

The Foreign Policy Centre



Putin and the Press

The revival of Soviet-style propaganda

Oleg Panfilov

Translated by Maria Blake

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This pamphlet is the fifth in the Foreign Policy Centre's 'Future of Russia' project which is built around seminars, lectures, publications, media contributions and larger conferences on the future of liberal and pluralist democracy in Russia. The project takes recent Russian developments and Russian perspectives as its departure point, but ground these in the broad principles of democracy and the commitments of Russia under its adherence both to the Council of Europe and OSCE founding documents. The main purposes of the Future of Russia Project are to expose to wider media scrutiny the reversal of hard won freedoms in Russia and to address the foreign policy dilemma faced by European leaders in relations with Russia as a result. That dilemma is how to protect and promote democratic principles in practice in the face of the visible retrenchment of basic freedoms in Russia, at the same time as advancing more traditional economic, security or geopolitical interests. The work of the Future of Russia Project is directed to making sound policy recommendations for action, followed up with appropriate public dissemination, especially through seminars and media coverage.

The Future of Russia Project features prominent figures from Russian progressive politics, as well as leading specialists and policy advisers from around the world. The project concentrates on the mechanisms by which Western governments, especially the UK, can revitalise the question of Russian democratic governance as one of the central issues of European politics today.

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Return of the Cult of Personality

During the first two years of Mr Putin's Presidency there was considerable demand for books about the new President. This was reflected in the few dozen articles written by foreign journalists accredited in Moscow on how new, specialised sections were set up in Moscow bookstores with books on President Putin. Those books varied in size and design, but they were identical in content. They were all biographies, written either on the order of the Kremlin or voluntarily by writers who were quick to recognise the comeback of the Russian and Soviet tradition that writing politically correct books would lead to personal gain through getting closer to those in power.

The new personality cult of the second Russian President was reported on mainly by foreign journalists and very rarely mentioned by Russian journalists. The latter might have concluded that Russian society was happy to embrace their 'new Tsar' and forgive him everything, including the re-establishment of a personality cult of the sort that had long been forgotten since the days of Brezhnev. Yeltsin, by contrast, had published only one account of his rise to power in the middle of his term, followed by a second after he retired.

Putin's era has revived something that was almost forgotten during the nine years of liberalism under Yeltsin: the old Russian tradition of adoration of officials and the presidential establishment, reverence to a Bureaucrat, who has the power to give or take, to punish or reward, with a new position or privileges. Thus corruption was given another lease of life. Bribes and illegal financial operations were nothing new and have always been 'the good old way' of doing things in Russia, but the annunciation of Putin as a Saviour of Russia has taken the younger generation of Russian society by surprise.

However, the older and middle aged generations, brought up in the Soviet ideological tradition, were happy to accept any political leader who, firstly, would be younger than the previous inhabitants of the

Kremlin geriatric home, and, secondly, would promise radical changes to the country which was suffering from the liberal reforms not only in politics, but mostly in the economy. Thirdly, the expectation of 'a strong hand' coincided with the beginning of the second military campaign in Chechnya in 1999. At that time the majority of Russians saw that war as the revenge for the previous defeat in the first war of 1994-96.

Vladimir Putin did not have any programme at the time of his first election campaign in 2000. When asked why he had no programme, he would smile and reply 'What for?' He was sure of his victory in spite of the fact that a number of independent TV and Radio channels were still in existence (NTV, an independent television channel, and a few private radio channels, mainly *Ekho Moskvy*). A great number of liberal papers also cautiously watched the appearance of a new man in the Kremlin, the one with the KGB past.

However, some of the liberal papers read the handover of power to Putin as 'a good sign' and immediately supported the acting President. Moreover, the new Russian leader did not break the traditional relationship between press and power. As early as June 2000 he signed a Decree on awarding medals and honours to a large group of journalists working in state papers. In response to that, the Director of the state news agency ITAR-TASS, Vitaly Ignatenko, called Putin the 'Guarantor of Free Speech'.

But the triumphal moment of state affection for an independent press was the presidential decree of 9 December 2000, which rewarded 48 journalists 'for their courage in the coverage of the Caucasus events'. That is when the President started talking about freedom of speech: 'Free press and mass media remain the most important condition for the society and state development'. Hardly anyone dared to ask then how the journalists who worked in Chechnya were selected. Were there any of those among the awardees who helped to stop the first war? The figures are as follows: 20 reporters died, a few dozen were wounded and nine were missing in action. Or maybe the awards were given to those who 'became aware' of the real patriotic calling and stopped reporting numerous civilian

casualties, carpet bombings and the sufferings of the thousands of refugees?

The cult revival did not encounter any resistance though. If you were to enter a bookstore in central Moscow, the Putin section would also contain various framed photos, cheap and expensive, as well as posters and other propaganda rubbish. These are popular with the small bureaucrats keen to demonstrate their 'affection' to power, and with tourists who similarly enjoy the wooden nested dolls, *matryoshkas*. In one such shop, there was a little souvenir tombstone for sale, made of expensive polished stone, with a simple engraving on it: 'Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin'. The artistic 'masterpiece' was supposed to express the popular love of the Russian President, but the creators of this souvenir never suspected that this love would turn tragic.

The external adoration of President Putin varies to such an extent, that it could be described in a multi-volume study. That would include the poetic Ode to the President written by a student of law from Chelyabinsk alongside a pop-song with the vulgar refrain in it 'I want a guy like Putin'.

When the Moscow correspondent of the German paper *Tageszeitung*, Klaus Donath, wrote an ironic article in 2001 about the student from Chelyabinsk, the latter took the paper to court. The case lasted a few months and the paper won, however strange it may seem. Patriotic songs continue to be composed, and the hit of the patriotic list is the song with the following lines in it: 'Putin and Stalingrad stand behind us'.

Certainly Putin will never be able break Lenin's or Stalin's record for the number of images, but after Gorbachev and Yeltsin, years after the cult of Brezhnev, who relished such self-promotion, Putin's personality cult is not so much a matter for concern as a matter for sneering and mockery. There are many Russians who are still convinced that Russia needs a tsar, but as it is impossible to restore the Romanov rule, they are content with the KGB colonel as a replacement. The press has helped greatly in strengthening Putin's personality cult.

Getting Hold of Power

Putin entered the Kremlin on 26 March 1997 as the Chief of Yeltsin's Presidential Control Department (monitoring the observance of federal law and presidential decrees). A year later he was appointed First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. One year later he was appointed Head of the FSB, and then Secretary of the Security Council. One more year elapsed and in August 1999 Putin was appointed Prime Minister of Russia. A week after that appointment, Putin spoke at the 95th Anniversary of ITAR-TASS State News Agency, saying that 'the Russian Government has always pursued and will continue to pursue the principles of democracy in all its activities, as well as will continue to support freedom of speech in every possible way'.

