Censorship in Russia is a state-sponsored process of control and punishment. The Kremlin and its local proxies use this system to repress the media, ensure the delivery of state propaganda, and promote views favorable to the government. Journalists who dare to question the official line are subject to brutal forms of censorship, including criminal prosecution, physical harassment, torture, and even death.

Nowhere is the heavy hand of the Kremlin more visible than in the North Caucasus, where the Russian government seeks to stifle separatist conflicts and silence independent journalists in the name of its “war on terror.” In the absence of a conflict resolution policy, the region is left to the mercy of the *eskadrony smerti* (death squadrons) and secret police, at whose hands journalists and others face the ever-present threat of intimidation, abduction, and execution.

To address this situation, foreign governments must urge Russia to recognize press freedom as a fundamental policy priority and support the European Court of Human Rights’ call for changes in Russia’s political and legal arrangements. Nongovernmental organizations should provide resources to journalists at risk; demand free access for international media in the region; and call on Russia to uphold its international commitments. The world should not turn a blind eye as Russia wages its campaign of repression against the people of the North Caucasus.

— Fatima Tlisova, Tuesday, June 15, 2010
BRUTAL CENSORSHIP:
Targeting Journalists in the North Caucasus

Fatima Tlisova
Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow
June 15, 2010

The views expressed in this presentation represent the analysis and opinions of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

Picture from www.kavkaz.uzel.ru
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I. Media in Russia
Media Ownership in Russia

State-owned Media Coverage:
98.5% of Russia, former USSR, over 200 countries worldwide
II. Media in the North Caucasus
Media Ownership in the North Caucasus

- GTRK State TV-Radio Company
  - 99% of local TV
  - 99% of local radio
- Local Governments
  - 98% of local newspapers
Independent Media Covering the North Caucasus
Media in the North Caucasus: A Repressive Environment

- Accreditation
  - Local governments use licensing authority to regulate access to information and institutions

- Self-censorship
  - Journalists, media outlets self-censor the subjects and extent of reporting

- Security services use informal authority to regulate journalism
  - “Official Papers” summons may soon no longer be required

- Internet Censorship
  - Many bloggers have mandatory reporting obligations
Media in the North Caucasus: Challenges for Journalists

- **Personal Engagement**
  - Ties to family and community make detachment difficult; increased likelihood of traumatization/PTSD

- **Lack of Opportunities for Professional Growth**
  - Low level of professionalism and journalist training
  - Opportunities to work in mainstream media very limited
  - Those who utilize pseudonyms cannot develop their professional reputation

- **No Life Insurance**
  - Parent journalists unable to financially protect family in case of death
Media in the North Caucasus: Challenges for Journalists

- **Insecurity**
  - Police, courts, and other officials unwilling to protect journalists
  - Agents of the “Escadrony Smerti” enjoy almost complete impunity

- **Salary**
  - Average salary for journalist from the Caucasus = $200 / mo
  - Average salary for journalist from Moscow = $4,000-7,000 / mo

- **Lack of Psychiatric Health Care**
  - Treatment is stigmatized by community
  - 97% of medicines are “fake” according to former Minister of Health Affairs
III. Types of Censorship and Profiles of Journalists

- **Marginalization and Alienation:** Oleg Panfilov
- **Internet Censorship:** Remote Control Over the RU-Net
- **Judicial Harassment:** Elena Maglevannaya
- **Criminal Prosecution:** Valery Dzutsev
- **Enlistment:** Zurab Markhiev
- **Execution:** Natalia Estemirova and Magomed Evloev
1998: Attacked, along with TV crew, by unidentified assailants

1998-2002: Won 3 civil cases against officials accusing me of libel

2004: Faced allegations of illegal possession of pension. After I investigated & published article about my case, it was dismissed.

2005: Abducted by the FSB, beaten, cigarettes burned on fingers

2004-2007: Detained five times with no legal explanations

2006: Diagnosed with kidney failure as a result of intoxication

2007: Emigrated to the USA
Marginalization and Alienation

“At the beginning, they forbid one from talking; then they forbid them from demonstrating; then they put pressure on one’s relatives; then they take away one’s business; then in the end they kill them.”

