

# RUSSIAN MASS MEDIA: PROSPECTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

## РОССИЙСКИЕ СМИ: ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ

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*This article analyzes the communication matrices that determine the functioning of Russian mass media. It is shown that the prospects for Russian mass media transformation are determined by the contradictions of the Russian social system, and dependent on the chosen model of national development.*

**Key words:** *public institution; mass communication; communication matrix; matrix media; mass media.*

*В статье анализируются коммуникационные матрицы, которые определяют функционирование российских СМИ. Показано, что перспективы трансформации российских СМИ определяются не только технологическими и экономическими факторами, но и противоречиями российской социальной системы, и зависят от выбранной модели национального развития.*

**Ключевые слова:** *социальные институты; массовые коммуникации; коммуникационные матрицы; медиаматрицы; СМИ.*

The debate about what is happening to Russian mass media, and in what direction national journalism develops, began with perestroika, involving journalists and scientists alike. The goal of the debate is to find answers to the following questions: why the media quality has declined, why tabloids and yellow journalism dominate the media, and why it is corrupt, incompetent, and servile; why we still cannot have a free, fair and objective press.

There are a variety of answers from the corrupting influence of the West, and a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy, to the iron hand of the Kremlin. The tones of the conclusions are also different, from restrained and balanced scientific statements, to the apocalyptic emotionality of journalistic media criticism.

It would appear that involvement of pundits in this “exploratory” activity should lead to the desired result. And, indeed, numerous scientific studies on the analysis of media and journalism were carried out, in which scientists tried to identify the patterns and trends of media processes. Thus, research of mass media is adequately covered by three main complexes:

- **socio-centred research**, considering the mass media as a specific social machine that performs a set of functions (the composition and content of which are disputable);
- **media-centred research**, analyzing the organizational aspects of media companies;
- **anthropic-centred research**, in which the problems of journalistic creativity and audience behavior are brought to the forefront.

Obviously there have been quite serious attempts to answer these questions; however, it is equally obvious that almost 20 years of debate has not led to concrete conclusions. Why are these questions still unanswered?

In my opinion, the answer is simple: *Mass media comprise a social institution that organizes the activities of people in its sphere of influence using certain long-lasting, narrow matrices, which resist change.*

I will try to elaborate.

## **Mass media as a social institution**

I remember the year 1979, when as a young scientist I spoke at a scientific conference and proved that the future work of the journalist shall be determined by norms and rules. The head of Kiev University's School of Journalism, D. M. Prilyuk, stood up, frowned, and said that I was wrong, because journalism is a creative profession, and there can be no rules.

Now the idea that the media is an institution of mass communication, acting according to certain rules, has become commonplace. Today, one does not need to prove that mass communication is a system providing rapid production and mass distribution of semantic constructs, the core of which is a way of life in a changing environment, and creates (of course, using elements already available to the community) a set of social institutions and activities, ensuring its operation and development.

Mass media are one of such institutions, and journalism allows this institution to function. Mass media as a social institution require journalism to follow regulations and rules of professional conduct, which are based on certain principles and legal bases, and perform stimulating and sometimes forceful functions (through prohibitions, permissions, obligations, etc.)

Just like any social institution, mass media arise in response to a social need to have an objective process of labor division, and in more general terms – the different human processes of objective activity and public relations. Needs and wants form the respective interests and priorities that act as direct determinants for social institutions, establishment and development. Therefore, one of the specific features of such institutions origins, is that they appear as a result of the joint goal-oriented activity of a group of people, and the realization of their target settings. The institutionalization of the activity presupposes a certain standardization of these settings, their consolidation in certain forms and creation of conditions for their reproduction.

This means that the media in general are not just a set of organizations and teams, performing certain freely chosen obligations. This is a rather

rigid system of rules, regulations, and public expectations, according to which such obligations should be performed<sup>1</sup>. These rules, norms, and expectations manifest themselves in the production of mass media, as well as in roles that are assigned (and sometimes imposed) to people associated with the institution<sup>2</sup>.

In this sense, the media, as well as any social institution, appear as part of the social whole, which according to the expectation of other elements should behave in a certain way, that is, to realize well-defined functions. But just as the behavior of an individual can deviate positively or negatively, the functioning of a social institution may or may not meet the expectations of the social order and other social institutions. If the institution fails to perform its functions (or there are inappropriate deviations), it (namely, individuals performing it) face various consequences.

However, it is time to move on, starting with the understanding that the media are a social institution.

