards and requirements of global market only minor changes could be expected.

**Newspapers**

The Soviet press system has largely collapsed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Newspapers lost a great part of their circulation and many traditional dailies were forced to transform. High prices for newspapers have often been mentioned as a reason for collapse of circulation, but this may be not the main explanation: for example, the relative prices of newspapers grew significantly only in 1994–1995 when the major drop in circulation had already happened (Pietiläinen, 2002: 271).

Increasing poverty may explain the decline especially in 1992 and 1993 when the amount of those earning less than the basic cost of living was at the highest level and increased significantly compared with the Soviet Russia. In 1992 especially the poorest 40 percent of population lost its share of income and the inequality of income continued to grow in 1993 and has not been dramatically reduced since then. By that time the rise in the basic income in the country was a major prerequisite of further development of press in Russia.

Currently Russian press is dominated by local and regional papers. Usually the case is that the smaller the location is, the stronger is the position of the local paper (or papers). There are also national newspapers, which are read mainly in big cities. The bulk of Russian press has been divided between mass and popular newspapers, of which popular ones are clear leaders among mass audience. Most of the popular newspapers are weeklies. The rise of the popular press can be understood as part of the decline in standards of living among the majority of the population and increasing uncertainty of their life. While the Soviet press was directed to average Soviet citizens, the new popular press is directed to the large segment of population which can afford to buy a newspaper once a week but are not necessarily affluent consumers.

In many regions of Russia the number of newspapers for the general audience has increased compared to the Soviet era. The increase in number of newspapers has led to the fragmentation of the audience, which usually results in the spiral effect of declining investments in content production. According to a model applied usually to the electronic media, the smaller audience for a given media generates lower income, which requires less expensive content (Picard, 2000: 186-187). Since the salaries of the journalists are relatively low, the pressure for lowering the costs of content investments is not as high as in developed press markets.

In Eastern and Central European countries the national press after the collapse of the socialist system has become more regional and local, but in almost all of these countries the dailies has remained the major segment of the print media market compared to non-daily or Sunday newspapers (UNESCO, 1999; WAN, 1998; Sasinska-Klas, 1996; Gulyas, 2003).

In Western European countries, the most important factor which influences the level of circulation is the economic wealth of the nation. In addition, the countries which have a strong regional and local press as a rule have a higher circulation than might be expected on the basis of GNP. The countries at the top have both a strong local press and strong national papers, while the
less developed countries at the bottom have mainly national press which is not very strong and the countries in between have either a strong national or a strong local press. (Gustafsson and Weibull, 1996: 39).

Countries with a high level of subscribed circulation have usually the highest overall circulation and the countries with the lowest are those in which newspapers are sold mostly in retail. (Gustafsson, 1999). Also media factors have influence: in France newspapers are weaker because of presence of many news magazines with different political outlooks and in Denmark the lower newspaper consumption than in other Nordic countries can be explained by the large amount of free sheets (Gustafsson, 1999: 40). Those cases are rather exceptional, but similar situations may come up in other countries as well.

The experiences of the USA are different from Western Europe. In the USA the circulation of the print press reached the peak in the 1920s–1930s and since then has been in decline. The growth of television has been mentioned as a main reason for the decline of newspapers (De Fleur, 1989). Besides, in the USA the circulation of weekly press has expanded in the time when the dailies has been in decrease.

Russia is a big country with local policies gradually getting more influential and therefore it is not likely that national newspapers will get similar prominent role as in the Soviet Union. The formation of localized national newspapers is a prospective option, although the competition between national (even localized national) and local newspapers might likely be won by the local papers, if they can provide full service of national and international news, sports, economics, etc. besides the local content. Newspapers are yet to develop those services however. The expansion of news agencies and common correspondents in the Capital will be necessary for this. In the regions the development of the press is related economic prosperity but also the strength of civil society while the level of urbanization and the freedom of the press have no direct relationship (Pietiläinen, 2002: 151).

The development of newspapers is even more linked with politics and economy than the development of television. Formation of economically independent newspapers is dependent on the increase of advertisement of daily products and therefore closely linked with the development of retail sales and consumer capitalism. Newspapers may also remain representatives of political programs and various points of view and only gradually become market-oriented. Their criteria of expansion apparently are yet to be worked out.

