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[A Lie is The Truth](#)



In the first decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, it appeared that repressive policies of the communist past, such as censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech, would occupy a principal place in Russian textbooks as an example of blatant human rights violations. However, fourteen years later, these undemocratic policies of the Soviet past are systematically returning to occupy a place within the new Russian reality, albeit in a different, modernized form.

The process of tightening the screws in Russian society was connected to the creation and development of all the preconditions needed to legitimize and institutionalize propaganda. Although censorship in the mass media is prohibited under Article 3 of the Russian Federation's Law on Mass Media, asserting that it does not exist in today's Russia is as pointless as denying the presence of Russian troops in east Ukraine or the violation of civil liberties in Russia.

The conversion of Russian media into the Kremlin's mouthpiece is reflected in restrictions on press freedom and the country's poor international rankings in this regard. In its [2015 World Press Freedom Index](#), the international non-governmental organization (NGO), Reporters without Borders, ranked Russia 152 out of 180 countries. The country dropped four places in just one year. Note that even in Turkey and Venezuela, media outlets fare better, although the space for freedom of speech is steadily shrinking in all three countries.

The authors of the report point out that the current restrictive climate for the Russian media can be directly attributed to Putin's return to the presidency in May 2012. Under his leadership, in direct response to civil society activity in Russia, the government introduced a number of harsh measures, including the adoption of a series of draconian laws that significantly restrict freedom of information. However, the legal framework and basis for filtering information to the public was established long before 2012. Freedom of speech was muffled little by little, step by step, through the introduction of legal mechanisms which allowed for the liquidation of media interfering in the formation of a unified, but artificial, picture of reality.

At the start of his first term, Putin issued a decree on the "Concept of Information Security," which divided media into 'good' and 'bad'. But even then it was already understood that any criticism of the authorities in the media fell under the category of 'bad.' In this decree, a separate clause was dedicated to what the Kremlin deems one of the most dangerous internal threats to Russia's information security in relation to its foreign policy - the "information propaganda activity of political forces, NGOs, the media and individuals who misrepresent the country's foreign policy strategy and tactics." If the media or a public figure interpret the Kremlin's foreign policy differently than Moscow, it is considered a threat to Russia's national interests.

The process of muffling independent television journalism in Russia began on the night of April 13, 2001, when the state took control of and nationalized, previously-independent NTV. From the start, Putin clearly focused on gaining control over television, knowing perfectly well that 90 percent of Russians form their opinion of the world solely on the basis of what they see on television. By removing 'unnecessary' facts from television programs, they are removed from the reality of millions of viewers. Posing far less of a danger to the "Lord of the Kremlin" than television, print and internet media enjoyed a longer period of relative freedom. Large TV networks had been subject to the dictates of the Kremlin for years before print and internet publications were.

There is one available alternative to Kremlin controlled television - independently owned *Dozhd*, or TV Rain. However, this channel is not available through terrestrial (earth based transmitter) frequencies [in North America, this is known as broadcast television] and its programming targets a very narrow audience - primarily those who already share the presented point of view, and are willing to pay for content. Most Russians would never consider purchasing a subscription and paying to watch specific channels when they can watch state-run channels for free. To reach as wide an audience as possible, a TV channel should have no paid content and be broadcast on one of the first ten channels easily found on each Russian's remote control. Clearly, this is not always feasible. That said, even without access to a wide Russian audience, *Dozhd* and other opposition media have become regular targets of government harassment.

With their ability to capture the attention of the wider public, still functioning regional television stations, unaffiliated with the government or oligarchs and friends of Putin, have greater potential to challenge the existing status quo. In contrast to *Dozhd's* narrower audience base, a quality regional channel is able to attract people of completely different political orientations. Herein is its undeniable advantage and strength. Until recently, the regional stations' primary focus was covering local events, its criticism directed towards local authorities, companies and corrupt officials. However, the existence of such bastions of free regional TV journalism are acceptable to the Kremlin only as long as their work does not directly contradict the key tenets of ["Kiselev's \(aka, Kremlin's\) propaganda."](#)

A 'demonstrative flogging' was recently held to indicate the existence of a 'red line', which if crossed, can lead to serious consequences. The victim was the channel Tomsk TV-2, for airing the truthful story about Russia sending (volunteer) fighters to Ukraine's Donbas region. Without adequate explanation, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) withdrew the channel's license that had been previously issued until 2025. The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network (RTRS) then also refused to renew the channel's broadcasting contract. (With the same bureaucratic red tape used by Roskomnadzor, the Kremlin later closed down the Crimean Tatar channel ATR in Crimea.)

Knowing that Roskomnadzor had already established a system to disable unwanted media outlets, many media practice 'local self-censorship.' Though no formal regulation or law has been issued, the set of postulates developed by the Kremlin's gang of political technologists are well known, and extremely dangerous to challenge.

The turning point in the state's move from controlling, to actively and comprehensively attacking free media, came on November 1, 2012, when amendments to the Law on the Protection of Children were adopted. The amendment prohibited information deemed 'harmful to the health and development' to children and resulted in the creation of a single registry of sites blocked for containing "prohibited information". This amendment became known as the 'blacklist of sites'.

Roskomnadzor was behind the creation of this registry. In compliment, on February 1, 2014, the Lugovoi Law entered into force. Named after the Duma member who sponsored it, the Lugovoi Law authorizes the prosecutor general's office to order the authorities to block online sources within 24 hours without any court approval. The prosecutor general or his deputies are authorized to ask Roskomnadzor to block access to media that disseminates calls for extremist activities, participation in unsanctioned mass public events or mass riots. In fact, Roskomnadzor gained the exclusive right as censor to choose which resources should be blocked. According to official data, Roskomnadzor has blocked 52,000 websites since 2012. However, according [to data](#) from the independent organization, Roskomsvoboda, as of June 3, 2015, 263,249 domains have been unjustly blocked. Throughout the entire period of blocking sites more than 640,000 domains have been scrutinized. Under the Lugovoi Law 4,000 websites were blocked. "Russian censors of the 21st century" are sheltering themselves behind lofty slogans while obediently carried out orders from the Kremlin.

Recently, hackers posted an SMS conversation allegedly belonging to Timur Prokopenko, Deputy Head of Domestic Policy Department within the Presidential Administration, which provides excellent insight into Roskomnadzor's true role. In the message, Prokopenko states, among other things, that Roskomnadzor has repeatedly "provoked" the liberal, independent media, while ignoring illegal nationalist attacks made by media loyal to the Kremlin. He states that NGOs monitoring the status of the media in the country, though unwilling, are included in a list of foreign agents, and that a new law restricting the share of foreigner ownership in

Russian media companies by 20% will come into force in 2016.

In the last 15 years, Putin and his team have succeeded in creating a well-oiled control mechanism over the media, which targets those identified as having 'anti-Putin' views and sympathy towards the West. This is set to continue.

Though the current information blockade does not yet have a single legislative authority, this will soon change. It is no accident that during the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when lies and anti-western rhetoric abound, that the Security Council has started to develop a new policy on information security. The policy will address such dangers as other countries using information technology 'in order to gain intelligence and achieve political and military objectives', influencing the development of the Russian Internet and addressing the lack of coordination of authorities' activities on security issues at different levels. Once again, the focus is on identifying external threats, not on protecting freedom of expression and the media.

The oppressive climate for those who question the Kremlin narrative and discourse continues to grow, with dissent either brought under control or erased from existence. Moscow's suppression of independent journalism started with "Doctrine 2000" and it now seems that "Doctrine 2015" will see the process to its logical end.

[Photo](#): Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders

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