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# The Russian media under Putin and Medvedev: Controlled media in an authoritarian system.

Master's thesis in Political Science

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## **Executive summary**

What we see in Russia today is a dual media system, with independent and critical newspapers on one side vs. controlled and censored television channels on the other. The independent media are facing severe difficulties, and the accountability of the elected are nearly non-existing. The weaknesses of the judicial system allowing arbitrary exercising of the legislation against journalists, the increased control of media outlets both regional and federal, among television channels, newspapers and online media, lack of access to information, all are preventing the development of the media as the fourth estate providing a check on those in power. Journalistic practises, the heritage from the Soviet era and not at least the ownership structures are contributing to the development of a media system in favour of authoritarianism. Globalization has only a minor effect on freedom of speech due to increased control of the internet, and the capacities the authorities have shown to use globalization to their own advantage. The Russian media today are far more contributing to uphold an authoritarian regime than contributing to increased democracy.





## Acknowledgements

The idea to this thesis came while I participated in Professor Sabrina P. Ramet's lectures in the master's course *The Soviet Union and Russia since 1917*. The lack of democratic development in Russia is subject to fascination for many researchers today, and it has been an adventure looking into the role the Russian media is playing in this.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Sabrina P. Ramet for generously shearing her knowledge of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. I owe many thanks to Sabrina for triggering my interest in this vast country with her enthusiastic lectures. In the work of my thesis, she has challenged me further and made me keep an eye on the details but at the same time keep focus at the overall picture. Sabrina's consistent interest in my project and her guidance have improved my work and been a great inspiration. She has also done en great job in increasing my English skills and in proof-reading my work.

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To my family; my mother, brother and sister, I would express my gratitude for the support they give me and for always sharing their knowledge. Thanks for all the great moments we are sharing, together with our families.

My thanks also go to Hallvard Skauge, cartoonist in the newspapers *Nationen* and *Klassekampen*, who drew the cover of my thesis giving it the final touch.

In my search for literature and empirical data I soon understood the vast amount of research and research possibilities available when looking into the Russian media. The work with this thesis has been a great learning experience from start to end. Luckily, the subject is not exhaustive and there so much yet to learn in this field of research.

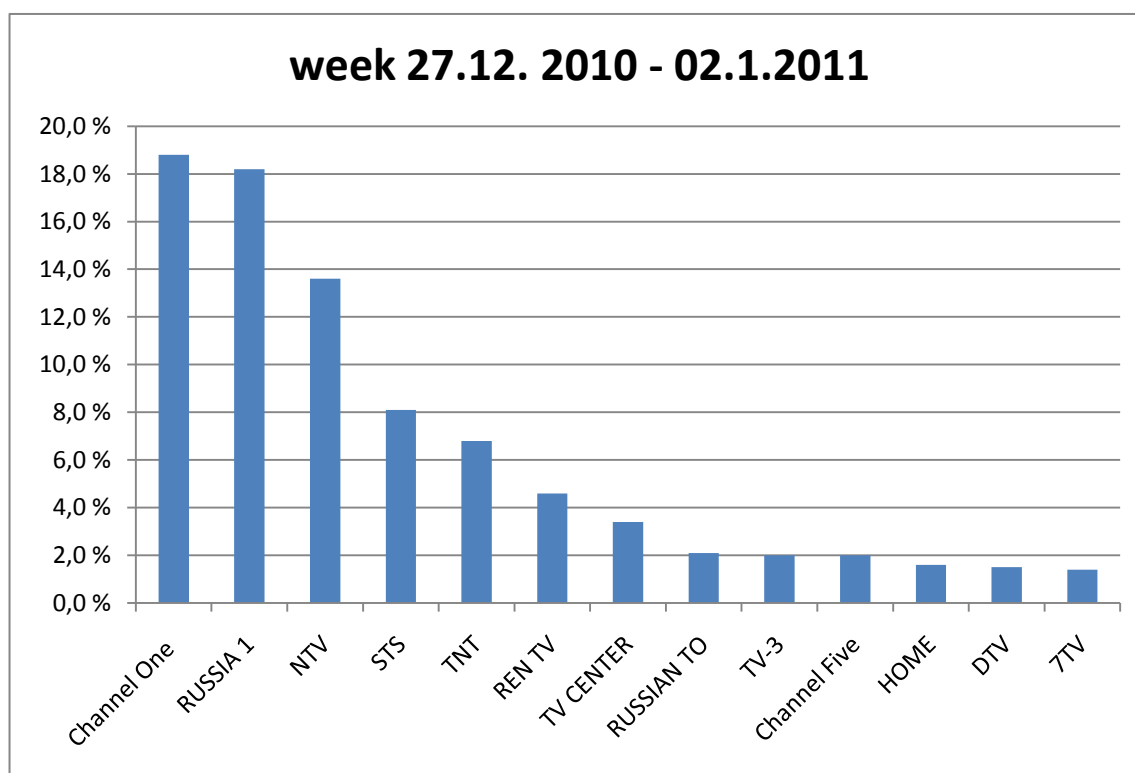


Table 1 Newspaper circulation figures in Russia, 2008

Newspaper	Circulation (2008)
Argumenty i fakty	2.9 million
Weekly Life	1.9 million
TV Guide	1.2 million
Perm' region Izvestia	1 million
Komsomol'skaya pravda	726, 000
Antenna	654, 000
Metro-74	551, 000
Novaya Gazeta	535, 000
Russijskaya Gazeta	432, 000
Our Newspaper for Television Programmes	415, 000
Ads of the South	365, 000

It is difficult to find exact circulation figures for Russia. The National Circulation Service (NCS) is responsible for monitoring and auditing press circulation, both only around half of the country's leading papers have signed up to the service. This table is based on three different sources: (BBC 2008; Krasnoboka 2010; Oates 2010).

Table 2 Television audience in Russia (average daily share)



Source: TNS Russia

**Average daily share of television** - the average number of people who watched TV during the day, expressed as a percentage of total viewers (those who watched any TV during the day, including the estimated channel).



### 3 Introduction

The topic to be addressed in this master's thesis is the role of the media in the authoritarian political system in Russia. The Russian authorities are keeping control over the main media and their coverage of major events in Russia today. One of the major differences between Russia today and the Soviet Union before Mikhail S. Gorbachev (b. 1931; General Secretary, 1985-1991) is access to information from the world outside Russia. With the increasing access to internet and TV channels as BBC, Russians can get access to other angles of news events. How does the Russian state continue to control media coverage, in a global environment? This thesis will analyse the media system in Russia today, and its relation to the political system. **What role do the media in Russia play today, after a decade with Vladimir Putin (b. 1952) either as President (2000-2008) or as Prime Minister (1999-2000 and since 2008)?** Has the increased access to the rest of the world had an impact on media coverage, and how do the authorities respond to the challenges which this access poses?

Russia has undergone great changes the three last decades. The Soviet regime was an authoritarian system with the rule of one party, having considerable control over the lives of the citizens. Censorship was thorough and permeated all of society. Art, culture, music, foreign and domestic news were subject to censorship before being put before an audience (Newth). The media was the prolonged arm of the Communist Party, and information was seen as a privilege (de Smaele 2006; Simons and Strovsky 2006).

The years under Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007; President of the Russian Federation, 1991-1999) have been labelled as the golden era for mass media in Russia (Belin 2002; Simons and Strovsky 2006; Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008). Although the press was given far more freedom than under the Soviet era, the Kremlin was still defining what kind of information was useful. But in contrast to the omnipresent censorship in the Soviet Union, the limitations for the media became reduced when Mikhail Gorbachev permitted the broadcasting of debates among Party officials and when Boris Yeltsin granted some measure of freedom of the press. Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Russia developed pluralistic and more independent media.

In the decade since Putin came to power, Russian society has undergone changes politically and economically, and the media are deeply affected by these changes. Among scholars studying Russia and Russian politics, many have considered whether Russia, after

a decade in the 1990's with media freedom, is moving towards a more authoritarian political system, controlling the media. The Russian media outlets today are under the control of the authorities, both regional and central. Some independent media radio stations, printed press and online media exist, but with few listeners/readers.

When discussing the role of the Russian media, the historical development of the media will be discussed. I will look into the ownership structures of the different media outlets today and how the authorities control the media and what they control. The journalistic professionalism among Russian journalists will also be considered. The thesis will focus mainly on television news, newspapers and internet. The period will be from 2000 to 2010. I will also look into regional differences.

### **3.1 Background**

Russian independent media outlets are confronted with several challenges in Russia today. Among these challenges are denial of access to press conferences, the closing of websites, the barring of access to transmit their radio or television programs and the replacement of oppositional editors with loyal ones (Belin 2002; Simons and Strovsky 2006; Leeson and Coyne 2008). The independent journalist has yet another fear to encounter as, according to a recent *Reporters Without Borders* report, 22 journalists in Russia were killed in the period from 2000 – 2009 while performing their job, five of them in 2009 (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010a).

The war on terrorism has led to limitations for the media outlets in how and what they should report from the war. Censorship in the aftermath of acts of terrorism in Russia is extreme and critical. The regime implemented a takeover of the ownership of the most important TV channels, discharged editors, and issued guidelines on how and what to report on acts of terror. Bills have been proposed that further limit the media outlets news communication. Together with the frightening environment the independent journalists are forced to work under, freedom of expression is under hard pressure in Russia today.

Russian authorities argue that the state is the best provider of information to Russians, and that they protect the interests of the citizens when preventing the mass media from reporting freely. The Russian authorities claim that they act in the best interests of society, to protect their citizens. The developments in Russia since Putin came to power have caused political scientists from both western countries and post-communist countries to warn about

authoritarian trends in Russia.

### 3.2 Statement of the problem

The aim of this thesis is to look at the role of the media in an authoritarian system. **What role do the media in Russia play today, after a decade with Vladimir Putin (b. 1952) either as President (2000-2008) or as Prime Minister (1999-2000 and since 2008)?**

The media, and in particular the television channels, have become the main source of political debates and discourse. The political elite's principal concern is the importance of media and the impact media have on their electorate. Thus, the regime's media policies are designed to serve the interests of the regime itself. Government regulations are different in different countries, where the greatest discrepancies in the role of the media are between democratic and nondemocratic political systems (Mughan and Gunther 2000). Media freedom and freedom of speech are widely discussed themes in established democracies. What limitations of freedom of speech, if any, should be present in a media system in a democracy? John Stuart Mill did elaborate on this question in his *On Liberty* (1868) discussing what reasons a nation could have for putting restrictions on freedom of expression. Such questions emerge now and again in many countries. How far should freedom of expression reach in religion, pornography or a nation's security? The debate in Norway has repeatedly been related to freedom of expression in religion. A Christian magazine printed cartoons of Mohammed on two occasions, once in 2009 and again in September 2010, leading to threats from Muslims directed at the chief editor of the magazine. When two Russian regional newspapers, *Gorodskie Vesti* in Volgograd and *Nash Region* in Vologda were in 2007 closed down after publishing cartoons of Mohammed, that did not provoke any public discussions (Azhgikhina 2007: 1258; Khrestin and Elliot 2007). Another discussion ongoing both in Scandinavia and in the USA is how much information about the nation's military action should be public information. And when does free expression of one's opinion turn into something else, such as libel or slander? In the USA, advertising during election campaigns may be viewed as slander, as the advertising goes far in the direction of attack ads which frequently include disinformation.

WikiLeaks has lately played an important role. It has published anonymous submissions and leaks of otherwise unavailable documents while preserving the anonymity of sources. The publication of 250,000 US Embassy Diplomatic Cables in November 2010 has led American commercial web-sites to expel WikiLeaks from their Web site hosting services. In



addition, Pay Pal, American Express and Visa have blocked the possibility to donate money to WikiLeaks through their services. According to PayPal's Vice President, the United States Department of State had informed his company that WikiLeaks was involved in illegal activities. Tom Flanagan, senior advisor to the Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, said WikiLeaks leader Julian Assange should "*be assassinated actually*" (Siddique and Weaver 2010). Has WikiLeaks pushed the media to write more openly and directly? Or are we seeing censorship unfolding in the Western countries as well? What, if any, are the influences of WikiLeaks in Russia?

Russia has undergone many changes during the last three decades, and the earlier optimism among political scientists that Russian society was in transition toward democracy has been attenuated (de Smaele 2006; Simons and Strovsky 2006; Oates 2007). The changes in society and the changes in system of government are evidently reflected in changes in the media and media politics. Today, there are hardly any discussions regarding freedom of speech in the public sphere, with the exception of instances when a Russian journalist is killed. The Russian media encounter challenges to freedom of expression as *they face serious issues in terms of openness and control* (Oates 2006: 6).

The objective of this study is to analyze the media system in Russia today. I will discuss what role the media have in Russia today, both for the politicians and for the citizens. The role of the media will be viewed in relation to the Russian political system, and the global environment.

With access to internet and to foreign television channels, the Russians are increasingly capable of getting other views and different news coverage than what is offered by the Russian main media. How do the Russian media encounter these challenges, and how does the government respond to this different news coverage from abroad?

## 4 Democracy theory

The word democracy has a positive resonance nearly all over the world. Politicians want to be viewed as democratic, and people struggling for a freer life and better conditions want to be ruled by democratic rulers. The concept democracy is so widely embraced by different regimes giving their own understanding of the word, that there is a danger that the term will lose any clear meaning (Schmitter and Karl 1991; de Smaele 2006).

Closely linked to democracy is freedom of expression. The free press *operates as check on politics and as a link between the citizens and their political representatives; it is an instrument for holding government accountable, and for citizens to get informed, communicate their wishes and participate in political decision-making* (de Smaele 2006:42)

To begin with, theories about democracy and freedom of expression will be outlined. The idea is to indicate how democracy and freedom of expression are linked together. An examination of the discourse on democracy in Russia will also be outlined here. Hallin and Mancini's variables for analysing the media system will be presented, as this is the method used for analysis in this thesis.

Democracy theories are well established in political science, and have a central focus in the research field. These theories discuss how democracy is a process of selecting governments, and what the necessary conditions for a democracy are.

Democracy is the rule of the majority (Bobbio and Bellamy 1987). It is a political system rested on free, competitive and regular elections.

In the research field today, scholars discuss whether democracy can be applied to all parts of the world no matter what culture, or if there are any cultural preconditions that must be present in society before a country can become a democracy. The idea that some cultures adapt better to democracy as a political system than others is not new. But there has been renewed interest in this idea as primarily the USA, with support from other western democracies and the UN, has been promoting democracy in new areas of the world, as seen in Iraq and Afghanistan (Zakaria 1997).

The defence of liberties, or constitutional liberties, such as speech, assembly, religion and property is connected to democracy. But, as Zakaria argues, these liberties are not a necessary part of democracy. A country can hold free and fair elections and restrain constitutional liberties, and still be a democracy, though not a liberal democracy. He states that even though democracies can be found in more parts of the world than earlier, many of these democracies are violating liberties such as freedom of speech, religion and other political and civil liberties (Zakaria 1997: 22). If those who are elected perform their duties

badly, by being corrupt, unfair, or reducing the citizens' civil rights, such "*governments are undesirable but that does not make them undemocratic*" (Huntington 1991: 10). Such democracies, where the leaders are elected through free and fair elections, but who erode or diminish these liberties after they are elected, may be called "*illiberal democracies*" (Zakaria 1997: 23). In his Gettysburg address, American President Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as "*government of the people, by the people, and for the people*" (Lincoln 19 November 1863). A government not ruling for the people and by the people may turn into a pro forma democracy, ruling against the people. If new democracies fail to perform as expected by the citizens, without developing democratic set of rules as defence of civil liberties and political competition, they might revert to earlier authoritarian practices or even constitute new such regimes (Schmitter 1994). This thesis focuses on freedom of expression in Russia, and hence, also on the performance of democracy in that country.

To continue with the aforementioned *meaning of democracy*, researchers of democracy have developed new terms to define the regimes where the rulers have introduced elections, and elections only, which do not create a democracy. Scholars have defined such hybrid regimes, as competitive authoritarianism, electoral authoritarianism and delegative democracy to mention some.

A term introduced by Schmitter and O'Donnell to refer to formally democratic systems which are deficient in practice is *democradura*. This term refers to regimes which hold elections, but under such conditions that the government is ensured re-election. *Democraduras* are not democratic, but can serve as a smoke screen for continued authoritarian regimes (Schmitter 1994; O'Donnell 2002).

One notion indivisibly connected with democracy and included in the actual definition of democracy is accountability. In the article "What Democracy is...and is not", Schmitter and Karl (1991) provide this definition:

*"Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives"* (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 76).

I will focus on what is under discussion here, namely how to link accountability to freedom of speech. We can understand political accountability, according to Andreas Schedler (Schedler, Diamond et al. 1999), as how a society copes with actual and potential abuses of power. Hereunder is the aspect answerability. Answerability assumes the presence of freedom of speech, as answerability is understood to mean that those held accountable must inform those to whom they are accountable of their decisions and provide explanations of those decisions. The most obvious means to do so are the media. The civil society actors, as

the mass media, try to hold state agents accountable for their actions. The existence of press freedom is necessary for holding government accountable (Schedler, Diamond et al. 1999) . The role of media in democracy theory will be further discussed in chapter 4.1.

#### **4.1 Democracy Theory and freedom of expression**

Theories on democracy have underlined the importance of media's role in a democracy. Huntington defines democracy as a political system based on free, competitive and regular elections. Without a free press there will be no competitive elections. Democracy presumes the freedom to speak and publish whatever is necessary for political debate and an informed public. A system is undemocratic to the extent that media outlets are censored or closed down (Huntington 1991: 7).

Linz and Stepan (1996) differentiate between consolidated and transitional democracies. To obtain a consolidated democracy, autonomous and independent civil and political society must be supported by the rule of law. To ensure these conditions in a society, civil society must be relatively autonomous from the state and be able to advance its interests. Civil society is also capable of removing the government through free and competitive elections, if its actions are unacceptable to the majority. The media are ideally the means for the citizens to exercise such control of the politicians' actions. (Linz and Stepan 1996; Mughan and Gunther 2000).

Robert Dahl has sorted out the required political institutions in a modern representative democracy (2005). These are

- i) Elected officials
- ii) Free, fair and frequent elections
- iii) Freedom of expression
- iv) Alternative sources of information
- v) Associational autonomy
- vi) Inclusive citizenship

In order for citizens to participate, they must have the opportunity to share their views and opinions freely. Dahl eloquently describes this in an article published in 2005, where he writes: "*Free expression means not just that you have the right to be heard. It also means that people have the right to hear what others have to say*" (2005:196). And whereas Linz and Stepan discuss civil society using the media as a means to control the politicians, Dahl has discussed how the citizens of the country, need to achieve civic competence by exchanging opinions and views, being involved in discussions, and listening to and talking to

experts and politicians. In the absence of institutionalized freedom of expression, civil society loses its potential to influence “*the agenda of governmental decisions*” (Linz and Stepan 1996; Dahl 2005:196).

