'In the name of democracy'
The paradox of democracy and press freedom in post-communist Russia

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'It is not enough to merely defend democracy. To defend it may be to lose it, to extend it is to strengthen it. Democracy is not property; it is an idea.' (Hubert H. Humphrey, VS democratic vice president, 1 Oktober 1942)

1. Introduction

There is a common understanding that democracy and press freedom are strongly connected and mutually reinforcing. Mass media fulfil an essential function in democracy as a link between the citizens and their political representatives. The information and representation function of the media is thought to be best performed if the media are free, that is to say autonomous. In all dissident movements in Eastern-Europe the demand for democracy was accompanied by the demand for a free press. In Russia, Gorbachev stressed the importance of *glasnost'* (not the equivalent of press freedom but a step in that direction) as a *sine qua non* for democratic reform (Gorbachev, 1987: 91). Yeltsin affirmed that he could not conceive of a democratic society 'without the freedom of expression and the press' (radio address, cited in *Moskvosky Komsomolets*, 15 March 1997: 1). And also Putin stressed the relationship: 'without a truly free media, Russian democracy will not survive' (statement to the Russian Parliament, 8 July 2000 cited in Mereu, 2000).

In this paper we discuss the relationship between press freedom and democracy in post-communist Russia. Post-communist Russia represents a unique historical and socio-political setting, which does not readily allow for generalization. Nevertheless, the observations on Russia can contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between press freedom and democracy in other contexts as well. Although widely used words, the concepts of democracy and press freedom are not uniformly defined. Different perceptions

of democracy cause different perceptions of the role of the media in democracy. In order to avoid confusion of ideas, we start by having a closer look at both concepts.

2. The concept of democracy

Press freedom and democracy are words with a highly positive emotional value. Amartya Sen (1999) has pointed out that while democracy is not yet universally practiced, nor indeed uniformly accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right. Because of its positive emotional value the word is highly vulnerable for abuse and 'cooptation' which leads to a shift, and in the end an emptiness, of meaning. In the Soviet Union a distinction was made between the real 'socialist democracy' (*sotsialisticheskaya demokratiya*) and the fake 'bourgeois democracy' (*burzhyuaznaya demokratiya*) (see for example, Ozhegov, 1988: 130). The meaning of the word democracy became even more obscured by the use of the prefixes pseudo-, new-, or 'not consolidated' in combination with democracy. Post-communist Russia has been labelled all of this, due to the gap between its democratic quality and its democratization rhetoric. Other labels have been used that question the genuineness of Russian democracy even more: Russia as 'delegative democracy' (O'Donnell in Weigle, 2000; Remington, 1999), 'totalitarian democracy' (Goble, 2000) or 'authoritarian democracy' (Sakwa, 1998). With the same half-heartedness, Olcott and Ottaway (1999) speak of 'semi-authoritarianism', Zhelev (1999) of 'a multiparty authoritarian system', Sergej Kovalev of an 'authoritarian-police regime that will preserve the formal characteristics of democracy and market economy' (in *RussiaReform Monitor* nr. 742, 31 January 2000) and the Russian commentator Mikhail Delyagin of a 'liberal dictatorship' and 'manipulative democracy' (in *RussiaReform Monitor* nr. 742, 31 January 2000). Koshkareva and Narzhikulov (1998: 164) speak of a 'nomenklatura democracy'. Diamond (1996) calls this a characteristic of the 'third wave' of democratization (Huntington, 1993): the gap between the so called electoral (formal, political) and liberal (substantial, social) democracies.

At a minimum, democracy is a political system based on free, competitive and regular elections. This 'electoral' democracy presumes space for political opposition movements and political parties that represent a significant range of voter choice and whose leaders can openly compete for and be elected to positions of power in government (eg. Schumpeter, 1979). The concept of 'liberal' (eg. Diamond, 1996) or 'substantial' democracy (eg. Kaldor & Vejvoda, 1999) extends the key element of free competition with a bunch of political and civil rights (freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of religion, etc.) and the notions of the rule of law, inclusive citizenship and civil society. The concept of substantial democracy cannot easily be reduced to a set of procedures and

institutions but is described as 'a way of regulating power relations in such a way as to maximize the opportunities for individuals to influence the conditions in which they live, to participate in and influence debates about the key decisions that affect society' (Kaldor & Vejvoda, 1999: 3-4). Democracy in this sense is not a dichotomic but continuous variable. The choice is not between democracy or no democracy but between more or less democracy, which comes down very often to 'old' and 'new' democracies (Mayer, 1989: 72). Linz and Stepan (1996) distinguish 'consolidated' and 'transitional' democracies. Consolidation is attained to when democracy became 'the only game in town', constitutionally as well as behaviourally and attitudinally (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 5-6).[1] At this stage, institutions and laws alone are not sufficient anymore, and the element of political culture joins in.