But it is typical of Russia that statements and slogans are repeated, and Putin has reiterated and confirmed his commitment to freedom of speech and democratic values. However, at the same time various governmental departments were putting pressure on journalists and the popular press. Under Prime Minister Putin, the first conflict occurred with the popular *Kommersant* newspaper which was part of the publishing house of Boris Berezovsky.

On the 23 August 1999, the State Fire Department within the Ministry of Internal Affairs closed and sealed the building where the newspaper office was located, allegedly for non-compliance with fire safety requirements. The Publishers' Guild for periodicals, with over 260 Russian papers and magazines among its members, vigorously protested and accused the government of the suppression of free speech. In the same month, Putin spoke in defence of the Constitutional rights of Russian nationals, in favour of free access to information, and in defence of those state-controlled TV producers, whose programmes were banned on the territory of Bashkortan, one of the Russian Republics.

On 22 December 1999, Putin made a statement that 'Free speech and free access to information, right for the accurate coverage of what is really happening in the country, will remain an immutable law

for the Russian authorities'. It was a welcome sign both for journalists and liberal politicians, as the majority had no doubts about Mr Putin's strong chances in the Russian Presidential elections.

On 21 January 2000, President Putin commented on the ungrounded rumours of 'the coming dictatorship' and 'the iron fist' in Russia. 'The basic principle of the Ministry for Internal Affairs is the protection of the rights and freedoms, as well as the personal immunity of Russians,' he stressed.

Both during his short term as the Head of the Ministerial Cabinet, and as the acting President of Russia, Putin kept repeating how important it is to maintain and protect freedom of speech in Russia. However, in late 1999, he took the first steps toward creation of censorship in Russia in relation to the second war in Chechnya.

Managed Democracy

The press has been a real test for Putin. His predecessor Boris Yeltsin never publicly attacked the press. He felt grateful to journalists for their support in 1990-91. Putin fully revealed his attitude to the Russian press on 22 August 2000 at the meeting with the families of the *Kursk* victims. Journalists were not allowed to attend, but some reporters managed to get in and recorded the straight talk between the President and the desperate relatives.

It was only when the transcript of the recording was published in the Russian press that Russians found out the true situation. Putin said: 'Television? This means they are lying. This means they are lying. This means they are lying. There are some people working there, who are yelling at the top of their voice now, but ten years ago it was they who started to destroy this very Army and the Fleet where people perish today. Today they are the ardent advocates and defenders of the Russian Army, but they are doing it in order to finally destroy and discredit the Army and the Fleet. Within a few years they have accumulated wealth through criminal actions and by

stealing, now they buy everything and everyone! They make laws to suit their goals!'

Earlier, during the election campaign of 2000, Putin's administration risked and designed a peculiar public relations exercise. They suggested that a few reporters should talk with the main presidential candidate and publish a book called 'Straight from the Source: Talking to Putin'.

The authors explained the process: 'We did not add anything, and there is not a single line in the book written by us, it is all based on our questions. If Putin and the people around him started remembering their past, or thinking aloud when answering, we would not interrupt them. That is why the book format is rather unusual, it is all interviews and monologues'. The initial print by Vagrius publishing house was set for half a million books, but by law this kind of publication during the election campaign is of promotional nature, so it had to be financed out of Putin's campaign budget.

However, this book became popular, as both experts and readers wanted to find out what Putin thought of foreign and home policies, what kind of individual they would have to deal with as their President after the 2000 election.

The follow-up on the journalists who put the book together revealed that Natalia Timakova, a professional journalist, was later appointed Deputy Head of the Presidential Press Service, Andrey Kolesnikov joined the presidential pool representing *Kommersant* newspaper, and Natalia Gevorkyan left for France after a number of unsettling interviews about Putin and the making of the book, and she is working as Paris correspondent for *Kommersant* newspaper.

In the first months after his presidential inauguration in March 2000, the authorities started to name loyal and disloyal journalists and to closely monitor the press community. Putin first started to 'handle and adapt' the press after his appointment as the Prime Minister. The first meeting of Prime Minister Putin and Editors in Chief of the daily newspapers took place on 25 August 1999. The important statement he made then appealed to both journalists and

administrators. He said: 'The government of Russia will not tolerate if any violations in connection with press business activities should be turned into tools of political pressure'. When in a few months time such pressure started being exercised against Media Most Holding Company and NTV channel, no one dared to quote his own words back to Putin.

The tradition of regular meetings with Editors in Chief is a peculiar Russian custom. Though, as a rule, heads of state-controlled papers are invited to such meetings; and they are exactly the people responsible for state political propaganda and presidential PR. Later Putin frequently demonstrated his peculiar attitude to propaganda, inviting the 'good' journalists and ignoring the 'bad' ones.

On 14 October 1999, Putin had a meeting with the Editors in Chief of the Russian provincial papers. They started with the subject of Chechnya. Prime Minister Putin outlined both the external reasons and the internal hidden causes behind the decisions of the government leading to the second war in Chechnya:

If we do not destroy the bandits and fail to take control over this territory, the disintegration of Russia is inevitable. Certain forces have paid attention to Chechnya recently, those with oil dollars and a desire for military and political presence in this area of Russia. Either we preserve the integrity of Russia, or we give away the North Caucasus as the first step on the road to losing the other territories.

Putin was convinced that the people of Chechnya would ultimately support the actions of Russia aimed at the elimination of terrorists, as the people were tired of poverty and terror. 'It will only be later, after the terrorists are done away with, that we should start negotiating the political status of Chechnya'.

Putin also stated that he knew of the alternative view of events in Chechnya. The phrase about negotiations was repeated a number of times during the talk, but every time with the condition that 'the terrorists are eliminated first'.

Control over the Press

In parallel with regular meetings with the Editors in Chief, Putin's administration started to reform the state policy on press and mass media. The press control Ministry was kept by the new government, as was the former Minister Mikhail Lesin, not only famous for his work in the press, but also for his role in setting up the TV advertising monopoly, Video International Company.

The second most important figure in the media and press control was Oleg Dobrodeev, appointed Director of the State TV and Radio Company in Russia (VGTRK) in January 2000. Dobrodeev was one of the founding members of the independent NTV Channel, but under Putin drastically changed his attitude to independent television in Russia. Dobrodeev started to consolidate all state provincial television and radio companies, thus creating a massive and powerful propaganda network.

