



Mapping International Journalism in Post-Soviet Russia: Global Trends versus National Context

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of 1990s international journalism in the world is faced with new challenges due to a variety of factors, i.e., technology, globalization and economic crisis in media (Sambrook, 2010). In Russia transformation of international journalism is complicated by the existence of the strong Soviet legacy in the field of foreign reporting and the co-existence of different journalism cultures within one media system. In this paper the authors aim to provide an analysis of the current state of the international journalism in Russia, based on the results of a survey among editors of the leading media outlets as well as among foreign reporters of Russian media and teachers of international journalism at the Russian universities. The results of the study show the existence of cleavage in understanding of functions of foreign reporting between journalists of pro-state and liberal media outlets as well as the overall concern of professionals about the sustainability of international journalism in Russia and abroad.

Keywords: International Journalism, Russia, Global Journalism, Media Crisis, Foreign Reporting

JEL Classifications: D83, I29, Z00, Z13

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the beginning of 1990s the field of the international journalism has undergone major transformations in established democracies as well as in the so-called hybrid regimes. This development was influenced by the following factors: Globalization, de-ideologization, economical challenges and technological progress (Puiy, 2010; Sambrook, 2010). The end of the cold war marked the paradigmatic shift in the content of foreign reporting in the world (Castells, 2008; Skey, 2014). At the same time the economic crisis of the industry, first in the 1990s, and then later in 2001 and 2008 meant a big stroke for the "luxury" field of journalism as foreign reporting has always been considered to be in the media business, with closing of foreign bureaus and reducing resources for international journalism (Archetti, 2013; Berger, 2009). Today, in the time of "lean" media outlets the profession of international journalist differs very much from what it used to be

20 years ago (Hamilton, 2004; Terzis, 2014). Thus, today's foreign correspondent is as a rule less specialized (trend of "fireman" journalism), has more technical skills (trend to the "universalism" in journalism), often works as a freelance correspondent and has to address new audiences (from "foreign" reporting to "transnational" reporting) (Murrell, 2010; Sambrook, 2010).

It must be mentioned that in Russia the crisis of foreign reporting in the 1990s was more intense than in the West as far as during the Soviet time international journalism was stimulated by the state and the new-born commercial media in the conditions of the underdeveloped advertisement market didn't see profits in developing of foreign reporting (Vartanova, 2009). Only in the recent 6-7 years a new generation of foreign reporters (and also, a new generation of the international journalism teachers) has appeared in Russia with the renewed understanding of the functions of international journalism that exists parallel to the

“old generation,” which is still very much influenced by the Soviet legacy.

In accordance with this development the demand of the media industry in foreign reporting has changed significantly in the whole world and in Russia in particular, giving impulse to the transformation of the professional competences. In this paper we are going to analyze the current trends in profession of international journalist in Russia and the expert visions on the further development of this field.

In order to start the analysis we have to make some remarks regarding the current state of journalism education in Russia as far as traditionally international journalists were educated at journalism faculties within programs of specialization in international journalism. Professional international journalism appeared in Russia in the 19th century and as educational specialization – in the Soviet time, where it was considered to be the “elite specialization” and was even more influenced by the political dogmas as the “inland” journalism. The international journalists were considered to have similar functions as diplomats and were closely linked to the state. The main feature of their education was a very strong regional specialization on a certain country: They should know the language, traditions, history of the country and were sent there for a long period of time (more than 5 years as usual), so that the Soviet citizens during dozens of years knew, where the particular correspondents were located and there were several “stars” among them, who wrote books on the culture of the country of their specialization and “opening the world” for Soviet citizens, who couldn’t travel freely on their own, for example Vsevolod Ovchinikov and his works on Japan and Great Britain (Ovchinikov, 1986). Thus, opposite to the Western tradition of sending abroad a normal journalist, who proved himself to be a good editor and to have enough skills to work abroad, the Russian (Soviet) tradition was to send abroad only specially educated professionals with specialization on a region. As one of the Russian foreign correspondents, whom we interviewed for this paper, Sergey Sumlenny, remarks, the Russian media have been slowly moving to the first model in the recent time (first of all, of course, it is true for television; there are only very few Russian print media, which today can afford having foreign correspondents).

As mentioned above in this paper we are going to analyze the current state of international journalism in Russia with focus on the global trends and national specific features on this field. It must be mentioned that there is a lack of literature on the current trends in international journalism in Russia (Sambrook, 2010; Toepfl, 2011), Russian scholars predominantly focus their works on global trends in the field (Puiy, 2010; Nikonov, 2013; Potolokova and Kuryshva, 2013), so we had to undertake an empirical research to map the current trends of the international journalism market in Russia.

2. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The methods of our research include situational analysis that will be supported by the results of semi-structured interviews

with Russian international journalists (with 15 full answers). We define an international journalist a professional journalist (a person who earns his living with journalism), who is specialized in covering international topics (this could be an editor working in Russia as well as foreign correspondent of a Russian media outlet).

In our results there is a certain age bias (from 20 to 34 years old), but our speculation was to interview people, who will be defining the future of international journalism in Russia.

We also took eight in-depth interviews with experts – professors teaching international journalism at the Russian Universities. The majority of them were taken at St. Petersburg State University, where the Department of International Journalism has predominance of younger teachers (with 6 professors over 50 and 7 associate professors under 40), so that the expert interviews also depict more the view of the younger generation of educators with one exception (Nicolay Labush 63).

In our in-depth interviews we asked the teachers the following questions (all of them were formulated as open ones and were just triggers for an in depth-interview):

1. Whether it is necessary at the university to have specialization in international journalism? Maybe in a globalized world, every journalist should have a high degree of cross-cultural competence, to be ready to work in an international context and it should be part of the education of any journalist? Or if there is no such a need at all?
2. If this specialization is needed – what focuses should the curriculum have? What skills does an international journalist has to have nowadays? Do we need the regional specialization that is still traditionally strong in Russia, to teaching international journalism?
3. Do you think it is important to take into account the Russian traditions of personalized writing and the particularities of the Russian media market in education of international journalists? Or should the training be rather based on the international Anglo-Saxon standards, so that journalist would be able to work for the foreign media outlets as well as for the publications in Russia?

As for journalists, in our semi-structures interviews we asked them about their professional carrier, key skills they use in their routines, perceptions of the role of the international journalist and the education specializations needed to become a successful international journalist.

3. INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM IN RUSSIA: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

In Russia the impact of the global factors on the development of international journalism was accompanied and intensified by the slow process of democratization in the country, by the structural reform and the severe crisis of the media system in the 1990s (Bodrunova and Litvinenko, 2012). In was only in the late 1990s – beginning of 2000s when the advertisement

market has developed and foreign investors started to develop their businesses on the Russian media market, also investing in foreign reporting (i.e., travel magazines such as GEO and National Geographic appeared in Russia). However, the recent economic crises of 2008 and of 2014 have led to major cuts in this highly expensive segment of journalism. On the other hand, the state gains more and more shares on the market of international news, because the state still has enough money to finance international journalism, especially on TV. The full-fledged foreign bureaus have remained predominately at the state-funded media outlets: Federal TV-channels, Sputnik, Russia Today, Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

The main source of the news, including international news for the Russian population remain Federal TV channels, which are predominantly state-funded (Oates, 2010; Toepfl, 2011). There exist an oppositional internet TV-channel “Dozhdj” (Rain), but it’s audience is quite limited and the amount of international news in the programs is low (they can afford sending reporters abroad only in a “fireman journalism” modus, thus in 2014 there were a row of reports from the Ukraine, but rarely from other countries). It has to be also mentioned that media outlets from the liberal or alternative media cluster (Bodrunova and Litvinenko, 2013) such as TV Dozhdj or online portal Meduza that are considered to be independent have quite non-transparent financial structure. Thus, TV Dozhdj is partly financed by ads which are very few, partly by paywall (app.80\$ per household per year) and partly by crowdfunding (Russians are known for their reluctance to pay for any content so crowdfunding doesn’t work very well in the country) that is obviously not enough to sustain the TV business. Founded in 2014, the news portal Meduza that also sends its correspondents abroad (mostly Europe, predominantly Ukraine) doesn’t reveal the sources of its funding at all (there is neither advertisement nor paywall on the site). This situation with funding of international news in Russia (majority of state-funded media outlets vs. “oppositional” ones with rather vague information on their funding) raises questions about the motives and functions of international news coverage in the country.

Commercial print outlets has been closing their foreign offices during the past seven years as it happens in other countries, for instance magazine “Expert” that was one of the last commercial print outlets still having foreign correspondents closed their European Bureau in Berlin in the early 2014. There exist some travel blogs and blogs covering international affairs (opinion citizen journalism), but as far as we can judge, there are not commercialized and cannot be considered as professional journalism. In Russia there is no such example of entrepreneurial international journalism as “Monocle” and there still do not exist crowdfunding projects in the field of international journalism.

In 2014 a quite new form of journalism funding appeared in Russia: Grants from a Russian independent foundation for support of media “Sreda” that were given to several outlets, among them also to Dozhdj TV. In the US this kind of funding is wide spread (e.g., Knight Foundation), but for many countries

in continental Europe it is quite unusual and being perceived as controversial, for instance also in 2014 in Germany Brost Foundation launched a project for investigative data journalism CORRECT!V and this new form of media funding was much discussed in the German media. It is still unclear if this kind of funding will be also used in the Russian international journalism.