“*Enlightened understanding*” through access to diverse sources of information, provided by agents other than the government, is defined by Dahl as “*alternative sources of information*” (iv). When all information granted or available to the citizens of a country is generated by the government or one main political group, those same citizens will be prevented from playing an effective role in society.

When discussing the media’s role in a democracy, the concept of accountability both directly and indirectly accounts for media as a necessary actor to execute accountability. Here it is interesting to bring in the concept of *the mass media as the fourth estate*, a concept western media outlets willingly embellish. The idea is that the mass media have the function of watch dog for the ruling elites, and as such the media outlets may protect the society from “*excessive state power*”. The principle of the fourth estate is that the press as critical to those in power, are ensuring and protecting democratic principles. Although the principle of the fourth estate are not always realised, *the press’s self-conception as the fourth estate is essential to the belief system governing journalism as a field of practice* (Jensen 2010: 617 - 618). The mass media are the organs through which, in theory, the citizens communicate with the politicians they have elected, although, in reality, what is published in the mass media depends ultimately on who owns the media and what the media owners are prepared to see published in their media. The information and influence goes both ways through the use of mass media as means (Mughan and Gunther 2000). And as we have seen, in democratic theory, one of many variables necessary for a liberal democracy is media freedom. Established, free media institutions are essential to maintain a democracy. The media are the channels between the citizens and the politicians, and give the electorate an opportunity to control the elected, while the politicians use the media as a channel for giving the citizenry information, for discussion and for influence. This ideal, at least in western countries, casts the mass media as the fourth estate, where the mass media act as a check on the governing powers. The media are protected from government power, and media pluralism is institutionalized. Linz describes the connection between the authoritarian regimes and the media that the government are controlling the mass media, through strict censorship, repression of journalistic liberty, and control of the information conveyed to the public (Mughan and Gunther 2000).

This gives a normative description of the free media in democracies, acting as the fourth estate, versus the supervised media in authoritarian regimes. The normative aspect is interesting, and is often reflected in discussions of freedom of speech. In order to analyse a media system and its role in any political system, one needs to focus on what the functions of

the media are. Does the political system, in which the mass media are acting, promote accountability or does the political system prevent accountability and provide a framework within which the authorities use the media to control the information given to the public? Here a theoretical framework referring to the important aspects on how the media are behaving in relation to the political system is needed. An empirical study of why the media developed as they did, and what affects their relationship with the political system is provided by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Before presenting the method of Hallin and Mancini, the dual concept of democracy and media freedom as practised in Russia will be examined.

## 4.2 Democracy, freedom of expression and Russia

There are many labels put on the political system in Russia after the fall of communism. The heritage as one of 15 successor states after the dissolution of Soviet Union is considerable, and will be further discussed below. de Smaele (2010) has noted the various labels employed to describe Russia-- delegated democracy, authoritarian democracy, military democracy, and totalitarian -- all of which indicate an incomplete process of democratization. These labels refer to the division between the actual development of democratic institutions and the democratic rhetoric used by the authorities. Both Remington (2010) and Becker (2004) have called attention to several authoritarian trends in Russia after Putin came to power, and among these trends is the control of the media. Becker argues that an authoritarian regime is recognized among other things by its will to limit access to information on the part of the public. When a state power uses means to restrict the public's access to information and how this information is presented, the possibility of authoritarianism is present (Becker 2004). Russia today is generally regarded by western scholars today as an authoritarian regime, and many have asserted that, led by Vladimir Putin, currently serving as prime minister, Russia is moving toward a more authoritarian, Soviet style media system, if it is not already there (Oates 2007; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008; de Smaele 2010; Lipman 2010; Remington 2010). A different analysis is provided by Richard Sakwa in his book *Putin: Russia's choice* (2008): Here Sakwa writes that "[Putin might] *not be democracy's greatest friend, yet [he might be] providing the conditions in which democracy and the market could thrive*" (Sakwa 2008: 315). Ivan Zassoursky, in his chapter "Free to get rich and fool around" (2009: 41) compares the media system in Russia today, with the media under Leonid I. Brezhnev (1906-1982; General Secretary, 1964-1982). But Zassoursky indicates that the age of internet might lead to a more accountable and transparent political system, and cause a change in the system of administration.

John Stuart Mill, as a liberal democratic theorist, sees democracy as unthinkable without freedom of the press. This led him to the conclusion that media freedom is a necessary precondition of democracy, as well as the other way around (Mill 1868; Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008). Oates (2007) asserts that the media in Russia today have developed into an institution that strengthens the governing elites, ensuring their reelection. This results in a lack of accountability as mentioned above. The citizens cannot use the media to control the governing elite, and the media's function as a channel between those who govern and those who are governed goes only from the authorities to the citizens.

The label *democradura* as presented earlier, as a system where the governing elites prevent the emergence of real competition to ensure that they are re-elected, may be appropriate when discussing the Russian political system. The political democratic institutions are present in Russia, but only in form; these include elections, parliament and media outlets, but they lack democratic content (Oates 2007). The elections are not free and fair, and the competition is missing. This thesis will analyze the media system that supports the power of the elites, and the lack of accountability. The environment for the independent media and the independent journalist in Russia today will be considered. The thesis will look at the historical context and what effect it has had on the media system, and inquire as to whether the circumstances today are working in favor of giving democratic content to the media outlets. Who controls the media both in regards to ownership and power of influence will be analyzed. Scientists from the East European countries have discussed the historical context of the post-Soviet states and have also focused on how the Russian journalists and the Russian media are affected by the omnipresent censorship experienced in the Soviet era. Zassoursky (2004), Jakubowicz and Sükösd (2008), Koltsova (2001), and Pasti (2005) are important contributors to this discussion.

## **4.3 Theoretical framework**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

When studying the role of the media in the political system, a theoretical framework with a focus on the media system and its function is needed. The method I chose to use is borrowed from the field of communication studies. In their book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004), Hallin and Mancini have presented a theoretical framework for the comparative analysis of media systems. Hallin and Mancini are both professors in political science, but their comparative analysis was done in the field of communication studies. This framework is

chosen because they focus on the relation between the media systems and political systems, which is the focus of this thesis. The central question in their book is “*Why are the media as they are*” (Hallin and Mancini 2004:2). The focus in my thesis will be *Why are the Russian media as they are*.

I found Hallin and Mancini’s method useful for studying the media’s role in Russia today because they have focused on which variables it is necessary to investigate when discussing a media system. They argue that “*one cannot understand the news media without understanding the nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society*” (Hallin and Mancini 2004:8). In analysing these features in Russia, this thesis will, in all modesty, try to explain why the Russian media are as they are.

#### **4.3.2 The dimensions in the media system**

According to Hallin and Mancini, four variables or dimensions are essential when analysing a media system and its relation to the political system:

##### 1) The development of the media market

This dimension focuses on the historical development of the media. The level of a newspaper’s circulation is suggestive of the time when the development of a mass circulation press occurred. Another important aspect is to what kind of audience the mass newspapers were addressed and for whom the first newspapers were intended, the elites or the mass public. The dimension also looks at the debate in the newspapers, whether it was horizontal, between different elite factions or vertical, between political elites and ordinary citizens. Literacy rates are connected to the development of mass circulation press, the number of newspaper circulations are dependent on the ability to read. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that those countries which did not develop a mass circulation press in the late nineteenth century, never did so subsequently even though literacy rates and political and economical development have developed to the same level as high-circulation countries. “*The presence or absence of the mass circulation press has deep implications for the development of the media as political institutions*” (Hallin and Mancini 2004:24). This dimension is particularly interesting when discussing the Russian media system as the development of a mass circulation press developed under conditions quite different from those prevailing in the western countries Hallin and Mancini discuss.



## 2) Political parallelism

This dimension puts a focus on the connection between the media and the political parties, between the journalist and politician, the development of a party press and the commercial press. In Soviet Union, the development of the party press was the only alternative; all newspapers, radio and television channels were owned and run by the Communist Party. But what is the political parallelism in Russia today among the media outlets, and what are the differences between the printed media outlets and the television channels? Where are the connections apparent?

Hallin and Mancini refer to some indicators for identifying political parallelism:

- i. Media content – how the news coverage indicates the political orientations of the media outlet.
- ii. Organizational connections – between media and political parties, trade unions, cooperatives, churches and others
- iii. The tendency for media personnel to be active in political life
- iv. The tendency in some systems for the career paths of journalists and other media personnel to be shaped by their political affiliations
- v. Partisanship on the part of media audiences
- vi. Journalistic role orientations and practices.

How the Russian media system “scores” on these variables, will be reflected in how strong political parallelism is present in the system. If the political parallelism is strong, this will be reflected in how the culture and main discussions of journalism is related to the culture and discussions of politics (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 29)

One may also draw a distinction between external and internal pluralism. External pluralism is defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as the pluralism obtained when there are several media outlets or organizations that include different points of views reflecting contrasting groups or even tendencies in society. Such systems will be characterized by a high level of political pluralism. This is in contrast to internal pluralism, when pluralism is obtained within each individual media outlet or organization. The latter is referred to as media systems where the outlets avoid institutional ties to political groups and want to keep neutrality in their content. These features are seen in systems with low political parallelism.

### 3) The development of journalistic professionalism

Unlike many other professions such as medicine or law, journalism has no systematic body of knowledge or doctrine. Formal professional training has become more usual in journalism, and this is important for defining journalism as an occupation. Although it has become more usual also for journalists in Western Europe to complete some form of education, it is not formalized. You can become a journalist in Europe without holding a journalism degree. Hallin and Mancini are referring to other criteria of importance for journalistic professionalism, as autonomy, in the sense that the journalists control their own work process and have freedom of pressure from the management. Other aspects of journalistic professionalism as responsibility, accountability and freedom will also be taken into account in this thesis. The norms may deal with how to protect sources, or keeping distance between editorial material and advertised material (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The development of the professional journalist in Russia are special in the sense that historically Soviet journalists were trained by the Communist Party, and were expected to achieve objectives which were quite different from those expected of journalists in the West. I shall return to this later.

### 4) The degree and nature of state intervention in the media system

The state shapes the media systems in every society, using different means to different extents. Public service broadcasting in Russia is state-owned and therefore under some sort of control of the state. Other forms of control as press subsidies, the right to protect sources, laws regulating the media concentrations, media ownership and the media's access to government information are important. The latter is especially interesting as the state is the provider of information and "primary definer" of news (Hallin and Mancini 2004:44). The degree of control from the state, and whom the state wants to control are aspects of the Russian media which need to be explored.

Hallin and Mancini developed and used their method when comparing Western media systems, but they suggested that it could be developed to be used also for other media systems. Making use of the methodology developed by Hallin and Mancini, Jakubowicz and Sükösd looked at the media systems in the Soviet successor states, discussing 12 concepts regarding media system evolution. Their analysis is important for understanding the circumstances in which the Russian media were developing after the collapse of communism (Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008: 27).

In addition to Hallin and Mancini's variables, globalization and the effect this has had on the media system will be of importance for this thesis. Curran and Park discuss in their book *De-westernizing media studies* (2000) how globalization has affected the media systems also in the post-communist countries, and argue that this must be taken into consideration when discussing media systems and their relationship to political systems. Globalization theory is important for explaining certain traits of the Russian media system, and also the direction in which the media have evolved.

## 5 The media outlets and ownership structures

### 5.1 Introduction

Before analysing these variables according to the Russian media system, I will present an overview of the main television channels, the most important radio station and the printed media, together with the daily reach of the most popular television channels and radio stations. This chapter will also try to give an overall picture of the media ownership structures in Russia, in particular for television channels. The media ownership in Russia is quite diverse, but *“no central media outlet can challenge the Kremlin’s monopoly on power and information. In this way, the Russian media have in a broad sense come full circle back to the media environment of the Soviet period”* (Oates 2006: 29). Ownership concentration is likely to have an influence on the media outlets. Influence may be manifested insofar as the content may reflect the political or personal values of the media owners, or may be a function of catering to high-paying advertisers (Woods 2007). In this chapter the ownership structures will be introduced. It is particularly important to analyse media ownership, as a media concentration may affect freedom of speech. It is necessary to identify such media concentration because it can have implications for media independence. *“By answering who owns the media we also answer the question of who holds the reins of power”* (Hrvatín, Kučić et al. 2004). In an analysis conducted in 2003, Djankov and his associates found how government ownership had a negative effect on corruption. Corruption is higher in countries with concentrated media ownership. Corruption as part of the media system will also be addressed here.

In a survey conducted in Russia in 2004, 82 percent responded that they watched television on a regularly basis, whereas 13 percent were watching only occasionally. The local channels were somewhat less popular than the national channels. When comparing with the newspapers, the local newspapers were more popular than the national ones. When asked what media outlets they watched for news about politics every day, 62 percent of the respondents said this came from television, 28 percent said radio and only 14 percent said newspapers (Oates 2006: 33). Let us take a closer look at the television channels and their influence of the Russian citizens, and try to define what factors influence the content of the television channels.

## 5.2 Television channels

Television is the main source of information for Russians. 90 percent of all Russians have television, and the most popular news programs are *Vremya* on *Channel One* and *Vesti* on *RTR*. (See Table 2 for average daily share of Television audience.) Television is considered the “*only way to reach and sway the majority of the population*” (Zassoursky 2009: 31). Almost every household in Russia has a television set with access to *Channel One* and *RTR*, but fewer have access to the other national channels. Russia is a vast country, and the satellite and cable infrastructure are not fully developed everywhere. The lack of such infrastructure means that most citizens have access only to these two channels. Where the household is situated geographically decides which channels the households can access, not economic obstacles, as the costs for subscription are close to none (Oates 2006: 32) .

Fifty-one per cent of the main nationwide television network, *Channel One*, is owned by the state with the rest is in the hands of state enterprises (Oates (2007: 30). Some claim that the rest of the ownership is in the hands of Roman Abramovich, a well known Russian businessman with connections to the power elites in Russia (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010). The state-owned enterprise Gazprom, Russia’s biggest energy company owns the channels *NTV* and *TNT*. *Ren-TV* and *Channel 5* are owned by National Media Group (NMG), which again is owned by Bank Rossia and the insurance company Sogas. The main share holders of these companies are the brothers Kovalchucks, said to have close connections to Putin. *Channel Rossia*, *Channel Kul’tura* and *Channel Vesti-24* are directly belonged by the state (Telegraph 2004; Kiriya and Degtereva 2010). Some other channels exist, as entertainment channels, where the state is not the owner, but the ownership lies in the hands of the Russian economical and political elite. The ownership of the television channels are important to establish. As already mentioned, television has considerable influence in Russian society, and with the state as owner of most television channels, the Russian state has a threefold role. It is the owner, it regulates the market, and is the main provider of information to the news (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010).

In 1999, VGTRK, a new media holding company, was established, with the TV channels *Rossia*, and radio stations *Mayak* and *Radio Rossii*, *Channel Kul’tura* in its umbrella, together with 89 regional TV stations.<sup>1</sup> The transition of the regional TV channels to the

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<sup>1</sup> 89 is also the number of administrative units in Russian Federation.

VGTRK came at the same time as the Kremlin cancelled the elections of regional governors and expanded its control of the regional administrations. In 2002, these TV stations lost their financial independence to VGTRK (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010).

The TV channel *Russia Today* is also under the VGTRK umbrella. This TV channel was initiated to contribute to improving Russia's image abroad. *Russia Today* is broadcasted in over 100 countries, and the channels has an own branch in USA, called *Russia Today Americas*, or *RT Americas* as it prefers to be called (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010; TheIndependent 2010; RussiaToday 2010b). As Table 3 shows, control of the TV channels can be described in three different types:

- i) Direct control of ownership by the state
- ii) Non-direct control via a state company (as Gazprom)
- iii) Non direct control based on unofficial relationship between the owner of the TV channel and the authorities (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010) .

**Table 3 Overview of ownership in Russian TV channels and networks**

Channel	Owner	Type of control	Affiliation	Average daily share <sup>2</sup>
<b>Channel 1</b>	State 51%, private owners 49%	Mixed: i), iii)	Direct state ownership, non official affiliation with Abramovich	18,3
<b>Rossia</b>	State media holding VGTRK	i)	Direct state control	18,5
<b>Culture</b>	State media holding VGTRK	i)	Direct state control	1,8
<b>Vesti-24</b>	State media holding VGTRK	i)	Direct state control	0,8
<b>Sport</b>	State media holding VGTRK	i)	Direct state control	2,2
<b>NTV</b>	Gasprom Media Group	ii)	Statemonopoly Gazprom	13,3
<b>TNT</b>	Gasprom Media Group	ii)	Statemonoploy Gazprom	6,9
<b>Ren-TV</b>	National Media Group	iii)	Bank Rossia, insurance company Sogas, Severstal Group, Surgusneftegas	4,6
<b>Channel 5</b>	National Media Group	iii)	Bank Rossia, insurance company Sogas	2,0
<b>STS</b>	STS Media Group	iii)	Alfa Group MTG, Sweden	9,2
<b>Domashniy</b>	STS Media Group	iii)	Alfa Group MTG, Sweden	2,0
<b>DTV</b>	STS Media Group	iii)	Alfa Group MTG, Sweden	1,9
<b>MTV</b>	Prof-Media	iii)	Interross financial industry group	1,0
<b>2x2</b>	Prof-Media	iii)	Interross financial industry group	0,5
<b>TV3</b>	Prof-Media	iii)	Interross financial industry group	2,7
<b>TV Center</b>	Moscow Government	i)	Moscow government	3,4

Source: Kiriya and Degtereva (2010)

In addition to these channels, a new Muslim national TV has been launched by the government, “in *the hope that it will foster tolerance*”. The satellite channel will be available from February or March this year according to *The Moscow Times* (2011). An Orthodox

<sup>2</sup> Average daily share (%) from 05.00 to 05.00 AM, week 2009.03.16 – 2009.03.22 (by TNS Gallup Media)

religious TV channel already exists, called *Spas* (“*Savior*”), launched in 2005 and supported by a group of anonymous philanthropists under the umbrella of the Russian Consulting Group. The editor of the channel was Ivan Demidov, who in 2008 was appointed head of the Ideological Directorate of the Political Department of United Russia’s Central Executive and now holds the position as *the Presidential Administration’s point man for supersizing relations with religious organizations* (RiaNovosti 2005; Umland 2008; Goble 2010).

The state is the main owner of the major TV channels and as such the largest actor also in the TV market. This thesis will look at how this ownership influences state control of news coverage at the main TV channels, as *Channel One*, *Rossia* and *NTV*. The content of the non-state versus the state channels are very similar, as Kiriya and Degtereva (2010:44) described it, “*the TV content ...[is] homogenous and entertainment-oriented.*” A closer look at the content will be provided in chapter 6.3. Before discussing the situation for the radio stations, the print media, and the internet, I will take a further look at an important feature of the Russian society, namely corruption.

