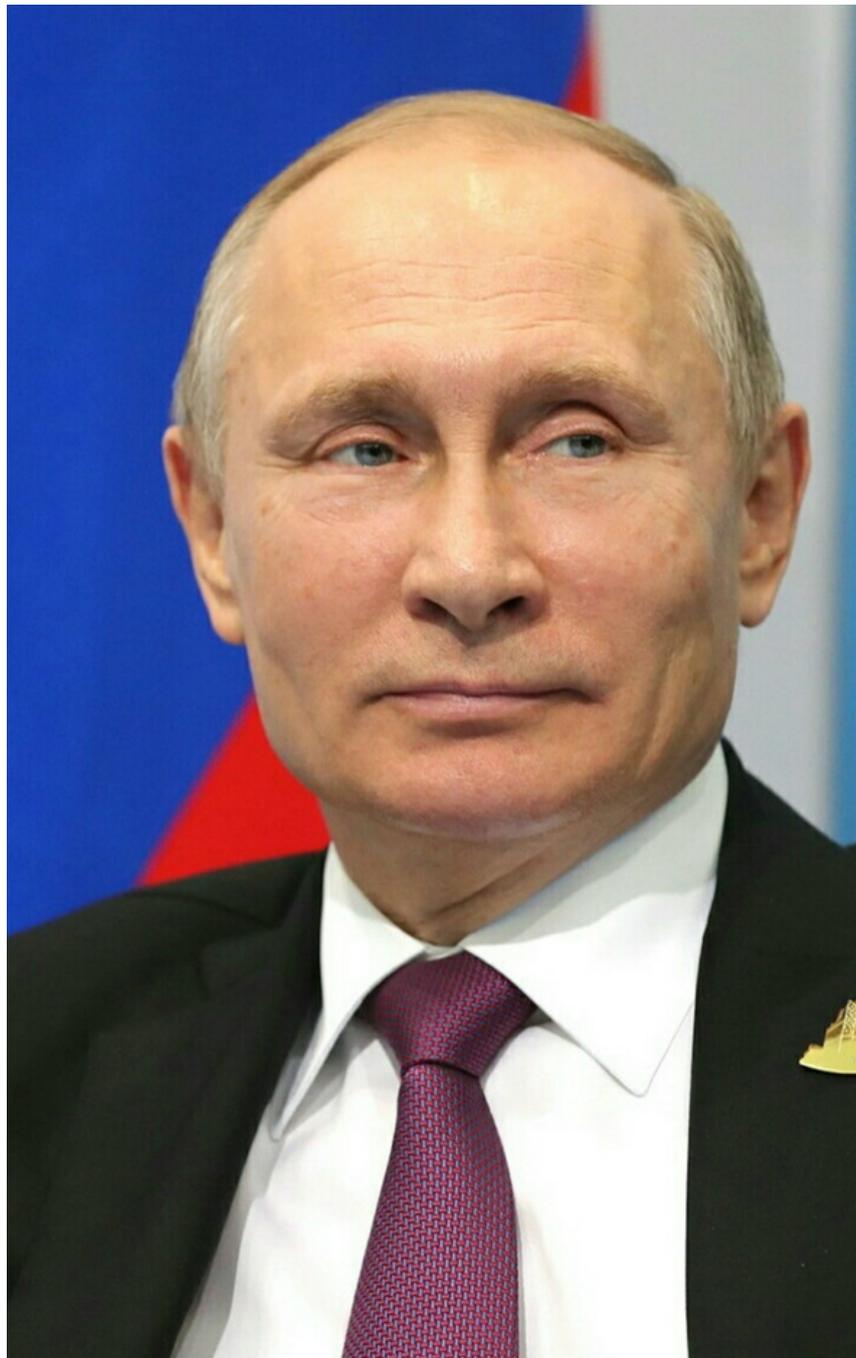


OCTOBER 2018

Media Influence Matrix: Russia

**Government,
Politics
and
Regulation**

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The Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS) is a research center for the study of media, communication, and information policy and its impact on society and practice. Founded in 2004 as the Center for Media and Communication Studies, CMDS is part of CEU's School of Public Policy and serves as a focal point for an international network of acclaimed scholars, research institutions and activists.