The concept of political culture builds largely on the book of Almond and Verba (1989, original 1963), *The Civic Culture,* and experiences some renaissance in the last decennia.[2] The idea however, that one 'culture' - one constellation of values, norms, belief systems, and attitudes - fits democracy closer than the other, is not new. Plato already pointed out that forms of government (oligarchy, democracy, tyranny, aristocracy) differ according to dispositions of men (Störig, 1985, vol. I: 155). More recently, Miller, White and Heywood (1998: 66) have expressed this as 'democracies require democrats'. The concept of political culture provides a link between the macro level of the society and the micro level of the individual. The concept of culture also suggests some continuity over time: 'neither an individual's values nor those of a society as a whole are likely to change overnight. Instead, fundamental value change takes place gradually' (Inglehart, 1997: 34). The value

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[1] A relativization has to be made. Hence, consolidated democracies are not 'guaranteed democracies'. Kaldor and Vejvoda (1999: 22), for instance, speak of a 'post-democracy crisis' in Western Europe which coincides with a 'pre-democracy crisis' in Central and Eastern Europe. In support of this statement, they point a.o. to the meagreness of the public debate, the growing apathy and cynism, and the top-down approach of politics in nowadays Western Europe as well as in Eastern Europe.

[2] Almond and Verba (1989: 13) define political culture as 'the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation'. Based on Talcott Parsons they distinguish cognitive, affectional and evaluational orientations. Archie Brown (1979: 1) defines political culture as 'the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalti, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups.' David Easton (in Wyman, 2000: 104) distinguishes between 'beliefs about the current authorities, support for the political system and attachment to the political community'. In the Soviet Union, F.M. Burlatsky is said to be the first academician who, in 1970, made use of the term. White (1979: 58) traces the term *politicheskaya kul'tura* back to Lenin and more recently to Brezhnev. The concept caught on rather slowly in the Soviet Union and was picked up more eagerly only in postcommunist Russia (eg. Sergeyev & Biryukov, 1993). Sergeyev and Biryukov (1993: 10) describe political culture as 'the basic knowledge about or vision of social life shared by a relatively large section of society that determines for those who belong to it their understanding of particular political situations and their behaviour in them'.

that has singled out as most contributive to a 'civic' or 'democratic' culture is trust, and more specifically impersonal trust, in contrast with personal trust.[3]

In the 'democratic' culture, the individual is considered an end in itself and a rational being, capable of making independent judgments and choices (eg. voting) and able to construct his own 'truth' out of widely divergent messages (Siebert et al., 1956: 40). 'Authoritarian culture', in contrast, places truth in the hands of a few 'wise men' whereas the common man is distrusted and considered a dependent, irrational being, a 'cog in the wheel', not capable of making independent judgments and choices (Siebert et al., 1956: 11). Merrill and Lowenstein (1990: 159-160) speak of a 'democratic orientation' (with examples such as John Locke and John Milton) versus an 'elitarian orientation' (with examples such as Plato, Machiavelli, Hegel, or Nietzsche). The former can be linked to individualism, pluralism and trust; the latter to collectivism, dominance (unitary truth) and distrust. Russia has traditionally been an elitist country. Tsarist Russia was characterized by a wide gap between the ruling elite and the common men (Krug, 1990: 9). Communist Russia was, despite its claims to be egalitarian, very elitist oriented. Lenin stressed the role of the Communist Party as a vanguard party. Hence, the mass lacked class consciousness and organization and had need of the guidance of the Party (Lenin, 1972, vol. 36: 122-123 and 1963: 84-93). According to Kropotkin, Lenin's attitude was dictated by a fundamental distrust in mankind (cited in Krug, 1990: 106). The American journalist Robert Kaiser (1976: 22) has stated it very crude when he wrote: 'The Soviet system is built on the assumption that the citizenry cannot be trusted'. The sharp dichotomy between the Party and the people outlived Lenin. Pavao Novosel (1995: 11-12) speaks of a division of the Soviet society in 'first and second class citizens', formalized through the *nomenklatura* system. Postcommunist Russia is characterized by a more diversified social stratification but the contrast between the 'elite' (oligarchs and rulers) and 'the people' remains. The distinction is expressed more frequently than before in terms of money and standard of living, but remains present in the mentality of the Russians as well. Also Zhelev (1996: 7) sees this as a constant between the past and the present: 'the sense that 'we, the people' are of no consequence' and the tension between 'us' and 'them'. Truth has traditonally been unitary in Russia and so was the community, as words like *sobornost'* (a kind of mystic unity) testify to. In the Marxist interpretation too there was only one right position. Opposition and diversity were considered falsehood and therefore deserved no hearing (McDaniël, 1996: 35). William Zimmerman (1995: 631) has called this 'synoptic