### **5.2.1 Corruption and *Zakazhuka***

The practice of politicians or parties paying journalists in order to get positive news coverage for their own behalf, or ensure that the media are giving the opposition negative coverage, is a common phenomenon during election campaigns. Corruption is probably the greatest challenge in Russia today. Corruption is widespread and present at all levels of society. The phenomenon of corruption in journalism is present in diverse forms, from paid articles about the new local store to paid investigative journalism (Zassoursky 2004: 93; Pörzgen and Sager 2009: 7 - 8). This kind of corruption, to buy for news coverage, is called *zakazhuka*. The word is referring to acceptance of bribes by journalists in exchange for editorial content (Peters 2003: 53). *Zakazhuka* is in the literature also referred to as Black PR, defined as *illegal methods, by which media outlets or journalists accept bribes in exchange for publication of materials, which are specifically intended to sway public opinion in favor of or against a certain candidate* (Ledeneva 2006: 33). According to Ledeneva, a lawyer engaged in a regional electoral campaign reported that before an election campaign, the campaign leaders made a list of loyal journalist they could make use of in their campaign. At the federal level, PR companies are contracted by the politicians in order to give news coverage according to the political party or the politicians’ wishes. “[...] *it could cost \$500 - \$10,000 for an article to appear during the run-up to an election, depending on the article size, source and the name or the position of the journalists [...]. Custom-made articles could*



cost as much as § 30 - § 50.000, whereas a TV release to the same effect would take the price up to the §20.000 - §100.000” (Ledeneva 2006: 34) . Black PR, or zakazhuka, is usually associated with payment for presenting negative information about a political opponent, in order to influence the electorate, but also to avoid negative coverage of a party or politician. The service of avoiding negative information is regarded as the most “expensive service” (Ledeneva 2006: 219)

Editor of the newspaper *Vyatsky Nablyudatel* in Kirov region, Sergei Bachinin mentions

*“[...] the payment non-governmental media of Kirov Province [got] during the election campaign for the State Duma [in 2007]. A number of individuals offered all these media, without exception, substantial ‘charitable aid’, ranging from tens to tens of thousands of dollars in return for their keeping quiet. They were required for these months to say nothing negative about United Russia or its candidates or about the doings of the province’s administration, whose governors happens also to be in charge of United Russia’s election campaign”* (Bachinin 2008: 133).

Corruption in the Russian media is a common practice, and gives the parties and the politicians with money better opportunities to influence the media, either through PR companies or through their election campaigns. In addition, the authorities use bribes in order to get favourable coverage which results in paid articles. It is a paradox however, that the practice of Black PR is serving “*competition as well as the needs of the political regime in terms of the manageability of democracy. [Corruption and black PR] are beneficial for certain groups of political technologists but also cater to the weakness of political parties. Such practice can be viewed as “weapon of the weak” in the context of competition with an incumbent who has access to the administrative resource. At the same time, the impact of [...] black PR in combination with the administrative resource can be enormous*” (Ledeneva 2006: 53) A further look at how the authorities, and the party in power, are ensuring news coverage to their support will be provided in chapter 6.3.2. And chapter 6.4.2 will discuss further the implements of negative campaigning for journalistic professionalism.

### 5.3 Radio

In this vast country, Russian citizens have approximately 1,250 local and regional radio stations in addition to nationwide stations to listen to. The majority of the radio stations are state-owned. Most radio stations do not produce alternative news, but are mainly music channels, which are quite popular in Russia. The most important radio stations with news are Radio Mayak, Radio Russki and the independent Ekho Moskvyy. The latter is an independent radio station producing alternative news coverage (Beumers, Hutchings et al. 2009; Krasnoboka 2010). Radio Mayak and Radio of Russia are both under the umbrella of the state-owned VGTRK as mentioned above. Those stations provide their listeners with news, language programs and cultural events to mention some (Beumers, Hutchings et al. 2009).

**Table 4 Daily reach for the radio stations in Russia, the period April – June 2010**

<b>Radio Stations</b>	<b>Daily reach %</b>
<b>All Radio</b>	65,2
<b>Europa Plus</b>	18,2
<b>Russian Radio</b>	17,4
<b>Autoradio</b>	16,9
<b>Radio Chanson</b>	14,9
<b>Retro FM</b>	13,4
<b>Traffic Radio</b>	13,4
<b>Radio Russia</b>	9,2
<b>Humor FM</b>	8,4
<b>Lighthouse</b>	8,2
<b>Love Radio</b>	6,8
<b>DFM</b>	5,8
<b>Militia wave</b>	5,3
<b>Hit FM</b>	5,2
<b>Our Radio</b>	4,4
<b>Radio 7</b>	4,3
<b>Radio Dacha</b>	4,2
<b>Ekho Moskvyy</b>	4,2

Source: TNS Galup (2010)

Table 4 shows the 18 radio stations that had most listeners in the period from April – June 2010 throughout Russia (TNSGalup 2010). Here the most popular stations are listed to include also *Ekho Moskvyy*. The numbers for Moscow in the same period put *Ekho Moskvyy* at

11<sup>th</sup> on the list and the similar numbers for St. Petersburg will put *Ekho Moskvy* at 12<sup>th</sup> on the list, indicating that the station is more popular in the big cities.

Radio has become more popular during the last decade, but the preferences have shifted from news radio stations as *Radio Rossi*, *Mayak* and *Echo Moskvy* to musical stations to *Autoradio*, *Europa Plus* and *Russkoe Radio*. Such decline in interest in news and in the state of affairs in Russia can be seen as a lack of interest of the political affairs in the country or at the best, an acceptance of the political situation (Beumers, Hutchings et al. 2009: 19). But the tendency to listen more to musical radio stations is seen in many other countries, and the popularity of *Ekho Moskvy* particularly in the big cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) contradicts the conclusion that Russians lack interest in the political life of their country. In addition to these radio stations, you can find some Christian radio stations such as *Russian Christian Radio* and *New Life Radio FM*. The international Christian news website *ChristianNewsToday*, claims that only a few cities in Russia have a local Christian radio station due to opposition from the Russian government (Johnson 2010).

The majority of the commercial radio stations today belong to entertainment media holdings. Russian radio stations confront the same challenges as in other parts of the world. Most advertising money goes to television channels and internet, and advertising on the radio is in decline. In addition, the radio stations meet competition in the digital music industry. The state is strongly present in the radio stations using mid-wave and long-wave, and on the close-circuit wired radio networks to which millions of elderly people still listen (Zassoursky 2009: 37) The radio stations are important for the authorities in building the image of a strong independent Russia. As Ryazanova-Clarke (2009) discusses in her article "What's in a foreign word? Negotiating linguistic culture on Russian radio programs about language," the Russian authorities engaged the radio stations in their campaign to focus on the Russian language. Several radio stations received funding for their radio programs that instructed their listeners how to speak Russian correctly. The radio stations have as such not lost their role as a public information channel.

## **5.4 The printed media**

There are more than 400 newspapers in Russia, but several are small and they are experiencing difficult times economically. Newspaper prices have increased and this has led to decreased circulation for most newspapers. The typical Russian is said to buy approximately one newspaper each week. In a survey in 2001, 58 percent said they read

local newspapers, while 36 percent reported that they read national newspapers (Oates 2006: 31). The circulation of the largest newspapers shows that their readerships cannot match the size of the viewing audiences for the major TV channels (Krasnoboka 2010) . As opposed to the lack of cost for access to TV channels, the income of the household has significance for the ability to consume newspapers. See Table 1 for an overview of the newspaper circulation figures.

Since Putin assumed the prime ministership for the first time in 1999, there has been a change in the ownership structures also for the newspapers, particularly the national ones. Most of these national newspapers are now in the hands of persons or companies loyal to the Kremlin (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008). The most widely read newspapers are *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovsii Komsomolets*, *Trud*, and *Izvestiia* (see Table 5). The two first-mentioned are tabloid papers, while *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* is the official organ of the Russian Federation. The six-page newspaper *Trud* is also among the most widely read newspapers (Beumers, Hutchings et al. 2009), as is *Metro*, which is owned by the worldwide media house, Metro International. This newspaper is published in the biggest cities, including St. Petersburg and Moscow; as the title indicates, it is a newspaper for the urban reader.

**Table 5 AIR (Average Issue Readership) in 1000 of people and in % of Russian population aged 10 and over (2006)**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Thousand people</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total</b>	62, 463	100,00 %
<b>Komsomolskaya Pravda</b>	4, 135	6.6%
<b>Moskovsii Komsomolets</b>	3, 147	6.0%
<b>Trud</b>	1, 171	1.9%
<b>Izvestiya</b>	1, 008	1.6%
<b>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</b>	725	1.2%
<b>Pravda</b>	705	1.1%
<b>Kommersant</b>	578	0.9%
<b>Novaya Gazeta</b>	515	0.8%
<b>Vedomosti</b>	507	0.8%
<b>Sovetskaya Rossiya</b>	481	0.8%
<b>Vremya Novostey</b>	293	0.5%
<b>Nezavisimaya Gazeta</b>	264	0.4%

Source: www.comcon-2.com

## 5.5 Internet

According to the World Bank, 31.9% of the population in Russia were using the internet in 2008, and according to Internet World Stat, the numbers for 2010 were 41.8 %. Both the World Bank and Internet World Stat claim that in 2000, only 2.0% were using the internet, so the numbers of citizens with access to internet are heavily increasing (InternetWorldStat 2010; TheWorldBank 2010) . The majority of the internet users live in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, and several other large cities (Zhitnyuk 2004; Krasnoboka 2010). 77 percent of those who access internet do this from their homes and 41 percent from their workplaces. The primary use for the internet is to check email, then to read news reports and blogs (FreedomHouse 2009a). Due to the increased prices for newspapers and expanding state control of the media outlets, several online-only papers have made their appearance in Russia. Most of those using internet have access through dial-up connection using a land phone, which limits the number of users (Strukov 2009: 211).

We know little of the quality of internet connections and accessibility, but the increase in online sources of information has led the government to intensify its monitoring of internet media outlets (FreedomHouse 2009a; Krasnoboka 2010; Oates 2010). Although the numbers of citizens with access to the internet are steadily increasing, many regions totally lack internet access and the majority have access to those online media channels controlled by the federal or state authorities. For those with access, the internet soon became the proper forum for globalizing the Russian citizens. The internet is where they, much as the citizens in other countries, can access foreign media; they can compare the stories in the Russian media with the stories in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and foreign TV channels streaming on internet. But the internet is also used to spread information that hardly corresponds to reality. The term *kompromat*, compromising material, will be thoroughly explained under chapter 6.4.2; here I will only mention the fact that several Russian sites in particular devoted to *kompromat* have been opened (Zassoursky 2004) .

The Russian internet domains are rapidly increasing, and more than 500,000 such domains are Russian, and .ru is now the second-fastest growing domain on the net, just beaten by China's .cn. The Russian cyberspace is called Runet, referring to all Russian-language sites together with those hosted in the Russian Federation. Runet has its origin from the last part of the 1980's, when the World Wide Web (www) made it possible to use the Cyrillic language on the net; subsequently, the number of Russian-written websites increased dramatically. Internet connectivity soon spread from Moscow and St-Petersburg to the regions. The internet in Russia rapidly developed simultaneously with *perestroika* and the

authorities' suspension of censorship. Therefore, in the beginning, also in Russia internet became a tool for free speech, the free flow of content, and ensuring the anonymity of those using the internet, and was in general an area where the users were free from the intervention of the authorities. In these early years, the internet became "*an extension of the samizdat culture and the dissident movement*" (Strukov 2009: 210). The *samizdat* culture will be discussed below, in chapter 6.2.1.

With the improvement of technologies it became easy to monitor also those using the internet as an arena for free speech. The internet became a mass medium as other mass media, and the authorities in Russia saw reasons to curb the possibilities for free expression on the internet. Today there are several regulations for the internet in Russia, and these regulations permit the government to control the internet, by monitoring the development of the industry. Here it is worthwhile mentioning two laws in particular which have been designed to monitor and control the internet: System for Operation-Investigative Activities SORM-1 (1995) and SORM-2 (1998). These laws gave FSB (Federal Security Service, heir to KGB) the authorization to monitor internet usage and e-mail messages. To enable such monitoring "*Internet Service Providers must install surveillance devices and high-speed links to local FSB departments which would allow the FSB to directly access Internet users' communication*" (Strukov 2009: 214). Those who did not follow these instructions, were prevented from continuing their businesses and as the devices needed to do this surveillance were quite expensive, small internet service providers were forced to shut down. There have been changes in this regulation, it is now required that FSB has a warrant before they can look at the electronic traffic of one user, but according to Vlad Strukov's article "Russia's Internet media politics: open space and ideological closure", this has not yet been implemented (2009: 208)

As has been noted above, Russian infrastructure is not yet developed to the extent that all Russian citizens can access the internet, or Rунet. But the Russian government sees the potential in the internet and has steadily developed technologies to control also this medium. FSB and the Kremlin are investigating other measures to ensure their control of the internet, e.g., blocking anonymous access from mobile phones or making anonymous access illegal. So far, such measurements have not yet been implemented, as the authorities can control who and what the citizens access at internet cafes and as will be discussed below, the Kremlin uses its power to block those Web pages with content of which they do not approve.

Still, the internet in Russia contains critical web sites and political parodies of the ruling elites of character never allowed on Russian television. But the government is continuously monitoring the development of internet, and some of the new legislation of the mass media

confirms that the government views the internet in the same way as other traditional media. The Kremlin is willing to control and enforce censorship in the online media outlets in the same way as it does with television channels and newspapers. The measures of controlling the internet will be further investigated in chapter 6.5.4.

The television channels are mainly owned by the state, the radio stations are with the exceptions of Radio Echo Moskvy and a few Christian radio stations, either state-owned or commercial and the newspapers with most readers are owned by people close to the Kremlin and in the regions by the regional powers. The internet is increasingly monitored by the government. With these structures in mind, an analysis of the media system in accordance with Hallin and Mancini's main variables will be undertaken.

## 6 The Russian Media System

### 6.1 Introduction

After discussing the ownership structures and how people access the different media outlets, I will look at the Russian media system, its political role and how it corresponds to globalization. This chapter offers an analysis of the media system in accordance with the analysis prepared by Hallin and Mancini, in order to try to answer the question *why the Russian media are as they are*. The first dimension I will present is the development of media in Russia.

### 6.2 The development of media historically

*“In twentieth-century Russia, theory was very important, binding, blinding and extremely misleading. It laid the foundation for the Soviet state. Then, in the beginning of the nineties, it became the weapon of that state’s demise, leading again to great debacles and, quite possibly, to a lot of unnecessary suffering. The power of theory in Russia declined in the nineties as a result of the great demise of the printed press and the rise of television with its image-based capacity for emotional involvement”* (Zassoursky 2004: x).

The words of Zassoursky in his *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia* (2004), serve as a brief summary of what happened with the Russian media in the twentieth century. It shows how theory had a central role also for the development of the mass media. Such historical development of the mass press is one of the variables in Hallin and Mancini’s media analysis. In many ways, this is particularly interesting in Russia. As the most important successor state of the Soviet Union, the heritage from the communist era is obvious in Russia. The mass media under the Soviet regime were dependent both on the state and on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The control of media varied from omnipresent and strict censorship under Iosif V. Stalin (1879-1953; General Secretary, 1922-1953), to the more liberal face under Nikita S. Khrushchev (1894-1971; First Secretary, 1953-1964), but the responsibility and tasks of the Soviet media were to support the Communist Party and its policy, regardless of who occupied the post of General Secretary of the CPSU. The state owned both radio and television, but the content in the media was



controlled and regulated by the CPSU through a multitude of resolutions and directives (Oates 2006; d'Haenens and Sayes 2007).

The first Russian newspapers were initiated by Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725; reigned as emperor, 1682-1725) in the eighteenth century, and were established as political instruments for the tsar and his descendants. The newspapers were highly dependent on the authorities, reflected their interests, and did not reflect the public interest (except to the extent that it might coincide with the interest of the tsar and his ruling elite). There were hardly any political discussions outside the court at all (Simons and Strovsky 2006). But in the discussion of the historic development of the Russian media outlets, this thesis will look at the development since the Russian revolution in 1917, when Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870 – 1924, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union 1922 - 1924) came to power.

I have chosen to divide Soviet and Russian history in the period since 1917 into three different periods. The first period will be from 1917 until 1985, when, after a brief period during which the Mensheviks were able to publish their newspapers, all mass media were controlled by the Communist Party and subject to censorship. Of course, it is well known that there were striking differences at all levels of policy when one compares the Stalin era with the Khrushchev era with the Brezhnev era, but it was only with the advent of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and the passage of Yeltsin's media law that the mass media were freed from strict censorship and freedom of speech (including in print) was guaranteed. At that time, there was also provision for the privatisation of media outlets. The years 1985-1999, the era of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, thus, constitute the second period in this scheme, while Putin's de-privatization and return to more self-censorship marks the third period (Oates 2006; Simons and Strovsky 2006).

### **6.2.1 1917- 1985: The Communist era**

Although this thesis focuses on the media system today, since 2000, a brief account of the media situation under the Communist Party is of interest. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue, the historic development of the media has a continued impact on the media system we see today.

After the revolution in 1917, censorship was abolished by the Provisional Government, but as early as 1922, Glavlit (the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press) was established as the central censorship office. Censorship in the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics (USSR) under Stalin was thorough and permeated all of society. Glavlit was established to ensure that 'military secrets' were not distributed, as well as, stated in very general terms, preventing 'anti-Soviet agitation'. The superior guidance was ideological purity, and the government implemented a pre-publication political censorship, which led to self-censorship and the banning of all critical journalism. In the Soviet Union, the state monopoly on television and radio was total. The state was nominally the owner of both, but the CPSU controlled content and activity (Ganley 1996; Zassoursky 2004) .

Gosteleradio or 'the USSR State committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting' had the responsibility for radio and television broadcasting. Some of the chairmen at Gosteleradio were also members of the government and of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

Gosteleradio was divided into Central Television, Central Radio and External Radio in addition to production and technical services. The organisation operated both on the federal and the regional level. In the late 1980s, it consisted of 14 republican divisions and 124 regional centres (Ganley 1996: 5, 11, 70, 79). Means of communication, including both printing and broadcasting facilities, were state property. Television and radio editors had to be members of the party, educated, trained and selected by the Party, and in this way the Party maintained administrative control over broadcasting.

