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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. IDEALS AND REALITIES

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Abstract

A common Western view of Russian media is they are manipulated and censored by political forces. This view is also shared by several Russian scholars who consider the Western media system to be a model for a democratic society. On the other hand, many scholars from the EU and the USA mean that Western media are also subjected to tough control by the economic and political elite, thus, undermining the media as a democratic forum. Is there real freedom of expression - in Russia or in the Western countries - or is it just an ideal, and what are the determinants of its different representations? This paper strives to answer these questions from a discourse analytical perspective on the basis of results from interviews with media professionals in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Stockholm, Sweden, and other comparative studies within two projects financed by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

Key words: *freedom of expression, democracy, media discourses, Stockholm, St. Petersburg*

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DEMOCRACY - TWO ELUSIVE CONCEPTS

The common image of Russian society consistently spread by Western media is negative, most often associated with president Putin's governance which is perceived as authoritarian. Putin is often compared to notorious dictators. In such a context, critics emphasize (what they consider to be) the strong limitations placed on freedom of expression in Russia, a freedom which is considered to be one of the basic characteristics of Western democratic societies along with free political elections. Besides the limitations on freedom of expression in Russia (e.g. related to the numerous murders of journalists and alleged censorship), critics emphasize a number of other shortcomings of the current administration; for example, the repression of demonstrations (e.g. tougher regulations) whereby the political powers furiously marginalize every tentative attempt at political opposition, as the Swedish scholar, Gudrun Persson, maintains in her latest book (Persson 2011). Corruption is increasing; people's trust in the judicial system is decreasing. Mistrust towards state representatives prevails, the majority of the population is deeply uninterested in politics while conspiracy theories flourish, says Persson and many other Western researchers and journalists (i.a., Mendras 2012). As A. Rahr points out, Russia's reputation is spoiled as the few positive reports are lost in the flow of media information and do not interest the majority of media users since they contradict established Western stereotypes (Rahr 2012).

The last-mentioned shortcomings of Russian society during the Putin's rule have been especially emphasized during and after the parliamentary and the presidential elections in December 2011 and March 2012 respectively. The elections were followed by several demonstrations in the big cities, both pro- and anti-Putin, largely emphasized in the Western media with sharp criticism of the current political situation in Russia. The demonstrations themselves have been described as evidence of the regime's repressive nature.

In this paper, we argue that similar representations of today's Russia are unjust. Seen from a comparative perspective, similar (if not stronger) objections could be raised about the state of freedom

of expression and democracy in several Western countries. It should be stressed, however, that the arguments presented here need further evidence in the form of more systematic analyses of relevant literature and empirical results from different projects, an important part of which will be produced in the coming years within our research project (see Cecilia von Feilitzen's contribution). Therefore, this paper should be considered as an outline of some of the hypotheses to be concretized and tested in our future research. Research which will also problematize some basic concepts such as freedom of expression and democracy with reference to some established Western scholars and empirical results, mainly from our own projects 2006-2009 (some central findings are reported in von Feilitzen & Petrov 2011) and 2012-2014; all of which imply a number of comparative studies in Sweden (Stockholm) and Russia (mainly St. Petersburg). This means that the present analyses have an explorative character while the assertions we put forward have a rather hypothetical character.

Freedom of expression is connected to a number of other basic concepts that are objects of controversy. For instance, democracy has received a manifold of different significances each of which correspond to specific social demands aiming to change the prevailing power relations in one or another way.

The empirical basis of our argumentation includes, e.g. a comparative analysis of ca. 35 in-depth interviews with Swedish and Russian media experts (including mainly journalists and media managers but with a few PR-managers, officials with responsibility within the media; several interviewees have academic backgrounds) carried out 2007 and 2012 as well as a number of publications from Western and Russian scholars.

As we emphasize several positive aspects of the contemporary public sphere in Russia, it is important to emphasize that we do not mean that Russia has reached any kind of democratic state in some essential meaning. Nor is there any evidence that the nascent civil society, in the long run, will lead to a substantial amelioration of the Russian state and its citizens (in terms of social equality/justice or a strong and stable state) - especially considering the changing economic and political conditions that have characterized Russia during the last 25 years and the fact that Russia is a part of the dynamic world system.

THE PUBLIC'S VIEW OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DEMOCRACY

As an introduction, we summarize some central results from an extensive comparative survey of young people (ca. 17 years old) and adults (ca. 50 years) carried out in Stockholm and St. Petersburg in 2007 concerning people's attitudes to a number of social institutions (Petrov & von Feilitzen 2011). The study shows that the participants' trust in the major political superstructure (political parties, parliament and government) is quite low in both cities. The results were also similar in the two cities concerning people's trust in the educational system, the state controlled ether media and the private media. The relatively similar rates of trust in the state controlled ether media are especially worth mentioning seeing as critics (Russian as well as Western) have considered the big Russian TV-channels as Putin's propaganda machine while Swedish media experts are inclined to consider their public service radio and television as the bastions of freedom of expression and democracy (Persson 2011).

