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**Report on Russian media coverage of the Beslan  
tragedy:  
Access to information and journalists' working  
conditions**

**16 September 2004**

*The research for the report was conducted by the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations of the  
Russian Union of Journalists*

# **Report on Russian media coverage of the Beslan tragedy:**

## **Access to information and journalists' working conditions**

### **Summary**

The coverage of the events has proven that media freedom had taken hold in Russia. However, several worrisome developments in the relationship between the government and the media drew the attention of local and international experts and human rights activists.

*Cases of detention and harassment of journalists occurred, seriously impeding their work.*

*Even more importantly, the government did not provide in a timely manner truthful information on the handling of the crisis:*

- How many people were taken hostage;
- What was the number of hostage takers;
- Who were they;
- What were their demands.

As a result, journalists were physically attacked in Beslan for allegedly misinforming the public.

*A triple credibility gap arose, between the government and the media, between the media and the citizens, and between the government and the people. This is a serious drawback for a democracy.*

The main sources of information for the Russian people are the three nationwide broadcasters. Unfortunately, they did not provide accurate and up-to-date information. In the end, the print media and Internet news sites stepped in, filling the information void as much as they could.

### **History of Events**

On 1 September around 9:30 local time, a GAZ-66 car usually used by the military pulled up in the yard of school #1 in Beslan (Republic of North Ossetia-Alania). Armed people in camouflage uniforms and face masks got out of the car. With automatic guns, they shot in the air several times and announced that they were going to take everyone present hostage, all of whom were at that time attending the school year opening ceremony.

The largest death toll was registered on 3 September during the release of the school, when, at approximately 13:05 local time, there were two explosions in the school area. News agencies reported that at 12:45 the crisis centre managed to agree with the terrorists about evacuation of the bodies of people who had been killed during the capture of the school.

At 13:05, officers of the Ministry for Emergency Situations entered the school to evacuate the bodies. At that moment, there was an explosion and some hostages started to escape from the school. The terrorists started shooting at them. At 13:15, units of the special force were sent to the school to help the hostages. Only at 16:00 did security forces gain control over the whole building. In the school gym, more than 100 dead bodies from hostages were found. The Chief of the North Ossetian Federal Security Service (FSB) office, Valeriy Andreev, said that “No operation with the use of force was planned. The special forces started the operation in response to the shooting of the hostages by the terrorists”.

### ***Insufficient, Contradictory, or Incorrect Information from Government***

First, there were reports stating that 10 of the terrorists resembled native Arabs and one resembled a native African. Later, official sources reported that the man resembling a native African actually proved to be a Chechen. According to the General Prosecutor of Russia, Vladimir Ustinov, the latest information on the number of terrorists as of 8 September was that there were “about 30 people, including two women”. A day earlier, Sergey Fridinskiy, the Deputy General Prosecutor, had announced a more definite number of 32 people.

During his meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Ustinov announced that only one militant, Nur-Pashi Kulaev, was captured alive. However, according to *Izvestia*'s report, four militants were captured, including one woman.

Also, so far no representative of the authorities has been able to intelligibly explain the identity of the terrorist group that seized the school in Beslan. In the beginning, official reports said that the terrorists arrived in Chechnya through Ingushetia. Subsequently the name of the field commander, nicknamed Magas and who was an ethnic Ingush, was reported in connection with the hostage at the school. Several times in the past, authorities have reported that he was killed, including after the attack on the Republic of Ingushetia in June 2004.

President Putin and General Prosecutor Ustinov are communicating that Shamil Basayev and Aslan Maskhadov organized the terrorist act although they have not given any evidence.

The number of people who were held hostage is also unknown. The latest data –1,200 people – was delivered by Vladimir Ustinov, although a day earlier it had been reported that 1 181 people had been taken hostage. According to Ustinov, as a result of the terrorist attack, 326 people died, although the number of 335 was previously reported for several days.

News agencies reported that parents were not allowed to visit hospitals where their children were treated, and doctors were not allowed to use their mobile phones either.

### ***Working Conditions of Russian Journalists in Beslan***

Two journalists, Svetlana Pelieva and Bella Dzeestelova, and news photographer, Fatima Malikova, who work for the Beslan paper *Zhizn Pravoberezhya* happened to be among the hostages. They had come to the school in the morning of 1 September to prepare a report about the Day of Knowledge (1 September) and were taken hostage as well. All of these journalists survived.

According to most of the journalists who were working in Beslan from 1 September until the release of the hostages at midday on 3 September, the authorities did not obstruct the work of most reporters during this time period.