## **Communication matrices**

Contemporary science has proven that any communicative action is mediated by binding regulations, which determine mutual behavioral expectations, and which must be understood and recognized, by at least

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Journalists should ...’. ‘Journalists should not...’ The President, the Prime Minister, the speakers of both houses of the ministers, the oligarchs – the list goes on until the last drunkard – all they know what journalists are supposed to do and what they should not. And woe to the journalist, whose opinion about his duties does not coincide with the public’s expectations.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of ‘role’ (as a rule, together with the definition ‘social’) traditionally assigned to an individual and is used to denote the set of rules, determining the behaviour of individuals acting in a social system depending on the status or position they have, and actions implementing the these standards. However, in my opinion, the powerful heuristics potentiality of this concept gives a possibility to represent a specific aspect of the functioning of the various social actors (organizations, institutions – various subsystems of society, with the status, position in the system of social interactions).

two communicating subjects. Everyone involved in communication, intuitively aims to follow some rules and regulations, which allow, in their opinion, effective and successful communication. These ‘regulators’ are defined by different concepts: principles, postulates, rules, policies, discourses, conventions, and codes.

For example, one of the linguistic studies states that “domestic and foreign scholars in the field of speech act theory – A. A. Leontiev, L. S. Vygotsky, M. R. Lvov, A. E. Suprun, E. V. Kluev, T. G. Vinokur, J. Austin, J. R. Serl, G. Grice, G. Sanz and others – have developed rules (principles) of speech communication: the co-operation principle, the consistency principle, the preferred structure principle, the politeness principle, the equal security principle, the de-centric orientation principle, and the utterance perception principle” (Umantseva, 2007).

The concepts of “discourse” and “convention” are the most popular at the moment.

The word “**discourse**” (*fr. discours, lat. discursus* – reasoning, argument) is translated in Russian as speech, statement, and reasoning. However, these words do not convey the meanings that experts associate with this concept. Discourse is seen not only as a tool to master the reality through “articulation,” but also as a tool to construct normative models – perception frames and behavior scenarios. Thus, the discourse is both a process and a result (as established methods, rules and logic necessary to discussion). With this idea, discourse is considered a linguistic method of organizing reality, which is a perception of the world, realizable in a variety of (not only verbal) practices, and therefore, not only reflecting the world, but also developing and co-creating it.

Any discourse relates to institutionalized communication. Institutional discourse is a discourse, carried out in social institutions, in which communication is an integral part of the organization itself.

The main parameters of institutional discourse are:

- A set of typical communication situations (speech events),
- Presentation of the typical patterns of speech behavior in the performance of certain social roles,

- Certain (limited) topics of communication, a specific set of intentions and related speech strategies (Sheigal, 2004).

The **convention** refers to the forms of interaction accepted by society (and regulated by a given society), including speech. Most communicative acts are regulated to some extent (Austin, 1999, 2004, 2006; Searle, 2004; Strawson, 2004).

If we bear in mind the social conventions regulating the initiation of communication, it will be convenient to consider the communicants as members (strictly and not as strictly) of social hierarchies, such as:

- boss / manager / employer – a subordinate;
- superior officer (for example, in the army) – inferior in rank;
- teacher / master / lecturer – student / apprentice / audience;
- parents / adults – children;
- leader – team;
- owner – tenant;
- host – guest.

Quite often in order to refer to the rules of communication, the term “code” is used. L. V. Umantseva writes the following about it: “In the dictionaries the word ‘code’ is defined as a set of laws. The Criminal Code, a set of rules, beliefs (fig., book.). In verbal communication, there are also rules, beliefs, i.e. communicative code’. According to her, ‘the basis of the communicative code is built of such basic categories as communicative (speech) purpose and communicative (verbal) intention. Communicants should comply with the criterion of truth (faithfulness to reality), the criterion of sincerity (faithfulness to you), the criterion of knowledge of the native Russian language and its literary norms (allegiance with the Motherland, and its heritage – Russian language), and the criterion of morality (trust your mind, your heart)”<sup>3</sup>.

Recently the concept “**Format**” has become extremely popular. In Latin, “format” means a “look, external appearance”. The term was used in the printing industry in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and meant “the size of the printed edition, paper size”. Format was used as a term, plus

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.t21.rgups.ru/doc2007/8/20.doc>.

printing names and nomenclature attached to it, meaning specific sizes of publications, say, the A4 format, A3 format, or A2 format. It is no longer just about appearance and size, but about quite a specified size, a benchmark, a standard in the printing industry. Then the concept was used by computer scientists to refer to some parameters, properties, and opportunities that allow for the operation of certain computer programmes. The derivative concept of “formatting” came from computer vocabulary: 1) erase the old data and install new software; 2) specify text’s appearance, for example, text to the centre, left, or right. Both meanings of the verb “format” regard the structure and the standard.

According to T. I. Surikova, “it was this actualized sema ‘standard’, ‘benchmark’ that lead to the use of the concept ‘format’ in theory and practice of mass communication when such notions as media type, genre, style, reflecting the systemic nature of this phenomenon, ceased to convey standard and benchmark notions. And the word became fashionable...

Such a set of linguistic and extra-linguistic circumstances, in our opinion, could lead to “format” replacing the other concepts or, at least, beginning to be used as a modern, trendy synonym matching the linguistic taste of the times. This is indicated by its contexts and compatibility”<sup>4</sup>.