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Legal Overview

Freedom of speech and press is a relatively new phenomenon in Russia, guaranteed by the Constitution adopted in 1993. According to the document, censorship is expressly prohibited and freedom of speech, thought and mass communications is warranted. Freedom of expression and the right to information can only be restricted by a federal act and only if such a measure is needed to protect fundamental principles of the constitutional system, morality, health, the rights and lawful interests of other people, for ensuring defense of the country and security of the State.

As a member of many international organizations, Russia formally recognizes the supremacy of international law, but its officials and Members of Parliament have repeatedly tried to reconsider their obligations. Thus far, they have not succeeded.

The main law governing mass media in Russia is Mass Media Law adopted in 1991. The few other national laws mandate how mass media must act in particular situations such as elections, emergency or when martial law is instated.

The Constitution and Mass Media Law are in line with how Europe defines freedom of speech and mass media. But law enforcement in practice often contradicts the spirit of law; and many legal provisions are not implemented.

Over the course of the last several years, a bevy of federal acts that are not intended to regulate mass media directly, but to restrict media freedom indirectly, have been adopted.

One such law was the Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development adopted in 2012, which prohibits the distribution of “harmful” content among minors, including content that “may elicit fear, horror, or panic in children,” or that depicts violence, unlawful activities, substance abuse, or self-harm. Another law put forward a blacklist of websites that promote suicide, glorify use of illegal drugs, or feature child pornography. Authorities can add websites to this blacklist and block access to them without court order: they only need a decision of the Prosecutor Office. An amendment passed in 2013 added “propaganda” to “non-traditional sexual relationships,” a category of harmful content in the law.

Another law, passed in 2013, allows the Prosecutor Office to block without court order websites that feature riotous or extremist statements, or information about unsanctioned demonstrations. In yet another law, the amended Mass Media Law, media that receive foreign funding are categorized as a “foreign agent.” Such media are obliged by law to make public that they are foreign agents. Another law, adopted in 2016, limits the foreign capital in Russian media to 20%. Before 2016, there were caps on foreign ownership, but they only applied to television and were more relaxed (foreign companies could own up to 50% in broadcast operators).

And that is not all. These are just a few of the most relevant laws adopted in the past few years that have dramatically changed the media landscape in Russia.

All media in Russia, no matter whether TV, radio, print or internet, are regulated by the same regulator, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Федеральная служба по надзору в сфере связи, информационных технологий и массовых коммуникаций) or Roskomnadzor (Роскомнадзор).

Regulatory Authorities

Media policy in Russia is probably the most sensitive topic of all. A regulatory behemoth, Roskomnadzor is in charge of everything that has to do with media and communications regulation and control, from broadcast licenses to print media registrations to internet to data protection. With a yearly budget hovering around US\$150m and a staff of some 3,500, Roskomnadzor influences a myriad of markets, probably hundreds of thousands of companies and, more importantly, the right to their personal data protection of the country's 144 million people.

Ironically, however, the power over Russia's media is not in the hands of this regulatory colossus, specifically created to keep track of media affairs and communications. That power rests with the Presidential Administration, which controls most of the country's media through a policy of rationed rapprochement with the industry consisting of a mixed bag of punitive measures and favors, delivered in dribs and drabs as circumstances require.

The Administration of the President Vladimir Putin directly influences hiring and sacking of managing editors in major media. Invoking a raft of legal provisions, they can block critical websites. But at the same time, they can reward media outlets with generous stipends and even give some media organizations sufficient space to freely adopt some of their editorial policies as long as those decisions do not hurt state policies and the government's agenda.

Konstantin Ernst, the head of First Channel, a leading Russian television channel, enjoys full autonomy to create the station's entertainment programming, but when it comes to newscasts, he has to obey Kremlin's orders. Sometimes, even some liberal voices are allowed. Alexey Venediktov, the editor-in-chief of Echo Moskvy, a high-quality radio station known for its liberal views, has access to Kremlin. The price for that favor is a difficult balancing act between various Kremlin officials and their own interests.

