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Famous Perestroika Mouthpiece Relaunches With RIA

By Alexander Bratersky

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Legendary perestroika mouthpiece Moskovskiye Novosti relaunched for the second time in its history Monday, though its editor acknowledged that it would not be as critical of the authorities as it was in its heyday.

The newspaper, whose name translates "Moscow News," will be published daily with a circulation of 30,000. It is a joint project of the state-owned RIA-Novosti news agency and the Vremya publishing house, which was behind the now-defunct Vremya Novostei newspaper.

Vladimir Gurevich, former Vremya Novostei editor who is now editor of Moskovskiye Novosti, said in an interview published in the relaunched paper that the editorial content would focus on "civil society trends," from the "blue buckets" motorist movement to volunteer firefighters.

He promised that RIA-Novosti would not interfere with the editorial policy but admitted that the new Moskovskiye Novosti does not envision itself as an opposition newspaper.

"I won't put myself in opposition to the authorities but will try to stand against disgusting things," Gurevich said. He did not elaborate.

Moskovskiye Novosti was launched in 1930 as the official English-language mouthpiece of the Soviet Union, and it targeted foreign professionals working in the country. After adding a Russian-language edition in 1980, it developed into a legendary media brand under editor Yegor Yakovlev, who took the job in 1986. The newspaper, then a weekly, capitalized on media freedoms granted by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and had a print run of 1.6 million.

"Under Yakovlev, Moskovskiye Novosti was a team of kindred spirits," Svetlana Babayeva, who worked as a reporter under Yakovlev, said Monday.

"The journalists not only covered the topics but created them as well because topics did not exist in the Soviet era," she said by telephone.

Despite being a trailblazer for free press in Russia, Moskovskiye Novosti's popularity dwindled in the 1990s. Its Russian version closed briefly in 1991, though it was relaunched the next year.

In 2005, Moskovskiye Novosti was purchased by Yukos owners but resold the next year to Israeli businessman Arkady Gaidamak, who closed its Russian edition in 2008. Later he sold the brand to RIA-Novosti — thus closing a circle that had seen the paper separated from RIA-Novosti's predecessor, APN, in 1990 to become Russia's first independent newspaper.

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