Having given a brief overview of the current state of the international journalism in Russia we can conclude that although Russian foreign reporting is much influenced by the global trends, especially in terms of cutting the costs, there exists national specifics in the adaptation of innovations on the market: There is lack of entrepreneurial international journalism, there are still no crowdfunding projects in that field and the most wide-spread business model for foreign reporting is state funding.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

We’ve got 14 interviews with Russian journalists covering international news. Among the respondents there were three foreign correspondents working abroad (in Germany and in Belgium); five journalists working for the international department of local newspapers in St. Petersburg; one journalist working for the Russian-speaking news portal in Estonia; one TV-news reporter, dealing among others with international topics in St. Petersburg; one editor of the international department of the local newspaper in St. Petersburg; one reporter working for the online-newspaper on North Caucasus and dealing with inter-ethnic topics; one reporter of an English-language daily newspaper published in Moscow; one journalist working for the Russian edition of an international travel magazine. The age of respondents is put in parentheses after the name.

We will analyze the answers of both the journalists and the experts according to the core issues of our investigation: The education paths and working conditions for international journalists in Russia, the core values of journalism culture of international journalists (about the concept of journalism culture see Hanitzsch, about the research of journalism culture in Russia Anikina) (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Anikina, 2013).

12 of 14 of respondents in our survey answered with clear “yes” to the question if the specialization “international journalism” within the journalism educational programs – bachelor – master – is needed. Although among those who work particularly in the field of international journalism the answers were more differentiated.

Sergey Sumlenny (32), who has been working for 6 years as correspondent for the magazine “Expert” in Germany, sees although no need in such a specialization as a branch of journalism educational programs. Russian media does not need a big number of foreign correspondents, as far as they reduce the number of the correspondents constantly. He suggests that the good idea would be to prepare “autonomous” (universal) journalist, who would be able to produce the media product and sell it all by himself. “This

person, if he/she speaks foreign languages, can easily do the same thing also from abroad.”

Mikhail Tyurkin (34), editor of the international department of the local St. Petersburg newspaper “Nevskoe Vremja,” considers his historical education to be very useful in his everyday work and supposes that this “fundamental education” “is ideal for a political journalist: Being great on history helps to understand background of the processes.”

Olga Lizunkova (24), who works in the region of North Caucasus, accepts that “with a good knowledge of language, a journalist with no special training will be able to work in another country. But in order to ease their way the specialization is necessary, as far as it is not possible to include in the general program for journalists, for instance, the teaching of cultural features of the Arab countries.” Olga Kapustina (29), working for the German public broadcaster says that “in today’s world, every journalist should have international competences, even if he does not specialize in this subject.” She thinks that seminars in Global Journalism are needed for all journalists. This opinion was expressed by the most of the respondents (10 out of 15).

All the teachers were clearly for keeping the traditional specialization, stressing that the competences of international reporting have to be gained by all the journalism students (“the modern globalizing world requires intercultural competence from every journalist,” Anna Gladkova, Senior Lecturer), but “there is a significant difference between a reporter for a local newspaper and that of the TV-program about international affairs; international affairs should be an additional level of knowledge, it is about understanding of the dynamics of interstate relations, historical aspects of the macro-regions” (Svetlana Bodrunova, Associate Professor). Mikhail Tyurkin states that “even detached from politics people have become actively monitor what is happening in the world because their trip to the store tomorrow and their confidence in the future depends on it.”

According to our respondents there exist some core competences that an international journalist should have. Ivan Nechepurenko (28), working for the English-language daily Moscow Times, argues that “for an international journalist getting education abroad is not just an elegant finishing touch but almost a direct necessity.” Sergey Sumlenny speaks about the shift from the Soviet model of educating the specialist on particular countries and regions (“this is this is a long-term planning, which as it seems to me, does not justify itself”) to the western mode of sending correspondents abroad, “who are trained to work in emergency situations.” Mikhail Tyurkin was in seven trips in 2014 including Sotschi and Kiev, Crimea, Dresden and Potsdam.

According to the majority of the answers, the specialization on particular regions is still needed for a foreign correspondent (“such specialization is very good for the carrier” – Kapustina), although it has to be “macro-regional specialization,” with stress on the understanding of global trends and educating the “systemic view.” Angelina Davydova (37) who works for the national daily

newspaper Kommersant and focuses on the environmental issues believes that “specialization on particular countries can be done by the students on their own, at the university they should learn to have the systemic approach to world affairs and understanding of the global interrelations.” That approach opposes the global trend to “fireman” or “parachute” foreign reporting. Angelina Davydova sums up this tendency: “We become interested in the events in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the past the world was bipolar and the amount of regularly covered regions was smaller.”

Three journalists and three teachers stressed the necessity of the topical specialization (sports, politics, etc.) within the global journalism instead of the regional specialization. Ivan Nechepurenko: “The best for a student – to find his or her position as early as possible – in direction, in issues. Best journalists are often specialists in a narrow area, in politics, economy or culture.”