Unexpectedly for many, former KGB staff members were being appointed managers of state-controlled television and radio companies. KGB General Alexander Zdanovich was appointed Dobrodeev's Deputy in the State TV and Radio Company (VGTRK) as former senior KGB officers were appointed as managers in other mass media.

The new authorities made no secret of the fact that they wanted an obedient and patriotic press, of the kind acceptable to the government. Regular meetings and talks with the press were held not only by the President, but also by the Ministers of Defence, Security, Justice, Internal Affairs and FSB. On 15 December 2002, such meeting took place on the initiative of Nikolai Patrushev, the FSB Director who argued: 'We are all pursuing the same objectives; we are working for the state and society'. He stressed his satisfaction with cooperation between the FSB and the Russian mass media.

Neither Putin nor the ministers were trying to hide their main objective – to support the authorities in their struggle against ‘international terror’.

Beginning in late 1999 and immediately after, the authorities were really at a loss when Liberal publications issued critical articles on how the Russian security forces work, revealing the untold facts, deliberately withheld by the authorities, in connection with the explosions of the residential houses in Moscow in September 1999, the war in Chechnya, the *Kursk* tragedy and terrorist acts in the Russian cities.

The authorities found that they could not directly control all of the media. In September 2000 Putin signed a document called the Doctrine of Information Security. This document was about 90 pages long and because it did not have any legal force, it was not mandatory for state departments or the press. But as any doctrine, it became the policy to follow, a signal for action for the officials interested in the issues of ‘developing state policy for Information Security within the Russian Federation’. This document is also peculiar as it mentions the constitutional rights of the Russian citizens in its Preamble, namely the right for objective and reliable information. It reads that the authorities are willing ‘to strengthen state mass media, to extend its modern means of providing reliable information to the Russian citizens and foreign nationals’.

For those who had doubts about the need for such a document, it says that in order to fulfil the national interests of the Russian Federation, it is necessary ‘to develop and perfect the infrastructure for the unified information space of the Russian Federation’. The document states a threat for the country, namely the fact that ‘a number of countries are developing the Concept of Information Wars, aimed at the creation of dangerous tools in order to influence the Information field of other countries, to disrupt the normal information flow and telecommunications, undermine the integrity of data resources and gain unauthorised access to them’.

The new Russian media doctrine recommended that the country ‘clarify the status of foreign news agencies, foreign mass media and

reporters, as well as investors’ background for the purpose of their partaking in the Russian Information Structure’. The most striking passages of the doctrine are as follows:

The greatest dangers in the sphere of home policies are the following threats for Information Security of the Russian Federation: ‘dissemination of false information on the policies of the Russian Federation, the activities of the Federal Authorities, on the events at home and abroad.

Main measures on Information Security in the Russian Federation in the sphere of home policy are: stepping up counter propaganda efforts, for the prevention of negative consequences of information pollution on Russian home policy.’

The external threats to Information Security in the Russian Federation of the worst kind are: dissemination outside Russia of false information on Russian home policies.

The greatest dangers in the sphere of foreign policies are the following internal threats to Information Security of the Russian Federation: information and propaganda activities of political forces, public associations, mass media and of individuals, which distort the strategy and tactics of Russian Foreign Policy; insufficient information awareness of the public of the Russian foreign activities issues.

The greatest dangers in the sphere of spiritual life are the following threats to Information Security of the Russian Federation: deformation of mass information system through mass media monopolisation or through uncontrolled expansion of foreign mass media within the national information space; use by foreign Special Branches of mass media on the Russian territory, with the purpose to damage Russian National Defence and Security and to disseminate false information.

By the outset of the 21st century, the Russian press was a strange combination of state-owned, independent and opposition press. After Mikhail Gorbachev declared Glasnost in his new presidential capacity in 1987, the first new ‘Law on Press’ was passed in 1990 allowing for private publishing agencies, and the Soviet Press started changing rapidly. However, these changes only affected newspapers and radio stations, as they did not require large investments. Nevertheless, new papers mushroomed. They were small newspapers, with low circulations, enjoying the new found

freedom and not thinking about any media business development. The only businesses that developed were the large, former Soviet publications set up after the Revolution of 1917 and then changed into Joint Stock Companies during Perestroika.

Trud, a large daily broadsheets newspaper, had a circulation of 19.5 million in the USSR; now it is under 2.5 million. The same applies to the popular daily youth papers, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 3.5 million and 1.5 million respectively. These papers only manage to increase circulation by publishing sensationalist stories, gossip and tabloid news on the private lives of Russian celebrities. The long-standing leader of the dailies is *Argumenty I Fakty*, with a circulation of up to 3 million. Though these are independent publications, they avoid conflict with the authorities and are pro-presidential by nature.

The other considerable part of the print media in Russia is the state press, financed out of the state budget. The largest national publications are *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* with a circulation of over 300,000, *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* – not more than 100,000, and also the Ministry of Defence paper, *Krasnaya Zvezda* with 30,000 circulation. There is also a large number of daily and weekly papers published by various departments, institutions and industries in Moscow.

By the summer of 2004, the total circulation of Russian newspapers was 8.5 billion copies and for magazines about 600 million copies. One third of them are federal publications. The other third comprises the municipal press, mainly regional and city newspapers. As for the magazines, the metropolitan publications of general interest are the leaders, with a share of over 80 per cent in the annual circulation total. Official statistics on 1 September 2004 listed the total number of publications in Russia at 41,080, with 23,749 newspapers, 14,332 magazines and the remainder of various formats. Around 20 holding companies control the newspapers with larger circulations.

It is obvious that the tabloids are leaders in circulations, such as the leading paper of Prof-Media Publishing House *Komsomolskaya Pravda* – 3.5 million copies daily.

The magazine market is considerable, but 92 per cent of all magazines are published in Moscow. The total circulation for magazines per annum is 600 million copies, of which 60 per cent is attributed to weekly magazines and 40 per cent to monthly magazines. The most popular socio-political magazine is the Russian (however strange it may seem) edition of *Forbes* and *Newsweek*, and the most popular monthly magazine is the Russian *Cosmopolitan* (over 1 billion copies), *Glamour* (600 thousand copies).

The largest Holding Company is Prof-Media Publishing House, which publishes 90 newspapers, and the second largest is HFS-InterMediaGroup with 62 newspapers. Financial statements of the companies are not disclosed, but it is known that the revenue of the *Izvestia* newspaper was \$13.4 million in 2004.

It is difficult to assess the quality of newspapers and magazines in Russia, and it is even more difficult to determine their political stance, their relations with authorities or their critical attitude towards authorities. This depends on many things, such as the political views of the newspaper founding members or of their printing house (as over 70 per cent of newspapers in Russia are still printed in state printing facilities).

