

MEDIA IN SOCHI AND IN THE KRASNODAR REGION :
BETWEEN ADAPTATION AND FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Excerpt from

"Heroes and Henchmen. The work of journalists and media in the Russian regions"



For some years now, everything in Sochi, the most well-known Russian spa on the Black Sea, has centered on just one thing – the Olympic Winter Games to be held in the city in 2014. This is a prestige project of national significance and it therefore affects the local political situation. The controversial election for mayor in April 2009, in which the opposition politician Boris Nemzov took part, was won by Anatoly Pakhomov, the candidate favored by the Kremlin. During the election campaign, practically all of the

media in the Krasnodar region reported as if the opposition candidates did not exist.

Political influence on the media in the Krasnodar region is very great. The former largest regional private broadcaster, *NTK*, was bought by the regional administration and has since kept its reporting in line with government positions. "There are practically no independent media left in the Krasnodar region," says **Vadim Belyayev**, the former director of the state broadcaster *GTRK Sochi*. For years, the so-called "media register" has served as an instrument to regulate and subordinate the media. All of the media listed in the register enjoy certain financial advantages and tax concessions. The price to pay is political loyalty.

The only papers that can still be described as independent are the tabloids *Komsomolskaya Pravda na Kubane* and the *Krasnodarski Kurier*, as well as the *Novaya Gazeta Kubani*, a regional edition of the well-known Moscow newspaper critical of the government. Sochi itself is home to the *Chernomorskaya Zdravnitsa* newspaper, but with a print circulation of only 3000, it is not a significant player. Independent news is provided to the whole of the north Caucasus region by the Internet newspaper *Kavkazki Uzel* (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru), which was founded by the Memorial human rights organization.

In recent years, there have been no cases registered of violence committed against journalists in the Krasnodar region. Those that report on controversial stories, however, can quickly find themselves before a judge. The regional journalist **Svetlana Kravchenko** reported in the since closed *Delovoy Sochi* newspaper on the moving of cemetery graves to provide a neighbor with a more convenient road access to his house. She was subsequently charged with libel and fined 50,000 rubles (then around 1500 euros). According to the Moscow Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, libel cases are an instrument used by many government officials and business people to combat journalists who get in their way.