The trend to the universalism in journalism (and especially in international journalism, as far as media often can’t afford keeping the whole bureau abroad and the journalists have to work on their own) forces the trend to universalism, so that, as Sumlenny puts it “international journalist must be able to perform many tasks that are not typical of a journalist, who is working in an big editorial office. Also, international journalist should be more than the usual journalist skilled in the time management. Ideally international journalists need to know at least two foreign languages (for example, the language of the host country plus English), to understand the work of international organizations, to have an idea about the law (to obtain visas and accreditations), to be good at taking pictures and at shooting with a video camera (even if there are working for print media), also video editing could be of great help.” All these requirements are similar to what we can observe on the global level (Sambrook, 2010). There are also some technical skills that have been gaining more and more importance in the recent years: “Work with big data, visualization and mapping methods become increasingly important also within the international journalism training,” says Angelina Davydova.

All the respondents, journalists as well as educators stress the importance of the expertise on the Russian media market and knowledge of the Russian national specifics in journalism writing which traditionally have differences with the Anglo-Saxon model, in particular regarding the maxima of separating between facts and opinions. “Of course, studying Anglo-Saxon standards is useful, but the most of our graduates will work in Russia, and they have to know the journalistic standards of the country they will work in. A number of quality Russian media outlets shift from the Anglo-Saxon principles of news reporting, and it is possible that they will return to the Russian traditions of personalized writing” (Inna Timchenko, Senior Lecturer). “Anglo-Saxon tradition is good, but is not universal. As is the case with democracy, it is not perfect, but nothing better has been invented yet. The separation of fact from commentary and balance of sources should still be the part of the principles of educating the journalistic skills. And we should take the best elements from the national tradition and show the best form of it. For example, if Russia has a strong journalistic tradition in such genres as essay or pamphlets, we should not just throw it

away,” says Svetlana Bodrunova. Although some of the reporters remark: “It seems that in teaching of the others (Western) standards the Russian journalism education has not used the full potential yet,” says Olga Kapustina.

Mikhail Tyurkin assumes that an international journalist should be flexible also concerning the professional standards: According to him, freelancer working for the St. Petersburg newspaper “Nevskoe Vremya” in Germany, France and Israel adopt their writing style to the certain media outlet: “Our correspondent in Germany writes for the ‘BILD’ short, succinct news. And for us – extensive articles with background.”

The balance between national tradition and Anglo-Saxon model seems for the educators to be the clue to professional success of the international journalist: “Leading journalists in both their countries and abroad will be those who will be able to combine the best features of national tradition on the Anglo-American standard,” says Svetlana Bodrunova.

5. DISCUSSION

As our research shows, foreign reporting is still regarded in Russia as a specific field of journalism, where a special education and professional preparation is needed. Although the development of this field goes in the mainstream of the global trends, for instance with becoming more convergent, so-called “universal journalists,” who can work on his own abroad on producing of media products for different platforms, there is still a clear trend among journalists to have a certain, at least macro-regional specialization.

As consequence of the economic crisis of the media market, there was a further decrease of foreign correspondents bureaus of commercial media as well as of the number of business trips of journalists abroad. On the other hand, we observe growth of the state-funded international journalism with international broadcasters such as RT and agency Sputnik as far as only state in Russia seems to be able to afford in this low-profit sector of journalism. There are also waves of interest in foreign reporting from the part of the Russian audience, one of them started in the end of 2013 with the Ukrainian crisis. This correlated with the sinusoid graph of demand on international news in the US described by Sambrook (2010).

As Mikhail Tyurkin puts it, “in a globalized world the need for international journalists increases. Despite of the fact that the amount of information about other countries, their political, economic and spiritual life grows, the problem of understanding of the life of other cultures gets bigger, there exists a lack of analysis and of bridges between cultures. And international journalists can play the role of these ‘bridges’.”

6. CONCLUSION

The Russian international journalism has undergone several transformations in the recent decades: A major economic collapse

in the 1990s, commercialization and the growth of foreign investments in the media market in the early 2000s. Currently we observe a shift from commercial to more state-funded international reporting, due to the economic crisis as well as due to the growing interest from the part of the government in influencing the media representation of the country. Alongside with the other trends this tendency can be defined as a global one (see the popularity of such international broadcasters as CCTV, France 24, Deutsche Welle, etc.), but in Russia this kind of foreign reporting is gaining predominance on the market. This trend raises a question of necessity for scholar of examining the business models (as well as actors and their inter-dependences) of today’s foreign reporting across the world. We also suggest a discussion among international community of journalists of the normative functions of international journalism as far as the new correlation of actors on the global journalism arena brings new challenges to the profession that journalists and scholars should be aware of.

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