The problems of the Russian printed press are aggravated by the collapse of the printed matter distribution system as only private companies look after annual subscriptions. Delivery and sales are the job of many individual distributors, but as newspapers and magazines are rather expensive, the number of distributors is limited. Only those newspapers which have regional offices, such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets* can actually profit. These papers are not subject to any harassment on behalf of the authorities. Just the opposite, they are in favour, and their Editors in Chief are invited by Putin on overseas trips. The papers reciprocate and publish articles on the President avoiding any kind of criticism. On 23 May *Komsomolskaya Pravda* celebrated its 80th Anniversary. President Putin visited their office and congratulated the staff. One can hardly imagine similar gestures towards *Kommersant* or the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

The provincial press follows the same pattern, as it very much depends on the favours of the local Governors or Presidents of the Russian Republics.

The same applies to Russian television. According to the Internews Agency, a non-commercial organisation, there are 1,070 TV Companies and 634 radio stations in Russia. But the area of their coverage varies, with the largest share belonging to the state-controlled TV companies and radio stations. The main channel, which was the leading Soviet channel, has had a number of names during the recent years: Ostankino, ORT, and now it is Channel One. It has the potential audience of 98 per cent of the country's population. Channel Two, Russia TV Company, previously called RTR has the potential audience of under 95 per cent. The NTV company (officially independent television Channel, but 69.4 per cent of its shares belong to the state-controlled Gazprom), has an audience of 72 per cent. The other three national television Channels have audiences of 58 per cent to 36 per cent (one of them is *Kultura*, the other one is the *Sport Channel*).

At present there are no standard Independent companies in Russia. There is only one private television company, REN-TV, using ultra-high frequency (UHF). Its audience grew from 50 million people in 1997 to 110 million, but the majority of the viewers are outside Russia.

The situation with radio is different. According to the latest research, radio is preferred to television by many: 65 per cent of the Russians are happy with television, but 76.9 per cent prefer radio.

There are over 500 stations working in Russia, with 1,002 licenses issued. Of all the working radio stations there are 143 state, municipal and non-commercial ones and 391 commercial ones. There is no open access radio in Russia. Commercial radio stations mainly operate as entertainment and information channels. The experts are convinced that as of today, music wins over information. Powerful network stations, such as *Evropa Plus* (Europe Plus), with

158 regional partners, or *Russkoye Radio* (Russian Radio), with 150 partners in 700 cities, attract most of the local advertising budgets.

When the financial problems of radio stations are discussed, it becomes clear that the actual revenues, as well as the developed advertising market, belong to the majority of the commercial radio stations broadcasting music. News radio stations are scarce in Russian radio broadcasting. *Ekho Moskvy* and its related regional radio stations (*Ekho Rostova* or *Ekho Moskvy* in Ekaterinburg) has become the only independent news network in Russia. These are the only radio stations which present the whole of the political news and give a chance to the leaders of all political parties to have a say and comment on the political events in the country.

Internet is the most free and open information source in Russia. According to various studies, it is used by 10 to 12 per cent of the people in Russia. However, more specific statistics on what kind of information is of interest to Internet users are unavailable. The official figure for the number of Internet news sites in Russia is 1,700, with probably 2 to 4 per cent of the visitors looking for political news or commentary.

In the early days of the Internet's appearance in Russia, the authorities started to create their own websites, with the main development of activities in mid 90's. But no one knows how many visitors those sites have and if they are of any use. The variety of political parties is presented on the Internet, including various movements, such as nationalists and neo-fascists.

The popularity of the Internet and the growth of the number of users is directly related to the standards of living. Very few people can afford to buy a PC and then keep paying for the Internet connection. Also, there is a certain passivity towards information in society, and many people prefer to get free information without having to worry about its quality or objectivity. This is why the most widely watched television channels in Russia are free, excluding cable television. The choice for the majority of people is quite simple: why should I spend money on papers or a PC, if I can press a button and find out what the news is?

Nevertheless, authorities began to take advantage of the Internet, such as creating topical information websites. Gleb Pavlovsky, Head of the Efficient Politics Fund, a pro-Kremlin PR structure which supports President Putin and his policy, has set up a number of sites, including the most famous ones - www.strana.ru, www.vesti.ru, www.smi.ru, www.ukraina.ru. Later the majority of Pavlovsky's websites were handed over to the state broadcasting company VGTRK, but they remained what they used to be before, that is PR or propaganda websites.

On the other hand, the Russian Internet is totally uncontrolled, and there are some openly nationalistic or neo-fascist websites. Nevertheless, the struggle for users is on, and since the beginning of the second war in Chechnya nationalistic sites of the Chechen resistance have appeared. The most well-known one is www.kavkazcenter.com, and it is a constant nuisance for the Russian special services.

Mass Media and Propaganda Tools

Putin's administration has exploited the budget dependency of the state-controlled newspapers. In January 2000 Putin approved an amendments to the Law on Economic Support of Regional (City) Newspapers. Since then all the publications were to be financed centrally by the Federal Authorities, through the Ministry of Press and no longer through the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

With Putin's accession to power and the introduction of the Doctrine of Information Security, various representatives of state authorities, including members of the Government, members of parliament (Duma deputies) and officials of the Presidential Administration, started to work towards change in existing laws. There were a number of attempts to control and limit reporters' coverage of terrorist acts. Russian MPs intended to adopt the Law on creating Community Councils to censor TV programmes. This latter initiative was to limit and eradicate 'scenes of violence' on television. Such

initiatives were deemed to fall under the Constitutional or Criminal Code provisions that ban ethnic or racial vilification. Thus while Russian MPs claim to be taking care of their voters, they fail to understand the restrictive essence of the new law they are trying to introduce.

In 2003, a new Law on the Organisation and General Principles of Local Government in the Russian Federation was adopted, which limits the right of the local government to establish mass media. On 19 May 2005, however, recommendations for the change of this law and lifting of the limitation were adopted by the Duma at parliamentary hearings. (Putin does not interfere with his parliament, in spite of the fact that he has his own representative there and that the pro-Putin Party has the majority in the Duma.)

When yet another book on Putin was published in Moscow, *Vladimir Putin: the Life Story*, on 3 February 2002, the *Los Angeles Times* published a review of it under the title 'The Bells of Propaganda are Heard in the New Book on Putin'. John Daniszewski stated that: 'The new biography is a surprise, as it looks like an effort to restore the Soviet tradition of praising national leaders'.