Most of the problems that journalists faced came from local residents who began to treat the press aggressively after Russian state TV channels only reported official information about the number of hostages. The number of 354 people was persistently given, as initially stated by Lev Dzugaev, the press-secretary of the President of North Ossetia and Valeriy Andreev, the chief of the local FSB office.

Only after the parents of the children who were held hostage announced that they would start making their own lists did North Ossetian president, Alexander Dzasohov, say that there were over 900 hostages in the school.

Local FSB chief, Valeriy Andreev, said in the morning of 3 September that “journalists and locals provoke periodic shooting by terrorists because they want to be in the midst of things”.

On the second day of the school siege, 2 September, the press secretary of the North Ossetian president, Lev Dzugaev, and the Minister of Interior of North Ossetia, Kazbek Dzantiev, held a briefing where they asked journalists reporting from Beslan “not to report information of unfolding events to their editorial offices for some time or to co-ordinate their materials with the crisis center for release of the hostages”. According to journalists’ remarks, this happened after the Russian media reported that the real number of people held by the terrorists differed greatly from the official data. They were referring to the evidence given by one of the first group of hostages to be released in the afternoon on 2 September.

The correspondent from the newspaper *Gazeta* ran an article on 3 September stating that ever since 1 September, the staff of the press services of all security services involved in the release operation – that is: the Ministry of the Interior, FSB and the General Prosecutor’s Office – had been sent to Beslan. These representatives were always present at the crisis centre. Their task should have been to provide the media with information and arrange meetings between journalists and the chiefs of the release operation. Not only did they not cope with these tasks, they never even started to carry them out, according to correspondents from *Gazeta* working in Beslan. “It seems as if there are no representatives of the law enforcement agencies here at all,”

the correspondents said. “Only one man from the local FSB office came out to talk to journalists and said that a criminal case had been launched.”

Many journalists noted that local militia representatives were more willing to communicate: they answered reporters’ questions, presumably hoping that the journalists could help release the hostages, many of which were relatives of the militiamen.

On 2 September, the Industrial Committee, an organization that incorporates top managers of 24 media outlets, most of which are reported to be close to the government, circulated an address to the Russian press. It reminded them that after the siege of the theater in Moscow in October 2002, a so-called “Antiterrorist Convention” had been adopted. Most Russian journalists did not support this convention because they believed it was a way for Russian authorities to try to limit freedom of speech.

“While elaborating and discussing this document, we proceeded from our belief that the threat of terrorism should not be used as grounds and justification for imposing limits with regards to freedom of opinion and freedom of the media. At the same time, being aware of the measure of responsibility in working with information in these conditions, we proposed a range of acceptable restrictions and rules that we would willingly accept stipulating that in extreme situations the rescue of people and the human right to live are primary and take precedence over any other rights and freedoms,” the address of the Committee noted.

On 3 September, on *NTV* (a nationwide TV channel majority owned by GAZPROM, a state controlled gas company) a correspondent in a broadcast from Beslan said that there were “many” wounded and dead at the school, but did not specify. Neither did report the number of victims the two state channels, *ORT* and *Rossiya*. The *NTV* correspondent suggested that the lack of information in the reports were the result of the antiterrorist self-restrictions that many media had voluntarily adopted after the tragic experience of the theatre siege. Nevertheless, *NTV* referred to doctors to confirm a *Reuters* report stating that the number of wounded reached 200.

By the end of 3 September, the Internet newspaper *www.gazeta.ru* wrote in a commentary: “The crisis centre applied tactics that can be explained as an information blockade of the terrorists’ demands. This seems almost obvious today. The demands included one major request, which was impracticable, as well as secondary demands which the terrorists probably also put forward.”

The hostages told the media that the terrorists in the school who were watching the news on TV were irritated by the distorted information. Yelena Milashina, a reporter for *Novaya Gazeta*, wrote: “A girl (hostage) said that after that persistent and extremely important newscast (because those lies provoked the terrorists’ aggression), the children were no longer given tap water”.

Local residents were also irritated. They accused journalists of incorrectly reporting the events in Beslan. During street meetings two days after the release of the hostages, locals beat up Alexander Kots, the correspondent from *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The

people who attacked him argued that he distorted everything in an article that had been published on Saturday, 4 September.

On 6 September, the *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* newspaper printed the article “Why did you, journalists, lie?” which quoted a dialogue between a correspondent and a resident of Beslan as included in the following extract:

“‘Did you also write in your paper that there were 300 people there? But there were 1220 of them, do you understand?!’ The man in a black shirt waives his hand in impotence. ‘Why did you lie?’