In addition, the media were controlled by limited access to information sources. Information was seen as a privilege, mainly for the elite and handed out on a need-to-know basis. The Soviet Information bureau TASS distributed foreign news bulletins that were "*assembled daily (...) and distributed on differently colored paper according to the degree of detail and the targeted reader*" (de Smaele 2006: 52). No news or information programs were broadcast live, and "*television (...) in essence became something like radio with pictures*" (Zassoursky 2004: 7). Radio news programs were almost compulsory, and when they started at 6 a.m., in hotels, hostels and communal apartments the radio could not be turned off. The mass media were entirely controlled by the party, and had the functions of propagandist, agitator, and organizer as Lenin once described the party press (Zassoursky 2004: 8). Mass communications and the press were understood as necessary ideological and political means to organize the masses (Aumente 1999: 50). In the Soviet Union, each branch of the CPSU had its own media outlets, functioning as mouthpieces for the sub-departments of the party. The newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) was the organ of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Literary Newspaper) was the organ of the Board of the Writers' Union of the USSR. The Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Supreme Soviet, and the Soviet of Ministers of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic shared the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (Soviet Russia). This did not matter as for the political direction of these newspapers; all publications had to follow the party's guidelines

about content and ideology. But it was well known that the directives from the party would be presented in *Pravda* first. (Zassoursky 2004; Oates 2006).

The journalists were expected to allow both opinion and “factual” reporting in their coverage, in order to gain the ideals of communism. During the Soviet era, there were eventually more than 60,000 journalists. Many of these journalists became impatient with the censorship and self-censorship which constrained them, and dissident journalists contributed to the development of an underground press, the *Samizdat* (Aumente 1999).

*Samizdat* is the evidence that oppositional views and uncensored media existed also before President Gorbachev introduced his *glasnost*. Under Stalin, censorship also included literature and poetry, as well as children’s literature and all published materials, although some periodicals were reviewed more carefully than others. Initially, *Samizdat*, as an underground and hence illegal medium, was a way to publish poetry, and distribute this among friends. *Samizdat* was not one publication, or one newspaper, but a number of publications, with several publishers. It was an underground system of publication, lasting from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. The word *Samizdat* is an abbreviation of *samsebiaizda*, which means Self-publishing. Soon *Samizdat* developed to more political publications, and Soviet dissidents re-published and distributed their texts with the making of carbon copies and redistributed it between their friends (Greene 2009: 57).

One of the first political *Samizdat* materials was a typescript of Khrushchev’s secret speech, held in 1956. In his speech to a closed session of the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev criticised Stalin, talking about the terror under Stalin. Liudmila Alekseeva, chairman of the Moscow Helsinki Group, sees the *Samizdat* as a social phenomenon. She refers to two essential factors that contributed to the appearance of *Samizdat*. First, people understood that important information did not reach them, such as the invasion of Hungary in 1956 or of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In addition, the citizens saw that the authorities were lying, and that they had no means to distribute their own information or convey their opinions back to the authorities (Greene 2009: 58). The *samizdat* literature was primarily produced and read by dissident members of the intelligentsia, and the circulation of the *samizdat* hardly found their way into the countryside (Johnson 1999: 23). Although not fully developed as independent newspapers or magazines, *Samizdat* became a source for information and getting oppositional thoughts as they published versions of events that were in opposition to the official version. To work with these publications was dangerous, as they were under the surveillance of the authorities; many dissident journalists were arrested, and more than 400 dissidents were imprisoned in the 1970s. Only a few years before General Secretary Gorbachev’s *glasnost*, in the period from 1979 to 1980, 86 dissidents were arrested, of whom 71 dissidents were convicted. It is worth mentioning the *samizdat* periodical *The Chronicle of*

*Current Events* which, from 1968, soon developed to be the most important Soviet underground periodical, reporting news that Russians could not get elsewhere, such as the arrests of dissidents and religious persecution of Jews and Baptists (Aumente 1999: 51). *Samizdat* publications were important and independent, but only available for the few, in particular for intellectuals.

The legacy of *samizdat* literature and dissidents are said to have had important impact for the *glasnost* era under Gorbachev. The importance of these dissidents was even underlined when, according to Robert Horvath (2005: 91), the leaders of the coup d'état in 1991 arrested as many as 75 democrats, among them well-known samizdat journalists such as Sergei Grigoriants and Lev Timofeev. Many of those engaged in the political publications of *Samizdat* continued their engagement in human rights groups, such as the Moscow Helsinki group. With its focus on human rights and democratic practices, the *samizdat* network had an impact of designing politics in the early 1990's (Horvath 2005). The journalism of the *Samizdat* publications was not "*a journalism of information with a measure of objective and verifiability and informed opinion*", but rather "*a combination of informational and mobilization, opinion and recruiting messages on behalf of anti-Communism*" (Gross 1999: 152). As such, the *Samizdat* journalism did not contribute to journalistic professionalism and media as the fourth estate, but rather as an opposition to the Communism and an arena for human right activists. Horvath describes why the dissident culture did not come to power in Russia in the 1990's, and may serve as an explanation for the lack of impact dissident journalists had on Russian media outlets: "*With their emphasis on morality and their consistent renunciation of political struggle, most dissident were singularly lacking the unscrupulousness and the thirst for power that marked the successful post-Soviet politician. On a purely pragmatic level, the dissidents had little experience in working in political structures, and could not compete with the established networks of the nomenklatura*" (Horvath 2005: 205). Although little research is done to investigate those engaged in the *Samizdat* publications and networks as *The Chronicle of Events*, those journalists had less impact on development of the Russian media outlets than some of the young pioneers of Komsomol who early understood the possibilities of media and media market.

### **6.2.2 1985 – 1991: President Gorbachev and *Glasnost***

With President Gorbachev, the media in Russia came to play a different role, but were still seen as one of the allies of the government. Gorbachev saw the media as his partner,

contributing to the reformation of the system without changing it. But *glasnost* provoked the politicization of society; together with a remarkable increase in readership, journalists took the opportunity to present their own interpretations of political events. At this time, the press also investigated some of the crimes of the Communist Party, and the party leadership's control over both the press and television became weaker. The party impeded its own control of the media, and with its new democratic direction it became difficult to continue censorship by closing down publications or discharging chief editors (Aumente 1999; Zassoursky 2004). Zassoursky claims that there were no really independent media outlets in this period, other than the *Samizdat*, but many journalists saw the independent journalist and the independent media outlet as the ideal. The Law of the Press and Other Mass Media that was passed in 1990 started a debate about press freedom in the Soviet Union, with liberals wanting more freedom for media outlets and less censorship, and party conservatives fearing that *glasnost* was leading to political chaos and destabilization. Some restrictions were still imposed on the media outlets in this period; the military in particular restrained the media from writing about economical and structural problems in their ranks, and Gorbachev also tried to prevent the media from writing negatively about his role in the invasion of Lithuania. He also tried to suspend the aforementioned law which he had initiated.

The expression "fourth estate" became one of interest for Russian journalists. The first live television program started in October 1987, called *Vzglyad*, or *Viewpoint*, which soon became the most popular television program in the period. The program developed into a very popular political talk show, with the combination of late-night talk and a call-in program. *"Vzglyad was advocated by ideologists in the CPSU Central Committee, who wanted a television show that could compete with Western radio broadcasting to the Soviet Union. In an effort to lure audiences who were bored to death with Soviet television, three "young and charismatic" people were brought from Radio Moscow's external propaganda arm."* (Ganley 1996: 72). The popularity of the show made Kremlin interested, and Gosteleradio made efforts to control the show. In 1989, *Vzglyad* had invited the dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov (1921 – 1989, awarded Nobel Peace Prize 1975), who continuously criticised the Kremlin in their war in Afghanistan amongst other. Just shortly before the show went on air, an order came from the top management of Central Television (Gosteleradio) to stop the live broadcast of the show, and rather air a show previously broadcasted. In addition, the police came to ensure that the planned show was not taped at all. *"By spring, 1990, the Kremlin's top propagandists seemed to have managed to curb Vzglyad. At first they simply tried to kill or to delay several editions of the popular show. Then they tried to replace the Vzglyad team"* (Vartanov 1991; Ganley 1996: 72-74). The program serves as an illustration of the period, and perhaps also how Gorbachev saw the media. The openness of the period is seen in the

fact that the program was allowed, although political and critical, and the desire to keep control of the media is seen in the fact that the Kremlin in the end chose to close the show.

In August 1991, communists opposing *glasnost* and *perestroika* staged a coup d'état placing Gorbachev under house arrest and taking over the press, television and radio. But the putschists were not able to control the independent media outlets, and the journalists who had understood the influence they had; the coup petered out after just three days. The Russians who were witnessing the coup from the live broadcasted press conference soon understood that this coup d'état would not be carried through:

*Suddenly came the August 19<sup>th</sup> coup and television was reduced to [the] emergency announcement appealing for Soviet patriotism in ponderous pre-glasnost voices. Dead air-time was filled with ballet and opera to mask the absence of news. But there were seeds of opposition in the controlled media, and when the emergency committee went on live television with a press conference to defend the coup, state television producers and camera people deliberately focused on the nervous, trembling hands and runny nose of one of the coup leaders. Orders to edit this out in later broadcasts, along with the derisive laughter and disrespectful questions of sceptical reporters at the press conference, went unheeded. It was said that the televised spectacle influenced other officials to distance themselves from the coup (Aumente 1999: 54)*

In the 1990s, the television became an important information source for the Russians. By bringing in-depth analysis of the weaknesses of the Communist era, critical reports of the Afghanistan – Soviet war, etc., TV channels in Russia had an important function in bringing information to the Russians, which again led to protests against the leadership (Oates 2006: 2).

### **6.2.3 1991 – 1999: The golden age or the reign of the oligarchs?**

In 1993, the state monopoly of broadcasting ended with the establishment of the first private TV network, *NTV*. The license to broadcasting was given to *NTV* by the Kremlin administration according to the decree of President Yeltsin. The owner of *NTV* was the business man Vladimir Gusinsky. Two years later, Boris Berezovsky, another business man with close connections to President Yeltsin's family, established the *ORT*, with 51% owned by the state, and the majority of the rest of the shares belonging to a bank owned by Boris Berezovsky, (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010; Remington 2010).

The beginning of this period is viewed upon as the golden age for the Russian media. The first Chechen war (1994-1995) and the media's role in the campaigning against this war clearly showed the independence of at least some media outlets. The media were able to exert pressure on the government, by showing the brutality of the war for the Russian citizen. With the television channels' coverage, it became obvious for citizens that Yeltsin had not kept his promise to cease the attack. The critique was enormous, and led to the termination of the war. As we shall see, this was only temporary, as the next president kept the Russian media under tight control when the second Chechen war (1999-2002) started (Zassoursky 2004).

Much has been written and said about the Russian tycoons who soon became central in Russian economical and political life in the 1990s. With the privatization of Russian state enterprises, i.e., the transfer of ownership of state enterprises to private owners, party members from the KGB and the Komsomol used their positions to take over state enterprises or create banks using their position to win government contracts and privileges. They became extremely wealthy as they took over many of these enterprises, not only with legal means (Remington 2010). They soon came to be known as *the oligarchs*, and two of them are especially important in the study of mass media: Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky. The oligarchs came to rescue the media outlets in their economic crisis in 1996, and several invested in media outlets and played a role in setting editorial policy (Hoffman 2002). The oligarchs grasped this opportunity to advance their own interests, both economic and political interests. They allowed some kind of pluralism, but this was not based on balance and political neutrality, where different political interests had access to media, but were dependent of the interests of the owners. Political movements with which the oligarchs did not want to be associated, such as the Communist Party or the far right, were barred from access to media outlets. The pluralism that existed was dependent on the competition and dissension between and among the oligarchs, and when they joined forces, pluralism was deeply undermined as it was not institutionalized in the system. This became particularly obvious in 1996, when the oligarchs joined their forces to ensure the re-election of President Yeltsin. Such pluralism as had existed decreased significantly in the course of the campaign promoting Yeltsin (Dunn 2009). President Yeltsin's health problems had become more and more noticeable even before the presidential elections in 1996, but as the oligarchs saw how useful Yeltsin was for them, they gave him tremendous support. The television channels they owned, and the newspapers they had in their portfolios, were all available to support Yeltsin's campaign to be re-elected. Boris Yeltsin's health problems were kept out of the media outlets, and Yeltsin kept his presidential position; the oligarchs kept their power and wealth. But the victory would not last long, at least for those oligarchs with the closest ties to Yeltsin

and his family, and in addition had political aspirations (Hoffman 2002; Goldman 2004; Remington 2010).

#### 6.2.4 2000 – 2010: Putin and Medvedev

Remington (2010) writes that there are strong parallels between the state power under Putin and Dmitri A. Medvedev (b. 1965; President of the Russian Federation since 2008) and the state power under the Soviet regime. This can also be seen in the authority's view of society's access to information, and how media outlets are being granted access to information. Sarah Oates (2007: 1280) chose to call today's media system a neo-Soviet model of the media.

Unlike the institutionalized censorship in the USSR, press freedom and the absence of censorship are guaranteed in the Constitution. The 1993 Russian constitution is securing this rights in the article 29 (Oates 2006: 24). Putin stated, early in his presidency, that freedom of the press was necessary in a democracy (Lipman and McFaul 2001). Soon it became evident that this was only political rhetoric. As described by Sakwa (2008: 150); *Putin's presidency was accompanied by persistent fears for media freedom*. In his speech to the Duma in 2000 Putin stated that the press was to be a tool for the state (Remington 2010). The Doctrine of Information Security came into force in September 2000, less than a year after Putin came into office, —*“for prohibiting media distortion and the deliberate circulation of false information”* (Belin 2002: 152). The purpose of the doctrine was to increase state power and keep information in military, economic and ecological matters outside public the arena. The doctrine maintains that only the state can provide Russians with objective information, and that the state media therefore must dominate the information market (Lipman and McFaul 2001). The message sent to the mass media through this doctrine is quite clear; the doctrine *“demanded media that would bend to the will of the authorities in order to preserve Russia's informational integrity”* (Simons and Strovsky 2006: 7). There are also other challenges to freedom of the press in the legal system of Russia. Sarah Oates describes how the media are regulated by laws passed in the Duma and subject to presidential decree as well.

*“[The president] can quite effectively limit freedom of speech with edicts that address specific issues. In addition, all 89 subjects of the Russian Federation have the constitutional rights to issue statues on media in their jurisdiction[...]. [This may lead to conflicts with national law and make it difficult for the regional newspapers, televisions*



*and radio stations to follow both legal boundaries.] “The impossibility of operating within the law, particularly in some regions, leaves media outlets extremely vulnerable to government pressure because there are so many legal excuses for shutting down even the most scrupulous and honest broadcaster or publisher. [Another] problem is the selective application of the law. [...]The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which came into force in 1997, introduced criminal liability for slander [...] in Article 129 of the code. In addition, Article 146 stipulates that those who abuse copyright or plagiarize can be subject to fines, a jail term or even forced labour. More ominously, Article 151 of the 1995 Civic Code and Article 43 of the Statue on the Mass Media lay the responsibility for the correctness of information with the defendant (i.e. the journalist or the media outlet). [...]This leaves Russian journalists vulnerable to deception by their sources, and, more frighteningly, civil suits even when they have tried to present a story fairly (Oates 2006: 24 - 25)*

The positive trends toward more freedom of the press under Gorbachev and Yeltsin was clearly altered after Putin came into power. The change of policy seemed to involve steps to a media-controlled authoritarian system. Putin started his presidency by taking control of the independent media outlets, first gaining ownership of the national TV channels and later also of the principal newspapers. The closing of websites, and bloggers and journalists working in online media being put under arrest, indicate the authorities' increasing interest in the internet (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008). Russia is currently ranked as the third most dangerous working place for journalists, and the organization *Reporters Without Borders* put Russia at 140<sup>th</sup> place in their freedom of the press index<sup>3</sup> in 2010 (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010e). In November 2010, while writing this thesis I learned about new and severe attacks against journalists (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010d).

After Putin came to power, the oligarchs encountered severe difficulties. While Yeltsin depended on the support from the oligarchs, and they were treated as members of his family, Putin perceived them as threats to his power. When their interests came into conflict with Putin's interests, the new president demonstrated fully his willingness to use his power to control also media not owned by the state (Becker 2004; Goldman 2004). One by one, Putin eliminated the media empires owned by wealthy businessmen with political aspirations. The aforementioned Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky were the first exposed to the new media regime of Putin.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Reporters Without Borders* index measures the state of press freedom in the world. It reflects the degree of freedom that journalists and news organisations enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom.

Putin introduced his media politics with a new policy stating that the state is the best information provider and therefore also the state should partly or completely own the media outlets. In his book *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, Zassoursky describes Putin's intervention in the media politics in such a manner:

*“Right before the eyes of the public, the pendulum of history was again gathering speed, and soon we found ourselves on the threshold of a new transformation of Russia's symbolic image. The hopes and dreams of the rebellious nineties were somehow transformed into the image of Great Russia once again coming together to meet challenges and combat enemies at home and abroad. The main difference between the new system and the preceding one was the monopolization of control over television, the node of the national information space. The pressure by the government, exerted via threats to cancel licenses or to begin criminal prosecutions, proved able without particular difficulty to bring the media-political system under control” (Zassoursky 2004: 33).*

Before reviewing what Zassoursky means by pressure on the part of the government and the monopolization of control over television, a closer look to the ties between the media outlets and the political parties in Russia will prove useful.

### **6.3 The link between the Russian media and the political parties**

Political parallelism is the second variable in Hallin and Mancini's framework. Political parallelism is the degree and nature of the links between the media and the political parties (...) *“or the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society”* (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 21). This variable is in many ways going to the core of the Russian media system. The ownership structures in the media foster a strongly intertwined connection between the media and the government party. As discussed in chapter 4 about democracy theory, when major political parties or opposition parties are not granted access to the media, the media system as an institution supporting democracy is weakened. Information is constricted and the public cannot easily inform itself fully about issues on the agenda. Therefore, I will analyse the links between the media and the dominant party in Russia today, United Russia, and its access to and influence in the media. I will also look at the opposition parties and the media, including the opposition movements.

When looking at the history of the media in Russia, what is already written, the mass media were deeply intertwined with the Communist Party. All information available was controlled by the Party and no criticisms were allowed. During the so-called golden period, we saw the first independent media outlets. But soon it became evident that also the owners of those independent newspapers and television channels had political agendas, and used their media as channels for the realization of their goals. In the late 1990s, each television channel supported a party or president candidate, something that was easily understood by the audience. In the elections from 1999 till 2008, those television channels which have survived are, as we will see, giving more coverage to the governmental president candidates and the governmental party than to the oppositional voices.

Sarah Oates in her book *Television, democracy and elections in Russia* argues that the “*political parties and the media enjoy a close, symbiotic relationship in any political system [...] However, evidence suggests that by the Russian presidential elections in 2004 this connection had become closer to the Soviet propaganda model than to one resembling the interaction among parties, candidates, the media and the electorate in developed democracies*” (Oates 2006: 66).

### **6.3.1 The Russian Party system**

After the collapse of the Soviet communist regime, new parties were established alongside the transformed Communist Party. Before the election in 1993, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation was the only party with a party infrastructure and local organizations in all regions, held together with a political program. The other new parties had to start with building this infrastructure in order to get enough votes to be elected to the Duma. Some of these new parties soon saw how they had easy access to voters across Russia through the television channels.