We shall outline our position without analyzing these categories. It is that the most appropriate term for all possible regulators of communication is the concept “**matrix**”. This concept was used in the cult sci-fi movie, filmed by brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski, to indicate an interactive computer program simulating reality for billions of people connected to it forcefully by machines, so that they could obtain energy necessary for their continued existence.

Of course, this concept existed long before the movie *The Matrix*, and had a rather specific meaning. It comes from the Latin word, “matrix” (womb), and was used in metal processing to identify tools with cross-cutting holes or recesses, which were used in stamping and pressing, as well as in printing to identify metal plates with the intaglio of a letter or a character, which served as molds for literals.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mediascope.ru/node/416>.

And this meaning – a form that sets parameters – provides ample opportunities for the use of this concept.

With regard to public processes, the concept of the “institutional matrix” was used by K. Polani and D. North. Douglass North defines the institutional matrix as a structure of institutions determining economic and political behavior of actors and their limits (North, 2010). S. Kirdina develops the idea of institutional matrices in more detail, originally she proposed a model of the institutional matrix to describe two types of economies (market and planned) (Kirdina, 2001).

The institutional matrix as a sociological concept is a stable, historically developed system of basic institutions, regulating the interconnected operation of the main social spheres: economic, political and ideological.

According to S. Kirdina, the institutional matrix is a triune social form; it is a system of economic, political and ideological institutions that are in constant accord. Or, in other words, the institutional matrix is a peculiar genotype of society – it forms when the state is born, and lasts throughout the state’s development. These matrices represent knowledge, values, and norms, adapting the environment to individuals in accordance with their needs, goals and ideas. They reflect the reality of ethnic and social groups who lived here before and effectively adapted<sup>5</sup>.

Institutional matrices are always bound to a particular social or geographical area, i.e. they have their own space with certain imperatives. In other words, we are talking about a real or virtual area, with a population that recognizes the authority of a certain matrix.

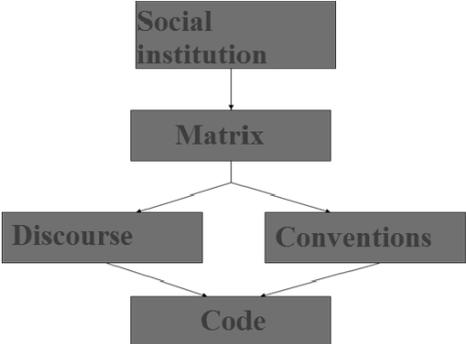
According to S. Kirdina, humanity has two basic matrices, which largely determine the lifestyle and social activities: the X and Y-matrices.

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<sup>5</sup> In a sense, defined term “institution” has something in common with the concept of “culture”, which is widely used in the Russian social science. Any culture is a set of programs that ensure the survival and development of the community, a group or an individual. Any culture emerges as a response to requests from people, who are seeking to survive and develop under the specified conditions in the most effective way.

Each of these matrices is based on specific economic, political and ideological institutions. All of the above allow us to formulate the thesis that the most appropriate term to refer to systems of knowledge, values and norms defining specifics of various subjects' communication in different situations and reconciling these systems with the general social situation, is the notion of the "communication matrix," manifestations of which are the discourses, conventions, codes. Schematically, this idea can be represented as (Figure 1):

*Figure 1*



**Types of communications matrices**

A variety of different communication matrices that determine the communicative behavior of individuals and social institutions can be sorted into three main groups: vertical, horizontal and diagonal matrices.

**The vertical matrix:**

- Vertical distribution of subjects of communication (parents – children, bosses – subordinates, the state – citizens);
- The state plays a dominant role in most communicative processes;

- Access to information is complicated due to a set of special regulations;
- Freedom of speech is not exercised.

**The horizontal matrix:**

- Partnerships between the subjects of communication;
- Established feedback loop;
- The right to free access to information, to expression of views, to personal choice of communication channels is legislatively enforced and exercised.

**The Hybrid matrix:**

- Allocates subjects of communication in classes with a horizontal and vertical relationships;
- Provides partial access to various information, however, access to a significant information resources requires special permission.

Today, in Russia all three communication matrices co-exist. The hybrid matrix is the base, with complementary vertical and horizontal matrices.

## **Media matrices**

Functioning in the media space, communication matrix is realized in the form of a media matrix that is a set of more or less stringent standards and rules according to which, a mass-media product is created. The media matrix operates at all stages of journalistic and editorial activity, such as the selection of news, the definition of genres, etc.

The media matrix has different forms that realize different media goals. In its most general form, the following media matrices can be identified: journalism, advertising, promotion, and PR.

The fact that the media as a social institution and journalism, as a type of social activity, function in accordance with the norms and rules based on the specifics of a social system, was recognized by experts thanks to an old work of American sociologists Siebert, Peterson and

Schramm, “Four Theories of the Press”, published in America in 1956 (Siebert, Schramm, Peterson, 1998). Having named these norms and rules “theories of the press”, the authors identified four such theories: authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet (communist).

McQuail added two more theories: the model of developing countries, and a model of democratic participation.