On the other hand, the Russian president enjoyed a higher level of trust than the Swedish prime minister (among the Russian respectively Swedish participants in the study). There were differences in the same direction regarding people's trust in their country's national defense and the (orthodox respectively protestant) church.

What do the above mentioned results reflect? Are they a result of one and/or another ideology or people's critical attitudes towards such ideologies? What factors are influencing the respondents' attitudes to the above discussed institutions? And how are the results correlated with the state of democracy and freedom of expression in Russia and Sweden? The answers to such questions are manifold and should be sought based on the background of media experts' opinions and some relevant theoretical perspectives discussed later on in this paper.

There was, conversely, significant differences (mainly among the adult respondents) regarding people's trust in welfare institutions such as healthcare, police, law courts and banks, to which most Russian respondents were negative while Swedes were fairly positive to their welfare system. These results are, however, understandable and could be interpreted as reflecting the factual state of things for the corresponding institutions. (For instance, the Russian police have a poor reputation among the population as a corrupt instrument of political power since the Soviet era, something that has scarcely changed for the better during the economic crises of the 1990s.) In this respect, it is worth mentioning that only one quarter of the adult Russian respondents consider that democracy works in their country, the corresponding figure for the Swedish adults is ca. three quarters. It should be mentioned that people's attitudes to the state of democracy in their country correlates with their trust in the welfare institutions.

It should be also emphasized that for most of the Swedish respondents "freedom of expression" is an essential characteristic of a democratic society while the Russian respondents associate democracy most often with "economic prosperity for all".

Yet another result with relevance for our further discussion is peoples' attitudes to the content of the mass media. Only a small proportion of the (Russian and Swedish) respondents think that TV and newspapers give an adequate picture of reality. There are very few who believe that it is possible to make one's voice heard via these media, the distribution of the answers in the two cities are comparable.

THE MEDIA EXPERTS' OPINIONS/INTERPRETATION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DEMOCRACY

On the following pages, we try to shed light on the notions of freedom of expression and democracy on the basis of some 35 in-depth interviews with Russian and Swedish media experts, most of them carried out in the Fall 2007 (a few were conducted in 2012 within a new project that has just started). N.B. In this conference paper, taking into consideration the form and the volume of our presentation, we focus on only a couple of the issues that we discussed during our in-depth interviews.

For the majority of the experts, both Russian and Swedish, freedom of expression is associated with democracy as the possibility to voice one's opinion openly, alternatively, the possibility to influence the politics of society in accordance with one's existential conditions, that all people should have an equal starting position when competing for the distribution of social wealth. Free media in itself should be a power factor independent of political institutions and business actors.

One difference between the Russian and Swedish experts concerns precisely the idea that democracy implies the possibility to change/influence society and one's situation, including that the mass media and the individuals can influence relevant social processes. Such an idea implies an independent mass media. The majority of the Russian experts are realists: such things do not exist in Russia, or in the West. (Some Russian participants explain this circumstance by pointing out that people have different

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backgrounds and abilities to intervene in the public sphere.) Most of the Swedish experts agree that this is the case but still say that the objective of a democratic society is that all voices should be heard.

However, several Russian experts (3 journalists, 1 from the left and 2 from the opposition right) believe that such possibilities exist in the West. The intuitive view of the Western countries as a reign of democracy is characteristic also for other experts, including the majority of the Swedish participants.)

The experts' statements are sometimes contradictory. For instance, an editorial writer from a Russian online newspaper, who maintains that freedom of expression is just an impossible ideal, at another place in the interview remarks that in the West people have possibility to "assert their democratic rights" (via the mass media).

Other features considered to be essential attributes of a democratic society are regarded in a similar way - direct participation in political decision making or, more generally, an individual's potential to influence their living conditions or social developments, often mentioned impulsively by Swedish experts who, at the next step, are compelled to admit that common people (for instance, workers, peasants or even most academic researchers) have negligible potential to influence their environment and society in general compared with persons belonging to the political and economic elite.

Interestingly, one Swedish participant, the manager of a successful commercial radio network, was convinced that one could accomplish a lot in this respect in Sweden, namely, by establishing a political party, a possibility which, according to him, did not exist in Russia.

Most experts pointed out the media's dependence on political or market forces as impeding factors for freedom of expression. There are some differences between the experts' attitudes concerning the balance between the state and the market forces' influence on the media. The majority of the Swedish experts point out that there are several restrictions (often in form of self regulations) related to ownership mechanisms and - especially - to the dependence on advertisers. Such factors are emphasized also by several Russian experts, the majority of whom, however, are critical to state interventions exercised by several formal levers (such as ownership and regulations, possibilities to start legal processes, etc.) and informal mechanisms, for instance, informal reference groups where media leaders are summoned to meetings with the Kremlin's officials, etc. A few Russian experts believed that there are 'black lists' of persons who should be banned from the media.