An interesting aspect of the party structure is the continuing change in the number of parties fielding candidates in the elections. 13 parties fielded candidates in the 1993 election, in 1995 the electorate could choose among as many as 43, which again dropped to 26 in 1999 and 23 in the election held in 2003 (Oates 2006). With so many new parties and party coalitions, it was a challenge for them to make themselves known to the electorate, not to mention to attract enough votes to obtain representation in the Duma. The nationwide television channels became an important means to convey, to the electorate, information about the parties fielding candidates in the elections.

The Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (CIKRF) enforces the federal law on the election of deputies of the state Duma and the presidential elections. All political parties are granted equal access to media, and are ensured equal terms and conditions for participation in election campaigns, referenda, public and political events (CIKRF 2001). Such access to media can be acquired to three different actions.

- i. Paid advertising. Virtually all parties and candidates are legally granted rights to buy political advertising in the mass media. The legislation set the spending limit at 2.3 mill § in the elections held in 1999.
- ii. Free time. Every party with candidates running for election is given free time in the mass media. This means that all parties are given the same amount of free access to the media, but the law that came into effect in 1999, required that parties getting 2 percent or less of the votes must refund the costs of the free time. This rule effectively prevents small parties from using the free time.
- iii. News coverage. Elections are covered by the media outlets, and as noted earlier, the nationwide television channels are particularly important as they reach out to nearly all of the electorate (Oates 2006).

But although the law ensures that all parties get advertising at the same rate at all media companies, the ability to pay for political advertising will differ considerably among the various parties, as the price with the broadcast media during the 1999 elections was 40,000 rubles per minute. The free time of which all parties with above 2 per cent of the voters behind them could take advantage, had little impact on the election results (Zassoursky 2004; Oates 2006). In November 2010, Medvedev suggested that it might be appropriate to change the laws to ensure that all parties campaigning for election get equal television time, but critics asserted that, as long as Putin enjoys unchallenged, privileged access to the television channels, such measures will not improve the opposition's access to television coverage (Abdullaev 2010a).

To establish the degree of political pluralism in Russia a closer look at the election news coverage is in order. The following chapter rests on studies done by the European Media Institute as presented by Oates (2006), Zassoursky (2004) and White et al (2005).

### 6.3.2 The Broadcast Party

In *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia* (2006), Sarah Oates suggests a theory to explaining that television is not only essential for having electoral success, but also how the Kremlin politicians are using television to retain power when forming a political party. Oates mentions three conditions in Russia to support her theory that the party supported by the government has been and still is a broadcast party, emphasizing how important the television channels for parties and politicians seeking to get elected. The theory suggests that the most important broadcast party in Russia, is the one with most seats in the Duma, and with the strong affiliation with the president, namely the party United Russia. Let us take a closer look at the conditions referred to in this broadcast party theory.

- i. Due to the shifting number and names of parties, the Russian voter is not as loyal as her Western counterpart. A survey after the election in 2000 revealed that as much as 22 percent of the electorate waited to choose their party until a week before the election. With such fluctuating voters, this means that a party cannot rely on loyal voters and has to struggle for votes until the Election Day. Fluctuating voters is not a specific trait of Russia, and can be seen in well established democracies in Western Europe as well as United States, but the voters and the parties in Russia are in far more flux than these countries.
- ii. The power of the political parties is also debatable as the executive branch is given power to obstruct decisions in the Duma. The president is also relatively free of affiliation with any party, making the link between party support and power quite tenuous.
- iii. The last factor is the non-presence of independent media in Russia, especially among the television channels (Oates 2006: 79)

The parties cannot confide in loyal citizens giving them the votes they need, and the citizens cannot trust that the party to which they gave their vote in the last election will run for election in the next. In order to be elected to the Duma, the party ensures that the electorate is, through the television channels, familiar with the party's politicians and politics. With money to run advertising campaigns; and influence to ensure that the party gets the news coverage you want at the television channels you prefer, the most important being Channel One, the party has the ability to be known in the electorate. The constant change in the political landscape in Russia and the societal chaos have led the politicians to rely more on short television campaigns than on any long-term connection between the party and the voters. The voters are not given the possibility by the television channels to hold the party and the

politicians accountable for their actions after being elected. It is important here to note that there are parties in Russia not acting as broadcast party, with a strong party structure with branches throughout the country, in particular the Communist Party. But the media-based broadcast party prevents the development of such a party structure. Although the broadcast party uses the popularity it gains from television campaigning and news coverage, it also has to exist in the world outside the television channels. A party list with members, party organizers and people running the campaigns is necessary, but with the close connection such a broadcast party has to the government, it can make use of the employees in the government for executing such tasks (Oates 2002; Reisinger and Hesli 2003; Oates 2006). In addition, the government is supporting the broadcast party, United Russia, also in controlling the regional media outlets, especially in front of elections. Many regional newspapers are being far more independent than the television channels; the media outlets can run independent, critical and investigative reports. But the regional media outlets are facing difficulties in providing the voters different views, or access to the opposition's views. Before the Duma elections in December 2010, many regional newspapers reported receiving threatening phone calls or invitations to meet with the FSB, and were prevented from printing news of the opposition. In November 2010, the regional issue of *Novaya Gazeta* in Samara was closed on the allegation of using unlicensed software. Although this might be true, as for many other media outlets and organisations in Russia, the timing was crucial: *"it was important for the local officials to disarm the opposition ahead of the Duma elections in December"* (Eismont 2008: 121 - 123). In 2006, before the Duma elections in 2007, the editor of the Saratov newspaper *Saratovskii Reporter*, Sergei Mikhailov was *"brought to trial after the newspaper printed a critique of the governing party, United Russia's role in undermining the dignity and reputation of Russian journalism. Regional party representatives demanded that the journalist pay 500,000 rubles or promise to stop criticising United Russia until the end of the year"* (Azhgikhina 2007: 1257)

To follow Oates' theory on the broadcast party, the party Russia's Choice was the broadcast party running for election in 1993. Russia's Choice obtained three times as much media coverage as the next party the Party of Russian Unity and Accord (PRUA)<sup>4</sup>, in the 1993 election campaign for the Duma (see Table 6). *"As a result, the Russian media have helped to subvert the fragile party system in Russia, encouraging the creation of media-driven parties, i.e. 'broadcast parties'" [...]* (Oates 2002: 2). This theory of the broadcast party explains how the Russian media relate to the party in power. The Russian media score high

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<sup>4</sup> PRUA ran for election to the DUMA in 1993 and 1995.

on the variable political parallelism as the television channels and the party of power is strongly connected. The connection between such media outlets as television channels and the broadcast party are deeply intertwined, and the broadcast party has easy access to election coverage at the television channels. The presence of the broadcast party impedes the development of other parties. Together with the lack of independent media outlets the other parties do not get nearly the media exposure that this broadcast party does, which has almost unlimited access to the most important television channels, as Channel One. The presence of different point of views or an opposition is almost non-existing in the television channel today. A few independence newspapers are representing other tendencies in the society but these are read by few.

Oates (2006) defines the party Russia's Choice as the first broadcast party, which ran for the Duma in the elections in 1993. The party ran for election with a political platform that had a focus on pro-market forces, which did not appeal to the majority of the voters, and they came second, with 7.4 percent less votes than the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). A new broadcast party was then founded before the new election in 1995, namely the pro-governmental party Our Home is Russia. This party chose to put the focus on the nationalistic tendencies in the electorate, and with the rise of this party, the Russian government had improved the broadcast party in order to respond better to the electorate. The leader was the popular prime minister, Viktor Stepanovich Chernomyrdin (1938 – 2010, prime minister 1992 – 1998)<sup>5</sup>. The party managed to get more than a quarter of all paid advertising and editorial coverage. The party did not win the election in 1995 - that was accomplished by the Communist Party. Before the elections in 1999, Our Home is Russia's leaders had broken with Kremlin, and the Yeltsin administration needed a new party organization to consolidate their power. The new broadcast party was named Unity, and the goal was to both shape the preferences of the voters, and convince them that this was the best party to pursue their interests, and the means to accomplish that goal was the media, or more specifically, the television channels.

### **6.3.3 The media and the party United Russia**

The last in line of these broadcast parties is, as mentioned, the party holding the majority of the seats in the Duma, United Russia. Before the elections in 2003, the Unity went

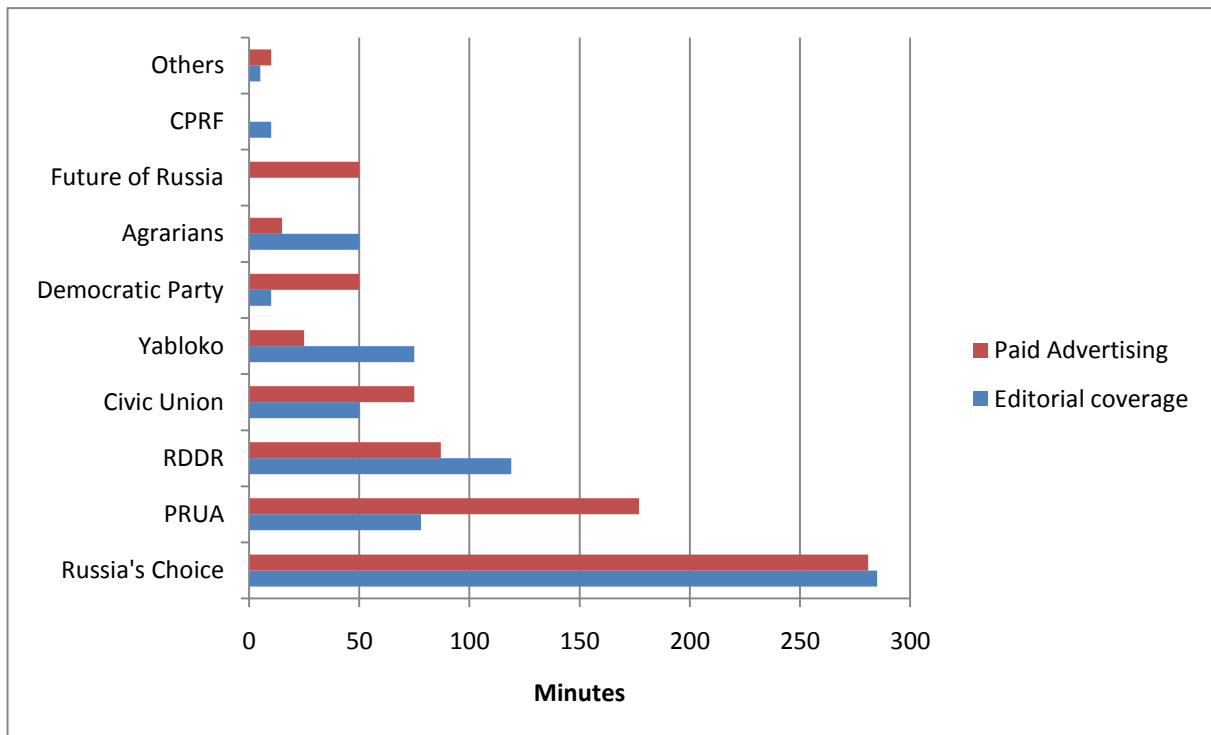
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<sup>5</sup> Victor Chernomyrdin was the founder of Gazprom Energy Company. His political carrier started in the CPSU, and he sat in the CPSU's central committee as member of the industry department, and under General Secretary Gorbachev, Chernomyrdin was the Minister of Gas Industries. Chernomyrdin became prime minister under President Yeltsin.

together with the party Fatherland, forming the party United Russia. This party did support then President Putin in his presidential campaign, although he has never joined the party. Henry Hale, the author of the article "Russia's Political Parties and their Substitutes" (2010: 81), writes that Putin held the position of chairman of the party in 2008, but refused to be an actual party member. The current president, Dmitri Medvedev is also not a member, although supported by the party. The majority of the governors are affiliated with United Russia as well. In the latest elections in 2003 and 2007, United Russia has managed to get the majority of the seats in the Duma. But there have been some signals of change in the attitudes from the Kremlin toward such broadcast parties. In November 2010, President Medvedev said in a video blog, according to *The Moscow Times*, that "*the ruling party should not just be an appendix of the executive branch. Instead [...] the ruling party should be responsible for forming the executive and must have rights and responsibilities before voters.*" This statement came after some suggested changes in the electoral system. "*Among the initiatives are tighter regulation of early-vote and absentee ballots; the introduction of electronic ballot-scanners at 5 percent of the country's polling stations; equal television time for campaigning parties; and allowing parties that collect more than 5 percent of the vote, but less than the 7 percent needed for entry as a faction, to send a representative to a legislative body*" (Abdullaev 2010a). These changes might result in better access to election coverage both for smaller parties and for opposition parties. But, as mentioned earlier, according to *The Moscow Times*, the Russian analyst Grigory Golosov, does not view this suggestion as entirely positive, as long as "*Putin reigns on the screen unchallenged*" (Abdullaev 2010a). This assertion on the part of Golosov was perhaps underlined when President Medvedev held his state-of-the-nation speech 30 November 2010, when none of his earlier statements regarding the failures of the election systems were repeated. The only statement he gave regarding the election system, was a suggestion "*to expand the proportional and mixed systems of elections into local councils for small towns and municipalities, which are traditionally formed by single-mandate candidates*" (Abdullaev 2010b). Such a change is said to be likely to improve the chances for a party such as United Russia to win seats to the Duma from the smaller municipalities.



**Table 6 Television Exposure in the 1993 Russian Duma campaign: minutes of editorial time and paid advertising**



Source: European Institute for the Media (1994, p. 117) (Oates 2006)

As mentioned, the first election where the electorate could vote for the party United Russia, was in 2003. Putin supported United Russia, and the party garnered 37.6 percent of the votes, 25 percent more than the next party, Russia's choice (which, as mentioned, had broken with Kremlin). In the most recent election for representatives in the Duma, held in 2007, United Russia won 64.3 percent of the votes (See Table 7). The Communist Party came in second at a comfortable distance, with only 11.57 percent of the votes. Here it necessary to note that 14 parties contested in the election, 9 fewer than at the election in 2003. Although this partly can explain how United Russia obtained significantly more votes than in the last election, it does not explain why the Communist Party fell so far behind.

**Table 7 Election to the Russian Duma 2007**

Party	% [of Votes]	Seats
United Russia Bloc	64.30%	315
The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)	11.57%	57
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)	8.14%	40
A Just Russia (JR)	7.74%	38

Source: ElectionGuide (ElectionGuide 2007)

The Organization for Safety and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provided a quite clear analysis of the media coverage during the election campaign in 2007, heavily criticizing the lack of access to media for all parties. In addition to listing several of the instances of harsh treatment to which independent media outlets and journalists writing about the opposition were exposed to, the report says:

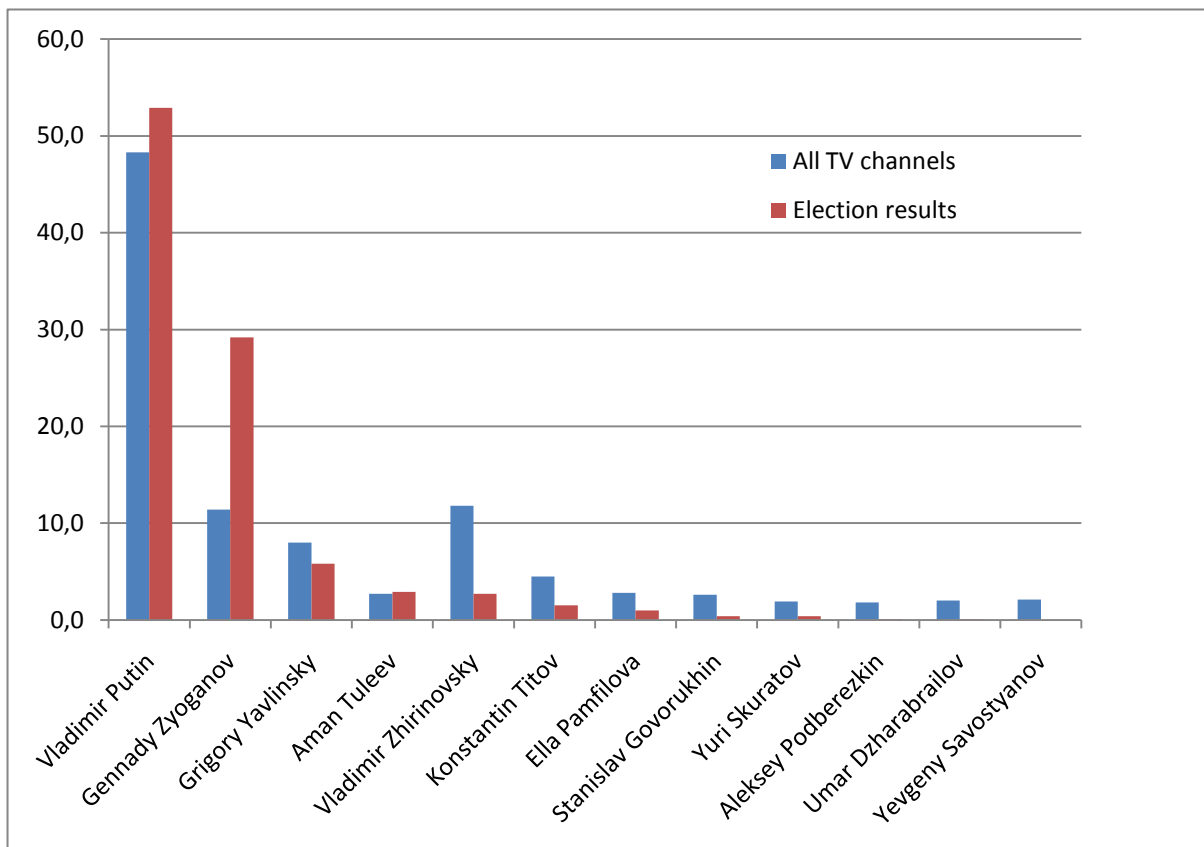
*The state-funded media failed to offer a balanced and objective coverage of the relevant political subjects and parties. Despite their differing statistical methods, both the official monitoring service of the Central Election Commission and the NGO monitoring service of the Russian Union of Journalists have indicated an overwhelming coverage in advantage for the ruling party on federal TV channels (Haraszti 2007: 2).*

Going back to Hallin and Mancini, one could argue that political parallelism in Russia is high. The broadcast party theory is specific for Russia and explains the tight connection between the state-owned television channels and the leading party. Such a connection is also evident in the statistics for news coverage before elections. Being the governmental party brings huge advantages in news coverage and election coverage, in addition to having more money to spend on paid advertising and better infrastructure as they can use the state apparatus. An analysis of the presidential elections shows the same tendencies, that the candidate already in power is getting most coverage. When looking at the election results and the share in news coverage in the election for president in 2000, the numbers are quite clear. The then elected president Putin received a majority of the share of news coverage and as is known, he won the elections (see Table 8).