However, the propaganda of 'the best qualities' of the Russian President was surprisingly apparent between the two election campaigns of 2000 and 2005. Between the elections the Russian President would get a regular mention in all Russian news on all television channels. Sometimes there would be three or four news items with the images or a mention of the President during a ten or fifteen minute newsreel.

The weekly *Vlast* (Power), published by the Kommersant Group, carried out a own study to determine just how often the Russian mass media uses the image or name of the President. The sample group comprised 291 lead items in the evening news of Channel One and Channel Russia, and 290 lead news items of NTV evening news from 15 April 2004 to 14 April 2005 (*Namedni* news programme on NTV did not take place on 20 June 2004).

According to the statistics, Putin was most mentioned by Channel Russia. In 2004, the activities of the President were treated as the main event of the day (lead item in the broadcast) 84 times by this channel. Viewers can see Putin three times a week in the lead item on the evening news.

Putin is much less visible on the other channels. Channel One put Putin into their lead news item 48 times during that year and NTV Channel – only 9 times. However, NTV can pride itself on stability. The coverage of the President on this channel has not changed since 2004, but Channel One and Channel Russia have drastically reduced their coverage of Putin by a factor of one third.

Russian laws, and mainly the Law on Mass Media, do not envisage any limitations for disseminating information or for the creation of new mass media, except for those which are aimed at starting or causing inter-ethnic or social conflicts. These limitations are in the Criminal Code provisions, but unfortunately the Russian Prosecutor's Office, responsible for the law enforcement, fails to act in connection with openly nationalistic or xenophobic publications.

Though the word *propaganda* does not get a mention in the Russian Laws, its meaning is of great importance for Russia. Firstly, in the Doctrine of Information Security the word propaganda is replaced by the convenient and well-rounded definition of 'a unified information space'. Secondly, the revival of bureaucracy in Russia during the last five years has created all the conditions for press activities regulation by the administrative resources, which means this very bureaucracy.

The new Russian propaganda system has an established record of withholding information. This was seen in connection with the *Kursk* catastrophe and also during those months when it was being officially investigated. The military press services and Putin's administration first were trying to convince people that the emergency situation happened through the fault of another submarine, a NATO one, which allegedly collided with the *Kursk*. Then for some considerable time the military tried to persuade the families and the relatives that there had been no chance of rescuing

the crew members. They withheld the fact that foreign experts offered their help immediately.

The reason for withholding information, from the point of view of the officials, was simple: the authorities were protecting the image of the President, who at that time had only been in the Kremlin for a few months. At the same time they would spread rumours on the great progress in the official investigation, hoping to support Putin's good reputation. In the end, the General Prosecutor Vladimir Ustinov published his book about this investigation, but the relatives of the dead still do not believe the official information.

Ratings for Internal Use

The main element of propaganda in the Russian press is that which rates President Putin himself. The ever so popular ratings are usually prepared by various sociological institutes. For example, the report of the Public Opinion Foundation, published on 3 October 2002, reads:

The image of the Russian President in public perception also remains quite positive. In reply to open-ended questions about Putin's personal qualities, the respondents were twice as likely to give positive answers: 68 per cent (Question: 'Which of Putin's qualities do you like?') rather than negative 31 per cent (Question: 'Which of Putin's qualities do you dislike?'). For example, the frequency of respondents mentioning Putin's positive moral characteristics has almost doubled, from 11 per cent in March to 20 per cent in September. The respondents started to talk more often of such qualities as honesty and decency, kindness and caring for people. When mentioning honesty and decency, the respondents used the following words: 'decency', 'straightforward, genuine, rings true', 'honesty', 'truthfulness' (open-ended question, 14 per cent as compared with 7 per cent in March), while mentioning kindness and caring, the respondents used the words: 'kind, loves the people of Russia' and 'empathises with people' (open-ended question, 6 per cent as compared with 3 per cent in March).

In March 2005, the newspaper *Vremia Novostei* published the Ratings Analysis for Putin since his accession to the Kremlin in 2000:

In the summer of 2000, at the start of Putin's first term of office, his trust rating, according to the All-Russian Centre for Public Opinion, was 58 per cent. Currently, the President is trusted by around 40 per cent of the Russians. Putin's trust rating has been lowering gradually. The first significant onset of dissatisfaction with Putin as a person came after the Dubrovka hostage crisis (Nord-Ost Theatre) in October 2002, when the President's trust rating dropped to 42 per cent. At the same time, the approval of Putin as the national leader improved slightly. In other words, the President gained approval as the Head of State, while 'Putin the individual' lost some of the voters' confidence.

Throughout 2003, the President's trust rating never dropped below 50 per cent. According to the May poll by the Centre for Public Opinion in 2004, the President was once again the only politician trusted by over half of all respondents. In May of that year, he had the confidence of 58 per cent of the Russians, including 82 per cent of the supporters of the United Russia Party, more than half of the supporters of the Union of Right Forces, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia and the Rodina Movement, and one third of Communist Party supporters.

Assessing Putin's policy at the start of his second presidential term, 40 per cent of the respondents agreed that he is continuing the policy of his first four years, mainly trying to reinforce stability and order in the country as well as implement gradual economic reforms. 24 per cent of the respondents suggested that the President's policy focus had changed since his first term, mainly in the area of radical liberal reforms in the social sphere. According to another 24 per cent, there is no such thing as 'the presidential policy', since 'in reality the decisions are not made by Putin, but by those in his close circle'.

Following the events in Beslan in early September 2004, the President's trust rating subsided again, but subsequently became slightly more stable. In effect, every negative event in the country resulted in a few points drop in the trust ratings, then rose back, though not quite regaining its original position. In other words, over the years there has been a slow but steady drop in the confidence of the Russians in their President. The last significant change was early in 2005, following mass protests against the latest welfare reform, in which social benefits were replaced by cash equivalent. In the end of February 2005, the President was named as one of the country's most trusted politicians by 42 per cent of respondents, as compared to 50 per cent in December 2004. According to sociologists, a similar situation may have resulted in an even worse

decline in trust to the Head of State, but in this instance the Russians chose to focus their disapproval on the Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and those in government directly responsible for the economy. In January 2005, the approval rating for the Cabinet of Ministers dropped to 27 per cent, the lowest since it began working under the leadership of Fradkov in April 2004, when its approval rating was 26 per cent. It follows that the President did not sacrifice his own rating in order to pass the unpopular reform, although it should be noted that Putin's approval rating has dropped again since the introduction of the new welfare law.

Regardless of this, 50 per cent of the Russian citizens still name Putin in response to the question on who they would vote for if a new presidential election was to be called next week. Reminded that under the existing law Vladimir Putin would be ineligible to run for the presidential election in 2008, around 40 per cent would refuse to vote, or would vote against all candidates. According to the analysts of the Public Opinion Centre, such response is the direct result of the fact that there is no real political opposition or competition.