Some Russian experts emphasized that the majority of Russian citizens are conscious of such limitations in the large media outlets (i.e. due to control mechanisms from the market or the state) and have, thus, a critical attitude. In this respect, it is different in Western countries, they say:

Foreigners sincerely believe that their mass-media are free. And this is the greatest victory of those who manage foreign mass-media. First assuring people that mass-media are free and then transmitting via this mass-media what they want. [...] We have another situation. First, our people understand that mass-media are not free, second, this is why they don't believe what is written (PR-manager, St. Petersburg).

The conclusion of this expert was that "in the USA, there is [material] prosperity but no democracy at all". Several other Russian mainstream experts (i.e., not belonging to the distinct anti-Putin marginal media) as well as Swedish experts from the marginal left media mean that there is no democracy in the USA where political elections are meaningless because of the lobbying of powerful actors from the financial and military sectors in combination with low voter participation (as one Russian expert put it).

There are no free mass-media, asserted the above quoted person, the difference is that Russian media are mostly controlled by the state (and, accordingly, state priorities become mass-media priorities)

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while in the West the same role is played by some big corporation, and the media's choice of positions is based according on this.

This expert's opinion should be considered against the background of the numerous contradictions among the Swedish experts reasoning (as well as a few Russian experts from the opposition right who idealize the Western media's democratic role). When formally asked, such experts say without reservation that freedom of expression is characteristic for Swedish/Western mass media in spite of the fact that earlier in the interview they stressed, with critical distance, the Western media's dependence on political and economic powers.

A few Russian experts maintain that, compared to Western media, Russian media can allow themselves very much liberties (i.e. sharp criticism of the political power etc.). However, as mentioned, the great majority of the Russian experts point out that the Russian media are subjected to state control (mostly informal and/or as a consequence of the symbiosis of the state and big business). Several - but not all of them - also mentioned the constraints imposed by different market mechanisms such as advertising.

Here, again, representatives for the newspapers from the Russian political opposition consider income from sponsors as a guarantee for independence and, thus, for better journalism.

In contrast, most of the Swedish experts consider the Swedish public service corporations as guarantors of diversity and balance - if not of objectivity. Only one representative from a conservative publishing house insisted that these media (financed by state controlled license fees) are problematic since their existence gave the state too much influence at the expense of the free market which should operate the media field alone without any state involvement.

When it comes to media content, many Russian experts regret the insufficient coverage of ordinary people and specialists (peasants, engineers, mechanics, etc.) - in comparison with the Soviet era. Contemporary Russian media are mostly interested in celebrities, the good life and crime. However, these are also essential features of the Western media content which the Swedish experts are used to. They are much less critical, if not indifferent in this respect.

The change in media content from informative (e.g. relevant issues related to people's everyday lives) to the sensational, often denoted as "yellow" (e.g. reality shows, games, reports on celebrities' lives), is a relatively new phenomenon in Russia. And while experienced as alarming by many Russian experts, is considered an unproblematic reality or, at least, a necessary evil among the Swedish experts. Spontaneous criticism is usual also here, but without directly relating it to basic systemic shortcomings of the media, shortcomings that would negatively influence freedom of expression (with the exception of two journalists from the marginal left oriented Swedish opposition media).

Democracy and freedom of expression are related to relevant information about the authorities' work, said a representative of the journalists' trade union in Sweden who, however, is conscious that access to similar information is becoming more and more difficult with the commercialization of the media and public institutions.

It should be pointed out that, contrary to the Russian participants, almost none of the Swedish media experts (with the exception of the two journalists from the opposition left) speak openly about essential limitations of democracy and freedom of expression in Sweden, even if all of them admit that access to the public space and the possibility of influencing society are strongly correlated with a number of variables such as education and material wealth.

The majority of the experts in both countries agree that there is correlation between welfare and people's perception of their society as democratic (even though some Russians are eager to assert that not all rich societies are democratic, naming Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries as

examples). It should be also mentioned in passing that several Russian experts declared that universal suffrage, another characteristic of a democratic society, was not fair in Russia. Such critical attitudes were much stronger among the interviewees from the marginalized anti-Putin opposition.

According to one Swedish official, such a correlation explains the fact that people in rich countries are less interested in politics. Or, as another Swedish expert put it, "The more people are full up, the less they bother about democracy."

In this respect, it is interesting to stress one correlation that appeared in our survey with ordinary inhabitants, that persons who are well integrated in the social pyramid (in terms of education, profession and material wealth) more often perceive their country as democratic and consider freedom of expression to be a distinctive characteristic of a democratic society (the correlation is weaker among the Russian respondents).

A person who has a good material situation can travel to Thailand for his/her holiday (most Swedes can afford it) so he comprehends his/her country as democratic while the majority of the Latvians and Poles can't do that. So, surely, this kind of freedom is connected with one's comprehension of one's country as democratic, says a Swedish editor in chief from the left wing opposition in Stockholm.