The news coverage in election campaigns is also biased in the newspapers; with the exceptions of *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the newspapers have taken an elitist approach with almost no public discussion or dialogue with the audience (Zassoursky 2004).

The television channels and the newspapers pay the most attention to the leading party and the president. The news coverage is biased, and it is difficult for other parties and candidates to get the same election coverage as the governmental party. The broadcast party is the government party, and is strong affiliated with the president. The authorities own the television channels, which gives the broadcast party an advance in getting news coverage. Together with the ability to run paid advertising, the amount of time in news coverage is significantly higher than for the other parties and candidates.

**Table 8 Television coverage of Candidates and Results of the Elections 2000, percent**



Source: Study by the European Media Institute, March 3 – 21, 2000 (Zassoursky 2004)

What is also seen in Russia giving the country a high score on the variable political parallelism is how media personnel also are active in political life. In the election campaign in 1996, Yeltsin brought in the then head of the NTV television channel Igor Malashenko to lead his campaign (Brudny 1997). Throughout his presidency Putin never faced a single unfriendly question from a Russian reporter. Those who would raise unwelcome questions do not have the access; those who have the access are not inquisitive. Access to press briefings is limited, and only for those approved by the Kremlin (Lipman 2005). As seen in chapters 5.2.1 and 6.4.2, corruption, bribery and presenting paid political advertisements as news stories are common during election campaigns.

Journalists are instructed to present the President in a positive manner and during the second Chechen War, the media outlets were exposed to direct censorship justified by the argument that non-official reporting would be considered “*anti-state activity*” (Sakwa 2008: 151; Remington 2010). In 2009 The Kremlin wanted to avoid news reports on the country’s economic crisis. Prosecutors warned against “*damaging*” reports, Prime Minister Putin instructed journalists not to write “*unpatriotic*” stories, and the media were warned not use the word “*crisis*” in their coverage (FreedomHouse 2009b).

The Russian media outlets score low on external pluralism, i.e., the media outlets most Russians are accessing do not present different views of view or the opposition's viewpoint. The election news stories on national televisions "*are propelled by advocacy of a candidate and denigration of the opponents*" (Mickiewicz 2006: 3). Mickiewicz asserts that the television channels had a form of external diversity, seen as each television channel was supporting its own candidate or had its own political agenda. Not all candidates were granted access in all television channels, but as the Russians could find different views on different channels, a form of external pluralism present. But also this kind of diversity has diminished (Mickiewicz 2006). Today we see television channels almost fully controlled by the government, giving them the most positive coverage and hardly admitting the opposition any air time. Each Friday, a member of the Kremlin's presidential staff holds a meeting with the head of the state-owned nationwide television channels to determine how to cover the news – and what the coverage should contain. Vladimir Surkov (b. 1964), the First Deputy of Staff of the President, has been running these meetings. This gives the Kremlin a tremendous advantage in exerting its influence on the news coverage, and as such ensuring that the controlling powers get positive coverage on the issues of interest for the government (Lipman 2005; Ioffe 2010; RISJ 2010). When the television channels cover whatever problems Russia encounter, the coverage always shows that the president and the prime minister are coping with the problems. The statement is quite clear, Russia lies safely in the hands of Medvedev and Putin (Lipman 2010).

The Russian media score low on pluralism as both the external and internal pluralism is close to non-existing. When regarding political parallelism the Russian media scores high in the sense that this is absolutely present as discussed under this chapter. But at the same time, it is tempting to assert that political parallelism does not exist as the other parties do not have the same media advocates voicing their agenda and political program. In then President Putin's state-of-the-nation speech on 29 November 2007, just days before the election, he concluded his speech with these words: "*this is why I ask you to vote for United Russia on 2 December. I count on you and hope for your support*" (Haraszti 2007: 3). The unlimited access for the governing party to the media outlets, and the restricted possibilities the opposition has to publish their opinions inflict also the journalists and how they conduct their work. A closer look at the journalistic professionalism is in order.

## **6.4 Journalistic professionalism**

Also the development of journalistic professionalism in Russia has a heritage from the Soviet era. Under the Soviet regime, the "good" journalist wrote for the Communist Party in

order to maintain the social order. The values of a good journalist were not to unmask the authorities in their wrongdoings but to serve in the interest of the Party, which owned all mass media and ensured their ideological commitment to the Party. A journalist during the Soviet era had to be a member of the party, in addition to holding a degree preferably in journalism, or other university degree in subjects closely related to media (Aumente, Gross et al. 1999: 196). The journalistic ideal, or goal, was propaganda and partisanship, a journalist was seen as “*a public worker and publicist and his or her articles were merely essays: analytical, didactic and paternalistic. Freedom against the government (state) could not be permitted*” (de Smaele 1999: 176).

The democratization of media outlets in the 1990s called for new journalistic practices in political reporting. The increase in number of newspapers and television channel led to increased demand for more journalists, many with no formal education. According to the Russian journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina (2007: 1252), “*thousands of non-professionals rushed into journalism, which immediately lowered the fairly high standards of publications and broadcasts; tabloid journalism appeared (and flourished) [...]*”. Today, there are no formal requirements for becoming a journalist in Russia, but most journalists holds a degree in journalism or other disciplines (Pasti and Pietiläinen 2008: 118).

The actual reporting in the media outlets in a democracy should reflect how the journalists are capable of giving the citizens compete and trustworthy news (Vltmer 2000). In the first period of the post-communist Russia, from 1993 to 1998, many journalists became advocates of democratic values and supported freedom of the press as stated in the Russian Federation Law on the Mass Media of 27 December 1991. But as seen earlier, the owners did not want a free, independent and critical journalist. As a result of this, Russian journalists are strongly connected with the media owner, supporting a party or a presidential candidate, and, rather than defending their own positions, they support the media owner’s interests. In other words, the Russian journalists understand the media outlets as political players, not political observers. Objectivity is not seen as a goal, and the objective news report is not attainable (Zassoursky 2004; Oates 2007).

The normative models of journalistic professionalism are often viewed up against each other, the autonomous journalistic professionalism on the one side and the journalists rooted in the partisan advocacy traditions on the other. In Russia, one can see journalists representing both models, but, as we will see, the working conditions for the journalists do not encourage the first. As I will briefly introduce in this chapter, many journalists encounter severe difficulties in the course of their work as journalists. First a review of the professional

journalistic practices will be presented. The special characteristic of Russian journalism, *Kompromat* will also be presented.

#### **6.4.1 Holding on to Soviet ideals or moving towards “western” journalism?**

The media outlets were traditionally seen as organs for advocating the interests of their owners, The Communist Party, and the authorities. The old tradition with subjective articles and reviews is still existing in Russia, but at the same time you see an increasing professionalism in more comprehensive and factual coverage of topics and events (Voltmer 2000). In the aftermaths of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*, new journalists with hardly any formal journalistic training entered into the media (Aumente, Gross et al. 1999: 196). How do the journalists in Russia respond to three specific dimensions of professionalism -- journalistic autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation -- as explained by Hallin and Mancini? Do the Russian journalists have journalistic autonomy, i.e., is the corps of journalists free from pressure from their owners? This question goes into several aspects of the media system in Russia, as we have seen, the main owner of media outlets (i.e. those media outlets most people have access to) are the state. The state also sets the premises for the journalists and their work, both as media owners and as law makers. Both economical and political forces are working to take control over the media outlets, to gain economical advantages and political influence (Voltmer 2000).

Both the heritage of the Soviet era and the years with increasing freedom of the press in the 1990s can be seen in the present journalism. Svetlana Pasti (2005) refers to this as the two generations of Russian journalists, the old generation that also practised journalism in the Soviet era, and the new generation that entered into journalism after 1990. Katrin Voltmer (2000) defines this as new and old journalistic practices. In a survey among St. Petersburg journalists, Pasti found that both generations may publish unverified information, they trust their sources, especially the authorities, and both generations collaborate with the authorities on local and national level. But the two styles of journalism differs in how they view the audience, where those from the old generation are still combining facts and comments, using Soviet style journalism with the journalist as publicist, the new generation is going towards the western model, with the separation of facts and comments. But although the two generations are conducting journalism in different ways, they both lack objectivity which again leads to a lack of pluralism:

*Nevertheless, it is hard to argue for the existence of any real objectivity in their journalism because both generations try to convey their personal opinions on the event in question, thereby personifying and destroying factual informing. This reveals the*

*continuing dominance of the publicist role, where the journalist is the writer's own exclusive preserve, not a technical product. The journalistic authorship is an integral part of the professional culture of Russian journalism rooted in the classics of Russian literature and publitsistika, inherited from the Soviet school of journalistic genres and turning all genres into publitsistika genres without rigid distinction within them. Meanwhile, contemporary publicist reporting do not necessarily represent a plurality of opinions (Pasti 2005: 101-102).*

Journalistic professionalism in Russia is deemed differently from the way it is viewed in the western countries. Although one can agree that objectivity is seldom fully accomplished, most western journalists would regard it as a goal to which to aspire. The Russian journalists, accordingly this survey by Pasti, do not combine objectivity with journalistic professionalism; nor do they see autonomy, independence and self-regulation as part of journalistic professionalism. Rather than striving to be the fourth estate providing a check on the other powers, the Russian media are working in alliance with the other three powers. Involvement in central events such as election campaigns is a sign of professionalism, and the journalists are working to fulfil their commitments to their owners, rather than to meet the needs of their audience. Both generations perceive their role as serving the political elite, and as propagandist for the power-holders in elections, while being critical of those in power or representing the views of the opposition is not part of their role, as they understand it. Their professional decisions are guided by the interests of the owners and sponsors, and self-censorship. Self-censorship is conducted due to fear for courts, criminals and even dismissals (Pasti 2005). Voltmer suggests that the lack of both objectivity and critical, investigative reporting are due to the Soviet era heritage, where criticism were symbolic only, and objectivity not considered a journalistic virtue (Voltmer 2000).

The Russian media are perceived as supporting the state more than filling the role as a watchdog of the state (Oates 2006). Oates is referring to the Russian media as “*a tame lapdog of the state*” (Oates 2005: 115). This is not only rooted in the development of journalistic professionalism from the Soviet era. The tradition of journalism as controlling and criticizing the power elite is weak. Also, the critical journalist encounters, at least, difficult environment. Here it is impossible to go one without mentioning the well-known story of Anna Politkovskaya. She was working for the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*<sup>6</sup> when, after a series of threats, she was killed in the elevator of her apartment in October 2006. She had

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<sup>6</sup> The biweekly newspaper is owned 49% by Mikhail Gorbachev and Duma deputy Alexander Lebedev and 51% by the employees.

written several critical articles covering the latest war in Chechnya and there was no doubt that she was killed due to her work as a journalist (IFJ 2009: 2; Remington 2010: 141). The crime has been taken to court several times, the last time in 2009 where those charged for the crime were acquitted. Politkovskaya stands as an example of the many journalists reported dead due to their work. Several of these killings according to Reporters Sans Frontiers (2009) and International Federation of Journalists (2009) have not led to in-depth investigation. It is not clear whether the authorities are behind all the murders of journalists, but the impunity for these crimes is the responsibility of an authority not willing to pursue criminal proceedings (IFJ 2009). And the latest headlines from Russia in November 2010 show that both well-known Moscow journalists and journalists from the regions still encounter difficulties. In November 2010, three journalists were beaten severely, and one of them, Oleg Kashin, from the daily newspaper *Kommersant*<sup>7</sup>, was undergoing emergency surgery after the beatings. Both Kashin and one of the two other journalists, Anatoly Adamchuk, working for a local newspaper in the town Zhukovsky nearby Moscow called *Zhukovskiye Vesti*, were writing about the protests against the authorities' plans to build new freeways. Kashin had been covering the opposition's stand on the new freeway from Moscow to St. Petersburg planned to go through Khimky forest. Adamchuk had written about the protests against a freeway going through Tsagovsky Forest (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010d). And not only do they fear violence; but the editor Mikhail Beketov of *Khimkinskaya Pravda* was recently convicted of defamation for having written critically about an official in connection with the deforestation of the Khimky forest. Apparently, the forest was chopped down in order to make room to build a new freeway. Beketov also made allegations about local administrations on other issues as well. He was severely beaten in November 2008 in an attack meant to kill him. To this day his assailants are still free, while he was convicted of defamation (CPJ 2010; Lipman 2010; Vasilyeva 2010). Luckily for Beketov, his verdict was overturned by the court, due to lack of evidence (Parfitt 2010). Both the violent circumstances the critical Russian journalists encounter and the fact that they can be taken to court as criminals, show that the journalistic profession in Russia differs rather radically from the western journalistic professionalism. It is difficult to have critical journalism and represent the views of opposition politicians when the sanctions range from dismissal or

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<sup>7</sup> Kommersant is a business-oriented newspaper; which originally stems from 1909, but was closed during the regime of the Communist Party. Kommersant resumed as daily newspaper in 1990 with the banning of censorship. The exile oligarch Berezovsky was an owner in the late 1990's, but is now owned by Alisher Usmanov, one of the most richest men in Russia accordingly Forbes Magazine 2010.



heavy beating, to being taken to court accused for defamation or libel. The ethics in journalism, the ethics the journalists by which are supposedly guided, will be deeply affected by the circumstances under which the journalists work.

#### 6.4.2 Kompromat

The Russian word *kompromat* refers to the use of compromising material in politics in Russia. It can be discussed if *kompromat* is a feature of the Russian journalism or a feature in the conducts of politics, but it certainly shows how politicised journalism in Russia is. *Kompromat*, or compromising documents, is a heritage from the Soviet Union. Political leaders in the CPSU collected evidences of their subordinates' "wrongdoings". *Kompromat* was used in order to punish, but also to control those who had a shady past (Ledeneva 2006). *Kompromat* has been mistaken for freedom of speech, as supposedly compromising material can be widely published and the public has ease access to the material. But as Ledeneva (2006) asserts, freedom of gossip has been mistaken for freedom of expression. It might be reasonable to compare *kompromat* with slander, which was mentioned in the introduction of this thesis as negative campaigning against a political opponent, but *kompromat* embrace even more. One definition of *kompromat* is "*the publication (or blackmail with the threat of publication) of information, documents, evidence and revelation that are related to a genre of denunciation (danos), exposure/unmasking (razoblachenie), slander (kleveta) and allegations that can destroy or neutralize political opponents or business competitors*" (Ledeneva 2006: 58 - 59).. When presented in Russian news programs, *kompromat* may have a basis in reality, but is presented in a biased or incomplete way in order to damage the image of that individual or organization as much as possible (Oates 2006: 116). In the use of *kompromat* there are no signs of objectivity or critical use of sources. The practice of using compromising material, or *kompromat*, came to a peak during the election campaign before the Duma elections in 1999, and the presidential elections in 2000. Each media outlet had chosen "its" candidate to support, and in the television channels it became quite obvious which candidate each outlet supported, and not at least, which it did not support. When one news program smeared one official, the next channel brought a counterclaim in its news program. President Putin did get overwhelmingly quota of the news coverage prior to the election in 2000, and simultaneously the oppositional candidate, Gennady Zyuganov from the Communist Party, was the target of *kompromat* from the state-run channels (Oates 2006) .

In the elections in 2003 and 2004, the method of *kompromat* was used to a far lesser extent. Although this seems positive, it was not necessarily caused by an understanding that using *kompromat* was negative, but more a result of the lack of competition to the governmental party, United Russia, in 2003 and to President Putin in 2004.

During September 2010, the then Moscow mayor, Yuri Mikhailovich Luzhkov (b. 1936, Mayor of Moscow 1992 – 2010), may have been exposed to *kompromat*. In September state-owned TV channel NTV ran a documentary where the mayor was criticized for his conduct as mayor, especially in the construction industry. The other media outlets were soon to pick up the harsh criticism. Luzhkov was forced to resign by President Medvedev after serious allegations of fraud and corruption in construction matters. The allegations are probably true, as Luzhkov's wife has a construction business that obtained many construction assignments from the authorities in Moscow. But why was Luzhkov exposed to this now? According to the reports, such corruption had been ongoing for many years, so why was President Medvedev eager to get rid of him now, one year before the Duma elections and two years before the President election 2012? According to reports from some independent media outlets, the removal of Mayor Luzhkov came for the same reasons as the removal of oligarchs in the beginning of the 2000s -- to get rid of political opponents. Analysts said that Luzhkov, once a partner of Vladimir Putin, started his downfall when he criticized the president. And that gave President Medvedev good reason to get rid of him (Golts 2010; Lally 2010; Pravin 2010; Walker 2010).

The corruption and the phenomenon *zakazhuka* discussed in chapter 5.2.1 are for many journalists a part of journalistic professionalism. In her research on St. Petersburg journalists, Pasti (2005: 106 - 107) found that the journalists found reasons to justify corruption in their work:

*“They argue that as everything around them is corrupt and dependent, there is no other way to escape poverty. Journalism and journalists are a commodity. Nobody buys an unprofessional journalist. Old (pro-state) values have been displaced by new (pro-market) values. As the saying goes in Russia, journalism remains the second oldest profession, next to prostitution. Both generations identify professionalism as technical skill, not including ethical norms; the venality of a journalist means an appraisal of his or her professionalism on the labour market”*

The conditions under which the journalists work, the journalistic practices and methods as corruption, *kompromat* and black PR, all are working against the development of journalistic professionalism that holds objectivity and criticism of the authorities as ideals. In addition, the role of the media owner has been and still is tremendously influential in the

Russian media system. A Russian journalist needs to consider who the media owner is, something that influences his or her daily work:

*“Particularly since Putin’s first election in 2000, political interests have increasingly consolidated behind Putin, reducing the variation of coverage in Russian media outlets. [...] Much as in Soviet times, tight control is not needed at every chain in the command. Rather, there is a good understanding of the “line” throughout the news organisation. Journalists who choose to question this line by writing a story that is not in step with the needs of the patron would not long work for the organization. As a result, it is a system of disincentives to free journalism rather than censorship or direct orders that produces slanted, incomplete reports (Oates 2006: 28).*

## **6.5 The degree and nature of state intervention in the media system**

Some observers have asserted that there are media outlets in Russia that, like their western counterparts, enjoy freedom of the press. Some critical voices are both seen and listened to (Beumers, Hutchings et al. 2009; Gehlbach 2010). As we have seen, the media outlets in Russia are numerous, and Putin’s own statement, that with all these media outlets, the Kremlin “*could not control them even if we wanted to*” (Gehlbach 2010: 78). But as noted in the previous chapter, it is evident that Kremlin still tries to control the media outlets, especially those with the best scope of reaching the Russian people.