Currently Russian newspapers are too weak economically and too many in number: in the future monopolization of the newspaper industry will increase in the local level. One precondition for this monopolization is increasing independence and political non-alignment of remaining newspapers. If these processes develop in the center more rapidly than in the provinces the national newspapers may gain popularity before the final victory of the regional and local papers. The development of prominent newspapers outside Moscow is one of the problematic cases: so far regional newspapers have not gained any wider popularity outside their home regions but in principle newspaper centers could develop in other big cities, especially in the Asian part of Russia. This trend is not widely observed at the moment but it may develop due to a number of factors and conditions.

The important role of television is visible even through the popularity of TV weekly guides like Telepark in Barnaul, TeleSem’ in many cities of the European Russia, Telekom in Saratov and TVR-Panorama in Petrozavodsk (GallupMedia, 2002). Also freesheets may have negative impact upon the development of the press by publishing television program and taking advertising money from newspapers. This concerns chiefly big cities. The number of journalists is still relatively high, especially employed by newspapers, and the trend is likely a sharp decline of this number, not only because of declining number of newspapers but also because of staff cutting. Old papers tend to be the most overcrowded by personnel and the sharpest cuts will likely happen in them. The other outcome of the development is that the income of those who preserve their jobs (due to possessing a set of qualities most required, perhaps) will increase.

Magazines and Journals

If in Russian newspapers industry the most important change has been the move from national newspapers to local and regional ones, in magazines the change was even more dramatic. Most of the 20 most popular the magazine sector (although the number of less popular journals is well over this figure) were founded during the last decade and those of
the older ones which remained have to change their lay-out and content significantly. Ogonyok (Spark) and Krestyanka (Farmer Woman) as well as Vokrug svaeta (Around the World) are among those few who has survived, but they have had to significantly reorient their style and content, Ogonek has done like (Lovell, 1996).

Many of the cultural-political and literary journals of the Soviet era, like Novyi mir (New World), Oktyabr (October), Inostrannaya literatura (Foreign Literature) have survived with limited popularity (circulations below 10,000 copies) those interested in literature, who often read them in libraries (Vartanova, 2002: 34). Which helps to get readers but not revenues. Soviet current affairs journals like Novoye vremya (New Times) have survived but they have had to compete with many new current affairs journals. Itogi, one of the first new current affairs journals, was founded in 1996 in co-operation with the US Newsweek. In 2001, after a conflict between a new owner and journalists (looking for politically less constrained working environment), the former journalists of Itogi launched a journal called Ezhenedelny zhurnal (Weekly Journal). Kommersant newspaper launched its journal Vlast’ (Power) and Denga (Money) in 1997. Foreign journals and papers have been active also at the segment of current affairs journals: Russki Fokus was founded in 2001 in co-operation with The Economist and the Business Week co-operated with Profil started in 2002.

Women’s and general interest magazines are the most internationalized part of the Russian media market. Among the most popular journals are almost exclusively those who have been produced according to foreign formats. Liza, one of most popular ones, is published by German Burda company which publishes Cool and Cool Girl as well. Cosmopolitan, Elle, Reader’s Digest have set up their Russian editions and even men’s lifestyle magazine Men’s Health has gained popularity in Russia.

Magazines have taken into account the mass market based on family and private life earlier than other Russian media (though some TV programs now try to catch up with them in touching similar issues and units). This section of the market includes television journals like Sem dnei (Seven Days) and Telepark which have gained huge popularity and have also highest advertisement revenues (Vartanova, 2002: 35-36). Also car-driver’s magazines Za rulyom (Behind the Wheel) and Avtomir (Car World) belong to this group. There is also a sufficient number of journals which are devoted to house design and various home gadgets, as well as to labor-saving technologies and devices. There is also an extremely broad range of computer magazines and many of them do seem to take after their Western editions.