According to the Raymond Williams’ concept (Sparks, Reading, 1998) a mass media system may be authoritarian, paternalistic, commercial, or democratic. The authoritarian system is a mass media system, in which “the main task of communication is to convey instructions, ideas and attitudes of the ruling group”.

The paternalistic system is an authoritarian model, where, however, the ruling group retains social responsibility, i.e. “values and goals that go beyond the power retention”. Although the commercial system differs from the authoritarian or paternalistic by a greater degree of inner freedom, “it has its limitations arising from the difficulties to make profit from some form of communication:” “you can say whatever you want, provided that you can afford to say it, and say it with a profit”. Williams could not find an actual example of the democratic media model, that’s why for him it was rather a system of principles to be followed, rather than specific proposals on the basis of accumulated experience<sup>6</sup>.

In Russia, the problems of media typology are actively discussed by A. Akopov, L. Resnyanskaya, M. Shkondin and many other researchers. (Bakshin, 1984; Grabelnikov, 2001; Shkondin, 2002). However, they tried to find an effective formal classification for media, which would create a sort of media periodic table, and in its cells, all the possible types of media will be included.

My approach to analyze types of media and journalism was first formulated in 1988, in an article that was published in the now-forgotten magazine, “*Slovo lectora*” (*Word of Lecturer*). Afterwards I outlined it in some of my other publications during the perestroika era.

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<sup>6</sup> There are also other more emotional definitions of the social role of journalism: “Night Watchman”, “Watchdog of Democracy”, etc.

Later, these ideas were more or less clearly expressed in my book, *“The Russian Journalist in the Post-totalitarian Era”* and other publications (Dzyaloshinsky, 1996a, 1996b, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

The approach was to claim that within the framework of Russian professional journalistic culture, several alternative paradigms of professional activity co-exist, which differ from one another in all their components, including the moral and ethical ones. All of them are located in a peculiar “space” formed by three vectors, which are fundamental, social and professional settings that determine the general attitude of journalists to the audience.

The first setting puts the journalist above the audience determining his right to treat their readers as an object of management (training, development), and a journalist as the carrier or the translator of management programs of different types and levels. If we try to convey the ultimate meaning of activities of journalists professing this approach, it is exemplified by the word “impact”.

This kind of journalistic practice has a quite fundamental grounding in the work of many researchers and theorists who have created a complex of harmonious concepts of the control of action, based on the idea of the active role of mass media that act as a subject of propaganda, and the passive (despite numerous reservations) role of the audience that is regarded as a product of ideological and propaganda influence.

The second setting puts the journalist near the audience, and is focused on information relations. In this case, journalists consider that their primary professional responsibility is to provide the audience with a variety of interesting information, data, and materials, as well as to assist in the expression of popular opinion.

Both of these settings, despite the significant differences between them, alienate the audience from the mass media.

The third fundamental setting requires that journalists should be inside a particular human community, and consider themselves interested participants of a search, performed together with the audience, to find solutions to community problems. The main idea of such journalism is that

journalists should consider readers, viewers, listeners, not as a background or as passive observers, victims of various circumstances, but as participants of the problem solving process. This journalism defines itself in such terms as humanitarian, personal, communitarian, participatory, etc.<sup>7</sup>

The main function or role of journalism is understood as the “dialogue moderator”. It means that journalism can and should create an environment for equal dialogue between different social groups – no matter how great they are, and how different their ideas, goals and organizations are – in the course of which social contradictions and conflicts can be resolved. Journalism can and should promote conflicting opinions and attitudes within a single information space, which, upon presentation to the public, can find ways for rapprochement or, at least, or provoke arguments to prove their own consistency. This feature is especially important in a society torn by conflict and split into different camps, when a society lacks public reconciliation. This function that can convert the conflict, revealing the problem, and thus, brings it closer to resolution, but not at the level of a street brawl, through a reasonable and pragmatic public dialogue<sup>8</sup>.

What conclusions can we make if we apply the above classification to the Russian mass media?

The first group – “impact” mass media belonging to the state and corporations – their main task is to influence public opinion and behavioral stereotypes of the population, represents the most powerful and secured communication resources. Currently, most Russian regional newspapers and 80% of municipal are owned by state and municipal

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<sup>7</sup> In America, almost the same idea has been realized in the concept of civil (public) journalism. Civil journalism puts journalists’ duties to society to the forefront not the rights of journalists. In other words, this journalism requires from editors and news organizations to perform the journalistic work so, that it would help people to overcome a sense of apathy, powerlessness and alienation, galvanize them into action, turning them from passive viewers into active participants of civil actions. The American experience of the citizen journalism is presented in the book by Edward D. Miller (Miller, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Technology dialogue in the media is outlined in more details in the following papers: Resnyanskaya (2001), Grusha (2001), Prokhorov (2002).

authorities, which is reflected in their editorial policies<sup>9</sup>, as well as their economic independence, because all of them are subsidized by regional and local budgets in some way.