Since ratings in Russia are a relative and highly contradictory indicator, nobody has yet studied the extent to which the level of propaganda, in the form of positive mention of President Putin and his activities, may affect public opinion. On the other hand, Russian society has no historic tradition of political culture, and for several generations the Russians have had no opinion on the personal qualities of the General Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee or what kind of person would be suitable for the post.

However, some democratic institutional changes such as taking part in free elections of the President or members of parliament are slowly becoming accepted within Russia. In order for the population to make the 'right' choice, the press and television, which is rigidly controlled by the State, present the image of the 'right' candidate in the most flattering light. For example, when terrorists captured a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan in September 2004, many analysts noted that during the first two days of the siege, while the authorities carried out negotiations and the security forces prepared to storm the building, Vladimir Putin's name was absent from all television news. Most likely, the Kremlin spin doctors had decided that any mention of Putin in the context of a tragedy may undermine his image.

Similarly, staff at the State Television Company admitted that during the events in Beslan, they received 'from above', a list of words not to be used or mentioned on air and a further list of words recommended for use in the context of Beslan.

Such conduct became a tradition, initiated by the Russian military during the first Chechen war, when the various press services of the Ministry of Defence were supplied with rules for communicating with journalists, including a glossary of essential terms. As a result, it is practically impossible to find a report in the Russian press or on Russian television, in which members of the Chechen resistance are referred to as anything other than 'bandits' or 'terrorists'.

However, the propaganda efforts began in earnest even earlier, in August 1999, when Prime Minister Putin began military operations in Dagestan, which he later transferred to neighbouring Chechnya.

The Information Blockade of Chechnya

The coverage of the situation in Chechnya changed dramatically after the Russian troops began military operations on the territory of the Republic. Analytical articles on Chechnya had all but disappeared from the state press, apart from coverage of military operations, which had, following the adoption of a new anti-terrorist law, also been dubbed 'an anti-terrorist operation'. The only exceptions to this were the television channel NTV, the radio station Ekho Moskv, and a few Moscow-based newspapers, which still attempted to write about the possible consequences of starting a second war in the region.

The start of the second war marked a complete change in the content of regional newspapers. Only a few of those still tried for a time to publish reactions, commentaries or analytical articles which still contained many questions, but almost no answers to these questions.

The start of the second Chechen war was preceded by the preparation of a new information policy. Military analysts and pro-

Kremlin experts began disseminating opinions within the media, designed to justify the introduction of restrictions of journalistic activities. On 7 October 1999, *Kommersant* newspaper published an article entitled 'The New Information Policy of the General Staff is Already Outdated', which analysed the actions of the military authorities in Chechnya towards the press. According to the newspaper, 'soon after the end of the first Chechen war, the former Chief of Staff of the Russian military in Chechnya, Colonel General Leontiy Shevtsov admitted: 'I understand now that without information support it would be impossible to win this war. We should have befriended the press instead of indulging in jiggery-pokery'. *Kommersant* wrote that the Chief of General Staff Anatoliy Kvashnin personally issued the ban on entry of non-State-controlled media representatives into the town of Mozdok. All visits to the front line of military operations stopped. The Minister of Defence issued an order to all central staff of his Ministry and the General Staff of the Russian Army prohibiting any direct communication with journalists, bypassing the military press-services. *Kommersant* went on to note that the press-services were equally useless to journalists, since they did not disclose any information.

The new information policy was founded on numerous reports, disseminated via the information agencies, which described the growing discontent of the Chechen civilian population with the paramilitaries and reported (without corroboration) the emergence among the terrorists of female snipers from the Baltic states, Azerbaijan and the Ukraine. These reports cited unnamed 'military sources'. At the same time, the state information agency ITAR-TASS began reporting that 'the bandits themselves place bombs in civilian houses and blow them up when Russian military planes appear overhead'.

The same issue of *Kommersant* mentioned above includes a quote from Colonel General Valeriy Manilov, the Deputy Chief of General Staff responsible for the information policy of the Russian Army. In a meeting with the military press staff, he said that it was necessary 'to behave like real professionals: to speak a lot, but to say nothing'.

The introduction of rigid regulations on the work of journalists was preceded by several hard-line statements by government officials. On the 16 November 1999, Vladimir Rakhmanin, a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, blamed the western media for 'one-sided and biased coverage of the situation in the North Caucasus'. On 29 of March 2000, the Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov declared that:

Recently an information war against Russia has started, in connection with the events in the North Caucasus. There are attempts to create a negative and one-dimensional image of Russia, not just of the Russian State, but of Russian society in general. It is a great shame that in the West even some highly esteemed individuals fall for it, well-known artists and scientists.

A month earlier Ivanov claimed that:

Firmness and openness are the priorities of the Russian information policy regarding the North Caucasus. Currently there is a second front in place, an information war against the interests of the Russian Federation, against those actions which the Federal Forces are carrying out in the North Caucasus. We understand perfectly well who is behind this and why it is happening. This is exactly why we must be firm and open. We are not covering up anything in the North Caucasus, there is nothing to cover up. We want to restore the rule of law and the Constitution. We want the people of the Chechen Republic to live in accordance with the same laws as all the peoples of our country. We will achieve this.

At the same time some representatives of the Russian government submitted rather 'exotic' proposals which opposed the existing laws. For example, on 14 March 2000, Minister of Justice Yuri Chaika claimed that the presidential committee against political extremism adopted a resolution to approach the Government with the proposal to assign the Status of national importance to the news reports obtained by newspapers from news agencies. According to Chaika, this would have freed the newspapers from paying information agencies for the news.

Another example of the new Information Policy was the meeting between the Secretary of the Security Council Sergey Ivanov and

the chiefs of the leading Moscow media on 25 May 2000. The media was represented by the State information agencies ITAR-TASS and *RIA Novosti*, the state television stations ORT and RTR, and the independents Interfax Agency, NTV Channel, the newspapers - *Kommersant*, *Moscow News*, *Pravda*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Segodnya* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Also present were Mikhail Lesin, Minister of Press, Sergey Yastrzhembsky, President's aide and the Deputy Interior Minister Igor Zubov. The topic of the meeting was Chechnya. The audience were informed that 'the total number of the Chechen paramilitaries is 1,500 of which around 600 are mercenaries, mostly from the Arab countries. Many of these mercenaries are not in a bad state, as they are suffering from a lack of medical help, weapons shortages etc'.

