

Yasen Zasursky, President of Moscow University Journalism Department, is Dead at 91

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Yasen Zasursky **Viktor Velikzhanin / TASS**

Yasen Zasursky, the legendary rector of the Moscow University Department of Journalism, died today at the age of 91.

Zasursky, whose unusual first name — which means clear or bright — was given by his mother in honor of his father's eyes, was a child prodigy. He completed school at the age of 14 and was immediately accepted at the Maurice Thorez Foreign Language Institute. He graduated at age 18 and was soon awarded a candidate (masters) degree; he would receive his doctorate a decade later.

In 1951 he worked for the Foreign Language Publishing House, but soon moved to Moscow State University where he took part in creating the journalism department. He headed the department from 1965 to 2007, when he retired to become president of the department, overseeing the program and giving lectures on the history of Russian and foreign journalism.

Zasursky is credited with founding modern print and electronic media in Russia as it developed during the perestroika years and the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He is remembered with respect and gratitude by many of his former students, including Peter Cheremushkin, who later worked in the press section of the U.S. Embassy for many years. "I had the good fortune and pleasure of studying in the journalism department when Yassen Zasursky was rector. He placed great emphasis on literature to broaden students' horizons and their general knowledge of culture. And he always insisted on how important it was to study the U.S. and support Soviet- and Russian-American relations."

Although Zasursky has been criticized for sometimes failing to defend all rights and freedoms universally, most commentators recall him as a stalwart supporter of the free press who was also adept at keeping bureaucratic interference at bay.

"He created an extraordinary atmosphere of freedom in the department, especially in the perestroika years," Cheremushkin said. "He wasn't afraid to invite free thinkers to speak, including Boris Grushin, Bulat Okudzhava, Yuri Afanasiev, and even Graham Greene.... The phenomenon that is Dmitry Bykov could have only been formed at the department of journalism under Zasursky."

Zasursky received dozens of awards and honors from the Soviet Union, Russian Federation and foreign countries.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been made public.

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