The second group of media, which are usually referred to as commercial, as they are focused on profit due to the interests and needs of the audience. Studies over the past ten years provide a basis for concluding that these media have favorable development opportunities. The advertising market is rapidly growing, and unpretentious mass audience gladly absorb low-quality content.

However, the commercialization of the media in a situation where other public institutions operate in the X-matrix, has led to the fact that many of them have ceased to meet their informational purposes, as well as to perform their inherent cultural, educational and other functions. Civil society has no traditions, and the population is excluded from the political process, thereby dictating that the media have to meet very narrow, mostly household and entertainment interests of their audience, which is very freely interpreted by managers of media companies.

The third group of media have positioned themselves as a social institution that protects the public from government and owners of capital; this is an insignificant, small group of media with an unsure future.

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<sup>9</sup> The results obtained in different studies indicate that the relationship between the government and the media in Russia define themselves whether in terms of submission and servitude, or in terms of war. Another option – that is a dialogue, partnership – is impossible. At the regional level, heads of any rank are characterized by an absolute unwillingness to consider the mass media as an independent social institution, by the desire to turn journalists into their henchmen, who are supposed to carry out instructions sent down. Heads of administrations see the local press primarily as a kind of additional information and analytical service, and a department of public relations, but never as a controller and a critic of their actions. With all the individual differences in age, education, life experience heads of regional and local governments consider the media as neither an independent institution of civil society nor special, relatively independent informational business, but only as an advocacy attachment to the administration. Many of them are originally convinced that journalists' duty is to help them, managers, to solve the problems they face.

## **What is the reason to choose a particular matrix?**

The ratio of different types of media can hardly be called accidental, unlikely to be the result of someone's ill will or incompetence. Most likely, this ratio is determined by the characteristics of the social system, which media serve.

In order to understand the development and aims of the Russian media, we need to understand what has happened, is happening and will happen to the general public.

In Russia, forms of interaction between X- and Y-matrices have been developed over many years. They can be summarized in three basic models which, in one form or another, are represented in the works of modern scholars.

***The Conservative-statist model.*** This model involves the work of Leontyev, and Eurasians (P. Savitsky, L. Karsavin, N. Alekseev, etc.). At the core of this model there is the paradigm of an updated ideocracy and Byzantinism. Civic consciousness is treated as national spirit, a single national will, and European liberalism, democracy and pluralism compose a hostile, sinful political environment, eating away at the roots of the Eurasian-Byzantine Russian society.

Today, the conservative-statist model is transformed into a fundamentalist (Conservative, Orthodox community) project, which focuses on the principled rejection of Western values, is based upon the idea of a "return to basics", "falling down before the deeper fundamentals of folk wisdom", "protection of national culture", etc.

The original principles of the fundamentalist project can be summarized as follows:

- society is understood as a sphere trying to realize the will of God in a sinful imperfect world, not as the embodiment of self-sufficient human desires;
- group and especially social interests primarily relate to the individual;
- the state in this value system is a universal organization, which can effectively develop society in support of wholesome traditions;

- innovation, particularly targeted, deliberate reforms are perceived as undesirable;
- reforms are only permitted in line with the country's civilizational values.

***The Liberal-conservative model.*** This model has two main branches: liberal-conservatism (B. Chicherin, P. Struve), and the new liberalism (P. Novgorodtsev, S. Kotlyarevskiy, S. Gessen, B. Kistyakovskiy).

The liberal-conservative model of civil society associates the freedom and rights of the individual with the principles of nation and culture, and political freedom with spiritual and cultural freedom, extending the traditional idea of liberalism.

The question of public participation in the legislative process and state management, in reforming the political, economic and financial system is considered part of the cultural liberation of the individual and open society. This approach involves the alliance of “ideal autocracy” with liberal and democratic social forces, based upon the principles of tolerance and the rule of law and order.

Today's liberals mostly support the Western project, which is associated with a strong belief in the inevitable construction of a universal world community, based upon the principles of democracy and liberalism, scientific and cultural progress, and the widespread acceptance of the industrial or post-industrial economy.

The terms of the proposal by S. Kirdina describe the transition from the dominance of the X-matrix to the dominance of Y-matrix, that is, a complete upgrade of the basic aspects of life. Such a transition is possible only if the government and society will take a special effort to provide the conditions necessary for such a transformation:

- a minimum standard of living;
- freedom of creativity;
- free enterprise;
- fair competition;
- a high level of education;
- the development of science;

- industry and innovation;
- the importance of social capital, trust (Yasin, 2007).

***The Revolutionary-radical model.*** Its interior includes models of civil society that are typical to the spiritual and political models of revolutionary democrats, revolutionary populism, Russian anarchism, and Russian Marxism (social-democrats of all shades and the Bolsheviks).

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the revolutionary-radical model manifested itself in two types of radicalism: national bolshevism and liberal radicalism. These directions, although based on different values and program-political grounds, are, in fact, aimed at narrowing the “corridor” of civil society initiative, either influencing it “directly” through ideocratic forces, using market and economic levers, or mass media technologies.

