

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 352

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Congress regarding manipulation of the mass media and intimidation of the independent press in the Russian Federation, expressing support for freedom of speech and the independent media in the Russian Federation, and calling on the President of the United States to express his strong concern for freedom of speech and the independent media in the Russian Federation.

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Whereas almost all of the large printing plants, publishing houses, and newspaper distribution companies, several leading news agencies, and almost all of the nationwide television frequencies and broadcasting facilities in the Russian Federation remain under government control, despite the extensive privatization of state-owned enterprises in other sectors of the Russian economy;

Whereas the “Press Freedom Survey 2000” reported by “Freedom House” of Washington, D.C., stated that the approximately 2,500 regional and rural newspapers in Russia outside of Moscow are almost completely owned by local or provincial governments;

Whereas the Government of Russia is able to suspend or revoke broadcast and publishing licenses and apply exorbitant taxes and fees on the independent media;

Whereas, in 1999, a major television network controlled by the Russian Government canceled the program “Top Secret” after it reported on alleged corruption at high levels of the government;

Whereas, in July 1999, the Government of Russia created a new Ministry for Press, Television and Radio Broadcasting, and Mass Communications;

Whereas, in August 1999, the editors of fourteen of Russia’s leading news publications sent an open letter to then Russian President Boris Yeltsin stating that high-ranking officials of the government were putting pressure on the mass media, particularly through unwarranted raids by tax police;

Whereas Mikhail Lesin, Minister for Press, Television and Radio Broadcasting, and Mass Communications, stated in October 1999 that the Russian Government would change its policies towards the mass media so as to address “aggression” by the Russian press;

Whereas the Russian Federal Security Service or “FSB” is reportedly implementing a technical regulation known as “SORM-2” by which it could reroute, in real time, all electronic transmissions over the Internet through FSB offices for purposes of surveillance, a likely violation of

the Russian constitution's provisions concerning the right to privacy of private communications, according to Aleksei Simonov, President of the Russian "Glasnost Defense Foundation", a nongovernmental human rights organization;

Whereas such surveillance under SORM-2 would allow the Russian Federal Security Service access to passwords, financial transactions, and confidential company information, among other transmissions;

Whereas it is reported that over one hundred Russian journalists have been killed over the past decade, with few if any of the government investigations into those murders resulting in arrests, prosecutions, or convictions;

Whereas numerous observers of Russian politics have noted the blatant misuse of the leading Russian television channels, controlled by the Russian Government, to undermine popular support for political rivals of those supporting the government in the run-up to parliamentary elections held in December 1999;

Whereas it has been reported that Russian television stations controlled by the Russian Government were used to disparage opponents of Vladimir Putin during the campaign for the presidency in the beginning of this year and whereas it has been reported that political advertisements by those candidates were routinely relegated by those stations to slots outside of prime time coverage;

Whereas manipulation of the media by the Russian Government appeared intent on portraying the Russian military attack on the separatist Republic of Chechnya to the maximum political advantage of the Russian Government;

Whereas in December 1999 two correspondents for “Reuters News Agency” and the “Associated Press” were reportedly accused of being foreign spies after reporting high Russian casualty figures in the war in Chechnya;

Whereas the arrest in January 2000, subsequent treatment by the Russian military, and prosecution by the Russian Government of Andrei Babitsky, a correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty covering the war in Chechnya, have constituted a violation of commitments made by the Russian Government to foster freedom of speech and of the press, and have reportedly constituted a violation of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation;

Whereas in January 2000 Aleksandr Khinshtein, a reporter for the newspaper “Moskovsky Komsomolets”, was ordered by the Russian Federal Security Service to enter a clinic over 100 miles from his home for a psychiatric examination after he accused top Russian officials of illegal activities and such detainment in psychiatric wards was previously employed by the former Soviet regime to stifle dissent;

Whereas the Russian newspaper “Novaya Gazeta” was officially warned by the Russian Ministry of the Press for its printing of an interview with Aslan Maskhadov, the elected President of the Republic of Chechnya; an entire issue of “Novaya Gazeta”, including several articles alleging massive campaign finance violations by the presidential campaign of Vladimir Putin, was lost to unidentified computer “hackers”; and a journalist for “Novaya Gazeta” was savagely beaten in May of this year;

Whereas President Thomas Dine of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on March 14th, 2000, condemned the Russian

Government's expanding efforts to intimidate the mass media, stating that those actions threaten the chances for democracy and rule of law in Russia;

Whereas "NTV", the only national independent television station, which reaches half of Russia and is credited with professional and balanced news programs, has frequently broadcast news stories critical of Russian Government policies;

Whereas on May 11, 2000, masked officers of the Russian Federal Security Service carrying assault weapons raided the offices of "Media-Most", the corporate owner of NTV and other independent media;

Whereas the May 11th raid on Media-Most represented a failure of recourse to normal legal mechanisms and conveyed the appearance of a politically-motivated attack on Russian independent media;

Whereas the raid on Media-Most was carried out under the authority of President Putin and Russian Government ministers who have not criticized or repudiated that action;

Whereas on June 12, 2000, Vladimir Gusinsky, owner of NTV and other leading independent media was suddenly arrested;

Whereas President Putin claimed not to have known of the planned arrest of Vladimir Gusinsky;

Whereas the continued functioning of an independent media is a vital attribute of Russian democracy and an important obstacle to the return of authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorship in Russia; and

Whereas a free news media can exist only in an environment that is free of state control of the news media, that is

free of any form of state censorship or official coercion of any kind, and that is protected and guaranteed by the rule of law: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring), That the Congress—*

3 (1) expresses its continuing, strong support for
4 freedom of speech and the independent media in the
5 Russian Federation;

6 (2) expresses its strong concern over the failure
7 of the government of the Russian Federation to pri-
8 vatize major segments of the Russian media, thus
9 retaining the ability of Russian officials to manipu-
10 late the media for political or corrupt ends;

11 (3) expresses its strong concern over the pat-
12 tern of Russian officials' surveillance and physical,
13 economic, legal, and political intimidation of Russian
14 citizens and of the Russian media that has now be-
15 come apparent in Russia;

16 (4) expresses its strong concern over the pat-
17 tern of manipulation of the Russian media by Rus-
18 sian Government officials for political and possibly
19 corrupt purposes that has now become apparent;

20 (5) expresses profound regret and dismay at the
21 detention and continued prosecution of Radio Free
22 Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Andrei Babitsky
23 and condemns those breaches of Russian legal proce-

1 dure and of Russian Government commitments to
2 the rights of Russian citizens that have reportedly
3 occurred in his detention and prosecution;

4 (6) expresses strong concern over the breaches
5 of Russian legal procedure that have reportedly oc-
6 curred in the course of the May 11th raid by the
7 Russian Federal Security Service on Media-Most
8 and the June 12th arrest of Vladimir Gusinsky; and

9 (7) calls on the President of the United States
10 to express to the President of the Russian Feder-
11 ation his strong concern for freedom of speech and
12 the independent media in the Russian Federation
13 and to emphasize the concern of the United States
14 that official pressures against the independent media
15 and the political manipulation of the state-owned
16 media in Russia are incompatible with democratic
17 norms.

18 **SEC. 2. TRANSMITTAL TO SECRETARY OF STATE.**

19 The Clerk of the House of Representatives shall
20 transmit a copy of this resolution to the Secretary of State

- 1 with the request that it be forwarded to the President of
- 2 the Russian Federation.

Passed the House of Representatives June 19, 2000.

Attest:

Clerk.