A manager from a conservative Swedish publishing house also expressed his conviction that "material welfare is completely... inextricably linked to well-being and also to how you perceive your environment, your surroundings and the country that you live in"

It should be pointed out that whether an expert belongs to the ruling elite or is in opposition greatly correlates with his/her standpoint in this respect. The Russian journalists whose media are part of the most salient opposition are, thus, the only ones who argue that freedom of expression, a **commodity in short supply in Russia in their opinion**, is a reality in the Western countries.

The potential to change one's own living conditions is a characteristic of a democratic society mentioned by several Swedish interviewees wherewith opposition journalists from the left wing question the democratic essence of Swedish society; the workers have no influence over their living conditions when Volvo decides to close down a plant, sais one of them. Such experts are eager to also mention the growing material gaps in Sweden. They also mean that there is practically no freedom of expression in Sweden since media content and the individuals whose opinions are represented are subordinate to media owners and advertisers, which is the direct cause of their media (which are critical to the prevailing social order) being marginalized which, in turn, marginalizes their newspapers' possibilities to influence social development.

Several experts define freedom of expression as everyone's possibility to say what (s)he thinks independently of his/her social position.

It is interesting that the Russian representatives from the marginal right, who are very critical to the situation in Russia, strongly associate democracy with the possibility (of mass media and individuals) to influence the political powers. They are deeply convinced that Western media have enormous potential to act in this sense. One such journalist (from a respected opposition newspaper with a national distribution) points out that the Western media present objective information, especially in the USA where journalists present the factual information and its interpretation separately. In Russia, he says that there is only interpretation. Another opposition expert is fully convinced that Western media really act as a fourth state power with substantial impact on the elite.

An editorial writer from an Internet based newspaper gives a distinct example in this respect:

In the Western countries, the mass-media space is built-in into the democratic political model. That is where the fourth institute of power can initiate scandals, political processes, can be an

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equal member of all this... i.e. it is a mediator between power and society... it's obvious that there you can publish material which will have real consequences for the life of the governor. He may be impeached. [...] Here [in Russia] it's principally impossible. Putin has a yacht which was given to him as a present by [the oligarch] Abramovich for 100 million, he used to sail around the Gulf of Finland but nobody writes about it.

The media coverage of the Swedish vice prime minister Mona Sahlin in October 1995, focusing on Sahlin's improper use of her official credit card for private expenses is another example that the journalist in question (as well as another Russian expert from the marginal right opposition) gives as an example of the Western media's potential to influence political life, like a fourth state power. As a result, Sahlin resigned her position as vice prime minister and did not run for prime minister during the next elections, in spite of the fact that she proved her innocence in court. However, the Sahlin case, known also as the Toblerone Affair, could be regarded as a typical example of a compromising media campaign (*kompromat*), which was/is especially salient in Russian mass media of the late 1990s and, a phenomenon that is considered anti-democratic by most politicians and researchers in Russia and in the West. Similar campaigns have been broadly in use in Russia in the last 20 years.

In a similar vein, one of the last mentioned Russian opposition experts defined democracy as "the possibility to spit in the face of one's boss **unpunished**", something that, in his view, is characteristic for Sweden and other Western countries.

We would like to comment on this statement by referring to another statement, a Swedish expert defining democracy as the possibility to express one's opinion without fear of repression was compelled to admit that it is difficult for an employee to openly criticize his/her boss, for instance, in the mass media, without negative consequences. "I mean, you can do it theoretically", added the expert in question, somewhat confusedly. In fact, such criticism of one's superiors is quite unusual, practically impossible which many Swedes explain with the allegedly consensus-oriented Swedish national character. Incidentally, we remark that consensus is not characteristic of the Russia of today.

SOME THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DEMOCRACY

From a theoretical point of view, it is obvious that the ideas of the above quoted Russian opposition journalists about the Western media's social essence are, in several respects, unrealistic. Being critical of the current situation in Russia, where political power controls the big media and insufficient advertising revenue further marginalizes them (the two factors being correlated with the fact that the political profiles of their newspapers are unpopular among the population) these oppositional journalists in St. Petersburg do not perceive the limitations of the Western "independent" media which exist as private companies financed by advertisements. In fact, such Russian journalists are instead aspiring to a media situation where newspapers with their political profile can support themselves by advertising.

However, the ontology of the western media (financing via advertisements and private ownership, alternatively, state controlled corporations) contradicts the freedom of expression principle. In the public debate in Sweden, the political economy of the media has recurrently been discussed in a similar spirit, most often by journalists from the left wing opposition. For instance, Johan Ehrenberg, the editor in chief of the weekly paper *Etc...*, in a public speech 2006 declared that in Sweden there is no "freedom of expression" (*yttrandefrihet*); instead, we have "cowardice of expression" (*yttrandefeghet*) where 90% of the newspapers belong to a few private corporations with (liberal or conservative) owners from the political right who interfere with the editorial work. The allegedly objective journalism is, in reality, severely controlled so that all of them are telling practically the

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same story, Ehrenberg said. As an example, he referred to the invented histories about Iraqi nuclear weapons in 2003, lies repeated also by *Aftonbladet*, a presumably social-democratic paper, nowadays controlled by the multinational conservative corporation Shibstedt. It is not the readers but the advertisers who decide what topics the papers will cover and from which perspective. The advertiser does not want people to feel disturbed since such feelings could destroy their buying mood. Moreover, stories diverging from the official version disturb people's self-confidence, Ehrenberg went on. Ordinary people contribute, thus, to the cowardice of expression since nobody wants to be regarded as the opposition, to hear that other people consider him to be an idiot (Ehrenberg 2006).