—January 2010

OLEG PANFILOV

1993: Directed CPJ office in Moscow

1993: Attacked in Moscow by unidentified individuals

1994-2000: Head of Glasnost Defence Foundation’s monitoring service


2002-2010: Directed Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations in Moscow

2003-2010: Banned from Russian mainstream media

2009: Emigrated to Georgia

Present: Author of 23 books on journalism and media freedom
Since 1998, Service of Special Communications and Information (SSCI) requires that all Internet providers install a special hardware named SORM that allows filtering and remote control of Internet traffic from SSCI headquarters.
“They initiated a court hearing against me, which they won. I was sentenced to write a refutation stating that I intentionally misled public opinion, and there was no torture taking place in this prison. They actually wrote it on my behalf; they only wanted my signature.”

—January 2010
Elena Maglevannaya


2008-2009: Published reports on torture of Chechen prisoners

2008-2010: Created 5 websites featuring news about situation in Russia and Chechnya

2009: Volgograd administration filed libel suit against her

2009: Volgograd Court sentenced her to publish a refutation and pay a $7,000 fee

2009: Emigrated to Finland
Case Reported by Elena Maglevannaya
“First they didn’t allow us to register our organization, with no explanation for rejection. Then the tax problems occurred.

I paid the taxes, but it wasn’t over. They confiscated all my computers and never returned them. The problem is you can’t prove anything in Russian court, it’s part of the prosecution system.”

—May 2010
1999: Coordinator for British Center for Peacemaking and Community Development

2002: Editor/Coordinator for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting

2006: Russian tax authorities accuse IWPR and Valery of tax evasion

2007: MVD starts criminal investigation into Valery’s journalism activities

2007: MVD confiscates Valery’s computers and never returns them

2007-2008: Moves to the US for a fellowship in Washington DC

2009: Granted political asylum in the US
“On November 26, 2006, I was arrested by the FSB, and taken to their office in Magas.

They offered me options: I cooperate with them, or I will be killed and reported as missing.

The conversation was absolutely clear; they did not pretend that they tried to observe the law, they spoke to me absolutely openly.”

—February 2010
Zurab Markhiev

1999: Moved to Ingushetia after second war in Chechnya began

1999-2009: Assisted foreign reporters as guide and local coordinator

2005-2009: Reported for Regum, AP, BBC, gazeta.ru

2006: Abducted by FSB and signed contract of collaboration

2009: Warned by Memorial staff about his planned assassination by the FSB

2009: Emigrated to Europe
“If you are a true human rights defender, you are constantly violating the unwritten laws created by the Russian government.

I believe our job is not only to talk about the fact that the crime is being committed, but to ensure that the crimes are stopped and the criminals are punished.”

—November 2008
Natalia Estemirova

1991-1998: Reporter at *Groznenski Rabochi* and Grozny TV
1998-1999: Press Secretary for the Organization of Filtration Camps
2000-2009: Representative of the Memorial office in Grozny
2006-2009: Reporter for *Novaya Gazeta* and *Kavkazki Uzel*
2007: Worked in UK for Frontline program after receiving death threats
2009: Returned to Chechnya, was abducted and murdered
2009: Russia refused entry to UN staff to conduct an investigation of Estemirova’s assassination.
“I created the site Ingushetia.ru because there was no other non-government media in my republic.

Our aim was to show reality. We became the most popular source in Ingushetia.

Only after creating the site did I understand that telling the truth is the most dangerous job in Russia.”

—March 2008
Magomed Evloev

1991-1999: Public Procurator of Republic of Ingushetia
2001: Created the website www.ingushetia.ru
2007: Public Procurator of Kuntsevo launches criminal case against Evloev and Ingushetia.ru
2008: Organized “I Did Not Vote” campaign
2008: Published list of members of “death squadrons”
2008: Kuntsevo court describes site as "extremist" and demands its closure
2008: Killed in police custody
2010: Officer convicted of killing Evloev is released from jail
IV. Cyber “War on Terror”: Creating Space for Radical Media

WWW.KAVKAZCENTER.COM
Suppression of independent media has created space for radical ideas to thrive.