Those who don't want to play the presidential administration's game usually lose their jobs. For example, Galina Timchenko, the former editor-in-chief of a popular website, lenta.ru (which has an average daily audience of over 1 million) and Elisaveta Osetinskaya, the former editor of a major publishing house, RBK, were both fired by the owners of these publishers and started their own independent projects. Small media still can enjoy some freedom and it is harder to influence them.

This political contract between the Presidential Administration and the industry is astonishingly effective. The Administration bankrolls key media outlets and gives media bosses and owners, now and then, freedom and perks. What the public gets is an illusion of a free and diverse media. The regulatory structures are mere executants.

An anaemic civil society response and weak foreign influence makes all that possible. There is no civil society group with sufficient clout to challenge the government-sanctioned media system. Much of that is because of the government's own meddling in the civil society. NGOs appear and disappear within short timespans, and some of their causes are hijacked by the government to shape public opinion. The League for Secure Internet, a conservative movement launched in 2011 by Konstantin Malofeev, a businessman close to the Orthodox Church (a mighty force in the Russian society), was a case in question. The League's cause, fighting extremism, pedophilia and homosexuality on the internet, was arguably misused by the government to instill in the Russian society the idea that online censorship is acceptable. Not much is known about the League today.

International institutions hardly have any influence in the Russian media policy. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) can name and shame Russia when it violates freedom of expression, but with little effect, if at all. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has forced Russia to award compensation to several Russian journalists whose rights were infringed by the government. But that hardly has any impact on the country's media policy. Moreover, high-officials in the Kremlin really believe in the world conspiracy against Russia. That dramatically reduces the space for interaction with international organizations even though Russia is part of them.

Broadcast Media & Frequency Spectrum

THE SUPER REGULATOR: ROSKOMNADZOR

Roskomnadzor, a state government body that is part of the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media, has significant power over the media in Russia. It was created in 2008 by presidential order. Its tasks cover almost everything in the Russian communications field: television, radio, print press, internet media and even data protection.

REMIT & TASKS

All media in Russia must register with Roskomnadzor. Failure to do so may result in fines. However, registration is rather a formality for Roskomnadzor, which formally has no right to decline a registration request if it is properly filled. (In rare cases though authorities can still find a reason not to register a media.[1]) Television stations, radio channels and press publishers are all obliged to register. Internet media are not legally bound to do that: they only have to register if they want to be recognized as mass-media by authorities and to hold rights media are entitled to such as the right to request information from authorities.

Roskomnadzor is the main (and, in practice, sole) body that ensures that media comply with all the laws that apply to them. If they breach the law, the regulator can issue a warning to the editorial board of the respective media outlet. Following three warnings over the course of 12 months, Roskomnadzor could launch legal proceedings against the outlet. The media outlet in this case faces the risk of being closed by court decision. Law violations, described in the Article 4 of the Mass Media Law, are primarily related to anti-extremism and counter-terrorism legislation, but also to use of strong language (such as swear words) in the media.

BOARD COMPOSITION

The head of Roskomnadzor is appointed and can be dismissed by the Prime Minister of the Russian Government. No one else (neither civil society organizations nor media players) has any role in the process. Since 2012, **Aleksandr Zharov** (previously deputy-minister of communications) has been the head of Roskomnadzor. The head of Roskomnadzor can appoint four deputies. At this moment they are:

- **Oleg Ivanov**
- **Antonina Priezjeva**
- **Vadim Subbotin**
- **Aleksandr Pankov**

1 See the case *Dzhavadov vs Russia*, European Court of Human Rights, Judgment, 18 December 2008.

These people are not public figures, they have never (or extremely rarely) appear in media and are not known to the public. Roskomnadzor’s central office has 200 employees; its regional offices have a total combined of 3,500 employees. The head of the regulator, Zharov, has medical educational background including a PhD in medical studies. Recently his thesis was examined by the independent group of researchers called Dissernet (a watchdog organization that examines theses of officials to find out whether they were plagiarized). The Dissernet experts claim that multiple examples of plagiarism were found in Zharov’s dissertation.