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[3] The correlation between a 'culture of trust' and democracy has been demonstrated in several works. A.o. : Almond and Verba (1989) noticed a correlation between 'trust in fellow-citizens' and 'trust in politics'. Putnam (1993, 1995) pointed out a correlation between 'social kapital' (that is, a culture of trust and tolerance, contributive to an extensive network of free associations) and degree of democratization. Inglehart (1997) proves a close link between the values of 'interpersonal trust' and 'the long-term survival of democratic institutions'.

thinking': 'the view that there is only one correct philosophy'. This view is diametrically opposed to the pluralistic view of truth and the parliamentarian model that 'by contrast is based on the assumption that the existence of groups or factions that express and defend particular interests in a representative institution is not only natural but its sole justification' (Sergeyev & Biryukov, 1993: 147).

3.   The concept of press freedom

A free press is a cornerstone of (liberal) democracy. It is essential for holding government accountable, and for citizens to get informed, to communicate their wishes, to participate in the political decisionmaking. In principle, and on the analogy of democracy, press freedom has been accepted worldwide as the norm. The Soviet mass media enjoyed, in contrast with 'bourgeois' mass media and on the analogy of 'real democracy', 'real freedom'. Hence, media were freed from the obligation to be profitable: 'Freedom of the press was equated with freedom from private ownership: being freed from the profit motive, the media were free to do their duties as instruments of the state and the Party' (Siebert et al., 1956: 140-141). The communist model embraced the notion of the so called 'positive freedom', namely the freedom *to*, whereas in the liberal view, common in the West, the concept of 'negative freedom' or freedom *from*, prevailed: freedom from external goals (eg. building of a communist society, class homogenization) and external control and pressures (eg. government, parties, industry). A free press, in other words, is an autonomous press: free to determine its own tasks and policies. In line with this view of freedom, 'traditional free press theory (..) lacks a prescriptive character. It does not in its simple and most basic form say anything of what the press ought to do' (McQuail, 1976: 9).

Media autonomy, or independence, implies that the media are clearly separated from state and political institutions and free from/of inhibiting forms of economic, political or other dependency. Karol Jakubowicz (2000) distinguishes three levels of media independence: 1. External independence of media organizations, that is freedom to establish and operate media outlets without legal, political, or administrative interference or restraint. 2. Internal independence of editorial staff, that is editorial autonomy, respected by owners, publishers and managers. 3. Personal/professional independence of media practitioners, both management and journalists, which implies their impartiality and detachment from social, political and economic interests in their performance of journalistic duties and a sense of high professionalism and dedication to journalistic ethics. Whereas laws, codes and institutions can contribute a lot to the first two levels of independence (media institutions and editorial staff) – one could speak of a 'formal press freedom' in accordance with the notion of 'formal democracy' – the third level, that is the individual level, is situated more on the field of (political) culture (t.i. attitudes, norms, values). And whereas the first two

levels can be possibly realized without the third, absence of the third level on the other hand makes external and internal independence to a large degree meaningless. In other words: as democracy, press freedom is not considered a dichotomic but a continuous variable. The choice is not between press freedom or no press freedom but between more or less press freedom. In every country and every system one can distinguish factors that spur press freedom on the one hand and factors that curtail press freedom on the other hand. The American organization Freedom House (2002) concentrates on the external factors that endanger press autonomy as the most measurable criteria: laws, regulations and administrative decisions that influence media content, political pressures and controls on media content, economic influences over media content and repressive actions (censorship, physical violence, arrests, killing of journalists). On the basis of these criteria Russia enjoys a 'partial press freedom'.

Very often the issue of 'press freedom' is linked to the issue of 'press responsibility' or 'social responsibility'. Together with Freedom House (2002) we want to stress the demand for 'freedom' above the demand for responsibility. Hence, the issue of 'press responsibility' often is voiced to defend governmental control of the press. It is linked more with the concept of 'positive freedom' than with the concept of freedom as such ('negative freedom'). Another frequently made association is that of press freedom with 'freedom of information' and the 'right to know'. This aspect is crucial indeed and complementary to press freedom as it relates to the perspective of the citizen. We'll come back to it later.

4. The paradox of democracy and press freedom : the politician's side

The process of democratization in Russia paradoxically became a justification to curtail press freedom and to keep the media instrumentalized. The instrumental use of the mass media in postcommunist Russia is a continuation of the communist past. Although the external (societal) goal has changed from the building of the communist society into support for the democratic society, the mobilization of the mass media as a means to a goal remained unchanged.

