**PAVEL GUSEV**[editor-in-chief of [*Moskovsky Komsomolets*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskovsky_Komsomolets)]: …Russian mass media is living through a stage of rebirth. There are about 70,000 different print media names in Russia which are issued today. Of course, high intensity is seen in the growth and immense force of different Internet media, as well as cable television which is also gaining force.

Russia is the largest geographic country in the world, which leads to great difficulties in communication. Today, we still have some territories where there is no TV coverage, for instance, to say nothing about the Internet, which definitely benefits only the central part of Russia, more or less.Today the Russian mass media is versatile. Nobody has ever banned freedom of speech in Russia. But in one way or another, 70 percent of the print media belongs to the state. Why does this happen? The reason is that the advertising market in Russia is so far, very weak.

President Medvedev has recently stated that all state-owned mass media should go private. Of course, this cannot happen overnight. If, for instance, tomorrow we let 70 percent of the media which is in one way or another owned by the state go to the free market, 68 percent of those will simply die because they will have no financing to exist. On the one hand, we admit that in the regions the authorities have a very great influence on the mass media. But, on the other hand, we have to admit that it would be impossible to move away from this control within a very short time.

Everybody admits that one of the most liberal and democratic laws which exists in contemporary Russia is the one which was adopted back in 1991, during the first year of the new Russia after the Soviet Union, and that is the [Law on the Mass Media](http://www.medialaw.ru/e_pages/laws/russian/massmedia_eng/massmedia_eng.html)**.**The reason that there is no ban on freedom of speech in Russia, is that, according to the Mass Media Act, freedom of speech does exist.

So why do democratic organizations criticize the mass media in Russia for not being free? The reason is that due to a number of preconditions, mass media does have some influence from the state…

**MIKHAIL PONOMAREV** [Editor-in-chief of information programs of our Moscow Television Network]: We often say that Russia is a very young country—it is only 20 years old—while the United States is definitely a much older country, being over 200 years old. But of course Russia in its statehood existed for many centuries. However, we have a date in fairly recent history as a point in which we can understand why we have differences in the media and in circulation.

In 1791, the [First Amendment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Amendment) to the Constitution was adopted here in the United States, which has clarified any doubts, if there have been any, about the eternity of the freedom of mass media. Thirteen years later, in 1804, in Russia we had the [Law on Censorship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureau_of_Censorship_%28Russian_Empire%29) adopted. That was the law that stated once and for all that nothing can be printed *without* censorship [aka everything must go through a censorship process].

So at approximately the same time in our two countries' history there were two documents born, one just having four lines in it, another one four pages, which exists practically until today. That is why the Law on the Mass Media, which was adopted in Russia in 1991, has for us some sacred meaning and importance, because in fact it cancels once and for all the Law on Censorship of 1804. That is why we, as the professional and the public community, are doing a lot in order to not allow any restrictions on that law.

The helping hand to us is usually offered by new technologies, because the ultrasonic speed at which Internet communication is developing offers great opportunities for the development and the distribution of mass media to the people. As was rightly stated by Mr. Gusev, there are 70,000 print media outlets in Russia and 1,500 TV companies. Imposing any control or supervision over that—I mean control and supervision in the bad sense of those words—would be impossible due to the fast development of technologies. This is where we lay our hopes.

**NARGIZ ASADOVA:** [Editor-in-Chief of [*Echo Moskvy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echo_Moskvy), the main opposition outlet in Russia] …If here in the U.S., people believe that mass media is a tool of the public to control the state, then back in Russia the people feel that the mass media is a tool of the state to control the public…

Speaking about the Mass Media Act, indeed the Russian law is very good and is very liberal from the point of view of the mass media….However, in real terms there are cases of self-censorship, because we understand that sometimes there are ways of making a journalist think twice, or sometimes thrice, before he says or writes something. There have been over 600 cases over the past years when journalists were assaulted.

The recent case of [Oleg Kashin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oleg_Kashin), a journalist from *Kommersant*, who was beaten, did not result in any proper investigation, any accusation, or putting the criminals into jail. This case was very demonstrative. When he was assaulted, he was beaten—his legs, his head, and his fingers—which in my opinion was very explicit in saying "Don't go there where you shouldn't go, don't say what you shouldn't say, and don't write with your fingers what you shouldn't be writing." In such a case, and in other cases, this climate of impunity sets a certain atmosphere for journalism.

In ending my comments, I would like to quote one of the public figures of the 18th century of Russia, who said once that Russia is very good at writing laws but not very good at living according to those laws.

**VLADISLAV FRONIN** [editor-in-chief of the main Russian governmental newspaper, [*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rossiyskaya_Gazeta)]: When introducing me, Mikhail said that I am editor-in-chief of the governmental newspaper. But I am telling you that I am not responsible for the government. I am only editor-in-chief of the newspaper.

Some 20 years ago, I don't think one would imagine, even in the most dreadful dreams, that the representative or editor-in-chief of the governmental newspaper would sit here [at a non-profit organization in New York] on the podium…

As here in the U.S., the press in Russia is living through difficult times [because of the popularity of Internet news], and the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* had to reduce its network in the regions by 20 percent. But this year we have managed to stop the recession in circulation. The reasons for the drop in the number of copies, in the volume of circulation, are numerous. I will give just a couple of examples. The newspaper which is owned by Pavel Gusev [*[Moskovsky Komsomolets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskovsky_Komsomolets%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*], costs 25 cents here in the United States and it costs 50 cents back in Moscow. Income is definitely lower in Russia than in the U.S., and so people sometimes cannot afford to buy newspapers. The newspaper which is represented here today by Azer Mursaliev [from Kommersant Publishing House] costs one-and-a-half euros, which is about $2.00. It is the cost and the high price of newspapers that has led to the reduction in the number of copies.

*\*Editors note: The Gross National Income in PPP in Russia in 2011 was $21,800 in comparison to $50,700 in the United States.*