Similar ideas are relatively unique in the big media outlets but quite salient in the academic research. Herman & Chomsky's work (Herman & Chomsky 1984) is just one example in this regard meaning that the content of the dominant media is adapted to the interests of the elite through the pattern of news and facts they cover, selected by special procedure where the separate news items must pass through a number of filters in order to reach the papers and the TV-channels' news programs. The elite dominate the media through several mechanisms of the kind Ehrenberg mentions: ownership, the media's board of directors most often consisting of representatives from industrial, financial or political elite and the information sources, the most important of which are the press agencies of the big corporations and different governmental bodies, as well as other "trustful" sources reflecting the elite's view. Seen from the perspective of Herman's & Chomsky's model, the news coverage of the "free" media turns out to be propaganda that works effectively due to the absence of formal censorship whereby people uncritically assimilate the mediated stories.

Herman's & Chomsky's propaganda model treats mainly the news coverage of political development. Other researchers have emphasized other aspects of the media content from similar perspectives, for instance, the impoverishment concerning diversity, meaning that serious social programs (e.g. political debates) have been displaced from the media nowadays dominated by entertainment which encourages consumer behavior thus diverting public attention from important political issues.

Already in the 1970s, Schiller remarked that the global exchange of information and culture, in reality, means a one-way flow whereby Hollywood entertainment and political information from the leading (mostly Anglo-Saxon) news agencies penetrate the world, thus, promoting American (and Western) interests, thereby, impoverishing the economy and culture of the developing countries (Schiller 1996). Several other eminent scholars, for instance, McChesney, points out that today's media are a component of global capitalism, the most dynamic feature of globalization (McChesney 2002).

Bourdieu (1996), on the other hand, has argued that the commercial interests expressed in the struggle for public audience shares have, especially after the 1960s, deformed the field of journalism, the political agenda of which is dictated by the big TV-corporations. The media content, in general, has become fragmented and saturated with light entertainment and sensationalism. This commercial logic (that has become more salient with the spread of TV) implies a weakening of the autonomy of journalism and other intellectual fields, an autonomy which, in Bourdieu's view is a crucial component of a democratic society. This process is especially devastating in the field of politics where grass roots activities have been continuously replaced by opinion polls and TV-transmitted PR-campaigns through which public opinion is systematically manipulated in order to manufacture consent for political decisions, which have been decided in advance from above (Bourdieu 1996, see also Champagne 1990).

The above quoted Russian journalists' belief in the potential of Western media to act independently from the state bodies, as a fourth power in society, turns out to be naive also from Bourdieu's perspective since the fields of journalism in Western countries are heteronomous, working in symbiosis with market forces and political bodies.

The Western media are, thus, subjected to a number of constraints that in many respects precludes their democratic function (related to social equality, fairness, diversity, impartiality) and, according to several other theoreticians, also transform the social relationships and human conditions in a new qualitative direction, implying still other negative features.

For instance, Baudrillard argues that the consumption characterizing the Western societies transmitted by the mass media counteract political action and makes people disunified and alienated by imposing consumerist goals via advertising, thereby, depriving consumers of their autonomy and free will. In the Baudrillardian anti-utopia, consumption is a social duty and, at the same time, an element of social control, praised as the realm of freedom where consumers are unorganized and unconscious of the social relationships accomplished via advertising where they are flattered and glorified by the apostles of public opinion who attribute them superiority and autonomy (Baudrillard 1970, see also Baudrillard 1994).

Political effectivity consists in replacing contradictions with marginal qualitative differences via consumption of signs which are hierarchically structured as status objects in a code spread by advertising and popular culture. Resolving the social contradictions consists, thus, not in levelling of access to the objects but in differentiation. There are no possible revolutions on the level of the consumption code - with the exception of fashion revolutions. By accustoming consumers to the unconscious discipline of the code, consumerism dismantles social virulence (Baudrillard 1970).

According to a number of contemporary scholars, the above described processes have deepened in the beginning of the 21st century in spite of the penetration and ever growing use of the Internet, a new medium that many politicians and analysts praise as a virtual platform for enlightenment and democracy.

For instance, Furedi means that at the beginning of the 21st century public life in the West is characterized by a sense of powerlessness, of diminished subjectivity associated with the feeling of being subject to manipulation and external control, being vulnerable or 'at risk' (Furedi 2005, p. 85). This "prevailing regime of political and social disengagement, [...] cynicism and suspicion toward politics" (Furedi 2005, p. 3) is denied by many politicians who, instead, try to create the impression that what we are going through is merely a more mature and democratic political era, an attempt to discover new forms of activism, new politics or new social movements (ibid).

