

## Big Cuts Loom in Izvestia Revamp

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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The statue of Alexander Pushkin standing by Izvestia's downtown offices. The daily faces a surprise revamp. **Igor Tabakov**

The publisher of Izvestia, once known as Russia's New York Times, signaled Monday that two-thirds of the newspaper's journalists might face dismissal as he seeks to turn the publication into something "cooler" than Kommersant and Vedomosti.

Some Izvestia journalists said they understood that Izvestia would adopt a conservative, pro-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stance ahead of the State Duma elections in December and the presidential vote next spring.

Izvestia has maintained a reliable pro-Putin policy since it underwent a major ownership shakeup linked to its critical coverage of the 2004 Beslan school crisis. Whether it can survive another revamp and find a niche remains unclear. But publisher Aram Gabrelyanov made clear Monday that the current editorial policy was unsatisfactory and hinted that few of the current team were worth keeping.

"The newspaper is completely ineffective as a business," he told Slon.ru. "Is it normal that of the 130 reporters, only 30 contribute while the rest do nothing?"

Gabrelyanov, who modeled his most successful newspaper, Zhizn, on the British tabloid The Sun, said that making Izvestia profitable was his main goal.

"We will be much cooler than Kommersant and Vedomosti," he said.

Gabrelyanov has ordered the transfer of 38 Izvestia employees to the offices of his National Media Group, leaving the jobs of the remaining 200 staffers, including 100 reporters, up in the air, Izvestia staff said in an open letter published in Novaya Gazeta on Monday.

Gabrelyanov has also removed "a globe and the digitized photo archive" from the old newsroom on Pushkin Square, the letter said.

Portraits of the past 23 editors of Izvestia are to be transferred later this week.

Gabrelyanov said no one has been fired and negotiations were ongoing. "People are just pressuring the shareholders and the management to get bigger bonuses and compensation, that's all," he said in comments carried by RIA-Novosti.

Alexander Malyutin, the recently appointed editor of Izvestia, confirmed that big staff cuts are in the offing, saying Friday that 60 percent of the staff would lose their jobs with the newspaper's move to 5th Ulitsa Yamskogo Polya, which also houses Zhizn.

"Some of them don't want to move. Others we don't want to take with us," said Malyutin, a former deputy editor for Russian Forbes magazine, RIA-Novosti reported.

Malyutin said shortly after his appointment in April that under his leadership Izvestia would have a stronger focus on business coverage and online content, but not at the cost of political reporting.

But deputy editor Yelena Yampolskaya has said in private conversations that Izvestia will actually become a "pro-Putin, pro-empire and pro-Orthodox Christianity publication," said another deputy editor, Sergei Mostovshchikov.

Reports said earlier that Yampolskaya, known for her conservative views, would keep her job at Izvestia, as would deputy editor Yelena Ovcherenko, a strong critic of the United States.

Mostovshchikov, who was named in the open letter published Monday as the spokesman for Izvestia's staff, made his comments to the news site Openspace.ru.

Gabrelyanov's press service refused to comment Monday.

But a former editor told The Moscow Times that Izvestia's relocation from the building on Pushkin Square, which still bears its logo in gigantic stone letters, will mark "the end of an era."

"It's sad symbolism because it will become a completely new paper with no connection to its past. However, looking at today's Izvestia, you could say that this building has already served

as its grave stone," the editor said by telephone. He asked not to be identified to protect his relationship with journalists still at the newspaper.

Established in the year of the Revolution, 1917, Izvestia rose to prominence as the country's second-most important daily, behind party mouthpiece Pravda. It has counted Vladimir Lenin's ally Nikolai Bukharin and poet Vladimir Mayakovsky among contributors.

Izvestia editor-in-chief Alexei Adzhubei, Nikita Khrushchev's son-in-law, was the only Soviet journalist to interview U.S. President John F. Kennedy in the White House, speaking to him in 1961, a year before the Cuban missile crisis.

At its peak, Izvestia had a print run of 8 million copies. It further boosted its reputation in the late 1980s when it became a flagship for perestroika. Although circulation fell from 1 million to 300,000 following perestroika, the paper, then owned by billionaire Vladimir Potanin, survived as a respectable broadsheet in the 1990s and early 2000s.

But following the Beslan crisis, Izvestia all but turned into a Kremlin mouthpiece after it was sold to Gazprom in 2005.

In a signal of the paper's stance at the time, then-editor-in-chief Vladimir Mamontov decorated his office with a portrait of revolutionary Che Guevara — which he said in the presence of a Moscow Times reporter was a gift from Kremlin deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov.

In 2008, Izvestia was purchased by National Media Group, owed by Putin's close ally Yury Kovalchuk. The media holding also owns Zhizn, known online as Lifenews.ru, a thriving sensationalist tabloid founded by Gabrelyanov.

Alexei Pankin, a media analyst and former Izvestia editor, said Izvestia was edged out by Kommersant as the national broadsheet after perestroika, and its core audience, older people who remained loyal to the Soviet-era brandname, could not make it profitable.

The paper has changed editors several times over the years, "but all have failed to create a product that would be popular with a quality audience," he said.

Leonid Bershidsky, editor of Slon.ru and founding editor of Vedomosti, said he doubted that Gabrelyanov could save Izvestia.

"He is the perfect tabloid editor and publisher. But Izvestia — as it's supposed to be — is not the kind of newspaper he knows how to make," Bershidsky told the Perm-based online newspaper Sol.

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