FUNDING

Roskomnadzor is financed entirely from the state budget. The agency’s budget has increased significantly since 2010. It quadrupled between 2010 and 2013, but then it slightly declined to some RUB 8.5bn (roughly US\$ 147m) in 2017.

Watchdog money

Roskomnadzor yearly budget, 2010-2017

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
In RUB (m)	2,455	2,578	10,491	10,024	11,292	10,000	9,519	8,527
In US\$ (m)	80	80	345	306	200	137	157	147

Note: Data calculated according to the official exchange rate of the Central Bank of Russian Federation (eop: end-of-period)
 Source: Roskomnadzor’s annual reports

Broadcast Media & Frequency Regulation

In Russia, radio and television channels must go through a licensing process before launching operations. Roskomnadzor is in charge of awarding licenses and also has the power to withdraw broadcast licenses in cases of serious legal breaches.

Print Media Regulation

Roskomnadzor has also powers in print media, being the main regulator where print publications have to register. Roskomnadzor also ensures that print media comply with the Russian laws.

Internet Regulation

Roskomnadzor has significant power over the internet as well. Since 2012, Roskomnadzor has been in charge of the so-called blacklist of websites, a registry of websites that publish information forbidden by law in Russia. The regulator adds to the blacklist and has the right to block them. (*See more about the type of information that leads to blocking of websites in Legal Overview in this report*). According to several Federal Acts, blocking websites in Russia can be justified by counter-extremism and counter-terrorism purposes or children protection. According to a 2014 law, the General Prosecutor or his deputies can decide in some cases to block websites without a court order.

Data Protection Regulation

Roskomnadzor is also the main regulator of data protection. The 2006 Data Protection Law gives Roskomnadzor broad powers in the area of data protection. According to the law, companies and individuals working with personal data must register with the regulator and accept to be added to a list of personal data operators, which consisted of nearly 400,000 entities in August 2018. Roskomnadzor has the power to run audits of personal data operators and to ask law enforcement agencies to intervene and even open criminal cases. Roskomnadzor itself is entitled by law to launch legal action in cases where data protection rights were violated. Most importantly, Roskomnadzor has the power to block websites if it decided that they violated legal provisions on personal data. However, it needs a court order in all these cases.

Key Decision-Makers in Regulation & Policymaking⁽²⁾

In spite of the fact that according to law, Roskomnadzor is the main state body that controls all types of media, the real center of the decision-making process in Russia is in a different place, the Presidential Administration, according to all the interviewees for this report.^[3] The Presidential Administration is the executive office of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, the unit in charge of supporting his activity.

The Presidential Administration has enormous power over the media in Russia, albeit unofficially. The Administration can decide about the appointment or dismissal of editors-in-chief of main media, can initiate new media legislation or cancel major business deals. Basically, Roskomnadzor and its formal authority is just one of the instruments Presidential Administration uses to influence the media landscape. All the strategic decisions in this field are made by Presidential Administration's staff.

Legally, the Presidential Administration has no instruments to influence media, but according to Kremlin and industry insiders who faced the Administration's interference in the media, decision-making during the past two decades has been fully in the hands of the President Putin. He has repeatedly denied that he or his Administration interfered with the media.

Presidential Administration exerts power in the media as following:

Financing of pro-Kremlin media

This includes funding given by the government either officially to media institutions promoting the Russian interests globally such as Russia Today or unofficially to news media outlets such as the newspaper Vzglyad.

Pressure on owners of popular media

Such pressures are usually used to fire editors-in-chief of media that the Administration finds to be too independent as were the cases of Gazeta.ru, Kommersant Vlast, Lenta.ru and RBC. If owners do not want to obey Presidential Administration's recommendations, they can face legal problems or raids by police and tax authorities (examples include the former owner of independent television channel NTV, Vladimir Gusinsky, and the former owner of First Channel television, Boris Berezovsky after his conflict with president Putin). Both claimed that criminal investigations were a way to force owners to sell their stakes in the media; more recently, in 2016, Mikhail Prokhorov, the owner of RBC, one of the biggest independent media companies that year, fired three top editors in one day just a month after law enforcement officers conducted searches in Prokhorov's offices.