Before we look at the degree of state intervention in the media system, what purpose does the control or the censorship serve for the authorities? Although the Russia we have seen since Putin came to power, has curtailed the buds of democracy that looked so promising starting with Gorbachev and continuing under Yeltsin, it is far from the totalitarian regime seen under Stalin. But the changes and the chaos that followed under Yeltsin have led not only the authorities, but also the citizens of Russia, to look upon democracy, and media freedom not entirely in positive ways (Washington 2010). The reign of the oligarchs made the citizens sceptical of the so-called free media, as they saw how the media outlets were used to promote the owners’ interests.

The censorship we see is not total, as under Stalin. Most scrutiny is put on the three national television channels, the main sources for news for the Russians (Gehlbach 2010). As mentioned earlier, the Kremlin holds a meeting with the heads of the three national television networks once a week to evaluate the news coverage last week, and discuss the news coverage for the next week. This is a way of ensuring that the news programs run stories in the interests of the authorities. Television plays a certain role in Russia, like many

other nations. With 90% of the Russians having access to one of the six main TV channels, television reaches all parts of Russia, like no other media outlet. State TV has ideological political functions for the state, which has led to tough restrictions on news coverage. Both the state and the non-state channels news programs are restricted in how certain news should be covered and presented. Limitation of certain news events, the black-listing of so-called non-grata persons are some of the guidelines to which the TV channels, both the state and the non-state owned, must conform. President Putin was the one who implemented these restrictions for how to cover important events, and the same system has continued also under President Medvedev (Kiriya and Degtereva 2010). Also the state information agencies are equipped with catalogues that list themes not to be discussed, banned individuals and words not allowed to be mentioned. Chechnya, hostages, and Politkovskaya are examples of banned words and themes. This is how Arkady Babshenko, a journalist of the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* describes the media situation under state control:

*“The miner’s strike in Kuzbass last year [2007] had no media coverage. There are no reports of the practically daily occurrences of troop carriers being blown up and police raids taking place in Chechnya. The fact that Novaya Gazeta’s office in Samara was searched last year and its editor-in-chief has been followed did not merit a mention in the media. During the Beslan crisis in 2004, the authorities gave out false information for almost two whole days by claiming the number of hostages to be four times lower than [it] actually [was]. At the time of the Kursk submarine tragedy in 2000, the authorities withheld the truth for nearly three days. Today, we rarely hear a word about any public demonstrations, any opposition to the police’s arbitrary conduct or any criticism of the government. [...] television news is always presented in future tense [...] less gets said about what has already been built and done”* (Babshenko and Olsen 2008: 117).

In President Putin’s state of the nation speech in June 2000, he “*divided the media into state and the anti-state, attacking private owners for turning media into mass misinformation outlets and into means of struggle against the state*” (Becker 2004: 148). The rhetoric is clear, if the media are not with us, they are against us. This was a signal to the independent media outlets in the beginning of 2000s for what was to come.

### 6.5.1 The de-privatization of media outlets

President Putin started his presidency by turning back the privatisation process of the media outlets. It was important for the Kremlin to gain control of the media outlets, particular television channels.

The first businessman, or oligarch, exposed to President Putin and his men, was the aforementioned Vladimir Gusinsky, who was the owner of a media company called Media-Most. He had the nationwide TV channel NTV under its umbrella. Media-Most also bought shares in the liberal media station *Ekho Moskvyy* and established the daily newspaper *Segodnya (Today)* and the weekly magazine *Itogi (Results)*. Professionalism and quality were labels put on the journalists from Media-Most. They emphasised values such as objectivity and detachment. Financially this media company was independent; Media-Most began by establishing its own media outlets, and the state had no shares in the company. But it was Gusinsky's connections with the Moscow city government that enabled him to start the company, and, due to his support for Yeltsin in the election campaign in 1996, he was given control over Channel 4, where NTV broadcast its programs.

NTV started off as the leading channel in the criticism against the Russian military actions in Chechnya. In the first war in Chechnya (1994 – 1996), NTV coverage of the war had a great influence on public opinion, and the opposition against the war and Yeltsin grew. In order to win the election campaign in 1996, a cease-fire was announced. But, as already mentioned, NTV turned around and started to support Yeltsin. The independent journalist of Media-Most was no longer as independent as some of its journalists were receiving money to promote Yeltsin in the news, and Igor Malashenko, as previously mentioned, became a member of Yeltsin's re-election team still holding on to his post as the director general of NTV. The initially independent media outlet of Media-Most became a channel for the viewpoints of their owner, just as the other media companies of the time. This became even more obvious when Gusinsky lost his bid for Svyazinvest, a telecommunications company. Media-most started a defamation campaign against the government in general, and Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais (b. 1955) in particular, which led to his removal from office. The criticism of Yeltsin increased further when the second war in Chechnya started 1999 (Lipman and McFaul 2001).

In 2000, Media-Most and Gusinsky chose not to support Putin in his presidential election campaign, but threw their support behind opposition candidates: The former Prime Minister Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov (b. 1929) for the party Fatherland and Luzhkov for the party Yabloko. Gusinsky was soon punished for this independence. Several strategies were used to harm Gusinsky. For example, the media company was exposed to selective application of

tax laws, and its offices were invaded by heavily armed tax police. Gusinsky himself received threats, and was accused of various crimes. Eventually he was arrested and later put under house arrest. In June 2002, he submitted to a secret deal, selling his share of Media Most to the state-owned Gazprom, in return for his freedom – and \$ 50 million (Latynina 2003). After a long struggle, Gazprom, with the help of the secret service, replaced the management of NTV, which resulted in several of its journalists leaving to go to other channels. Gusinsky fled the country (Lipman and McFaul 2001; Belin 2002; Becker 2004; Zassoursky 2004). According to Edward Lucas, International Editor of *The Economist*, Gusinsky is living in Israel today, and runs a satellite TV channel called RTVi (Lucas 2008: 27).

### **6.5.2 Impediments on the media in the aftermaths of war on terror**

During the regime of Putin and Medvedev, independent media outlets have been taken over by owners friendly to the state and elections are being manipulated when oppositional candidates are prevented from obtaining access to the media (Sakwa 2008: 176; Remington 2010: 18, 141 - 143).

The war on terror gave the authorities additional possibilities to control the information being broadcast to the public and more directly in how the media outlets should present the news to the Russians.

In the aftermath of the Chechen wars, Russia has experienced several terrorist attacks, such as the hostage taking in the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow 2002 and the Beslan Tragedy in 2004. In both cases, the authorities took direct action to control media coverage.

During the hostage crisis in the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in October 2002, approximately 40 armed Chechen took 850 hostages, demanding that Russian forces should withdraw from Chechnya and end the Chechen war. The hostage-takers were said to be in league with the Islamic separatist movement in Chechnya. The crisis came to an end when Russian Special Forces pumped chemicals into the ventilation system and raided the theatre. During the hostage crisis, the radio station *Echo Moskvy* published an interview with one of the terrorists on its website. The interview was removed from the website after the authorities threatened to close the website. At the same time, the television channel *Moskovia TV* was prevented from broadcasting for 15 hours after showing the bodies of the hostages as 129 of them were killed during the raid (Simons and Strovsky 2006).

After the Beslan tragedy, the newspaper *Izvestiya* ran an edition devoted to the hostage situation, questioning official casualty figures. The consequences were severe as the editor, Raf Shakirov, was forced to resign after the owner of the newspaper received a

phone call from the Kremlin. Shakirov was soon replaced by a loyal editor (Simons and Strovsky 2006).

In April 2010, another act of terror was carried out in Moscow. 39 people were reported killed and 70 wounded after, according to the FSB, two suicide bombs exploded at the Lubyanka Metro station and the Park Kultury. Chechen terrorists have claimed the responsibility for the actions. President Medvedev has declared that the anti-terror laws will be extended. In A 2010, shortly after the suicide attack, Medvedev proposed a bill said to increase the FSB's power in dealing with Russian citizens submitting it to the Duma. Critics were afraid that the bill would also be used to prevent the media from presenting news not in favour of the state. Accompanying the bill was a note asserting that the media were in part to blame for the rise of extremist activities (Bratersky 2010). The article quotes from the Duma web site: *"Some media outlets, both print and electronic, openly help shape negative processes in the spiritual sphere; propagate individualism, violence and mistrust of the state's capacity to protect its citizens, effectively drawing young people into extremist activities"* (Bratersky 2010; Duma 2010). The organization International Freedom of Expression exchange (IFEX) said that *"[f]acing domestic and international protest, Russian lawmakers scrapped provisions in the original bill that would have explicitly allowed FSB agents to summon journalists for questioning over news coverage and to demand that editors censor articles considered to assist extremists"* (IFEX 2010).

In 2007, Russian authorities put amendments on the Law on Fighting Extremist Activity, which stated that extremism also includes media criticism of officials. Violation of this would cause both three years of imprisonment for the journalist and if convicted, their publication will be closed down. Journalists may also be accused of criminal libel charges for either printing or broadcasting statements unfavorable to public officials (Oates 2010: 125). A law stating that trials in terrorism, extremism and treason-related cases will not be presented before a jury was passed in the Duma in December 2009. Extremist charges are used against government critics, both bloggers and journalists (FreedomHouse 2009b). The war on terrorism is used as an argument for more state-control of the media, appealing to the journalist's "patriotic duty". Although Russia is not the only country where the authorities have appealed to the media to be prudent when reporting about terrorist acts, Putin took the war on terrorism as a gift to limit what is reported (Simons and Strovsky 2006).

### **6.5.3 The situation for the regional media outlets**

The regional media outlets face censorship in a different extent, viz., at the local level, where they are dependent on the local authorities and their view of the mass media and also

the region's significance for the central authorities. Some regions experience high levels of independence, while others are subject to a great degree of control from the local authorities (Marsh and Froese 2004; Pörzgen and Sager 2009). As manifestly shown in the North Caucasus region, the mass media suffer from censorship, struggling for independent reporting (Dzyadko, Juilliard et al. 2009). In 2008, Magomed Yevloyev, an opponent of the government and owner of the independent website *Ingushetiya.ru* was killed by a policeman. The policeman was, according to *Reporters without Borders*, sentenced to two years of "supervised residence", which enabled him to continue as a policeman (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010c). This unpunished murder by a policeman stands as an example of the harsh conditions also in the regions. The same is seen in the Krasnodar region, the home region for Sochi, host of the next Olympic Winter Games in 2014. As *Reporters Without Borders (2009)* report, there are barely any independent media outlets left. A media register is created, and all of the media listed in this register will gain subsidies as tax concessions and financial advantages. And "the price to pay is political loyalty" (Pörzgen and Sager 2009:10).

The media outlets owned by the regional, district or city authorities, are tools of their respective owners, presenting news according to the preferences of those authorities. This accounts for the vast majority of local and regional media outlets. Independent media are present in most of the regions in Russia, but they struggle to survive economic, and against censorship. Regional television channels are relatively popular in Russia, and they address different topics than the national, as the spread of HIV and AIDS or children's problems. But actions done by the government in 2005 and 2006, giving regional broadcasting frequencies to the previous mentioned state-owned VGTRK, created regional broadcasters that may be controlled by the authorities (Oates 2010: 120 - 121). When the regional independent media outlets are critical, they risk not being invited to news conferences and they can face economic difficulties, in addition to violence against both journalists and editors. Such media are effectively shut out of the information they need (Pörzgen and Sager 2009). And the fact that government subsidies for the regional media are not being granted by the regional authorities, but directly from the federal budget, has led to less criticism of the central authorities on behalf of the regional media outlets (Sakwa 2008: 154). The Russian journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina (2007: 1258) also claims that some journalists in the regional newspapers are controlled through their income, which is divided into "a official salary and an unofficial 'editor's monthly subsidy' which the journalists receive as a bonus", presumably when writing in accordance with the owners' wishes. Many regional newspapers do have more freedom to write independent and critical than their national counterparts, and not to mention, the television channels. But this freedom is challenged before and during elections, as Maria Eismont described in *Index of Censorship*: "[An] independent regional publisher,



*Sergei Bachinin in Kirov [..., for] the newspaper Vyatsky Nablyudatel, one of the few regional print outlets that has a relative strong investigative stand, was trying to provide its reader with independent in-depth coverage of the Duma elections [in 2007], and, according to Bachinin, enjoyed increasing popularity. But two days before Election Day, the entire print run was confiscated and barred from distribution” (Eismont 2008: 122 - 123). And Aleksei Venediktov, chief editor of Echo Moskvyy said to Le Monde in 2007; “As for the regional media and local newspapers, they belong to governors or administration, which make them instrument of propaganda” (Vitkine 2007). Independent journalists and editors in the regions in Russia also encounter the same dangerous environment as their colleagues at national media outlets, and as editor Bachinin describes it:*

*“The journalists and editor are regularly subject to threats of “unpleasantness” by officials and anonymous individuals. Access to information on the actions of the authorities and major corporations is made extremely difficult. The courts, subservient to the authorities, invariably side with officialdom in lawsuits brought against the newspaper. The editors constantly face the threat of tax or “fire prevention” inspections, conducted so as to give them as hard a time as possible. Unsanctioned and illegal phone tapping by the secret services of all the journalists’ conversations and hacking into our computers are an everyday reality and constantly have to be borne in mind ” (Bachinin 2008: 133).*

The editor Arkady Landers of the independent newspaper *Mestnaya* in Sochi was in April 2010 injured after being assaulted by intruders in his apartment. The editor and his colleagues at *Mestnaya* assume the attack was a reaction to a critical coverage of the allegedly corrupt practices of some local politicians in the newspaper (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010b). Such incidents contribute to self-censorship.

The regional media outlets and their freedom of expression are highly dependent on the political leaders. In some regions as Sochi and Chechnya, the media are under great influence by the regional authorities. In other regions, such as in Perm, the media outlets are enjoying more independence as the politicians have no financial interest in the media. But most independent media in the regions have been exposed to threats as soon as they report critical of governmental officials (Pörzgen and Sager 2009).

What we will see in the next chapter, the control from the Kremlin is not only limited to the regional and national TV channels, radio stations or the printed press. The scope of the authorities also reaches the online media.

#### 6.5.4 How the Russian authorities control the digital media

As mentioned earlier, 41.8 % of Russians have access to the internet. The increase in access has led to an increase in the authorities' interests in the online activities (FreedomHouse 2009a; Krasnoboka 2010). The aforementioned theatre hostage crisis in October 2002 has been described as a turning point for the authorities, as they received numerous messages criticising the official version of the events. One of the web pages criticising the authorities was running translations of news coverage from foreign media. This development aroused the interest of online media in the Kremlin. The solution for increased control of the Internet, was through ownership control, and the authorities repeated their actions from the beginning of the 2000s, buying web sites from the oligarchs (Soldatov 2010).

According to the Freedom House report on the Digital Media Situation (2009a), the Kremlin followed a more careful line in the control of the internet, and has not followed the advice of those who have wanted more complete control. But it has been suggested that Russia should build a nationwide filtering apparatus such as China has done; awaiting the build up of such a Firewall, the authorities continue to use other methods to control the internet sphere. As Freedom House describes such methods:

*“If an opposition or grassroots organization starts its own internet platform, Kremlin-related groups will launch several that are similar in form, if not in content. These sites create confusion among users by adopting similar imagery, slogans, and names. Meanwhile, bloggers who report on regional protests or some other sensitive incident are swamped by other blogs that give an opposite account, sometimes using sophisticated language but also resorting to obscenity to discourage debate.”*(FreedomHouse 2009a)

As mentioned, in 2007, President Putin signed several amendments that increased the definition of extremism, included media criticism of state officials as extremist activity. Journalists, media outlets and printers found guilty of producing and distributing “extremist” material, risk penalties, without defining what extremist material is. The first to notice this new amendments were bloggers, such as Dmitry Kirilin, who in 2009 was given one-year suspended jail sentence after blogging about how the current system of government caused degradation, demoralisation and the dying out of the Russian people (Soldatov 2010).

Several critical bloggers have been arrested. Owners of independent web pages risk receiving calls from the authorities, such as security agencies or regional administration officers, telling the owners to remove unwanted material, and this will again lead to self-

censorship (FreedomHouse 2009a). The authorities are also using the web to influence their citizens, several propaganda sites have been created and one of the effects of these propaganda sites is that they dominate the search results in Russia. According to *Reporters Without Borders*, the internet in Russia like other media may become a tool for political control (Morillion and Juilliard 2010). To an increasing degree, non-state websites are being blocked, whether for hours at a time or even for days. Prior to the presidential elections in 2008, the website for the newspaper Kompromat, [www.kompromat.ru](http://www.kompromat.ru), was blocked, but internet users regained access to the site after the elections. The former chess champion and now in opposition to the authorities, Gary Kasparov, has set up two web sites, [www.kasparov.ru](http://www.kasparov.ru) and [www.rusolidarnost.ru](http://www.rusolidarnost.ru), but both have been blocked and unblocked again. Cyber-attacks against oppositional web pages are not unusual; the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta's* website was inaccessible for seven days in January 2009 after a highly organized cyber-attack.

The government has also established connections with government supporters, in order to answer online criticism. One such group is called “the Brigade” and some of its members are paid by the government. Their task is to infiltrate discussion forums and they do not hesitate to use insults and threats in their campaign for the government. The economist Evgeni Gonthmakher asserted in *The Moscow Times* in June 2009 that he was heavily attacked by such group of paid bloggers after comparing Vladislav Surkov, the First Deputy Chief of the Presidential Staff, with Leonid Brezhnev’s chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov (1902 – 1982, Second Secretary of CPSU 1966 – 1982):

*“I became the target of a massive attack on the Internet. First, a group of bloggers and the web sites of United Russia's Young Guard attacked me, mocking my non-Russian surname, but none actually responded to the arguments I posited in my article. A few Kremlin-friendly newspapers even published long articles written by prominent political analysts, the content of which boiled down to the following: 'Gonthmakher, keep your dirty paws off Surkov.’”* (Withmore 2009)

Although the authorities want to control some of the information available on the internet, “sometimes the internet can fill the void left by traditional media outlets” (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010f:51). Video reports that are exposed to censorship at the nationwide television channels are posted at RuTube (the Russian answer to YouTube) and bloggers are using their blogs to report corruption or the imprisonment of other bloggers (ReportersWithoutBorders 2010f). But so far, the majority of the Russian citizens have no access to the internet, which may be one reason why the authorities are paying less attention to this new medium. Another theory explaining the lesser focus from the Kremlin on the

internet compared to the television channels is the supposed desire on the part of Kremlin to let the intelligentsia maintain the internet as their arena for discussions – and the same time giving the Kremlin a golden opportunity to monitor their activities.

## 6.6 A duplex media system

The Russian media system may not fit into the models of Hallin and Mancini, as they were applying their analysis to media systems in the western countries. Sarah Oates defines the media system as a neo-Soviet media model, and others have implied that the media are currently experiencing both the same degree of control and equivalent ownership structures seen under Brezhnev. The media system has certainly changed since Putin became President in 2000. What we see in Russia today is a duplex media system. The independent media outlets, newspapers, radio and online media are allowed critical and investigative journalism as long as they have few listeners/readers and do not go too far in their criticism. They maintain their freedom of expression to fulfil the needs of the intelligentsia and prevent criticism from the western countries. These independent media outlets are operating side by side with media outlets far more controlled where the television channels are playing a vital role in confirming and maintaining the existing power structures. It is a non-information media system withholding events and news.