To Furedi, real democracy is a form of political life that provides opportunities for people to participate in and influence the decisions that affect their lives. However, since 1980s, the political class has adopted the view that economic realities will always overwhelm political ambition, whereby, policies are no longer the outcome of informed political debate but are measures forced upon governments by global forces that are beyond anyone's control (Furedi 2005, pp. 13-14).

Furedi quotes several figures that indicate undemocratic attitudes in the Western countries. For instance, only ca. 50% of voters participated in the USA's 1988 presidential elections. In mid 1990s, three quarters of Americans felt that "the government is run by a few big interests looking only after themselves", two thirds believed that "public officials don't care about what people think", etc. (Furedi 2005, p. 33).

Furedi compares current times with previous circumstances where unresponsive institutions provoked protest and revolt, citizens organized and used political pressure to force the powers to listen to them. One example is the massive popular reaction in 1970 during the war in Vietnam compared to NATO's war in Iraq which, however, according to Furedi, soon vanished from the public domain and never amounted to a movement (Furedi 2005, p. 43).

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Like Champagne, Furedi points out that it is no longer the mobilization of grassroots support that matters in politics but an effective media strategy where non-profit groups are run by a professional oligarchy. Traditional instruments for market research such as focus groups and surveys represent an arena for the expression of the popular will (Furedi 2005, pp. 39, 114).

New civil society activism such as NGO and lobby groups, often called the new social movements, led by politicians or business insiders are oriented towards gaining publicity through the media (Furedi 2005, p. 111-113). Such organizations rarely seek to engage ordinary people. Instead they are involved in 'top-down communication' aimed at influencing opinion makers. The protest movements are, thus, an integral part of an oligarchical network constituted by the political class. They are profoundly intertwined with the market and, especially, the government, Furedi says (Furedi 2005).

Herman & Chomsky give several examples of similar institutions that are organized for specific purposes, e.g. for criticizing the mass media for insufficient sympathy with U.S. foreign policy ventures, thus, coercing them not only to support any national (USA) venture abroad, but to do so with enthusiasm, such enterprises being, by definition, noble. One such organization is Freedom House which, in recent years, has ranked the state of freedom of expression in Russia as defective, a fact often quoted by the critics of contemporary Russian policy. Herman & Chomsky point out that Freedom House co-operates closely with several ultra-conservative organizations and US government bodies such as the CIA, and "has long served as a virtual propaganda arm of the [USA] government and international right wing". For instance, Herman and Chomsky point out that in 1979 Freedom House sent election monitors to the Rhodesian elections staged by Ian Smith and found them "fair," whereas the 1980 elections won by Mugabe under British supervision were found dubious (Herman & Chomsky 1984).

Furedi's above described trend toward replacement of public bodies by private organizations has been emphasized by several other researchers. For instance, **Wedel** argues that a new kind of players has arisen in the past several decades who play multiple, overlapping roles on behalf of organizations or private interests and it's very difficult for the public to know who exactly they represent since they are less transparent and less accountable than powerbrokers of the past. What suffer in this story are democracy and accountability, as well as the free market, because these players are not really interested in the chief mechanism of the free market, Wedel says. They are all about the interdependency between government and business, the intertwining of state and private power. In addition, they get government benefits to use to the advantage of the market. Wedel points out that several cases of corruption have been disclosed by the media without any consequences (Wedel 2009).

In Furedi's view, the prevailing management of political issues in Western countries could be characterized as "politics of fear", a situation where politicians believe that fear and anxiety are the way to win votes, whereby, an election campaign quickly turns into a competition about who can most effectively frighten the voters. By provoking a common reaction to a perceived threat, it can also provide a focus for gaining consensus and unity (Furedi 2005, p. 125, 132).

Like Baudrillard, Furedi argues that such mediatization "limits the mobilization of most citizens into public life and encourages fragmentation of social identities and trivial polarization in public debates" (Furedi 2005, p. 111-113). The process of declining subjectivity has intensified the public's sense of powerlessness and passivity (ibid p. 71). Today, individuals rarely develop their identities through some form of political attachment, instead, self-identity is viewed far more in terms of individuals' lifestyles, cultural habits and personal experiences, Furedi says (ibid p. 30). Politics matters less to people for the very simple reason that what people can do does not appear to matter, Furedi says. Anti-politics, the cynical dismissal of the elected politician and the obsession with sleaze and corruption, express a deeply cynical view of the human experience (ibid p. 74).

In light of the above described theories of Baudrillard and Furedi, one can interpret the results of the latest World Values Survey carried out in Sweden during February–April 2011, focusing, e.g. on issues related to political corruption. It appeared that 21 percent of 18–29 years-old would vote for another political party for a small amount of money. At the same time, 23 percent of the same age group declared that it does not matter much if they live in a democracy or not while 26 percent said that it would be quite good or very good if Sweden were run by a "strong leader who didn't need to bother about parliament or elections" (Lindberg 2011).

