Can the Media Help to Fight Terrorism?

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TODAY, THE ROLE OF INFORMATION in the life of the world community is steadily increasing. Indeed, new information and telecommunication technologies offer new possibilities of information exchange and increase the media's impact on the social, political and cultural contexts, and international relations. Globalization of information exchange can potentially democratize public life to a great extent.

Because of this any normally functioning state depends, to an increasing degree, on the information sphere. It should be added that, despite the obvious advantages, the wide and widening opportunities of acquiring and disseminating information are fraught with potential threats to human rights and freedoms caused by unrestricted dissemination of materials banned by international and national legal norms. Today, private life is no longer safe from "information" invasion and encroachments on personal honor and dignity.

At the turn of the 21st century the negative trend of putting pressure on states realized by national and international terrorist groups through the media has appeared and is gradually intensifying. Regrettably, today, in the context of the mounting terrorist threat the trend has already acquired a new quality.

In the 1970s, the terrorists were satisfied with forwarding limited political and economic demands while their acts did not cause many casualties; today the situation is different. The terrorists challenge human civilization, they encroach upon the basic principles of the life of state and society, they claim world leadership at the expense of the existing world order and the system of international relations, and do not spare civilian lives. They have appreciated and learned to skillfully manipulate the specific features of the information era and achieve the desired results.

This ties together terrorism and the media. The terrorists want public attention therefore they spare no efforts to tap the explosive potential of the media, the electronic media in the first place. It is through the media that they make their messages public; it is through the media that society learns about acts of violence. Some of the terrorist organizations are contemplating their own

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media while many of them run Internet sites of their own or even radio and TV stations.

When speaking at the First World Congress of News Agencies "Information: Challenge XXI" held in Moscow in September 2004 President Putin pointed out: "We should never forget that the terrorists are cynically using the possibilities offered by the media and democracy to increase many-fold the psychological and information pressure on the public during hostage crises and other acts of terror to destroy the freedom of the press and democratic institutions."

The media can either be used by the terrorists as a powerful weapon or may become an efficient mechanism of counterterrorist struggle. Today, not infrequently the world public becomes an eyewitness of terrorist acts intended not only and not so much to cause casualties and material losses as to receive response from the media, send the public into shock, and put pressure on the state.

The media, in their turn, treat terrorism as a major information pretext: they not only inform us but also suggest definitions, conclusions, and interpretations. Not infrequently, in pursuit of "hot" news TV steps over the line beyond which the price of a word spoken on air or a picture that put on stake hundreds of thousands of lives and countries' future rises many times over.

In this context the media should be aware of their responsibility; cooperation between power and the media in anti-terrorist efforts becomes critically important. These issues should be clearly formulated in the normative-legal sphere; the balance between the state's interests in the state security sphere and the right of the citizens to the freedom of speech and the press should be preserved.

The president of Russia said at the World Congress of News Agencies: "Anti-terrorist struggle should not be used to infringe on the freedom and independence of the press. It is for the information community itself to create a model in which the media could be used as an efficient anti-terrorist instrument that would rule out any, even involuntary, cooperation with the terrorists. Information obtained at the scene of action should not hurt the victims of terror."

It seems that the journalist community should create special recommendations related to the media self-control when covering the entire range of terror-related subjects as one of the indispensable conditions of a successful joint counterterrorist struggle.

I should say that the Russian journalists have already made the first steps in this direction. In October 2001, the Union of Journalists of Russia elaborated and adopted the "Ethical Principles of Professional Conduct of Journalists Covering Acts of Terror and Counterterrorist Measures." The document can be described as a code of professional journalist ethics of sorts that contains the rules the media should comply with in extraordinary situations (including those related to terrorist acts and anti-terrorist measures). In 2003, the Industrial
Committee that unites the heads of all leading Russian media adopted an Antiterrorist Convention that set up the rules of conduct for the journalists covering terrorist acts and counterterrorist operations. The text was received with understanding in the UN, Council of Europe and the OSCE.

Many international forums and conferences of the media spoke about the need to grasp the realities more profoundly; they said that the media should discuss the topical problems of the journalists' responsibility when working in extreme conditions. In 2002, an international conference organized by the ITAR-TASS under the UNESCO aegis and held in Dombay brought together representatives of regional international organizations and journalist unions of various countries, which also discussed the media's role in anti-terrorist struggle.

The first International Anti-Terrorism Media Forum held in Moscow in 2004 formulated its key task as pooling the efforts of civil society and the media in the struggle against terror and drugs. Its resolution spoke about the journalist community's urgent need "to proceed, in its professional activity, from the principles of civil responsibility, protection of human values trampled down by those who would like to fan hatred and fear." The international public coordination council for opposing terror and drugs was set up.