Blocking websites

The Presidential Administration also uses Roskomnadzor's formal powers to block opposition websites in their move to get rid of critical voices online (such was the case of Grani.Ru and Kasparov.ru websites)

² The content in this part of the report is based mostly on interviews with Russian journalists and experts carried out for this report (See Methodology in Media Influence Matrix: Russia).

³ Media Influence Matrix Russia: Journalists Survey

Top Influencers

The President of Russia, **Vladimir Putin** has already been in power for 18 years now. He was appointed Prime Minister by the first elected president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, in 1999. Since then, Putin has been elected President three times. He was Prime Minister during the one-term presidency of Dmitry Medvedev.

Propaganda is core to Putin's regime. His first term started with a crackdown on the biggest independent TV station at the time, NTV. An owner of NTV, Vladimir Gusinsky, who was a political opponent of president Yeltsin and his successor Vladimir Putin, lost control over his assets to a state-owned company, Gazprom-Media. The new management changed NTV's editorial line, which prompted most of the journalists at NTV to leave. Putin denied his involvement into what happened to the channel, saying that the station's problems were purely economic and had nothing to do with politics.

According to experts and insiders interviewed for this report, Putin is controlling media mostly through the members of his administration. There is hardly any evidence showing that he personally intervenes in media affairs. Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner, host of the main interview show on the First Channel, openly acknowledged that there was a blacklist of people who cannot appear on the station, saying that this list was endorsed by the President.[4]

Born in 1960 in the Moscow region, a historian by education, **Alexey Gromov** is a longtime ally of president Vladimir Putin. He was appointed president's first press-secretary in 1999. Since 2008 he has been working in the Presidential Administration as a deputy and since 2012 as a first deputy. Gromov is considered to be the brain engineering Putin's information policies.

Gromov was behind a decision obliging editors-in-chief of main TV stations to come to the Presidential Administration's office for informal meetings. Sources at the Russian central television (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, VGTRK) say that during these meeting editors are given strong recommendations about what topics to cover, how to cover them, and even what experts to call for comments.[5] Gromov is said to control television, radio and print press.

Another first deputy in the Presidential Administration, in charge of the internal politics department, **Sergey Kirienko** is a politician with very long experience. In 1998, he became the youngest Prime Minister in Russian history, even though he only held this position for a few months. It was during his watch when a large-scale financial crisis happened, forcing the Russian government to default. After a short, five-month long stint as Prime Minister, he left the Government to head Rosatom, a state company developing nuclear energy.

Kirienko was close to liberal circles: he was a friend of the killed opposition leader Boris Nemtsov. In the beginning of the 2000s, the two were leaders of the liberal party Union of Right Forces.

4 See more on video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wg-TMymYSwE>.

5 Dmitry Sidorov, "Как делают ТВ-пропаганду: четыре свидетельства" (How to do propaganda: four testimonies), Colta.ru, 6 August 2015, available online at <https://www.colta.ru/articles/society/8163>

Kirienko's appointment in 2016 as head of the Presidential Administration's internal politics department has stunned observers. This position had been held by people closely associated with Putin's conservative rule, offensive measures against political opponents and NGOs, disrespect of democratic values and interference in the election process. Historically, the head of internal politics department plays a significant role in media regulation. Vladislav Surkov (the head of the department in the period 2008-2011), followed by Vladimir Volodin (in position until 2016) were said to control online media. Kremlin insiders say that Kirienko has no such interest in direct control of the media [6]; however, he still has significant influence in the media thanks to his position.