THE ORDER OF DISCOURSE

In light of the empirical results and the theoretical perspectives described in this article, a comparison between Russia and West could scarcely end in the conclusion that freedom of expression has more scope in the West, especially if the comparison is limited to the big cities. Freedom of expression should be considered as an individual's possibility to express in the media his/her views on relevant social problems, the accessibility of relevant information and people's factual use of it. However, we must repeat that such a conclusion has more of the character of a hypothesis to be followed up in a comprehensive research program covering several media and different methodologies, taking into consideration a number of theoretical and ethical components.

In our view (based on a hitherto relatively superficial review of a number of newspapers, TV-channels/programmes and radio stations) the contemporary Russian media system represents a large diversity of ideas about the state of Russian society and how it should be managed. This diversity also extends to the state controlled channels even if it is true that official views dominate these channels, especially at primetime. Some observers claim that, for the last three or four years, the informational environment of the big cities (influencing the most active part of the population) has been controlled by the opposition. *Novaya Gazeta*, *Echo Moskvy* and *TV-Dozhd* are just three examples of traditional media, apart from blogs and the Internet in general, which have an essential, mobilizing effect. The recurrent demonstrations should be seen, in themselves, as democratic actions, especially seeing as, in some observers' opinion, they have forced the state power to carry out reforms (e.g. changing the election law), fight corruption, etc.

Persson's statement that the majority of the Russian population is deeply uninterested in politics (Persson 2011) is highly questionable, i.a., given the background of the development of civil society in Russia in the recent years - especially in comparison with some Western countries like Sweden. However, a systematic comparative analysis based on adequately defined notions is needed in order to assess the situation.

Measured by Western standards, freedom of expression often takes extreme forms in the Russian media that are unacceptable in Western Europe. (Consider, for instance Navalny's notion of the United Russia political party as a "Party of thieves and scoundrels" or Udaltsov's "Putin's prostitution" - just two mainstream expressions in the opposition's vocabulary.)

The political movements in Russia nowadays should be regarded as an expression of active civic engagement, especially seeing that the material situation of the majority of the population has steadily improved since 1999. It is another question if this is thanks to Putin's or the result of cluster of global circumstances. However, a significant proportion of the Russian population actively strives to change social injustices.

When assessing such actions as civic engagement, it is also essential to take into consideration the fact that the structure of the opposition is very diverse. It does not only consist of the 1990-elites who want revenge by taking over political power in order to capitalize it in money, as some partisans of the

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ruling administration mean (Shevchenko in *Pryamoy Efir*, 06.03.2012). It seems instead that the larger part of the creative intelligentsia has openly taken sides in the ongoing ideological struggle. Strovsky's remark that engagement of celebrities such as O. Tabakov, N. Michalkov and V. Gergiev are just a part of Putin's propaganda machine is obviously erroneous since celebrities from the cultural and the scientific elite are visible in every political group, Alla Pugatchova (for Prochorov), V. Bortko (for the Communist party), B. Akunin and P. Lungin (for the non-parliamentary opposition) are just some examples. When assessing the democratic substance of the different movements, it would be useful to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the representatives of the cultural elite taking positions for the various political movements in terms of autonomy as defined by Bourdieu, i.e., related to variables such as specific symbolic capital and material success, not least concerning activists who are, at the same time, TV-celebrities, such as Tina Kandelaki (pro-Putin political activist and Oriflame fashion promoter) and especially Ksenia Sobchak (host of the reality show *Dom2*, a Russian version of *Big Brother* and, at the same time, one of the most salient non-parliamentary opposition leaders) involved in fashion and show business.

Persson's critique concerning the legal actions directed against some voluntary organizations financed from abroad (Persson 2011) is also worth closer examination from a comparative perspective. From the point of view of researchers like Herman & Chomsky and McChesney, it should be interesting to systematically map out the different media political and economic affiliations (ownership, advertisers, etc.). There are, for instance, many newspapers and radio stations operating in Russia (MTG's *Metro* and Bonnier's *Delovoi Peterburg* are just two examples in this direction).

In light of Baudrillard's theories, it should be mentioned, in passing, that people's different attitudes to work and leisure in the two cities (showing that the majority of St. Petersburg's inhabitants consider work, rather than leisure, makes life meaningful while the distribution is the inverse among Stockholmers) might be considered an indicator of Russians' higher civic consciousness (Osipova & Petrov 2011).