Gorbachev considered the mass media main instruments in promoting his politics of glasnost and gaining support for his reforms. As before, mass media mobilized people for the ideology of socialism but now in a more dynamic way. Yassen Zassoursky, dean of the Faculty of Journalism of the Moscow State University, has labelled the mediamodel in the glasnost era (1985-1991) successively the 'glasnost-model' (Zassoursky, 1997: 3) and the 'instrumental model' (Zassoursky, 1998: 16 and 1999: 29-30). The first label (glasnost-model) points out an element of change, namely the break with the previous

'administrative-bureaucratic model'. Also in this model, however, Zassoursky points at the instrumental use of the mass media. In the name he later used (instrumental model), this aspect of continuity is brought to the forefront.

The first Yeltsin-years received from Zassoursky the label of 'fourth power model'. The expectations, however, were pitched too high, and from 1995-'96 onward this label was changed in for that of 'authoritarian-corporate model' (Zassoursky, 1997, 1998 and 1999). It seems that the press could not meet the requirements for being called an independent 'Fourth Power'. 'Whatever good or bad happened to the Russian media in the 90s was directly tied to Yeltsin's views and acts in the information sphere', states media law specialist Andrei Richter (2000: 357). Yeltsin presented himself as the self-constituted personal guarantor of democracy and press freedom. While it is obvious that Yeltsin 'allowed' more freedom than any of his predecessors, he never questioned his presumed right to allow such freedom. And in exchange he expected loyal support from the mass media for his policy (see for example Chugaev, 1992). Yeltsin embodied the belief that in order to improve the democratic procedures one has to step 'beyond' these procedures.[4] In the name of democracy he fired upon Parliament in October 1993 and banned opposition newspapers (Tanaev, 1995 : 46 ; Benn, 1996 : 472).[5] In the name of democracy he ruled largely by decree thus ignoring a whole series of 'horizontal checks'.[6] In times of elections - 'the lifeblood' of democracy – the mobilization of mass media reaches a peak. In the name of democracy Yeltsin blatantly expected the mass media to support and arrange his re-election as President in 1996.[7] The mass media were comitted to an anti-communist crusade. The whole election campaign was reduced to a duel between President Yeltsin and oppositional candidate Zhuganov, between the future and the past, between democracy and communism, between press freedom and press control (Ivan Zassoursky, 1999: 103).

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[4] This attitude clashes with the presumption that in a democracy 'the rules of the game are more important than the outcome' (Mayer, 1989: 106). But as Mayer observes: 'such an attitude can be found only when there is not much at stake [in the democratic election]'. This observation seems to be confirmed by the Russian situation (where there is pretty 'much at stake'). A great deal of empirical research points out that Russians do endorse the democratic procedures in general, and for the own majority, but hesitate to apply them to political adversaries (eg. Gibson, 1995: 57). Again, these observations do not exclusively apply to Russia but can be illustrated by Western European examples as well. The Western leaders in general have sinned against this attitude and backed Yeltsin up, against all odds, as the only possible guarantee for democracy in Russia. See for a critical discussion of the Western attitude: Eyal (1998).

[5] The decree of 1993 had a precedent. In August 1991, after the anti-Gorbachev coup, Yeltsin also issued a decree to ban a number of newspapers that did not detach themselves explicitly from the coup d'état. Splichal (1994: 5) called this 'one of the most direct forms of the limitation of freedom of the press'.

[6] One has to admit that political power, even in the most democratic nations, always seeks to manage the media. Democratic systems, however, create checks and balances to minimize state domination of the media. In Russia, part of the problems can be attributed to the absence of a clear separation of powers. Examples of media materies that were 'organized' by decree rather than by law, are the issuance of broadcast licenses, the subsidization of newspapers, and the creation, reorganization and annulment of state organizations (ministries, departments, centres) concerning the media.

[7] Yeltsin needed the support of the media very badly. Hence, his popularity was alarmingly small: 6% in a poll in June 1995 down to 4% in December 1995 (Bowker, 2000: 14; Mickiewicz, 1997: 168).

The tone of the campaign was set by the sacking on 15 February 1996 of Oleg Poptsov, head of the state-owned television station RTR (Belin, 1997). The right to appoint and dismiss media functionaries is one of the most powerful means of *direct* influence in the media for the executive. The President appoints the chairman of the 'public' television channel ORT and the government channels RTR and *Kul'tura*. The government appoints the chairmen of the central radio channels. Another way of direct control are the state organizations directly subordinated to the executive, especially the Media Ministry[8] but also an *ad hoc* institution such as Boris Yeltsin's 'Federal Information Center of Russia' (December 1992 – December 1993)[9] or an institution with no direct authority over the media such as the Security Council.[10] The possibilities for *indirect* control are even greater. There is the reliance of many media outlets on economic sponsorship, either through state subsidies or by businesses, either open or secret.[11] There is the use of courts as weapons deployed against journalists (esp. libel and slander). There is the dependency on the Kremlin – instead of an independent agency – for the issuance and revoking of broadcast and publishing licenses. There is the dependency on state facilities such as printing houses, transmission facilities, and distribution systems. There is the accreditation of journalists and the inequal access to information. There is the use of violence against journalists.[12] To this we can add the legal insecurity caused by the rapid succession of decrees, government orders and procedures, and the upredictable changes in policy and practice of, for example,