This meeting essentially established not only the State monopoly over information from Chechnya, but reinforced the right of the state, as articulated by the government officials, to deal in propaganda, that is to disseminate false information with the intent to distort the actual events in Chechnya.

Of course, government officials had used propaganda in the course of the first military campaign, but in the beginning of the second war the disseminated information lacked both logic and common sense. The official sources were unconcerned if their information was subsequently refuted or looked rather ridiculous even to those who had no military experience. For example on 6 October 1999 ITAR-TASS reported, citing one of the Commanders of the North Caucasian military region that:

Chechen bandits themselves place bombs in civilian buildings and blow them up when Russian military planes appear overhead. This is done with the aim of creating resentment amongst the population of Chechnya towards the actions of the Russian Government in the North Caucasus. At the same time, according to our military sources, the civilian population of Chechnya is growing increasingly discontent with the actions of the bandit formations.

The carelessness with which false information was disseminated caused absurdities of geographical implausibility. For example on 4

May 2000 many Russian news agencies referred to military sources in their report that 'on 3 May, in the region between the Chechen villages of Makheta and Avtura a unit of extremists was successfully liquidated. The paramilitaries suffered 18 casualties'. In reality, the two villages named in the report are located in different regions, separated by a sizeable distance and a few mountain peaks.

Judging by the insistence of the military sources, the purpose of such false information was to change the attitude of the Russian people towards the Chechen separatists.

The most popular theme of official commentaries and official interviews throughout the course of the second war was announcements about the end of the war. For example, on 26 June 2000, General Gennadiy Troshev, Commander of the Russian Joint Forces in the region, declared that 'the war on the Chechen soil, as such, is finished'. He also stated that his forces 'are not into any offensive combat, they don't carry out any air strikes or artillery attacks'. By contrast, on the same day Interfax and the Military News Agency published reports that 'within the last 24 hours the Air Force has carried out 11-12 missions of SU-25 attack airplanes, two intelligence-gathering missions using AN-26 and AN-30, and more than 30 missions by helicopters Mi-24, Mi-8, Mi-26'.

The State agency ITAR-TASS cited military sources in its report on 8 August 2001, which was judged as a provocation by the well-known human rights organisation *Memorial*. As far as can be determined, the aim of this provocation on behalf of the military was to use ITAR-TASS to convince the Russians that *Memorial* was 'the abettor of the terrorists'. The gist of the report repeated the story of the money bribe to the Russian journalists by the Chechen separatists. The ITAR-TASS report was headlined 'Chechen separatists are trying to use some human rights activists and refugees as weapons in the information war'. Referring to military sources, the report mentions a letter allegedly sent by Aslan Maskhadov to *Memorial*, addressed to Ibragim Yahyaev and Maryam Yandieva. In the alleged letter Maskhadov thanks the human rights activists for 'their immense contribution to the Chechen peoples' struggle for freedom against Caffres and traitors to the nation'. According to ITAR-TASS,

Maskhadov recommends that 'new refugee organisations should be set up and registered with the Russian Ministry of Justice, which would defend the rights of the citizens of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria' and the 'transmission to the West and to the Russian media organisations, which are sympathetic to us, of the materials regarding the humanitarian catastrophe in the refugee camps in Ingushetia and the abuses of the civilian population carried out by the Russian military'. In order to support the media coverage of separatist activities, Maskhadov allegedly proposes 'a campaign highlighting the abuses of the human rights of refugees and coverage of protests in the newspapers *Grozninsky Rabochiy*, *Novaya Gazeta* and the journal *Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Two days after the publication of this report, *Memorial* forwarded a statement to the executive director of ITAR-TASS, asking for it to be published in accordance with Articles 43, 44 and 45 of the Law on Mass Media in the Russian Federation. This statement was never published.

The official sources of the State-controlled news agency ITAR-TASS have, since the signing of the August 1996 agreement between Aslan Maskhadov and Alexander Lebed, have been using the phrase 'The Chechen Trail' in a variety of contexts, but primarily in the context of condemnation. Even when there is no reason to mention the Chechens, representatives of the State use the phrase 'The Chechen Trail' in relation to criminal activity, be it an explosion, counterfeit money, a terrorist act or some other crime. Frequently, the phrase is used indirectly, as for example in a report on an explosion, 'no "Chechen Trail" discovered...'

Besides this, there are other variations in ITAR-TASS's reporting: 'the traces lead to Chechnya', 'the Caucasian trail', 'the Vakhabit trail', all of which have the same connotation as 'The Chechen Trail'. In the news section of ITAR-TASS information output, the phrase 'Chechen trail' is used 10 times in 1996, 32 times in 1997, 10 times in 1998, 34 times in 1999, 46 times in 2000 and 22 times in 2001. The phrase occurs most frequently in the context of condemnation in 2000 and 2001. It is necessary to point out that the overwhelming majority of crimes which are associated with 'The Chechen Trail' in

official statements have either not been solved or presented no evidence connecting ethnic Chechens to the crime.

Counter-propaganda

The methods of counter-propaganda are well known to former Soviet citizens who frequently came across it, mostly unaware of what it was. Psychologists have studied the elements of counter-propaganda fairly extensively, including the experience of the relevant sections of the Communist Party and the KGB, so counter-propaganda in the media coverage of the Chechen events is strongly reminiscent of the old Soviet counter-propaganda. It is fortunate, after all, that the old counter-propaganda operatives are still around and their experience remains available. The only problem is that Soviet counter-propaganda existed without any alternative opinions, that is, it was difficult to disprove it by means other than those offered by Western short-wave radio stations. Modern Russian counter-propaganda exists in parallel with independent alternative media, which essentially renders the effectiveness of counter-propaganda a pointless waste of time and resources. Moreover, for expert scholars Russian counter-propaganda represents a good starting point for a serious study of the protracted demise of the Soviet approach to information.

Nevertheless, the existence of counter-propaganda within the Russian media is entirely conscious. Elena Kuzmenko, who studies counter-propaganda, offers many examples of successful attempts to manipulate public opinion. She writes primarily about election campaigns, but the result is the same regardless of the immediate context. Among the tactical methods of counter-propaganda, Kuzmenko lists 'psychological tricks in speeches', 'transference of a negative image', 'use of feelings of fear and anxiety in reports', 'use of gossip', 'a discrediting campaign', 'full-frontal attack', 'partisan attack', 'proof of wrong facts or errors in the opponent's propaganda', 'deliberate disregard for some topics of the opponent's propaganda', 'use of counter-rumours and counter-arguments', 'derision', 'evasion through emotion', 'counter-propaganda as a ready response' and so on.