Along with these models with a solid history, other projects to transform Russia have been developed in recent years. If we generalize the set of possible ideas, we will find different versions of the modernization project. Supporters of the modernization project believe that the adoption of the “Western Project of World Order” in Russia faces intractable difficulties, and should be replaced by a similar form, but not alternative in effects and modernization. Modernization is the special adaptation of traditional societies to the challenges of the globalized world. The essence of modernization is to preserve cultural roots, and combine them with elements of modern Western civilization. For example, Russia’s development of certain market functions is combined with genuine confidence in the uniqueness of Russian culture built on non-market principles. Unwillingness to politically unify the planet is combined with the desire for economic unification, etc.

## **Where are we going? Development scenarios**

### **RLSC scenarios**

In 2008, The Research Laboratory of Civil Society at the Higher School of Economics performed a study entitled “Prospects of Civil

Society in Russia: Evaluation and Selection Problems”. The study discovered a number of possible scenarios for the development of civil society.

***In the first scenario, conventionally called the “society of solidarity,”*** civil society is characterized by high social activity on the part of the educated upper middle class, accompanied by a strengthening of civil society’s social base (increasing the core and reducing the buffer zone). In this scenario, the majority of the population perceives the society as a united body with growing trust, responsibility and a sense of their capabilities to influence the ongoing processes. In this case, the activities of the third sector are rather stale, thanks to effective personnel maintenance. NPO’s services are sought by the authorities and the business community, and contribution of the third sector to GDP is equivalent to that of developed Western countries.

***The second scenario is conventionally called “inertial society”***, in which the operation of civil institutions is manifested in concrete practices; however, there is only a low level of Russian involvement in such a model.

In such a society, the third sector organizations are diverse, but not stable. Certain types of NPOs may contribute to solutions of local issues, serving as developed forms of cooperation with the authorities at the municipal level. Civic involvement in the community tends to be “privatized” by local authorities. There are also groups characterized by high activity, “that is, people with higher education, or our traditional intelligentsia”. In this scenario, certain types of NPOs may contribute to the solution of local issues, but here interaction between government and non-profit organizations is possible at the municipal level”.

***The third scenario – the “society of social passivity”*** is characterized by, in particular, a weak social basis, especially on the periphery, the instability of the third sector due to little resource support. NPOs are not regarded as a development resource for municipalities, regions and the country in general. Such a society is characterized by low levels of social, and willingness to follow others, as there is a prevailing backwards

attitude regarding participation in civil society. Features of this scenario are: a weak social base, a large, comprising more than half of the population, periphery, the third sector is unstable due to a weak resource base, and forms of cooperation with the authorities are not diverse, with the prevalence of non-material forms<sup>10</sup>.

Given the prospects of each scenario, the researchers refer to the first scenario as the best one, and suggest that it could possibly arise in Russia. Specifically for this scenario, the roadmap for the development of civil society was designed. This map indicated that in order to adopt the first scenario, it is necessary to increase the sustainability of the NPOs, develop charitable and volunteer opportunities, provide effective support for these activities at the regional and municipal levels, and contribute to a positive attitude toward civil activity.

It is also important to expand the demand for the NPOs' services, develop information and consultancy support for NPOs, promote civic education and territorial self-government, monitor the status of civil society and monitor the activities of the federal and regional executive authorities that contribute to civil development. The implementation of these measures affects such critical factors as: the standard of living, way of life, the cultural integration of society, institutionalized rights and freedoms, and socio-structural dynamics<sup>11</sup>.

## **ZIRCON scenario**

Other research that made an attempt to form a set of different scenarios for Russian civil society and assess the likelihood of their implementation, was performed by group of sociologists under the guidance of I. Zadorina. The experts were well-known and respected professionals from a variety of social and political spheres, directly related

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<sup>10</sup> *Dorozhnaya karta grazhdanskogo obschestva* [Roadmap of the Civic Society]. <http://www.hse.ru/news/recent/6228644.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Russian civil society, including the leaders and activists of NPOs, public and other civil s organizations, representatives of state and municipal authorities that regulate civil activity, heads and senior staff of public and private funds of civil organizations, researchers, scientists, and analytical centers that deal with the problems of development of contemporary Russian civil society.

The experts identified the following three factors as significant for the development of Russian civil society:

- The level of civic engagement in the community (from high to low);
- The level of influence of the state on civil society (from a strong influence to a lack of influence);
- The level of state support for CSOs (from substantial support and funding to a lack of support and funding).