Most of the new magazines are not only produced according to foreign formats but are also printed abroad, either in Finland (Itogi, Vlast) or in Slovakia (e.g. Liza). But it is very important that the four-color high-quality printing has also started in Russia as well. In May 2003, for example, Ezhenedelny zhurnal started printing in Moscow (it used to be printed in Finland still a year earlier), Profil is printed in Smolensk and Russki Fokus in Kostroma. In the future the printing sector in Russia will grow and, perhaps, not because of costs, but because of smaller distances between consumers and printing houses. Smaller distances will also contribute to a shorter gap between editing and selling the product and therefore improve possibilities in news competition.

Internet

Internet started to spread in Russia at the same time as everywhere in the world and it has expanded mainly in cities but also in the countryside. Majority of Russian Internet users lives in cities with less than one million inhabitants. The core of Russian Internet is formed by traditional media which started to launch their internet versions in 1994 (Vartanova, 2001:60) but some of the media (at the regional level) has also ceased publishing materials in Internet (Pietiläinen, 2002: 226). There are also many information services which exist only in Internet, like Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru. Some of them are close to the official circles while others are oriented toward oppositional forces.

Internet may develop in Russia in forms which have not been yet seen elsewhere. On the first hand, Internet is developing in conditions when the major part of the media system is in turmoil and there exists a lot of space for new solutions. Remaining political and economic control in other media together with the low costs of setting up Internet services expands the importance of the new media significantly. On the other hand, the low level of computers penetration reduces the possibilities of Internet.

According to a recent survey, 18 percent of Moscovites have access to Internet and an additional 25 percent have friend, colleague or relative
who has this access. In Petrozavodsk, Karelia, 30 percent use Internet and in a small town (Pryazha) in Karelian countryside 7 percent has access to Internet. Still within this exact region the number of users is higher than the average number in the provinces over the country.

Access to Internet is greatly dependent on age, income, education and professional status. For example, among industrial workers only less than 10 percent had access and no one of retired persons (108 in the Moscow survey) had access while over 2/3 of students, managers and entrepreneurs had access at least among his/her acquaintances. In smaller towns the age in even more determinant factor. For example, in towns of Kondopoga and Pryazha half of those between 18-22 years have access and mean age of those who have access is only 23 years in Pryazha, while in Petrozavodsk the mean age of users is 31 and in Moscow 34 years. The age factor is similar in many other countries like the USA or Sweden, but in Russia the internet use starts to decline in earlier age than in the West.

Internet may serve as all alternative channel of communication and support group communication. “Disappointed by shallow reality of the mainstream press, people may turn to horizontal communication on the Internet” -stresses (Zassoursky Ya., 2001: 84). The network may actually work as a catalyst for the development of a civil society. In comparison with Ukraine, Russian Internet media show more professional and structured picture and are more balanced (Krasnобoka and Brants, 2002: 18). Internet media are flexible, mobile and basically run by professional journalists and enthusiasts (who serve to the ends of the new epoch and can deal with both content creation and technical items) and have usually oppositional character. It is also possible that online media will fulfill the task of democratization which the traditional media have historically played in established democracies (Krasnобoka, 2002: 496-497). So far the attempts to censor Internet has failed (see e.g. a case in Karelia politica.karelia.ru in February, 2003) and very few restrictions now can be put in its Russian sector.

**Advertising**

The development of advertising is one of the most important factors in the development of Russian media. In 2002 Russians use only 16 US dollars per capita for advertisement but this figure has increased signifi-

cantly during the last decade. In 1995 it was only four dollars and in 1992 below one dollar (70 cents) (figures for 1995 and 1992 according to Pankin, 1998: 30; for 2002: Reklamnyi rynok Rossii, 2002). In 2002 the revenues from advertis increased by 53 percent in comparison with 2001. If this huge rate of increase will continue, Russia will reach the Western level in the next decade.

This, however, is not sure and it may happen that the rise of revenues will increase with more moderate rate and could reach the level of 50-100 dollars at the end of the decade. Even this level can offer produce sufficient revenues for financial independence of the media as well as for elaborating successful economical strategies. Moreover, as long as advertising revenues increase the development of the media is not primarily dependent on cutting costs and reducing services. Only when profits decrease the companies need to pay more attention to costs. For example, in Hungary the advertisement expenditure was over $40 per capita already in 1995 (Pankin, 1998: 30), while in the developed Western countries it nowadays reaches 200 dollars.