Naturally, several other Western and Russian theories ought to be taken into account when comparing the political climate in Russia with the situation in Sweden and in the Western countries. In fact, like Furedi and Wedel (see above) - and contrary to several critics denouncing Russia's undemocratic political climate - Laughland argues that Western politics favors the power of the political elite at the expense of democracy; whereby, the West gives priority to international organizations (e.g. the WTO, the EU and NATO) which take charge of governance to an ever increasing extent. In such a manner, Western politicians alienate power from people by giving it to professional managers while the Russian system is based on a strong president and national sovereignty, Laughland says (for instance John Laughland sur France24 2012-06-12). It is probably from such a perspective one should consider the split in the Russian society where the majority of the population is skeptical towards Western democracies which, according to some Russian experts, imply that a marginal and ever decreasing share of the world's population concentrated in Western Europe and the USA control and enjoy an ever increasing share of the world's resources (according to the political talk show *Citizen Gordon*, Pervy channel).

Further, many critics emphasize the corruption spread among the Russian political elite, something that is emphasized as a major problem also by the ruling administration itself. Although there is no evidence (in the media) that the Swedish political elite are impaired by similar problems, the trust of the Swedish and the Russian public in their respective political institutions is not significantly different - at least in Stockholm and St. Petersburg according to our survey carried out in 2007 - although the explanations diverge. The low level of trust the Swedish public has in its political system could be explained from the theoretical perspective of scholars such as Furedi and Baudrillard, while the situation in Russia rather depends on the country's dynamic political development since the late 1980s

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characterized by the material disasters of the majority (especially during the 1990s) while a few become billionaires in illegitimate ways.

Although the relative number of billionaires in Sweden seems to be higher than in Russia (according to Forbes), the growing material divides in the both cities today are regarded as a much more crucial injustice in Russia, because of the lower average income of the population and - above all - because of the obvious and immoral - if not criminal - ways in which a few people rapidly acquired immense fortunes in Russia. A question that is more interesting to address in future studies is what part the mass media (especially TV) played in the delayed popular reaction to these injustices in Russia.

When discussing corruption in Putin's Russia, it could be useful to also take into consideration Goldman's point that American politicians make use of their political mandate to at least the same, if not higher, degree as Putin's inner circle (the so called second generation Russian oligarchs) although the mechanisms are different. In the USA, the politicians make money after their mandate ends, while in Putin's Russia, prominent politicians become rich as part of a government in command of important state controlled corporations such as Gazprom and Rosneft (Goldman 2008).

Several journalists and scholars in Sweden and other Western countries often criticize the Russian propaganda which treats the West, especially the USA, with morbid suspicion, as enemies responsible for the dissolution of the Soviet Union (which in such a context is regarded as a disaster) who aspire to dominance by also destroying Russia in one way or another. Without concretizing and examining the veracity of such assertions, we want to point out that, according to Herman & Chomsky, similar dichotomization mechanisms by which "the enemy" is constructed for political purposes have been characteristic of the American "independent" media, (at least) ever since WWII, most often by "fear of communism" (in the 21st century replaced by "fear of terrorism"), an effective mechanism for filtering out inconvenient news in propaganda campaigns (Herman & Chomsky 1984). According to scholars such as Furedi and Cottle, in the 21st century, conspiracy theories to an increasing degree dominate the exercising of power in Western countries where fear is socially constructed and manipulated by those in power who seek profits via mediatized pictures of epidemics, terrorism and other threats. Risks are, thus, considered by different actors as opportunities for political gains and other advantages. The logic of the threat society implies that epidemics, crime, terrorism, ethnic conflicts are politicized and amount to tensions between individuals and groups by singling out "the others" described as threats to "our society" something that, according to Furedi, leads to a "hate society". Such mechanisms result in authoritarian forms of government in which identity is politically constructed on the basis of "scapegoats" mechanisms. (Furedi 2006, Cottle 2009, see also Altheide 2002).

Finally, journalists' vulnerability in contemporary Russia is another factor that is emphasized by critics of Russian politics, even if they acknowledge that the number of murdered journalists continues to decrease in the 2000s - not least because of increasing self-censorship, emphasizes G. Persson (Persson 2011).

However, the increased physical violence (against journalists or citizens in general) which characterizes Russian society after the dissolution of the Soviet Union could be regarded as logical seeing the significant social changes in the political and economic system, a transition to a new social paradigm characterized by uncertain values and unstable discourse in general where the limits of what is allowed in specific social situations are blurred. This, in combination with a higher level of social injustice exposes some professions like journalism to greater danger. In this regard, it is interesting to mention B. Gasparov's interpretation of the situation during the 1930s when a similar vacuum in the order of discourse (that assures stable rules within specific social fields) in combination with a weak economy after the October revolution and the Civil War resulted in the Stalinist terror.

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Differently expressed, power concentrated in one or few persons is basically more unstable than in the Western democracies where the power relations are structured by stable discourse, basically independent of the 'higher chief' at the top of the social pyramid (cf. For instance Foucault 1975). However, discourses are historically constructed and cannot be exported to "new democracies" without causing (at least in the short run) significant social injustice and physical violence, which was the case in Russia in the 1990s.

In such a context, it could be also useful to take into consideration that, at least after WWII, Sweden has occupied a central position in the capitalist world economy (cf. Wallerstein 1979) whereas Russia, on the other hand, has vacillated within the inner and outer boundaries of its semi periphery.

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