In many respect, the control of the media outlets on the part of the government, can be compared to the model of control in the late Soviet era. But there are some differences. In the communist Soviet Union prior to the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev, no other view other than that of the CPSU was allowed. Texts were edited and changed until they were unrecognizable, and attempting to publish independent views could not only cause imprisonment but also result in psychiatric confinement. What the Kremlin does today, is to withhold information about important events from the main news sources. The aforementioned killing of Anna Politkovskaya was hardly covered by the television channels in Russia, but a tremendous interest from abroad media outlets was present. The unrests in the regions of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan are rarely mentioned in the Russian broadcast media. Arkady Babshenko, author of the book *One Soldier's war in Chechnya* and a journalist in *Novaya Gazeta* describes the situation:

*“Watching television, you get the impression that Russia is an advanced state with a stable and flourishing economy, a functioning legal system and a democratic leadership that is constantly concerned with the wellbeing of its people. But you only need to travel*

*100 kilometres outside the capital to find a complete different country – destitute and with a medieval governing system. The people here are not free; they are completely at the mercy of the local authorities” (Babshenko and Olsen 2008: 117).*

In order to find structures and mechanisms enabling censorship and control, I have analysed the media system in Russia. The authorities maintain their control and prevent the citizens from being fully informed about political, economical and social conditions in the society. How the government maintains this control despite the globalization, it is necessary to view the media and the government in Russia in accordance with globalization.

## **7 Globalization and the Russian media**

### **7.1 Introduction**

When analysing media systems today, globalization and its effect on the media outlets and the government must be taken into consideration. Hallin and Mancini (2004) discuss the convergence of globalization and modernisation in media systems, and how globalization may have affected media systems. Globalization is not mentioned in their theoretical framework for analysing media systems. My analysis of the Russian media will add globalization as a variable/dimension. The media system needs to be considered in relation to globalization and how it affects the media system. Russia is no longer a closed country where the citizens get no other input of news and analysis than those of their government or the Russian media outlets. Although the majority of the citizens in Russia have no access to internet, a steadily increasing numbers do access the internet, and to web sites all over the world. They get to see how other parts of the world live and view events of international and national character. It is important to note that, perhaps due to the tremendous changes in the Russian society since 1985, the Russians want to define the genuine Russia, to promote and preserve Russian values and be able to discuss political matters in an open way. Let us take a look at how globalization has also reach the Kremlin.

### **7.2 What is Globalization and how does it affect the media**

Simultaneously with the Russians' access to the "outside world", Russians are able to export their ideas, views and analyses. Globalization theory emphasizes that globalization does not equal westernization. In Anthony Gidden's words; "*Globalization is becoming increasingly decentred – not under the control of any groups of nations, still less of the large corporations. Its effects are felt as much in the western countries as elsewhere*" (In Curran and Park 2000: 7). The Americanization of the European media systems after the Second World War in order to prevent the revival of fascism and anti-democratic forces, has been replaced by globalization, even though, as we will see, the Russian authorities are focusing on the influence from USA and other Western countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Surkov 2009). Many scholars have contributed to the definitions and discussions of globalization, and the task here is not to account for these discussions. I will try to give a definition of

globalization in accordance with the media's role, in order to serve the analysis of media systems.

Globalization, according to the World Bank, can be summarized as "*the global circulation of goods, service, and capital but also of information, ideas and people*" (Perrons 2004: 1). This means, as Giddens said, that one of many results of globalization is the exchange of ideas, from the global world to the nation, and from the nation to the global world. Giddens has even argued that the state is over, but Curran and Park (2000) are warning against such argument, and assert that the development in countries outside the western hemisphere should be more taken into consideration when discussing media globalization. Sheila Croucher (2004: 112) asserts that nations have not disappeared; nation is a cultural and political category. The concept nation can be defined as "*a political concept serving as a symbol of societal identity and solidarity as well as a legitimation of practical policies*" (Francis 1976: 387). And not only has this national level interacted with the global, but the global has also interacted with the local level, what in globalization theory is referred to as glocalization. "*A complex combination of the global and the national [...] a simultaneous, mutually implicative, complementary and interpenetrative glocalization*" (Rantanen 2005: 100). Rantanen interprets glocalization to refer to a situation, for example, when global companies nationalize their products, and the national companies globalize their products (Rantanen 2005). There are tendencies in Russia today showing that the authorities understand how to take advantages of globalization. Global companies, such as *Newsweek*, try to influence the nation, but Russia, with its national media companies (or even state founded media outlets) can influence on a global scale. Also the state interferes in globalization, when the Russian government takes steps to influence the world, at least those parts of the world of interest for the government. These measures are taken to an increasingly degree through the media outlets.

In the matter of ownership structures, globalization is seen in the foreign ownership of magazines and also commercial television channels, such as the Swedish media concern *MTG* owning minor TV channels in Russia, and also leading Russian businessmen owning foreign media institutions. The most famous of the latter is Alexander Lebedev, the owner of the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* in Russia, as well as the British newspapers *The Independent* and the *London Evening Standard*. At a speech at the *Society of Editors Lecture* in Glasgow in November 2010 he discussed corruption as a global phenomenon. He highlighted the need for supporting investigative journalism in order to uncover global corruption, and in addition he talked about how British newspapers had influenced his thinking (Burrell 2010). Although Russia is one of the nations facing tremendous corruption, and rather than criticising the Kremlin for taking too few steps to prevent the increase of

corruption, Lebedev chose to take the global approach to the omnipresent problems of corruption.

The magazine *Russian Newsweek* can be seen as a result of the global world taking part in the Russian society. What happened to *Russian Newsweek* may serve as an example of how the government in Russia continue to control media coverage in a global environment. The owner was the German publishing company Alex Springer, who established the magazine in 2004. The magazine ran critical news stories that were avoided by other media, and the first editor, Paul Klebnikov, was shot in a contract killing a few months after the first issue came out. The latest editor Mikhail Fishman was exposed to an internet smear campaign or *kompromat*, showing images of him in compromising situations. According to the magazine owner, the reason for shutting down the magazine October 2010 was purely financial (RussianNewsweek 2010). But in October 2010, however, American *Newsweek* published an online news article telling another story, how the *Russian Newsweek's* critical reports of the Kremlin strategist Vladislav Surkov and other critical stories of the court systems were perceived by the Kremlin, preventing the magazine from being sold to interested buyers (Matthews and Nemtsova 2010; White and Kolyandr 2010).

Jakubowicz and Sükösd (2008) go far in suggesting that the influence of the international community, or western organizations, has led the media system in Russia in a different direction. After the fall of communism, the international community and organizations were faced with criticism in Russia, asserting that the international community presented a normative, idealized, non-existing media image of the free and democratic media of the western that should be the guidelines for the new media in Russia. The criticism said that even in the Western countries such free and objective media did not exist.

*“In Russia, post-communist political and business “clans” used westernization and Europeanization discourses against communist and right-wing populist during the 1990s, to be replaced by a strong development state and nationalism discourse under President Putin whose administration refused a mimetic orientation and implemented authoritarian media policies” (Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008: 19) .*

This theory suggests that the globalization might have made post-communist states, including Russia, more nationalistic as well as keeping the media system under governmental control. Ideological and normative journalism was rejected. It is far too easy to assert that the international community is the reason for why the media again came under control of the authorities in Russia. By the late 1990s one saw a “russification” of the citizens. At the same time the Putin administration was quite explicit in its orientation toward building Russian nationalism and pride by referring to the Great Russia under the tsar and the



accomplishments the Soviet Union made (Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008; Surkov 2009; Remington 2010). It is also likely that those in power, many of whom had been in power also under the Soviet Union or had started their career in the CPSU, wanted to “cling to any elements of the old command system they could still maintain” (Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008: 19).

As already noted in the introductory section in this chapter, globalization includes influence both on local and national levels. The government-initiated and government-financed TV channel *Russia Today* shows that the government in *Russia Today* is using global opportunities to influence foreign publics through media outlets. This is explained by Rantinen (2005: 100) that national companies globalize their products, to make their domestic products more global in order to attract both domestic and global markets. The TV channel was launched 10 December 2005, and according to their own website *Russia Today*, or *RT* as it prefers to be called, “is the first Russian 24/7 English-language news channel which brings the Russian view on global news” (Sakwa 2008; RussiaToday 2010a). As mentioned in chapter 5.2, the TV channel was initiated to contribute to improving Russia’s image abroad. It is quite obvious that the intentions are to provide the world and USA in particular, the Kremlin’s point of view – the Kremlin’s side of the story. *RT*’s objective is to attract domestic and global markets. Here is from a report in *Colombia Journalism Review* by Julia Ioffe (2010: 4) :

*[...] message control, though rare and targeted to highly sensitive issues, is not exclusive to coverage of the war. The trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the oil tycoon and Putin rival, is another example. When a RT reporter took a more balanced approach to covering the trial than RT’s previous dispatches, [the news director] Gachechiladze told the reporter that he was “not playing for the team.” “He asked me, ‘Why are you still working for this channel?’” the reporter told me. (RT officials deny that this exchange took place.) Another correspondent who pitched a story about the aids epidemic in Russia - a taboo topic here - was told it was not a “nice” story and was sent to cover a flower show instead. Usually, though, the Kremlin line is enforced the way it is everywhere else in Russian television: by the reporters and editors themselves. “There is no censorship per se,” says another RT reporter. “But there are a lot of young people at the channel, a lot of self-starters who are eager to please the management. You can easily guess what the Kremlin wants the world to know, so you change your coverage.”*

It can be argued that many TV channels today have a biased focus, using sources supporting the point of view of the authorities as well as of the management of the television outlet. *Russia Today* is under the same regulations as the other state-owned TV channels in

Russia, ensuring positive coverage of the president in power. The control by the Russian government to which the media is exposed reaches, thus, beyond the geographical borders of the nation (Ioffe 2010; Kiriya and Degtereva 2010; TheIndependent 2010).

In a global perspective, internet access gives a variety of views and opinions from an entire world. Some countries hardly have any access, while in countries such as France, Germany, and the USA, approximately 70 percent of inhabitants access the internet. As seen in chapter 5.5, the number of those with access to internet differs, but still the majority of those who access the internet in Russia are living in the big cities. According to the European Journalism Centre, about 54 percent of Russians have never used the internet, and in some regions as few as 12 percent have access (Krasnoboka 2010). Despite the increased opportunities globalization causes with internet and increased access to foreign channels, the majority of Russians are watching the state-owned channels, with Russian produced news programs. Together with the fact that the authorities control and shape the media system, the influence from abroad is minor. Russians do not view the influence from abroad, or especially from the West, in only positive terms. The Russians rather feel the West in particular are patronising Russia and after being tried to force westernized democracy onto them, Russians want to continue to develop their country to their own Russian democracy. In the newspaper *Rossiiskii Vestnik* in April 2005, journalist Alexei Strogin, was accusing the USA of wanting to dismember Russia. Strogin claimed that USA's geopolitical aspirations in their "march of democratisation" were to dismantle Russia. Although his article seems extreme, Strogin was probably highlighting some beliefs or tendencies in the society, that the global influence can pose a threat to the development of the Russian way (Strogin 2005). The sovereign democracy that the then President Putin, together with the Kremlin strategist Vladislav Surkov, developed was perhaps a response to this. As president, Putin associated himself with the term democracy, but was quite clear that from his point of view Russia needed to find its own form of democracy instead of mining the Western democracy. Surkov came up with the concept "Sovereign democracy". In arguing for his concept Surkov (2009: 8) writes:

*"Here, in Russia, democracy faces major challenges. It must test upon itself and turn to its advantage the might of globalization; overcome shadow institutions that block its progress – corruption, criminality, the market in counterfeits and disinformation; withstand the reactionary attacks of isolationism and oligarchy. It must create a new society, a new economy, a new army, a new faith. It must demonstrate that freedom and justice can and ought to be thought and discussed in Russia."*

In order to build democracy in Russia, the state must make sovereignty at home; take the powers from oligarchs and other “shadow institutions”. Abroad, Russia must claim its positions in the philosophical, sociological discourses of the west, strengthening the Russian culture. Surkov also warned against how the global influence might lead to further dissolution of Russia and was defending its participation in globalization. In addition to a renewal of Russia in global society, Surkov was quite clear in his support of the past.

*“While critically analysing the past, while acknowledging its errors and failures, we have [the] right to and shall take pride in all the best of what we have inherited from the Empire and the Soviet Union[...].” (Surkov 2009: 19)*

Globalization has made the government wanting to protect the nation, Russia, against outside influence more than becoming influenced by the global. At the same time, the government has taken advantage of the possibilities that lies in the nature of media globalization, by using media outlets as channels for expressing their views to other parts of the world.

## 8 Conclusion

Why are the Russian media as they are? The answer is, as seen, complex. The legacy from the Soviet era, features of Russian journalism, the authorities, ownership structures, legislation and journalistic professionalism - -are parts of the Russian media system of today. This leads us to the aforementioned dual media system of Russia – the independent media outlets read by the few, enjoying some freedom of speech on the one side, and the television channels and newspapers watched and read by a vast majority, following the authorities' line of censorship on the other. I have argued that the media system in Russia today cannot be compared to the Soviet media system seen after Stalin, although similarities can be found. Journalists are experiencing a society that hardly protects them from violence and arbitrary exercising of laws. The media outlets are trying to maneuver themselves in unsafe conditions, pleasing both owners and advertisers, together with federal and regional authorities and legislation.

The average Russian citizen has few abilities to run checks on the authorities, whether they are federal or regional. The ability to hold those elected accountable for their actions after they are elected is close to non-existent. *Democradura* was introduced in chapter 4, where elections are held, but under such conditions that the government is ensured re-elections. Surkov suggested that Russia should build democracy its own way, and in order to build its sovereign democracy, the party United Russia should rule the country for 15 – 20 years (Remington 2010: 129). Russia today has many similarities with the *democradura*; elections are held, but under such conditions that United Russia are ensured a majority of the seats in the Duma. With control of the election news coverage those in power, the government, is ensured continued power. Instead of a media system ensuring the citizens means to control and hold the elected accountable, the Russian media system is designed to ensure the government re-election. The television channels are keeping up appearances with building an image of a well-functioning state with a government working in the interests of the people. The independent media outlets may present investigative and critical journalism as a service for the intelligentsia and the western countries, as long as they are kept small and with marginal influence not in hindrance for the United Russia and the government to stay in power. The media system in Russia today is working more to the advantage of the authoritarian government, rather than encouraging democratic tendencies and accountability.

### 8.1.1 Future research

Much research has been done in the field of media and their relations to the political system in Russia, many of which made the writing of this thesis possible. But in some areas there could be research done to improve the understanding of the complex media system in this vast country.

- Both the regional media outlets and the religious media outlets have been received little attention. In the regional area, a thorough examination of the regional television channels and how their content differs from the federal channels would be of interest. In addition, the religious media outlets are rarely mentioned in the literature, and need a further study.
- Also, when searching for those working in the *samizdat* networks of the 1970s and 1980s and what happened to them later, I found that little research has been done. What became of those journalists in the late 1990s and 2000s? What impact, if any, did they have on journalistic practices and the development of independent media?
- The television channels as the major channel for information in Russia are thoroughly examined, among others by Sarah Oates to whose work I have referred in this thesis. Less focus is put on the content in the independent media – are the journalists focusing on accountability and a focus on the fourth estate or are they merely working in opposition to the actual regime? Are they contributing to the development of journalistic professional practises as objectivity and informing the opinion, ensuring pluralism?

These are questions I encountered during the work which should be further investigated. Worth mentioning is another problem I met, as I was trying to gather circulation figures for the most popular newspapers. It is difficult to say if this was due to my not understanding Russian or a poor developed system for gathering circulations figures. What I did find in my search for these figures, was that Russia's Guild of Press Publishers was to set up a new system to monitor newspaper circulation in 2010, but so far it seems this service is not yet operating (Zykova 2009).

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## Appendix

### WikiLeaks influences Russian politics

*WikiLeaks* are through their leaks, beginning to influence many parts of the world, and are a global phenomenon. *WikiLeaks* are exposed to attempts to be prevented from the continuance of leaking documents, and the USA is investigating the possibilities for starting a prosecution against Julian Assange, the leader of *WikiLeaks*. Some of the documents revealed the American embassy's views about both Putin and Medvedev, naming them Batman and Robin, which is quite telling about how the U.S embassy, and thus perhaps also the U.S. State Department, sees the dual leadership in Russia. In addition, Russia was portrayed as a corrupt kleptocracy where politicians and criminals were inseparably linked. The initial comments from Russia were quite harsh, with Putin soon denouncing the statements as slander. The response from Russia changed gradually in a more positive direction and Medvedev even suggested that Assange should receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The suggestion was seen as an understanding on the part of the Russian government that the leaks are more harmful for the USA's interests than for Russia's. Far more serious than the portrayal of Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev are the allegations that NATO secretly prepared a plan in case Russia invaded the Baltic States, which made Russia come forward and require answers from NATO. Vladimir Frolov, the former director of *the National Laboratory for Foreign Policy*, a Moscow-based think tank, now President of *LEFF GROUP*, a government-relations and PR company, suggested in *The Moscow Times* on 13 December 2010 that *WikiLeaks* directly meddled in Russian politics. The evaluation from the US embassy may, according to Frolov, lead to a more open competition between Putin and Medvedev, as both are running for President in the elections in 2012 (Black, Chrisafis et al. 2010; Frolov 2010; Harding 2010).

Globalization has effects on both the media and the politicians in Russia – and the government also uses the possibilities that globalization affords to influence the world. Intellectuals, with access to the internet and citizens in the big cities as Moscow and St. Petersburg have access to other views and opinions than the Kremlin's. But the great majority of Russia's population only access the state-owned television channels, where the news coverage is reflecting the aspirations of the politicians, rather than the daily activities and realities.

*Because of extreme social divisions, there is no such thing today as a united Russia. The country is made up of about ten different social spheres consisting of, among others, the destitute, and the poor, people who just get by, the war veterans, the well to-do, the rich and the authorities. These parallel universes will never meet. Moscow for example does not*

*represent Russia. It is a unique state surrounded by the rest of the country, and the same is true for all of the larger cities. It should also be noted that civilised society invariably begins in the cities. Unfortunately, it is still in embryo. Television is never referred to as 'zombie-box' in the cities, yet the state's politics of information is based on fooling society and reducing it to an infantile state, not on fostering a society that is prosperous and well-informed. Outside the larger cities, people seem to become increasingly 'zombified' (Babshenko and Olsen 2008: 120).*