How the advertising will be distributed among different media? Currently television, especially national television, is a clear leader. At least partly this is due to the leading role of the television among the audience but the advertised goods also cause this. At the moment leading advertisers are Procter and Gamble, Nestle, Unilever, Wimm Bill Dann and L`Oreal (including Garnier), while food products, cosmetics, non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks are the most important groups of advertised products (TNS Gallup Ad Fact, 2003). At the regional level newspapers are the most important channel of advertising although regional newspapers are losing their share to the television. Radio is important at the regional level as well.

It is questionable whether the shares of television and newspaper advertising will radically change during the coming decade. The popularity of television as a source of information and leisure activity will certainly remain. However, people use only half of their media use time by watching television, while television is getting over 75 percent of the advertising revenue, and therefore it is possible that these figures might become closer. There is still enough room for local media to develop their advertising sector.
Ownership, Foreign or National

The issue of ownership in Russian media is complicated. After the state and Communist Party control was abolished most media have been privatized by journalists but later have been taken over by banks, corporations and the state in search for funding (Zassoursky, Ya. 1997: 218). This led to the era of media tycoons (known in Russia also as magnats) but currently big companies (often linked to state or owned by it, like Gazprom) are taking ownership of most of the nationally important media. In comparison with the past, ownership is extremely dispersed. Many Russian journalists have a critical attitude towards issues of ownership and owners control in the media and have e.g. defended the right to elect the editor by voting among journalists.

Concentration in the Russian media has only started in Russia and there are few real media chains. The empires of media tycoons existed at the end of the 1990s, but under Putin's presidency their influence have been reduced and development stopped. The monopolization, on the other hand, continues in new circumstances with an active role of major industrial companies, like Gazprom Media. There are few cases of cross-media ownership, like Kommersant publishing house which owns newspapers and magazines. Gazprom Media, however, owning both television channels and newspapers, has not combined the operations of these media, but only owns them. Also book publishing and film industry have remained independent of media companies from other sectors.

Because of its size and rapid development the Russian media market interests foreign companies. So far foreigners have been the most active in those sectors which are the newest and the most profitable (magazines, economic newspapers) but have participated also in television (e.g. in making movies and popular programming networks), news agencies and traditional newspapers businesses. Foreign participation has been mainly represented by investments to launch new media and to a lesser degree by purchasing shares from older companies. Direct sales of foreign media products to Russian clients have taken place, most actively in the field of news agencies: Reuters, France Press and Associated Press have set up their services in Russian. One the other hand, the formation of strong media companies suffers from the fact that many media are owned by holding companies which are mainly operating in other businesses.

Foreign ownership will certainly increase in Russian media. Preconditions for this are the increase in advertising market and media revenues but also stabilization of social changes and guarantees for property rights (which is usually an outcome of Russia’s joining international conventions). In other Eastern Central European countries the major part of the media has ended up in the hands of foreign investors but it is not likely that a similar development will occur in Russia where only few newspapers are owned by foreign companies and often foreign ownership is in a minority position. Among the few newspapers controlled by the foreign capital there are some economic newspapers (Delovoy Peterburg owned by Swedish Bonnier, Vedomosti launched by the Financial Times and Wall Street Journal) and some newspapers in English (e.g. Independent Media, which is also one of the most important magazine publishers). Magazines on the other hand are largely produced according to foreign formats and are controlled by many foreign companies.

Few television channels are owned by foreigners and there is a clear reason for that: the ownership of television companies which broadcast over the half of the Russian territory or for the half of the population is banned. If foreign ownership will not be limited, it is likely that most of the major television channels and major national newspapers will have significant foreign ownership which, consequently, will play a key role in the management of Russian media. In border regions and in economically more prospective areas the similar process will happen at the local level. Concentration is likely to happen even without foreign ownership.