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[8] The Ministry of Press, Radio, Television and Mass Communication (*Ministerstvo Rossijskoj Federatsii po delam pechati, teleradioveshchaniya i sredstv massovykh kommunikatsii*) is created by presidential decree of July 6, 1999 and the successor of both the State Comité of the Press (*Gosudarstvennyj Komitet Rossijskoj Federatsii po pechati*) and the Federal Service for Television and Radio (*Federal'naya Sluzhba Rossii po televideniyu i radioveshaniyu*), in their turn successors of the Ministry for Press and Information (*Ministerstvo pechati I informatsii*). Minister of Media is Michail Lesin.

[9] The creation of this 'information center' was actuated by the crisis between the Russian Parliament and the President in 1992-1993 and intended to 'secure the provision of information on the country reforms'. See: the presidential decree 'on a Federal Information Center of Russia' (*Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federatsii 'o Federal'nom informatsionnom tsentre Rossii'*) from 25 December 1992 in *Vedomosti S'ezda narodnykh deputatov Ros. Fed. I Verkhovnogo Soveta Ros. Fed.*, 31 December 1992, nr. 52 : item 3149. The Center was directly subordinated to the President. Government television, the government's press service, the news agency ITAR-TASS and other mass media became directly subordinated to the Center and consequently to the President. The Center existed parallel to the Ministry of Press and Information until the decree of 22 December 1993.

[10] The Security Council of the Russian Federation (*Sovet bezopasnosti Rossijskoj Federatsii*) is formed in 1992 by President Yeltsin mainly as a discussion forum and consultative body. President Putin turned it into a more important policy instrument. The Commission on Information Security (*Mezhvedomstvennaya komissiya po informatsionnoj bezopasnosti*) deals extensively with mass media policy.

[11] Richter (1995: 15-16) points out the decisive influence of the personal preference of President Yeltsin in adjudging subsidies. Consequently, in order to obtain money, some newspapers adapt themselves to the President's preference.

[12] In 1996, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick of the Commission to Protect Journalists (in 'Briefing on Press Freedom in Russia Before the Presidential Elections', *Press Freedom Briefing,* 1996) denied that Yeltsin could be named a press freedom champion: 'his government's failure to investigate the 13 documented murders and four disappearances of Russian journalists over the past two years is the most telling indication of its unwillingness to value and foster a free press.'

tax collection (eg. massively tolerated tax-evasion, followed by repressive controls on a large scale).

5. The paradox of democracy and press freedom : the media's side

It does not appear fair to exclusively blame the authorities for the described system. The label 'authoritarian-corporate model' implies next to the 'authoritarian' aspect (that is, the media subordinated to the authorities) also the 'corporate' aspect (that is, the cooperation and alliances). The distinction comes down to the question whether the media are 'forced' rather than 'free' partners of the authorities (Merrill, Lee & Friedlander, 1990: 59). The question of quilt is inappropriate. We can only observe and conclude.

In the early years of the Russian Federation (1992-'93), marked by the conflict between President and Parliament, 'most of the Russian media appeared to adopt a strongly pro-government stance' (Benn, 1996: 472). A content analysis of central television programs in the run-up to the referendum of 25 April 1993, showed 'the obtrusive partisanship of state television' (Mickiewicz & Richter, 1996: 119). The majority of media *voluntarily* opted for the new, hence democratic partiality. Their leaders approached Yeltsin on their own initiative for protection and promised loyalty (read: partiality) instead (Chugaev, 1992). In the presidential elections of 1996, the majority of journalists and media professionals rallied behind Yeltsin again and *voluntarily* agreed with the mobilization function of the media. As Shevelov, vice president of television channel ORT, stated: 'you can only refer to pressure if there is resistance. There is none.' (cited in Lange, 1996: 15). The journalists adhered to partisanship not only for material reasons[13] but also out of normative considerations. Igor Malashenko, president of the private television station NTV, who joined the Yeltsin re-election campaign in April 1996 as chief media advisor, explained this logic as following: if the private media provided "unbiased, professional, and objective" campaign coverage, Zyuganov would win the election, and journalists would lose their freedom permanently. Better to become a temporary "instrument of propaganda" in the hands of the Kremlin, Malashenko argued. *Partijnost'* was justified for the protection of democracy and consequently for press freedom. In the name of democracy the journalists voluntarily gave up their autonomy and their freedom (see Ivan Zassoursky, 1999: 105; Belin, 1997; EIM, 1996: 8).