The authorities admitted that there were over a thousand hostages in the school only after this figure appeared in the press. TV broadcasters were gagged; even Ruslan Aushev, the man who brought the first saved hostages out of the school, was cut out of reports.”

In the same issue, the newspaper ran a commentary by the columnist, Alexander Khinstein, entitled *The Chronicle of Lies. From 38 Snipers to 354 Hostages*.

*NTV* was the first TV channel to report about the events that took place in Beslan on 3 September, the explosions and the release of the hostages. The channel started live broadcast of the events at 13:30, a half hour after the explosions appeared live on television during the newscast.

The government channels *Pervy Kanal* and *Rossiya* only started live broadcasts from Beslan at 14:00. According to the advisor to the Chair of the *All-Russian State Television and Radio Company* (VGTRK), Viktoriya Arutyunova, this was explained by the fact that “We didn’t want to show the events unfolding the same way *NTV* did: someone is shooting from somewhere. We wanted to understand what was really happening. We waited until we had all the information in order not to create a panic.”

According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the delay in launching live broadcasts happened because at the same time that the events in Beslan were occurring, the Head of the Presidential Administration, Dmitry Medvedev, was meeting with the heads of state channels in Kremlin. This was indirectly confirmed by Arutyunova in her interview. She called this meeting the “traditional weekly Friday meetings”, an institution questionable in itself, during which the line of coverage of events was formulated.

According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the channel *Rossiya* limited coverage to an hour-and-a-half live broadcast then shifted to short news releases at the beginning of each hour apparently following the example of *Perviy Kanal*, which had adopted this form of coverage from the very beginning.

According to a *Rossiya* staff member, the channel’s administration circulated guidelines for reports and commentaries shortly after the capture of the school. For example, state TV channels never mentioned President Vladimir Putin in their reports from North Ossetia.

*Ren-TV*, a privately owned cable channel, reported about the situation in Beslan most thoroughly. The channel's cameraman, Boris Leonov, actually went to storm the building with *Alfa* group soldiers and later told the audience on the phone about what he had seen at the request of Olga Romanova, the anchor of the special news broadcast *24 chasa*.

## **Cases of Violence, Detention, or Pressure on Russian Journalists**

Journalists encountered some of their most serious problems on September 3 right after the storming of the school began.

According to the testimony of Marcin Wojciechowski, a correspondent from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the crew of the Russian TV channel *TBLI* (pronounced *TVTs*) was beaten up. Local residents and men armed with hunting weapons suspected that the channel's cameraman was an accomplice of the terrorists and started chasing him. It was only after militiamen started shooting in the air from automatic weapons that the journalists managed to escape.

Many other journalists were attacked in a similar way. According to an article by Elena Milashina published in *Novaya Gazeta*, a French journalist and a Swedish cameraman were beaten up. According to other journalists' testimonies, provocations may have served as reasons for some attacks. This could have been the case, for example, when there were people in the crowd who screamed that it was all the fault of journalists and the crowd jumped on reporters.

*Ren-TV*'s cameraman, Boris Leonov, said that tapes were taken away by men in civilian clothes. Here is an extract of an interview by *Moskovski Komsomolets* with Boris Leonov:

“- No, there is no censorship, but there is a complete mess. What does this mean? Well, they beat three cameramen then they took away my camera and my tape. They were civilians. Nobody knows who they are. Which cameramen were beaten? When I was there, the cameraman of IPN was beaten up. It's good that he was wearing a bullet-proof jacket. Then they beat a French cameraman and someone else. When we were standing by the Eurovision dish they also had a fight with locals.

### **-Why were TV crews beaten?**

-They said we were lying. They asked: why do the representatives of the authorities come out to the cameras and announce the wrong number of hostages? This is why we became whipping boys. Already on 1 September, the people were saying that there were 1,200 hostages, but the authorities announced 354. Foreign journalists wondered: what kind of a number is that, 354? Why not 600 or 700? I was surprised by that too. Also, all foreign correspondents were telling their viewers, their people, the whole truth – they knew the real number. This immediately made local people hostile towards us, as if someone

was doing this on purpose, fomenting people's anger... Having the Ossetians as enemies would cap it all!

**-Why were the foreign correspondents attacked if ours were lying?**

-That didn't make a difference. The foreigners have Russian cameramen too."

