The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's Media More Accurate Than in the West

By Alexei Pankin

December 12, 2011



I spoke with about 100 pleasant young people last week at the monthly meeting that Russian Reporter magazine editors and journalists hold with readers. Some of the young people had posted election reports on the magazine's web site. Some had volunteered as election observers and many had taken part in the protest demonstrations on Dec. 5 and 6. They were upset not only with the authorities' falsification of the results, but also with the television coverage.

"Why," they asked, "did the cameras capture the pro-Kremlin Nashi youth without showing those of us who were demonstrating nearby?"

Ironically, on about the same day, a U.S. colleague sent me a Fox News report supposedly showing demonstrators in Moscow — complete with street fighting, flaming barricades and palm trees in the background — with the snide comment, "Has the climate warmed up in Moscow?" State-controlled television enjoyed explaining that the clip had really depicted

demonstrations in Greece.

And another colleague from London who lived in Russia for many years wrote to me saying: "You won't believe it, but the British television and newspapers report that Boris Nemtsov is the main leader of the entire opposition and that he

supposedly enjoys the support of tens of millions of Russians, although I know that even his wife wouldn't vote for him."

But what changed my perspective was a book that I recently bought, "The Phony Litvinenko Murder" by William Dunkerley. That tome was released in late November on the fifth anniversary of the poisoning death in London of former Federal Security Service agent Alexander Litvinenko. Dunkerley is an authority on Russian media, and, in particular, he has been a featured speaker at the congress of the International Federation of Journalists.

Dunkerley apparently read everything about the Litvinenko case published in both reputable and mass-market British publications, and much of what had been published about it in the United States. He came to the following conclusion: "The basic media storyline is that Litvinenko was a Russian spy who became a dissident and defected to the West, turned into a sharp critic of President Vladimir Putin and was murdered in an effort to silence him. That may be all true. But maybe it's not true. I still haven't found reliable information that supports the storyline. The media coverage of the Litvinenko case has been a fantasy adventure."

What's more, Dunkerley apparently focused on the fact that five years after the event, the British coroner only reported Litvinenko's death, without classifying it as a homicide or identifying a cause.

But in light of current events, a retrospective of the way the U.S. and British media have viewed important episodes of modern Russian history tells more. From their viewpoint, President Boris Yeltsin's anti-constitutional decision in 1993 to have tanks fire on the parliament building looked instead like a rebellion by lawmakers against a legitimate government. Georgia's attack against South Ossetia in August 2008 was seen as Russian aggression. Yeltsin himself, loathed by many Russians, is portrayed as a great democrat and then-President and now Prime Minister Vladimir Putin — who enjoyed unprecedented popularity for many years — was depicted as a tyrant.

Thus, we have two opposite universes: the reality of life in Russia, and that life as it is portrayed by the West. It seems to me that Russian television, for all of its state censorship and control, comes closer to capturing the reality than the so-called objective Western media.

Alexei Pankin is editor of WAN-IFRA-GIPP Magazine for publishing-business professionals.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/12/russias-media-more-accurate-than-in-the-west-a11377