Elections in general, and the 1996 elections in particular, can be considered critical but not atypical periods. Hence, it is not possible to treat the electoral period as being distinct from the context in which media normally operate (Lange & Palmer, 1995: 10). Quite the

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[13] Many journalists welcome election periods as an additional source of income (see, for example, Kinyev, 1998: 13; Kokorin & Silant'eva, 1999). In an interview with the author (Moscow, 2 December 1999), Alexei Pankin used the word 'harvest time' to indicate the election period.

reverse, if we may believe Brzezinski (1970: xiii-xiv): 'A perceptive formula is easier to articulate in a moment of special stress. (..) The situation of crisis permits sharper value judgments'. In general, and apart from election context, research has shown that many Russian journalists do not reject the paternalistic character of power and therefore accept its tutelage in mass communication.[14] The journalist considers himself, in line with the tradition, a missionary of ideas, not a neutral observer or autonomous information disseminator. The concept adhered to is that of the active or participant journalist as decribed by the Hungarian writer Janos Horvat ('The East European Journalist' in Gross, 1996: 111): someone who wants to influence politics and audiences according to his political beliefs. The restriction to the presentation of mere facts is even commonly regarded as a devaluation of the profession of journalist (Voltmer, 2000: 478).

The attitude of the individual journalists suits the media-owners who like to use the argument of press freedom to protect their own freedom and their particular interests. As the majority of media-holdings form part of larger financial-industrial groups and as money is still made through political connections, political, economic and media-interests go closely together. Political and economic elites try to secure via the media their own positions. Oligarchs and media magnates like Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky are the classic examples. When the media outlets of Vladimir Gusinsky became the target of prosecution, Gusinsky immediately alarmed that press freedom and in extension even democracy was endangered. His alarm was taken over by other journalists in Russia as well as in foreign countries (the USA in the first place). There were, however, also sceptical voices. Robert Coalson (2000) wrote in a column in *The Moscow Times*: 'Gusinsky has shown very little genuine concern for press freedom. Like the other oligarchs, he only appears when his own interests are directly at risk'. In the same way Sergej Markov (2001: 24) noticed with reference to a rally on freedom of speech, organized in connection with the NTV-case: '.. all speeches by NTV stars were about NTV's freedom. Such egoism could not inspire champions of freedom of expression'. Also in line is the following reflection: 'Where were the voices of protest from this 'independent' press when Yeltsin attacked the legitimate Russian parliament with military force, when the Soviet Union became dissolved by the signatures of a few officials, when the country's resources passed into the hands of a few oligarchs, and when corruption allowed Yeltsin's chosen family and friends to suddenly acquire wealth and transfer this wealth out of the country? That 'independent' press manipulated a government that served its interests' (October 2000 see http://www.alternativeinsight.com/Putin_part-1.html). 'The

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[14] The voluntary alliance between journalists and authorities has been confirmed by a number of empirical studies, a.o. Manaev (1995), Kuzin (1996), Svitich & Shiryaeva (1997) and Juskevits (2000).

concept of freedom of speech has become hackneyed after Gusinsky and somewhat awkward to use' concludes the however not neutral General Director of Gazprom-Media, Alfred Kokh (2001: 20).

6. and the public?

As Price and Krug (2000 : 4) state : 'for free and independent media to 'work', the community in question must value the role that the media play'. The public however seems to accept the 'Russian interpretation' of press freedom. Or, in any case, is adapted to it. The people react to mass media information by asking themselves not 'is this true' but *'komu eto vygodno*?' (to who's advantage ?). News is interpreted in function of the news source, whether 'Berezovsky's channel', 'Gusinsky's channel' or 'the government's channel', or whether Potanin's newspaper, LUKoil's newspaper or the Communist Party's newspaper. It is telling that 'independent' media in Russia are identified with 'opposition' media. Media independence is considered illusory, and partisanship the norm. Many Russians endorse the proposition that the mass media have the obligation to support 'the system'. A poll at the end of 2000, for example, shows that 34% of the Russians agrees that the mass media have to give 'full support' to the President and that opposition is not desirable (*RFE/RL Newsline*, 10 november 2000). 'In today's Russia, media freedom is (..) not the most fashionable and popularly supported notion' declared television presentator and journalist Evgeny Kiselev in an interview with Jeremy Drukker (*Transitions Online*, 10 juli 2000). And Elena Androunas (1993: 35) points to the absence of 'freedom as a state of mind'.