After the storming of the school, many Russian and foreign TV journalists were reported to have been searched. Their tapes with the material they had filmed were confiscated.

According to Margarita Simonyan, the *RTR (or Rossya state channel)* reporter, doctor Leonid Roshal, pediatrician, one of the negotiators, ordered, for unknown reasons, that the tape from the crew of the state channel be confiscated.

At the same time, during and after the storming of the school, many journalists were exposed to pressure from the militia and from security services. Elena Milashina said that when journalists were stopped and asked to show their passports and accreditation cards, unexpectedly to them, the militiamen started asking for certificates of temporary registration in North Ossetia.

Therefore, correspondents from *Novye Izvestia*, Anna Gorbatova and Oksana Semyonova, were detained (they were kept at the militia station for an hour). Madina Shavlokhova from *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and Elena Milashina from *Novaya Gazeta* were also detained.

In the evening of 5 September, *The Moscow Times* correspondent Simon Ostrovskiy was detained in a military village called Sputnik near Vladikavkaz. He was brought to a militia station in the right-bank district of North Ossetia.

After the storming of the school, even the openness of officials with regards to giving information changed. Before the rescue operation, they often held briefings, announcing unreliable and altered messages. After the storm, the chief of the local FSB office, Valeriy Andreev, Deputy General Prosecutor, Sergey Fridinski, and the official from the Presidential Administration, Dmitriy Peskov, offered information only to the government-controlled Russian press. Because there was not even a sign of a press centre at the crisis centre, these officials often came out to the streets of the town to find state correspondents.

### **The Case of Raf Shakirov, the Editor-in-Chief of *Izvestia***

On Saturday 4 September, *Izvestia*, the Russian daily paper, came out in an unusual format. Having preserved the size and volume of the publication, the editorial office decided to print large page-sized photographs of wounded children on the first and the last pages of the paper. Inside the newspaper, there were also many photographs.

On Monday 6 September, the decision of the paper's owner, *ProfMedia*, to fire the paper's editor-in-chief, Raf Shakirov, was announced. In his interview with *Radio*



*Liberty*, Mr. Shakirov explained the reasons for his dismissal: “The management at *ProfMedia* and I had different views about the format of that issue. It was considered too emotional and poster-like – in principle, newspapers are not made like that. Well, if you remember – I don’t know whether you have seen the Saturday’s edition – a half of it is devoted to coverage of the Beslan terrorist attack. It is truly made like a real poster: there is a huge picture on the front page and on the back. In general, we have not used this poster like format for the sake of fine writing but this Saturday edition was based on our assumption of what it meant for the country. The *ProfMedia* management considered the issue too emotional.”

On 3 September, Raf Shakirov was the first of Moscow paper chiefs to publicly state his attitude about the information published by the media. In his interview with *Rosbalt* news agency, he said: “The media drew the right conclusions from the *Nord-Ost* events and now they deliver considerably less information concerning the attack on Beslan. At the same time, it is necessary to report more about the children and their parents because this may wake something human in the terrorists who are most likely to have access to radio and television even though attempts to win their compassion seem a little futile. Newspapers have a different status during terrorist attacks because the terrorist do not receive them. The press may allow wide discussions about the appropriateness of methods in combating terrorism and such a discussion has already begun.”

It was never confirmed, at least for this report, that the government played a role in the dismissal of Shakirov.

### **The case of Anna Politkovskaya, a Correspondent from *Novaya Gazeta***

Anna Politkovskaya, a correspondent from *Novaya Gazeta*, intended to come to Beslan on 3 September with Doctor Leonid Roshal who had been summoned by the terrorists as a negotiator. However, neither she nor other journalists were allowed on Roshal’s jet. Politkovskaya could not get on other planes flying to towns neighbouring North Ossetia. She only managed to get on a Karat Airlines flight to Rostov-on-Don.

Politkovskaya did not eat anything on the plane. She just asked a stewardess for a cup of tea. Right after landing, Politkovskaya felt very ill. She was taken to the intensive care unit of the central hospital clinic of Rostov-on-Don. The *Novaya Gazeta*’s editorial office said that she may have intentionally been poisoned. The paper’s editor-in-chief, Dmitriy Muratov, promptly flew to Rostov. Politkovskaya was then transported to Moscow.