In the book (which the authors A. Volodin and V. Konovalov called 'a training manual') entitled *International Security and the Problems of Terrorism*, the following is noted as an achievement: 'An important feature of the coverage of the Chechen situation was the transformation of the positions of a variety of Russian media organisations. If during the first war (1994-1996) the majority of the media had justified the armed cessation and frequently presented reports from the separatists' side, then the course of the anti-terrorist campaign (1999-2000) was characterised by almost all media justifying the necessity of defending Russia from aggression and from the threat presented by Chechnya's harbouring of terrorists'. To give the authors their due, they go on to write that 'the excessive duration of the second military operation in Chechnya reduced its effectiveness'.

According to Michael Gress, the author of the book *The Soviet-Afghan War*:

Ideological dogmas did not allow the Soviet intelligence and military commanders to adequately evaluate their opponent's potential, while their inability to conduct propaganda and counter-propaganda (this shortcoming is evident even now, during the military actions in Chechnya) undermined the morale of the army and the civilian population.

It is true that the number of counter-propaganda publications grew substantially during the course of the second war in Chechnya, compared to how the media had worked during the first war. On 1 March 2001, *Izvestia* published an article stating that, according to Mikhail Lesin, the Minister of Press, the Russian government planned to fund an advertising campaign in the USA, designed to create a positive image of Russia. Essentially, this would mean the resurrection of the old system of counter-propaganda. *Izvestia* also published a quote from the head of the news agency *RIA Novosti*, Vladimir Kulistikov, who had until recently worked for *Radio Liberty*:

I have heard of the government's idea and consider it absolutely the right thing to do. The problem is that there is lack of actual information in the West. I'm not saying that it is necessary to put out only positive

messages. The Soviet experience showed that direct propaganda is ineffective. We should simply give the world a full picture of our reality.

Counter-propaganda was a concern not only in terms of Russian public opinion, but also in Chechnya itself. On 14 December 2001, the then Chief Federal Inspector for the Southern Federal District Bislav Gantamirov stated that the main concern in the fight against the bandits in Chechnya ought to be 'the necessary increase in counter-propaganda among the local population'. He presented his own programme of political regulation in Chechnya and gave special prominence to counter-propaganda, since, in his words, the 'support' for terrorists from some of the population 'enables the continuation of the bandits' activities'.

The problem of successful counter-propaganda occupied the minds of different people, including those whose responsibilities included propaganda. On 23 October 2000 Sergey Yastrzhembsky gave a speech at the Conference on the Media Market and Information Security in Russia. He declared that 'the most dangerous opponent in Chechnya, in terms of information, is the "factory of rumours"'. He underlined that the paramilitaries 'use this method of counter-propaganda with relative skill and success'. The main method of resisting this tactic, according to Yastrzhembsky, is to create a 'normal information field' within Chechnya. In practice this would mean the return of the ORT and RTR broadcasts to the republic, which are expected at the end of November when a retransmitting station is commissioned and launched in the Grozninsky Region of Chechnya.

However, after discussing the counter-propaganda of the separatists who 'spread rumours' in response to Russian propaganda, Yastrzhembsky did not miss the opportunity to follow suit. He noted that the separatists' other information efforts are a failure. In his opinion, this is partly due to the absence of a single information policy and its management within their camp. According to Yastrzhembsky, the paramilitaries' most well-known promoter Movladi Udugov is all but disavowed as a 'newsmaker' by Maskhadov and his group. 'Udugov is currently practically without any sources of up-to-date information and despite all his efforts, he

is unable to play the same role he played during the first Chechen war'. Thus, according to Yastrzhembsky, the traditional information channels have proved to be out of reach for the Chechen paramilitary groups.

On 12 April 2002 RTR reported that '...a new subdivision of the Ministry of the Interior is being created in Chechnya, a Coordinating Division which will take on counter-propaganda and will be a counter-measure against Radio Liberty, which broadcasts across Chechnya, and also against the information which trickles down from the field commanders'. On the same day, the Chairman of the State Accounting Chamber Sergey Stepashin declared that in his personal opinion, Radio Liberty, which is financed by the US Congress, should have its license to broadcast across Russia revoked: 'I consider it absolutely right to pose a question about revoking the license of Radio Liberty, which broadcasts in our country'. Stepashin underlined that he was expressing his opinion not as the Chairman of the State Accounting Chamber but 'simply as the citizen Sergey Stepashin'.

As attested by the public statements of a variety of politicians, the Russian State has always been concerned with counter-propaganda in Chechnya. On 2 March 2003 RTR showed an item which claimed that '...the campaign against a Referendum on the Constitution of Chechnya is carried out by the paramilitaries, among others'. The head of the Chechen Government, Anatoliy Popov, called for counter-propaganda to oppose those efforts.

Conclusion

The renaissance of the traditions of Soviet propaganda represents a new era for Russian media and domestic policy. Of course it was not a difficult feat to achieve, since up to 70 per cent of the journalists currently working in the media are former graduates of Soviet Universities and former staff of the Communist media, where propaganda was considered an important tool of Soviet socialist ideology.

It has not been difficult to revive the old propaganda traditions in Putin's era, thanks in part to the wide presence of his old KGB colleagues. Not only are they familiar with propaganda techniques, but they don't want any changes either to society or the media. They still consider it essential for the Russian society to be dependent on a daily dosage of TV-delivered information and believe that only in these circumstances can the reign of the President be long and problem-free.

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Yet, many of these questions are crucial for understanding the present and future of the Russian electoral landscape, and hence the future of the country's democratic development. The Russian electorate is now far less predictable in its political preferences than in the first decade of modern Russian political history. Under such conditions, the prospects for the formation and development of an effective multi-party system appear quite bleak.

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As the title 'Kremlin Echo' suggests, there are various interpretations of the effects of Vladimir Putin's policy on the rule of law in Russia, not only from abroad, but within the Kremlin walls as well. Andrei Illarionov, an Economic Advisor to President Putin, gave several scathing criticisms of Putin's reforms before he stepped down as Putin's personal representative to the 'Group of Eight' on 4 January 2005. His interview on 30 December 2004 on Ekho Moskvoy Radio has been translated by the Federal News Service and has been reprinted by permission of the Federal News Service and Ekho Moskvoy Radio.

In the preface, Andrew Jack explores President Putin's contest with Yukos as he tries to reassert his power over a broken system. Konstantin Sonin, in his piece entitled 'Putin's Rule of Law is Mere Rhetoric' analyses Putin's recent political reforms, and its repercussions on the Russian economy and Constitution.

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protect individual civil rights. The UK should apply whatever leverage it possesses (including through multilateral economic co-operation agreements) to vigorously promote the protection of the hard-won rights and freedoms in Russia.

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