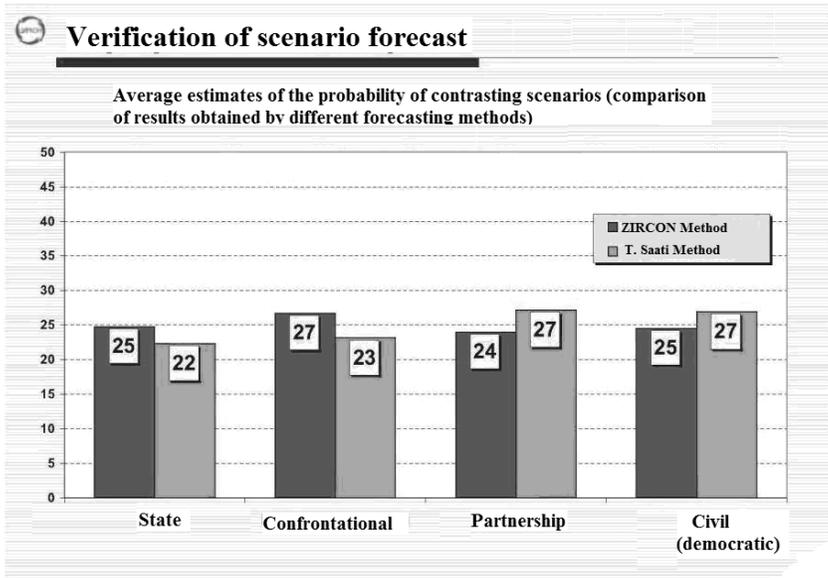
The combination of the three main factors produced four contrasting scenarios: partner, statist, confrontational, civilian (democratic).

Thus, the experts did not reveal a single dominant, or most likely, scenario. A statist scenario is considered by many experts as slightly more likely than others in the short term, where the state plays the leading role in the development of civil organizations. However, there are reasons to believe that, as a result of a possible decrease in state support for civil organizations, and the growth of social activity. Russia may develop a confrontational (more likely) or civil (less likely) model<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Public Initiative. Four Expert Forecasts of the Civil Society Development in Russia.* <http://www.infopublic.ru/content.asp?pn=2609>.

Figure 2



### G. Satarov's scenarios

Another predictive project was realized by a G. Satarov's group. During the project, experts identified and assessed the likelihood of several scenarios for the development of Russian civil society.

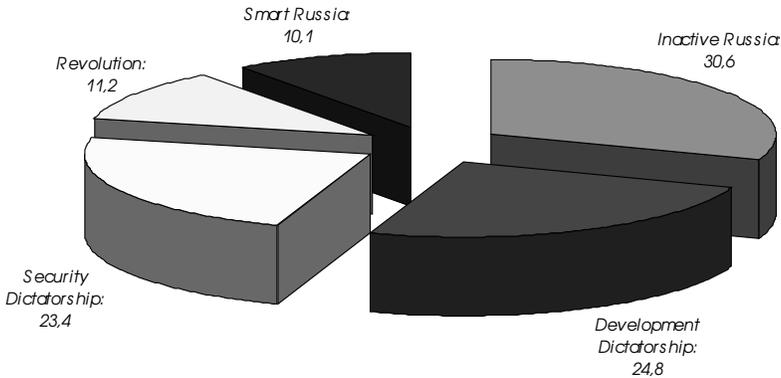
## Main scenarios

№	Name of scenario	Scenario Description
1	Inactive Russia	This inertial scenario, reflecting the continuing trend of instability and potentials of any other scenarios. Reforms are sporadic and imitative, power is weak and ineffective, elites are disunited, and society is demobilized.
2	Development Dictatorship	The tightening of the regime by group forces that take responsibility to restore order in the country, prevent or stop larceny and lawlessness in order to accelerate the modernization. A sort of Pinochet variant.
3	Security Dictatorship	Sharp tightening of the regime sake of keeping the power of the sitting group or any part of it, winning the other competitors. In the modernization sphere there is imitation with larceny.
4	Revolution	Quasi-legitimate or illegitimate regime change, resulting from a street activity of large groups of the population. Actual political coloring of force seizing power is insignificant.
5	Smart Russia	Movement to modernization according to the Western scenario, the restoration of normal political competition, improving the efficiency of legal institutions, etc.

This inertial scenario reflects the continuing trend of instability and potential for any other scenarios. Reforms are sporadic and imitative, power is weak and ineffective, elites are disunited, and society is demobilized.

This is the likelihood of different scenarios in 2005:

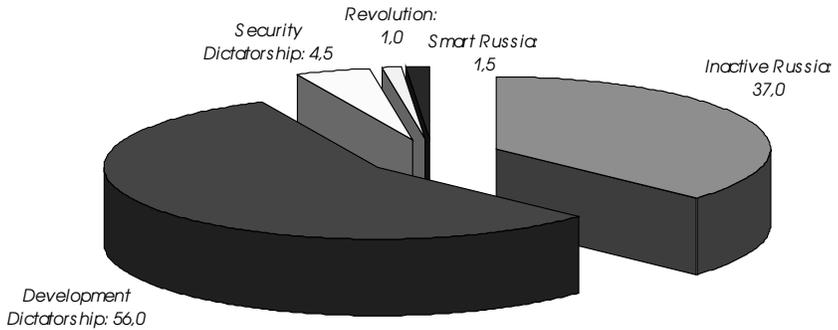
Figure 4



The Scenario, “Inactive Russia,” was in the lead. The next two places, with about the same result, were the models “Development Dictatorship” and “Security Dictatorship”. “Revolution” and “Smart Russia” held the last two places. Meanwhile, the chances of all five scenarios ranged from 10 to 30%, which means there were neither clear leaders, nor obvious outsiders. Such a small variation in the probability of the scenarios is typical for an uncertain situation (if not in reality, then at least among experts). It is even more interesting because it is a question about the period, which was perceived and evaluated as rather stable: the regime controlled all aspects of political and social life, and economic prospects were good.