Politics and the Press

The dependence on political authorities is often mentioned as a problem in recent Western research on Russian media (Belin, 2001; Lipman and McFaul, 2001). Return of control and censorship which actually took place has been criticized and in the recent report by Freedom House it is underlined that “Russia's rating declined from 'Partly Free' to 'Not Free' because of the closure of the last independent national television broadcaster, negative state influence over public and private media, and repeated attacks against journalists”.

Although problems between media and politics are essential, they are not unique or exceptional even in Western countries. In this respect, the Russian
media system seems to be, or is becoming, similar to the Southern European and Latin American media systems. Processes which has been widely described in research on Spanish, Greek or Latin American media systems (Papatheodorou and Machin, 2003; Rockwell and Janus, 2002) are named as clientelism. These countries “never developed the mass market that could render newspapers financially and politically independent from the state” (Papatheodorou and Machin, 2003: 34) and in these countries civil society is weak and politicians are dominating the public field. As a result, the major political forces and larger media groups have reached an implicit agreement that sets limits to the news agenda and the reporting of controversial issues which could potentially undermine the credibility of the political world (Papatheodorou and Machin, 2003: 52). Therefore, the media systems in those countries is thoroughly biased in the political respect.

However, developing market economies are gradually transforming media systems in Southern European countries and they have become more close to those of other Western European countries. At the same time, these media systems demonstrate elements of continuity with the traditions of state paternalism (Papatheodorou and Machin, 2003: 49), which are seen to be incompatible with developed market economy.

Similar tendencies might have impact in Russia as well. But there are also important differences: in Russia the political structures are not as stable as in Southern Europe and therefore they might not be able to resist the market influences with the same persistence. In Russia, the media system has changed radically: “Old power relations have suddenly collapsed, while 'new' ones are not yet routinized and thus have become visible to the actors” (Koltsova, 2001: 333). This has led “not only to explicit forms of control and conflict but also to greater reflexivity of all social actors, their general awareness of various mechanisms of power and pragmatic use of them” (ibid).

Russian journalists and experts from business and political spheres think that there is a high discrepancy between the real and ideal state of affairs especially in the field of administrative and economic dependence of the media on authorities who are normally prone to supervise. Journalists feel also that ethical regulation and professionalism among journalists are largely lacking. Only governmental support for the media is currently on the ideal level in a multitude of their areas of activity (Zhurnalist, 2/2003: 10-11, also Mezdunarodnyi press-klub, 2002). Although, the current situation is closer to the ideal than was the case with the Soviet journalism, the situation has not generally been improved in comparison with the Yeltsin era.

While some authors have pointed out one-sidedness of political journalism especially during the election campaigns (Lipman and McFaul, 2001; Belin, 2001), Alexei Pankin states that “television was hardly the kingmaker in the second round of the election” in 1996 and that “the enormous PR campaign orchestrated in favor of the Unity in 1999 produced just one-quarter of the votes cast” and therefore these campaigns have not been cost effective even if Russian politicians “are held captive by a myth actively promoted by the press itself which holds that the media determine the outcome of elections” (The Moscow Times, 26.2.2003).

The idea of media effects raised above has its roots in the Soviet thinking, according to which the function of the press in the Soviet Union was to agitate, propagate and organize. As an agitator, the newspaper published materials the aim of which was to influence its audience and in many cases it actually had influence (especially on those who used to practice critical thinking rarely) because journalism was part of political power structures. This thinking has remained both among journalists and among politicians. An attitude change is certainly coming, firstly in the new generation, and secondly in better understanding of poor cost-effectiveness of media campaigns and perhaps with results in which media favorite gains only second place. The Russian media policy during Putin's regime has been based on control of the most important media resources, the national television at the first hand, by the state but at the same time it provided some space for relatively tolerant and non-political media, like communist and fascist political media, regional media and entertainment television.

The state has not paid much attention to the support of minority media although support for media in national minorities languages has been offered, mainly on the regional level. There is no general newspaper or media support instruments in favor of 'secondary'-media (even vice versa, in some cases state funds have been channeled to dominant newspaper etc.), and it is not likely that they, or politically-based media subsidiaries, will be developed in the near future. The state has simply too much other financial needs and tasks to be solved. Unlike in many devel-
oped countries, for the Russian government such media are not the structures to prioritize yet.