Natalya Timakova started her career as a political correspondent and then observer for the federal newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, and later *Kommersant*. When she was 24, in 1999, she was invited to the Kremlin by Aleksandr Voloshin, the then head of Presidential Administration. The Kremlin wanted her to work as Putin's press secretary (Putin was just appointed as Prime Minister at the time) to soften Putin's public image (by having a woman next to him). But the plan fell through and she left the position after just a few months. However, she stayed in various position in the Presidential Administration until 2008 when the newly elected president Dmitry Medvedev hired her as his press secretary, a position she kept during Medvedev's entire presidential term and afterwards when he became Prime Minister. Only very recently, in September 2018, she left that position to take a job as deputy director at the state-owned Vnesheconombank.

Although Medvedev was Putin's official successor, part of the Russian society expected a liberal turn in Russian politics after his election. His presidency indeed started with a progressive rhetoric in domestic and even foreign politics (the famous "Reset" strategy in the Russia-U.S. relation). Timakova was considered back then to be the brain behind the new liberal narrative at Kremlin. Think tanks known for their liberal views, close to Timakova, were writing speeches for Medvedev. His communication with media slightly changed, Medvedev personally meeting with journalists and talking to them off-the-record and answering their questions (something that Putin had never done). Nevertheless, Alexey Gromov still held his weekly informal meetings with editors-in-chief and the television agenda was not changing.

Medvedev's liberal rhetoric remained mere rhetoric. During his term, Russia invaded Georgia and Sergey Magnitsky, a Russian accountant digging into domestic corruption died in prison. In September 2011 Medvedev announced that he would not run for a second presidential term and fully endorsed Putin for a third term. The soft outbursts of liberalism brought no results in the country's politics. Although Timakova stayed with Medvedev as his press secretary, she lost much of her influence.

Transparency of Decision-Making in Media Regulation

Roskomnadzor has its own procedures to ensure transparency: it has a website where it publishes annual reports (including financial balance sheets) summarizing what has been done during the year. Officials at Roskomnadzor (as any other officials in Russia) publish income declarations, as required by law. Roskomnadzor has a public council, a body comprising public figures, which is another formal mechanism of public accountability.

But all these measures and mechanisms adopted to ensure transparency merely give the appearance of transparency. The real decision-making process is completely non-transparent. It is controlled by the Presidential Administration and there is little information about how they exert their power over regulatory authorities. More importantly, the Presidential Administration exerts power directly on media owners: they can fire their journalists or dramatically change their editorial policy.

Impact of Regulators on News Media and Journalism

As authorities, namely the Presidential Administration, have total control of the media, directly interfering with media outlets, the role of regulatory authorities in Russia is rather formal. Its decisions have little impact on news media outlets (and when they have, they are orchestrated by the authorities) compared with the level of control and interference authorities exert on news media directly.

For example, authorities ensure that no independent view will be presented on national television and that no independent media will become too popular. Russia has a few independent media, but they are on the edge of extinction. Such a non-transparent, unpredictable decision-making process, fully in the hands of one authority, the Presidential Administration, has dismantled media's position as the fourth estate and totally destroyed the concept of media as a free market.

Local Influencers

Industry Players

The Russian news media market has changed irremediably since the crackdown on NTV back in 1999. Today, all major media are in the hands of people personally close to Putin or who share his political views. Outsiders, particularly the industry, have almost no influence in the decision-making process regarding media policies and regulations, especially when it comes to decisions that have major political implications.

Nevertheless, there is a group of local influencers fighting each other at times or struggling to influence less politically important decisions or decisions that affect media as a business. Editors of major media, with their own agenda, can also exert some leverage in the industry as long as they toe Putin's line.

A close, longtime friend of Vladimir Putin, **Yury Kovalchuk** is one of the main owners of National Media Group. Kovalchuk and Putin were both members of the infamous cooperative Ozero; this was a dacha housing cooperative associated with Putin's inner circle. After Putin became president, members of the Ozero cooperative were gifted top positions in the Russian government and businesses, the main source of their financial success. Kovalchuk is the main owner of Bank Rossya. Both the bank and him are on the list of U.S. sanctions.