In 2008, the situation, according to experts, changed as follows:

Figure 5



Compared to the assessment of the likelihood of different scenarios in 2005, which were within a small range, in 2008, it was different: two scenarios were in the lead – “Development Dictatorship” and “Inactive Russia”, and the rest of scenarios seemed extremely unlikely.

In 2012, due to dramatic changes in Russia’s political climate, it was considered necessary to change the set of scenarios so that they would more accurately reflect both the current political situation, and the range of core opportunities to change it. Here is an updated list of scenarios defined by experts:

Table 1

**List of scenarios presented by the name  
with a brief textual description**

№	Name of scenario	Scenario Description
1	<b>Inactive Russia</b>	The regime imitates some concessions and willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition. The protest movement cannot self-organize and express its demands and as a result, dies out. Corruption at the presidential elections is not shocking; their results do not give rise to a new wave of protests. Despite occasional bursts of dissent, conflicts and protests, the regime persists, Putin holds power.
2	<b>Interception</b>	During the election campaign, between rounds and after the elections, the regime takes a number of steps to partially satisfy the protesters and muffles dissent. A number of laws and personnel decisions are adopted, which helps to solve this problem. The regime is in power.
3	<b>Dialogue</b>	With the growth and institutionalization of protest, with a recognized core, capable of establishing universal demands, the regime starts a dialogue with representatives of the protesters. Rapid, progressive political reforms are developed and approved, and should be implemented within 2-3 years.
4	<b>Tiananmen</b>	The regime cracks down on the protests, using massive force and repressive measures toward opposition leaders, and a large number of protesters.
5	<b>Political chaos</b>	With the growth and institutionalization of protest, the regime continues to ignore ongoing social changes. Elections are held with gross violations, street protests are supported by a number of previously loyal elite groups. It leads to sharp destabilization of the political situation, putting the regime in jeopardy.

The analysis showed that there are two competing scenarios: “Inactive Russia” and “Interception”. The likelihood of the scenario, “Inactive Russia,” decreased to 46%. The three remaining scenarios measured less than seventeen percent. “Dialogue” is the least plausible

scenario. There are two scenarios that are now referred to differently, but have a clear, narrow political meaning. They are the scenarios: “Revolution” (before) and “Political chaos” (now). Here, however, likelihood increases.

A year ago, the likelihood of the “Revolution” scenario was almost zero, but now the likelihood of “Political chaos” has reached 8%<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, we can state that the initial desire of a certain number of Russians focused on Westernization, despite resistance from elites and the masses. Today, we have a hybrid, or rather a mixture of modernization of the fundamentalist model. It is no accident that today, a variety of traditional Russian values serve as the basis for further reforms: patriotism, great power, and social solidarity. The main task is improving the efficiency of executive power, rather than creating conditions conducive to the establishment of a fully-fledged civil society. This is an executive who balances and controls the authorities, despite the fact that the main threat to human rights and freedoms, democracy in general comes from executive power. Rigid verticalization of centralized power, manipulated population, “pocket” and obedient civil society institutions, theatrical democracy, “tame” State Duma – these are elements of Russia’s current national development.

As for the prospects of the transformation process in contemporary Russia, from the point of view of the institutional matrix theory, the forecast is as follows: “the main result will be, firstly, the strengthening of dominant positions of the redistributive economy’s basic institutions in its new forms, a unitary, centralized political system, and communitarian ideology. Secondly, an efficient niche for the embedding and functioning of a complementary-to-our-country market economy, federal structure and subsidiary ideology will be created. Thirdly, we expect the achievement of a social consensus on the country’s structure and development prospects, which will consist of expansion of the legal framework,

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<sup>13</sup> *Sisenatnoye prognozirovaniye politicheskoi situatsii v Rossii* [Predictive Scenario-Based Modelling of the Political Situation in Russia]. Analytical report No. 2, February 2012. [http://www.liberal.ru/upload/files/Doklad\\_3.pdf](http://www.liberal.ru/upload/files/Doklad_3.pdf)

i.e. more complete articulation of law, and consolidation of social life into civilized forms, particularly for the “life and idea” of our society”.

Thus, returning to the question asked in the beginning of the article, we have to state, that in these social conditions, when two incompatible social, communicative matrices are overlapping, mass media on the whole cannot be free, fair and objective

Mass media cannot, but journalists can be. But that is a topic for another conversation.

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