7. Freedom of opinion, not of information

The result is a pluralist but not an independent (autonomous) press. Pluralist, in the sense of representation in the media system of a broad range of political expression, opinions and interests. In this sense, postcommunist Russia is hardly less pluralistic than older democracies and probably even more, as it is not hindered to the same degree by 'political correctness' or 'la pensée unique'. Peter Humphreys (1996: 312) points in his book on media policy in Western Europe at a systematic decline of pluralism in the 20st century, caused by a de-ideologization of the traditional politics and commercialization, standardization and concentration of the media. While the Russian media system is characterized by a high degree of concentration as well, this concentration is not at all linked with depolitization: 'money in the CIS is still made through connections in the government, and in this game it helps to own newspapers and stations as instruments of political influence' (Pankin, 1998: 33). Ivan Sigal (1997) has named Russian news coverage 'a part of politics'. 'In such circumstances', says Izvestiya-journalist Sergej

Agafonov, 'a free independent press is doomed, but an unfree and dependent press can flourish' (cited in Banerjee, 1997: 59). Alexei Pankin speaks of a unique result: 'a genuinely pluralistic unfree media'. However, a pluralism that derives the right to exist from the presence of different power groups in society is an uncertain pluralism. Hence, when the different power groups join forces because they feel threatened in their positions, as was the case in the 1996 presidential elections, this pluralism dies.

The greatest victim of this kind of pluralism is the (factual) information. Every newspaper and every television channel brings its own *versiya* of the facts. In order to get an accurate picture of what happened, one has to read daily about six newspapers and watch several television stations, claims Andrei Fadin (1997). But who does? 'What we have is not freedom of information, and this 'freedom' is not exhaustive stimulating readers to buy half a dozen newspapers, but rather discouraging them from reading anything other than gossip columns and cheap sensations, and even more importantly, from organising their own actions on the basis of information received' reacts Alexei Pankin (1997). The scepticism of the public is illustrated by its small confidence in the media: down from 70% in 1990 to only 13% in 2000 (Fossato, 2000).

To fulfil their information function, the media need not only to break with the view of journalism as 'politics conducted with other means'. They also are in need, more concretely, for guaranteed access to information and transparency of governance. Press freedom presumes that, though independent, the press is not shielded away from government and industry. Worldwide, a correlation is determined between press freedom and transparency, and consequently between transparency and democracy:

> 'Information gathering is a vital component of freedom of information. Without access to information, journalists are engaged primarily in the presentation of opinions. And while openness in the statement of opinions is an important element of democratic society, it is not sufficient for its development and maintenance. The possibility for an informed citizenry depends on the ability of journalists to have access to sources. Without this kind of journalistic effectiveness, a society can have free and independent media, but their utility toward advancement of democratic institution-building might be severely limited.' (Krug & Price, 2000 : 19)

A climate of open access clings to the principle of information as a universal *right*, adjudged to everyone on an equal basis according to laws and procedures (universalism) whereas a culture of secrecy considers information a *privilege*, dependent on position or connections (particularism). Laws concerning transparency include those that recognize and guarantee public access to government-controlled information and institutions, with limited exceptions for national security, protection of personal privacy, crime prevention,

and other goals. Laws concerning the licensing and accredititation of journalists also relate to his question.

Russia has always been characterized by a culture of secrecy rather than transparency. Always in Russian history, information was considered a privilege not a universal right - a property of the 'elite' who could dispose of it arbitrarily. In the Soviet Union, access to news sources depended on one's hierarchical (Party) position. The privileges of the nomenklatura 'first class' citizens (Novosel, 1995: 11-12) not only included material goods, such as high salaries, access to 'diplomatic' shops, country houses, and the like, but also enhanced access to information: from the right to see foreign movies, or to read books, declared unsuited for general distribution (Kaiser, 1976 : 180 ; Benn, 1992 : 9) to the receipt of special foreign news bulletins, on a daily basis compiled by TASS and distributed on paper of different colors according to the degree of detail and the intended public (Lendvai, 1981 : 129-131). Though the high-placed functionaries received significantly more information, they too received their information on a 'need-to-know' basis (Bauer e.a., 1959 : 43). The result of this information policy was an information deficit: information became one of the most sought after commodities in the Soviet Union (Ellis, 1999 : 6). Informal networks and rumours filled the vacuüm (Bauer & Gleicher, 1964 ; Inkeles & Bauer, 1959 : 163-165). Parallel to the official information circuit, and on the analogy of the 'black market', an unofficial information circuit (eg. *samizdat*) was functioning. The use of personal networks and informal contacts for obtaining scarce information, services or goods is indicated in Russian by the word *blat* or the term *ZIS (znakomstva i svyazi)*.