### **The Case of Andrey Babitski, a Correspondent from *Radio Liberty***

Andrey Babitskiy, the correspondent for *Radio Liberty*, was detained at Vnukovo airport (Moscow) on 2 September. Babitskiy was supposed to fly to Mineralnye Vody in North Caucasus. According to the journalist himself, he and the *Agence France Presse* correspondent, Yana Dlugi, were detained under claims that they had allegedly

attempted to transport explosives, as reported by *Radio Liberty*. During the luggage check, a specially trained dog reacted to Babitsky's bag. Babitsky's luggage was searched. Because no explosives were found, the journalist was set free.

As soon as Babitskiy walked out of the militia station, two young men came up to him and started a dispute demanding that the journalist buy them beer. At that moment, two militiamen appeared on the scene and took the three men to the station. This time Babitskiy was detained as a victim. The journalist was forced to undergo a medical examination to find out whether he suffered injuries from the incident even though he said that no one had injured him.

On 3 September, a Justice of the Peace from Solntsevskiy district in Moscow sentenced Babitskiy to a 15-day arrest. However, on 5 September, the Solntsevskiy district court changed that decision and released Babitskiy changing the penalty to a 1000-rouble fine (about USD 34).

### ***Impact of Government Handling of Information on Public Opinion***

As a result of the fact that the nationwide broadcasters in Russia failed to correctly inform the public, and in the wake of this policy the media also underperformed, the Russian people sensed that some information was perhaps being concealed.

*Ekho Moskvy* radio station conducted an interactive poll of its listeners (1216 respondents), 92 per cent of which said that TV channels concealed parts of information and only 8 per cent of the people polled thought that they received all the information.

On 5-6 September, an independent analytical centre conducted a national poll by means of telephone interviews using a random representative sample. 1974 people were polled in 23 of the biggest cities and 31 settlements of the Russian Federation. The poll was meant to display the level of citizens' trust of the information on the terrorist attack. 36 per cent of the polled were constantly following the unfolding events, not missing a single newscast. 39 per cent were in touch with the situation all the time. 24 per cent were followed the developments from time to time. 0 per cent did not know anything about the attack.

13 per cent of those polled had the feeling that they were receiving a full and genuine account. 45 per cent suspected the information was not reported in full (for security reasons). 22 per cent believed that except for some reports, most of the information was false. 18 per cent of the polled said that they had the feeling that they were constantly being deceived or something very important was being concealed from them.

## ***Restrictions on the Work of Foreign Journalists***

As early as on 2 September, according to Marcin Wojciechowski, the correspondent for the Polish paper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a group of foreign journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Liberation* and *The Guardian* was detained at the airport in Mineralnye Vody. The militia and FSB kept the journalists for several hours and thoroughly checked and photocopied their travel documents. Besides, the security services staff asked the detained journalists about the whereabouts of the *Al Jazeera* correspondents who had been sent to Beslan.

On 3 September, during and after the storming of the school, tapes with content of the storming were confiscated from TV crews from *ZDF* (Germany), *ARD* (Germany), *APTN* (USA), and *Rustavi-2* (Georgia).

On 4 September, the militia and FSB detained the crew of the Georgian TV channel *Rustavi-2* which included correspondent Nana Lezhava and cameraman Levan Tetladze. They were accused of illegally crossing the border between Georgia and Russia. However, according to an intergovernmental agreement, residents of the border region between the two countries can freely travel to the adjacent territory for 10 days. Unofficially, the fact that the journalists arrived at the school only 15 minutes after its capture was used as a fact to prove and accuse the journalists of having contact with the terrorists.

According to the chief of *Rustavi-2* news service, *Eka Khoperia*: "The detention of the journalist could only happen because they (the Russian security services) did not like that she was interviewing people who were not saying very flattering things about the administration, the government, about how it was handled."

The journalists were released on 8 September. Nana Lezhava said that the security service staff who detained her did not treat the arrested badly. However, she was forced to undergo a medical examination although she had categorically been refusing to do so. Lezhava also said that she blacked out after drinking a cup of coffee that was offered to her.

On 10 September, the minister of healthcare of Georgia, Vladimir Chipashvili, said that Nana Lezhava who had been kept for five days in pre-trial detention centers of the Interior Ministry and the FSB had been poisoned with dangerous psychotropic drugs.

On 6 September, the chief of the Moscow bureau of the Arab satellite channel *Al Arabia*, Amr Abdul Hamid, was detained at the airport in Mineralnye Vody. According to the head of the *Kavminvody-Avia* company, Vassily Babaskin, the journalist arrived at Mineralnye Vody from Beslan where he was preparing reports about the School #1 siege. He was detained while checking in for a flight to Moscow because there was an object forbidden by air travel regulations in his luggage. Later it was reported that a gun cartridge had been found in his luggage. Amr Abdul Hamid is Egyptian but he has Russian citizenship. According to the TV channel, he was detained for at least two days.