The Kavkaz Center has emerged as the leading source of “information” in this media vacuum.

Adam Tumsoev and Mickael Storsjo operate the Kafkaz Center from Europe and claim a right to freedom of speech.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2002</td>
<td>Site operated as kavkaz.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Domain kavkaz.org is stolen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Kavkazcenter.com (KC) was established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2010</td>
<td>KC becomes main source of information from resistance movement with absence of independent media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2010</td>
<td>KC receives massive DDoS attacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Worm “Maslan.A” created in Russia to destroy the KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>KC’s IP blocked in RU-Net by court order, access to site is forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>KC declares itself as an Islamic news agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>KC rejects Ramzan Kadyrov’s attempt to buy the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>KC is frequently quoted in Western mainstream media regarding events in the North Caucasus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“A huge number of requests were coming from the same IP address, and I decided to find out who was doing this. I went to the right database, entered the IP address, and found out it was Lubyanka, Moscow (FSB head-quarter). Even their exact mailing address was there.”

—January 2010
1998–1999: IT specialist, Department of Communications, Government of Ichkeria (Chechya)

2000–2002: IT specialist, Union of Caucasus Journalists, Baku

2009: Granted political asylum in Europe

2009: Member of Union of Journalists (in country of asylum)

“We try to keep the Internet free from censorship since it has its own safe values of delivering information to the broader audience...

All opinions have the right to be aired; that is the basic idea of freedom of speech. This is my main motivation in hosting Kavkazcenter.”

—January 2010
2000: Member of Union of Journalists of Finland and Sweden

2005–2006: Deputy Chairman of Electronic Frontier, Finland

2005–present: Secretary of the Finnish-Russian Civic Forum

2005–present: Member of Finnish-Chechen Association’s Board

2008–2010: Received death threats from suspected FSB agents

2009–present: Claims to be under constant surveillance by unidentified individuals.
V. Political, Social, and Personal Consequences of Censorship
Quality of reporting from the North Caucasus is in severe decline

- The most effective journalists and human rights defenders are lost/eliminated

- Objective reporting is construed as one-sided and anti-government

- Independent media outlets in the North Caucasus are disappearing

- Human rights and freedoms displaced in favor of “power politics”
Political and Social Consequences

- Local populations have no voice in the media
- Lack of information and factual reporting decreases understanding between public officials and local population
- State policymaking suffers
- Radicalism (ethnic, religious, violent) becomes the main outlet for assertion of rights and rights discourse
Personal Consequences to Journalists

- Professional marginalization
- Strained or broken familial bonds
- Alienation from society
- Long-term psychological damage and PTSD
- Long-term physical damage
- Exile (displacement, loss of career, separation from family and community, loss of self-esteem)
- Premature death
VI. Policy Recommendations
Policy Recommendations: How to Assist Journalists from the North Caucasus

For Governments:

- Foreign embassies should create procedures that expedite rescue of human rights defenders and journalists
- Support independent investigations for assassinated journalists
- Evaluators of human rights should identify, track, and highlight specific rights violations and the basis for such acts in Russia
- Pay more attention to the North Caucasus and place more monitors there and in other parts of Russia
- Support U.S. international broadcasting efforts focusing on the North Caucasus and other neglected regions
- Follow the approach of the European Court of Human Rights, which calls for changes in legal and political arrangements
Policy Recommendations: How to Assist Journalists from the North Caucasus

For Nongovernmental Organizations and Media Advocates:

- Demand that international media reporters gain access to the region
- Provide trainings for local journalists on new media skills, professionalism, and safety
- Establish an emergency hotline for journalists at risk
- Develop website for journalists at risk
- Highlight inconsistencies between the Russian constitution, criminal codes and other international agreements to which Russia is a party.
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