Kovalchuk's National Media Group, established in 2008, has a stake in First Channel, Russia's main TV channel, a majority stake in REN-TV and Fifth Channel, and owns 100% of the national newspaper Izvestia, the sports newspaper Sports-express and some other media assets. Kovalchuk has personal access to the president, which gives him a lot of influence in important decisions regarding media industry.

Gazprom Media is another major media holding in Russia, controlling the nationwide TV station NTV, the most popular entertainment television stations TNT and Pyatnica, and a raft of radio channels and newspapers. The company's chairman, **Alexey Miller** is also part of Putin's inner circle. He was Putin's deputy when today's president was head of department in the Saint-Petersburg city hall. Miller has been at the helm of the state-owned Gazprom for a long time, but since 2007 he has also acted as the Board's Chair of Gazprom Media, the vehicle that runs the group's media outlets. Such position and closeness to Putin give him immense possibilities to influence decisions in the media field. Miller has a controversial public profile. Gazprom under his management has been permanently at the center of a spate of corruption scandals. Several journalism investigations claimed that the company enriched its management instead of its stakeholders who are the Russian taxpayers.

The general director of First Channel, **Konstantin Ernst** began his career in nationwide television during the Perestroika times of the former President Mikhail Gorbachev. Ernst back then was host of "Vzglyad" (translated as "the view"), the most popular TV-show at a time. "Vzglyad" became the symbol of the end of Soviet era and the start of a new one, of Glasnost (openness and transparency) at the TV channel. But 20 years later Ernst himself became a symbol of Putin's new television, a mass medium that once again, as in Soviet times, became an instrument of propaganda in the service of the authorities.

Ernst has been working for First Channel since 1989, but since 1999 he has been the channel's general director. Ernst was born in a typical Soviet family. With a biologist father, Ernst attended zootechnical studies. When he was 25 years old, he defended his PhD thesis and was invited for a prestigious internship at Cambridge University in the U.K. However, Ernst abandoned science to make a career in cinema. In the end, he chose television.

Ernst is considered to be one of the most influential people in the Russian TV industry. That doesn't mean that he can independently define the channel's editorial policy or not follow Kremlin's recommendations. But his relation with Kremlin's officials is more like a partnership. He is allowed thus to have his own view on information policies and enjoy some freedom when building the station's entertainment schedules (less politically sensitive). Journalists say that Ernst is more sophisticated compared to bosses at other nationwide television channels. He fills First Channel with modern TV shows and films catering to more educated tastes. But when it comes to news programs, First Channel's newscasts are shaped by the Kremlin, resembling thus the news programs at any TV channel in Russia.

The editor-in-chief of Echo Moskvy, a reputable Moscow-based radio station, **Alexey Venediktov** is one of a few people who can head a liberal media outlet and still be received by Kremlin. For the last two decades Venediktov has been running the most respected independent radio station in Russia, Echo Moskvy and had to play a balancing act, sometimes risking dismissal, between different Kremlin officials and their interests.

Venediktov is a historian by education. For many years he has combined work as a journalist with a school teacher job. He came to Echo Moskvy in 1990 and made his way up from the very bottom working initially as a simple reporter. He has been the editor-in-chief of the radio station since 1998, owning an 18% stake in it.

Venediktov calls many of Kremlin's officials his friends. One of those is Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for president Putin. He does not hide his close contacts with various officials, lobbying for the interests of his radio station or fishing for insights that could help him prepare for changes in government politics.

The General Director of the National Alliance of Advertisers, **Sergey Vasiliev** is not a public figure, but experts identify him as a rather influential industry player. He now heads the organization that has almost monopolized the television advertisement market. The National Alliance of Advertisers that he heads now controls 95% of the market.[7] The alliance was founded by four main television channels.

Just recently the State Duma, the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia, has adopted legislation that allows television channels to air more advertising. It is known in the industry that Vasiliev lobbied lawmakers to pass that law.