Amr Abdul Hamin said he was released on 8 September but a criminal case was launched against him. He believes that the cartridge for a Kalashnikov automatic gun was secretly put into his luggage at the Beslan hotel.

Finally, on 7 September, North Ossetian security services expelled the crew from the Georgian TV channel *Mze* from Beslan. This included correspondent Zurab Dvali and his cameraman. "The night before, very late, local laws enforcement officers broke into our hotel room in Beslan and demanded that we immediately leave the town, saying that they could not ensure the security of the Georgian journalists," Zurab Dvali said to *Ekho Moskvyy* radio station.

According to Mr. Dvali, "The representatives of the security services took the crew's travel documents and, at 9 o'clock the next morning took them to the airport in a militia car. It was only at the entrance to the plane which was flying to Moscow that they gave the journalists their IDs back." Zurab Dvali noted that during his work in Beslan, he often had problems with persons who said that the Georgians should not be there.

### ***Observations on Consequences of Governmental Information Practices***

According to current Russian legislation the only restrictions concerning the work of journalists are stipulated by two laws, one entitled "On the Fight against Terrorism" (1998) and one entitled "On the Internal Security Troops of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation" (1993). These restrictions prohibit publishing information on the relocation and the manpower of the military units of the internal security troops of the Ministry of the Interior as well as "disclosing information about special technical measures and the tactics of a counterterrorist operation which can impede implementation of a counterterrorist operation and threaten the live and health of the people who happened to be in the zone of the counterterrorist operation, or who are outside of the designated zone; [information] which serves the propaganda or justification of terrorism and extremism; [information] about the staff of special units, members of the crisis centre which controls the counterterrorist operation, as well as [information] about the persons who facilitate the implementation of the mentioned operation."

There are no other restrictions in the legislation. This is why any claims by militiamen or security services staff are even legally objectionable on the basis that they prevent journalists from exercising their profession. According to article 144 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, officials who restrict the work of journalists by prohibiting them from working -- for example, confiscating materials that they have filmed -- may be prosecuted under criminal law.

On 9 September, the Internet newspaper *www.gazeta.ru* ran an article by Georgiy Satarov, the president of INDEM Foundation, entitled *The Lie that Kills* in which the author offers his thoughts about the information blockade of the government-controlled media. He finished his article with the following words: "I demand to view this article as an appeal to the General Prosecutor's Office. I demand launching a

criminal case looking into the fact of malicious misinformation which resulted in grave consequences.”

However, there are warning signs that in dealing with journalists covering terrorist attacks, some Russian politicians continue to be guided by what is expedient from their point of view, rather than by what is legal.

After the hostages were released, some Russian politicians commented on the work of the press. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* interviewed some of these politicians. Lyubov Sliska, First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, said “We should make sure that the media do not facilitate terrorist activity and all means are good for this. America has shown a decent example after 11 September. And the whole world said nothing. All the press limited its freedoms itself realizing that some of its actions help terrorists. This is why we should not be afraid of the suppression of freedom of speech, the suppression of democracy. We can take any temporary measures to prevent anarchic terrorism.”

The gravest consequence of the Government’s information policies were summed up by political analyst Dmitriy Oreshkin in his interview for *Ekho Moskvy* radio station: “In what we receive from the official media one can feel, to choose my words carefully, that some facts are not reported. And if we use real terms, one can feel that there is an attempt to lead the discussion in the wrong way. As a result they will not lead in the wrong way but will lose the people’s trust. One can hardly believe now in what is said on television. Excuse my using special terms, but the mechanism of communication between the power and the people is broken.”

Finally, here is how several leading Russian and international human rights organizations – Amnesty International (AI), International League of Human rights (ILHR), International Helsinki Federation (IHF), International Federation of Leagues of Human Rights, Moscow Helsinki Group, All-Russian Movement for Human Rights, and Human Rights’ Defence Centre Memorial, Human Rights Watch – commented. On 8 September they issued a joint statement in which they pointed out the responsibility that Russian authorities bore in disseminating false information.

“We are also seriously concerned with the fact that authorities concealed the true scale of the crisis by, *inter alia*, misinforming Russian society about the number of hostages. We call on Russian authorities to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the circumstances of the Beslan events which should include an examination of how authorities informed the whole society and the families of the hostages. We call on making the results of such an investigation public,” the statement reads.