In the Soviet Union, the use of informal information networks primarily had an economic function, namely the survival in an economy of scarcity (Ledeneva, 1998). In the transition to a free market economy, privileged access to information played a key role in the process of privatizations, which became indicated as 'insider privatizations' (eg. Gill, 1998 : 311-312 ; Arik, 1999 : 52-53). Personal (particularistic) relations (eg. corruption, loyalties, privileges) continue to dominate the post-communist Russian economy and politics alike. Postcommunist leaders continue to see secrecy as a method to control the information flow (Gulyaev, 1996 : 14). The panellists that IREX (2001: 196) brought together to discuss the media situation in Russia agreed unanimously that 'access to some publicly relevant information is not free: authorities continue to view information as their property, and want to control access.' Defense-related security topics that are not state secrets have the status of classified information. As a result 'obtaining publicly relevant information has become an increasingly challenging and dangerous job for Russian journalists, especially in cases of investigating authorities' abuses, corruption, fraud during election campaigns, and the war in Chechnya'. Banai (1997 : 242) sums up the three most efficient processes of

information gathering in Russia as 'trust, relationship and integration'. Authorities still offer privileges to some periodicals and journalists. Mikhail Gulyaev (1996 : 14) names as 'privileged media' under President Yeltsin the news agencies ITAR-TASS and Interfaks, the newspapers *Kommersant'* and *Izvestiya*, and the weekly *Argumenty i Fakty.*

More recent examples support the enduring culture of secrecy. The way in which the Kremlin handled the disaster with the sunken submarine Kursk in the summer of 2000 fuelled speculations that the government was trying to withhold information from the public. Media coverage of the disaster was restricted, only state-controlled television channel RTR was granted full access to the disaster scene. The dissemination of false and misleading information led to confusion and government officials provided obscure answers to justified questions. The adoption by the Security Council of the 'Doctrine of the Information Security of the Russian Federation' (*doktrina informatsionnoj bezopasnosti Rossijskoj Federatsii*)[15] on September 9th, 2000 roused fear that the government intended to limit the free flow of information and conceal information from the public. Among others, the doctrine promotes a feeling of distrust towards the foreign press whereas the unrestricted access to foreign media nowadays is guaranteed by the Russian mass media law of 27 December 1991 (art. 54 §1).

The Russian mass media law (*zakon Rossijskoj Federatsii o sredstvakh massovoj informatsii*)[16] gives the citizens only an indirect right to information, that is they have the right to efficient reception *through* the mass media of correct information on the activities of state organs, societal organizations and their functionaries (art. 38 § 1). Mass media however have guaranteed access to government and administration information. Unlawful refusals from government or administration functionaries to communicate information requested upon are punishable by law (art. 144 of Penal Code). In reality however, refusal of information remain a problem. Since 1993, the Glasnost Defense Foundation (*Fond Zashchity Glasnosti*, 1997) draws up an inventory of all infringements of the rights of journalists and mass media. The majority of violations is tied up with precisely the refusal and restriction of access to information. What's more, the number of infringements increases throughout the 90s (Svitich & Shiryaeva, 1997: 157). Very few journalists however, claim their rights before court (*Fond Zashchity Glasnosti*, 1997: 312; Svitich & Shiryaeva, 1997: 160). Again, we have to conclude that the existence of laws alone is not a sufficient condition for their implementation. Kathryn Hendley (1999) points out that the

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[15] See : http://www.scrf.gov.ru/Documents/Decree/2000/09-09.html. See for a discussion: Yasmann (2000), Article 19 (2000).
[16] In *Vedomosti S'ezda narodnykh deputatov RSFSR i Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR*, 13 February 1992, No. 7: item 300.

'demand for law' lags behind the 'supply of law'. The demand for law implies respect for the law and trust in law, or, in other words a 'juridical culture'.

8.   Concluding remarks

We started from the common understanding that press freedom and democracy are closely associated concepts. Both concepts, however, are not unequivocally defined. Democracy implies participation of the citizens in the decisionmaking process, at the least in the election of the government. But gradations are legion. Press freedom implies media autonomy, freedom from external goals and controls. Again, gradations are numerous. Having said that, the correlation seems to exist: in the sense that there was 'no democracy' and 'no press freedom' in the Soviet Union and only 'partial democracy' and 'partial press freedom' in post-communist Russia. A third concept should be added, crucial to both press freedom and democracy, namely the right to know or the right to information coupled up to transparency of governance and administration. Information has to be considered a key concept in democracy and, at times, an antidote to opinion.

The close integration of democracy with press freedom and in extension of politics with mass media has to be considered not only in terms of manipulation and force but also in terms of sharing a common political and information culture. Hence, the same values underly both 'cultures'. All observations come down to the same conclusion: laws and institutions alone are not sufficient. Attitudes and values do play a role - whether named juridical culture, political culture, information culture, or culture *tout court*. The concept of culture suggests some communality of values: politicians, media workers and public alike share the same political culture and in extension the same information and communication culture. The concept of culture also suggests some continuity over time : not only over the communist and postcommunist period but also dating back to the time of the czars. Culture is not unchangeable, but too high expectations concerning the role of media as triggers of democracy are doomed to fail. Media and society's development go together in coherent patterns.

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