Trust, Control and Attitudes

The Russian media is trying to get back the trust of the population which was partly lost in the 1990s. For Russian media the danger to lose credibility was especially remarkable in 1992 when the prices for newsprint, other materials and postal services increased heavily while the subscriptions collected in the autumn 1991 were calculated on the basis of earlier prices. The newspapers had to rely on sponsor support or clearly recognizable hidden advertisements in order to survive and this had a harmful influence on the objectivity of journalism. Also political campaigning has distorted the objectivity of the press, the usual case was more or less open support to some political movement or candidate. It took time to realize that the trust of the reader was a quite refundable matter and that it was worth trying to regain.

According to survey results in Karelia (2003), 23 percent trusted partly or fully Russian media, while 30 percent trusted the Karelian media. Half of the population both trusted and not trusted, while 25 percent distrusted partly of fully Russian media and 24 percent Karelian media. The media was trusted less than the Russian president and government, the Karelian leadership, the church, NGOs, the army, but more than the courts, the Russian parliament, the militia, entrepreneurs and banks.

According to the factor analysis on the basis of survey done in the Republic of Karelia the trust in media is closely linked with trust to nongovernmental organizations and also, surprisingly, with trust in banks and regional leadership. It might be possible that this is linked because people understand that local government and banks are among supporters of the media and trust (or lack of it) in these institutions is followed by a similar attitude to the media.

A national Russian survey in 1998 gave a result that around 42 percent population did not have any confidence to the media, while only 20 percent had confidence mainly or fully. Then the media were the most trusted, only the Orthodox Church was at the same level.

According to a local survey in Karelia in 2000, over one third (36 percent) of respondents in Karelia saw the role of the media as mainly negative, while 26 percent saw the media as more positive than negative and 24 percent saw it as overwhelmingly positive. In 2002 the number of those who had a negative opinion on the role of the media had declined to one fourth (26 percent), while positive attitudes had slightly increased. The most positive opinions were among those who trusted the media completely and the most negative among those who did not trust it at all. Also media consumption had an influence: the more people read the newspapers, the more positive was the attitude they had towards the media. Actually the causality may work so that a negative attitude towards the media decreases the will to consume it.

Several surveys have given the result saying that a significant part of Russians supported the control of the media. On the other hand, according to survey results in 2000 and 2002 in Karelia the support for direct censorship was not large: only every sixth or fifth (17 percent in 2000, 19 percent in 2002) was a supporter of censorship, 43 percent supported the idea of social control in the form of a supervising Council (37 percent in 2002), while every fourth (25 percent in both surveys) felt that no control was needed.

Censorship was favored mostly among those over 50, those with lower incomes and among workers. Those who opposed censorship were more often below 30, with higher education, with higher income, and among self-employed and managers. The idea of supervising councils was supported almost equally in all the population groups. Almost half of those who trusted the media completely saw no need for control, while those, who did not trust were the most willing to support censorship. In comparison, the answers to the same question in Moscow in 2002 were divided practically equal into three groups, 28-30 percent respondents belonging to each of them. Support for censorship is more frequent in Moscow than in towns of Karelia, but so is also the oppose for censorship.

The survey question was formulated so that the answers should refer to only control of political material in newspapers but actually a great part of population might had in mind control of media content in general, e.g. the control of violence and pornography, or in general, the need to control the quality of the programming. In the oldest group, many might
In Russia new types of media companies and structures which offered a useful service for their audiences have survived and succeeded. They include format radio stations with popular music, financial newspapers, entertainment television suiting various new genres and popular magazines and newspapers. The future of Russian media is closely connected with the development of Russian society and economy and political changes. It is likely that during the next decades Russian economy will continue to grow and Russia will become more post-industrialized society.

The dependence upon the import of oil will decrease and the development of information society will continue. It is possible that information services and technology may become more important sources of export revenues. The influence of Russian media over bordering countries may continue to spread, and the disperse of the flows overseas is not excluded either. Internet might well serve as an important tool for the developing of civil society and assist grass-root organisations. As a smart and complicated device it may also introduce brand new intellectual activities and pastimes.

**References**


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Russian Media System: Prospects for the Future