7 Ksenia Voleckaya, "Сергей Васильев занял 95% рынка телерекламы" (Sergey Vasiliev took over 95% of the television advertising market), *Vedomosti*, 10 April 2017, available online at <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2017/04/10/684823-vasilev-zanyal-telereklami>

Civil Society

Civil society in Russia hardly has any influence on the decision-making process, in media or elsewhere. There are a few players that try to play that role, but it is hard to say whether NGOs have any influence on the government's decisions. Worryingly, officials use (or sometimes even create) NGOs to fabricate public reactions, usually public approval of state policies. One such example is the League for Secure Internet, a conservative movement that was established in 2011 by Konstantin Malofeev, a businessman close to the Orthodox Church, Russia's official church.

The League declared that its main aim is to fight extremism, pedophilia and homosexuality on the internet. The main activity of the movement's activists has been to look for forbidden information on the web and to warn the law enforcers about it. The League has been lobbying for the creation of a blacklist of websites that publish information deemed as harmful for children. A law that allowed such a list, the Child Protection Law, was adopted in 2012.

There is evidence that Malofeev tried to use the law to protect his own business interests. Pavel Durov, the former CEO of Vkontakte, the biggest Russian social network by number of users, wrote in 2012 that Malofeev tried to push him to sell his shares in VKontakte. Malofeev threatened Durov that if he failed to do so the social network would face legal consequences as it featured child pornography, which was a legal offense.[8] While it's not entirely true that Malofeev is the sole beneficiary of the Child Protection Law, it is likely that the Government used the League to fabricate a chorus of public approval for internet censorship. The League's representatives on the other hand tried to use this law in their own interests. The League seemed to be an influential organization with a big budget, but now nobody hears anything about it. Such movements pop up when they are needed and disappear shortly.

External Influencers

No global bodies could ever affect media policies in Russia. Foreign institutions are traditionally seen in Russia as part of an information warfare against the sovereign Russian government. Kremlin insiders say that high-level Russian officials really believe in the world conspiracy against Russia. That's the main reason why no room for cooperation with foreign institutions or international organization exist. On the contrary, if sensing any pressure from foreign institutions, Russian officials are likely to do exactly the opposite of what external powers advise them to do.

At the same time, Russia is part of many international bodies. Andrei Richter, a leading Russian expert in media law, author of a slew of books and renowned professor at the Moscow State University, said in a 2016 interview [9] that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the world's biggest security-focused intergovernmental organization in which Russia has membership, has some influence on national governments. Richter is a former director of the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OSCE institution in charge of media freedom affairs. Richter added in the interview that the OSCE only has the power to name and shame governments that trample down freedom of speech. As experience shows, that does not result in any changes in internal regulations in Russia.

8 "Малофеев взят под стражу, Провоторов может быть задержан вечером (обновлено)" (Malofeev is arrested, Provotorov might be arrested today's evening), Roem.ru, 20 November 2012, available online at <https://roem.ru/20-11-2012/133740/malofeev-vzyat-pod-straju-provotorov-mojet-byt-zaderjan-vecherom-obnovleno/?c%23message148758>

9 "Россия – это далеко не Кремль" (Russia is not just Kremlin), Radio Liberty, June 2016, available online at <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27852226.html>

Another international institution that theoretically should have some influence in Russian media policies is the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), an international court established by the European Convention on Human Rights, which was adopted by the Council of Europe. The court accepts applications from individuals or groups of individuals from the Council of Europe's 47 member states, which include Russia. Thus, officially, Russia must respect the decisions of the ECtHR. Some Russian journalists use this method to find justice for their problems in Russia. It is true that the ECtHR accepted the claims of a few Russian journalists who went all the way to the ECtHR. Some of them received relatively high compensations from the Russian state thanks to ECtHR rulings. However, that doesn't lead to any changes in Russia's media policy.

Russia interacts with many nations and is influenced by some of them in the process, but so far there has been no indication that other countries influence the Russian government in any way when it comes to its media policy. Media policy is a very sensitive topic for the Kremlin, which is the main reason why the Russian government leaves very little room for cooperation, debate or advice. None of the international protocols and institutions created specifically to ensure freedom of speech worldwide really works as they were meant to in the Russian case.



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