In November 2004, journalists from 28 countries, including Russia, who came to Israel to attend an international conference "Journalists against Terror" discussed the problem of terror and its coverage in the media. They resolutely condemned terror as one of the gravest threats to mankind and having recognized their own responsibility reached an agreement on drafting an essentially new anti-terrorist charter. It was suggested that a Standing Anti-terror Commission should be set up to unite all international organizations of journalists as well as lawyers and NGOs.

The world community has to resolve a very difficult task: How can it neutralize the information element of terrorism while observing the freedom of speech—the key democratic principle? The transnational nature of contemporary terrorism calls for concerted efforts on the national and international level by actively using the potential of international organizations to create new norms better suited to the challenges of the day.

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 September 1966 contain basic international norms related to journalist activities in extreme conditions.

On 8 June 1977, Protocol 1 approved by the UN General Assembly was adopted. Its Art 79 speaks of the measures designed to protect journalists "engaged in dangerous professional missions."

The declaration and recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "On the Protection of Journalists in Situations of Conflict and Tension" of 3 May 1996 is one of the most profound and detailed international legal instruments in the media sphere.
In December 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva passed a declaration "Building the Information Society: A Global Challenge in the New Millennium" which spoke of the need to prevent "the use of information resources and technologies for criminal and terrorist purposes, while respecting human rights" based on the commonly accepted international legal norms.

Having become an object of terrorist aggression that strives to undermine the state and split society Russia is taking all necessary measures inside the country and is actively involved in formulating a normative basis within the universal and regional international organizations adequate to the new challenges.

When working with international organizations and being involved in bilateral relations the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation pays particular attention to formulating concrete legal norms and moral-ethical standards by which the media should guide themselves when covering terrorist acts and counterterrorist operations. The Ministry considers the European direction as one of its priorities; this is connected with the continued adaptation of the European institutes to the anti-terrorist tasks and creation of an effective structure of Eurosecurity in the new conditions created by the EU and NATO enlargement. An approach designed to synchronize the processes of setting up anti-terrorist mechanisms and standards in European institutions (the Council of Europe, EU, and OSCE) and to prevent their possible setting off against one another or duplication of their functions is totally justified and meets Russia's interests.

Russia proceeds from the need to carefully study the lessons of the media's functioning in extreme situations or in the contexts close to military conditions. We are convinced that the media can and should play a greater role in anti-terrorist efforts.

It is sometimes hard to reach mutual understanding with the OSCE which, when assessing interaction between the Russian authorities and the media in the course of counterterrorist operations often demonstrates an objectivist approach and apply dual standards (obvious in its response to the events in Beslan).

In the context of forming an international anti-terrorist front, including in the information sphere, the Council of Europe positively responded to Russia's initiative in adopting a new code of conduct of states and the media in anti-terrorist struggle.

On 2 March 2005, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Declaration "On the Freedom of Expression and Information in the Media in the Context of the Fight against Terrorism" that contains recommendations to be applied to the media coverage of terrorist acts and related events and counterterrorist operations. The document adopted on Russia's initiative preserved a balance between the freedom of speech and the media responsibility when covering crises.

The declaration took into account the interests of the public that needs...
adequate information about terrorist acts and the requirement to refrain from jeopardizing the safety of the victims of terrorist acts as well of those involved in antiterrorist operations.

The fact that 46 member-states of the Council of Europe unanimously adopted the declaration speaks of the problem's importance as well as of the European community's desire to acquire an adequate anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legal basis to be used by the media and to regulate cooperation between power and the media in crisis situations.

In March 2005, Kiev hosted the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy that adopted a packet of documents related to the future trends of activities of the Council of Europe and international cooperation in the mass communications sphere. The Integration and Diversity: The New Frontiers of European Media and Communications Policy panel discussed the problems of the freedom of speech and information in crisis situations and adopted a corresponding resolution.

Russia is involved in an active dialogue with the partners with which it works on anti-terrorist conventions within the Council of Europe. Three conventions have already been elaborated with Russia's active involvement: On the Prevention of Terrorism; On Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime, and On Financing Terrorism. They were open for signing in May 2005 at the Warsaw summit of the Council of Europe where Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov voiced an initiative "to create within the geographical boundaries of the Council of Europe a common anti-terrorist and law-enforcement space."

In June 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation "The Media and Terrorism" that, in particular, "asks the Committee of Ministers to monitor the treatment of terrorism in European media" in particular with regard to the Declaration mentioned above. It was also recommended "to prepare, under the guidance and in close cooperation with media professionals and professional organizations, and with UNESCO and other organizations working in the same field, a handbook for journalists reporting about terrorist acts and violence." The same document suggests that the member states should demonstrate more initiative in applying an additional protocol to the Convention on Cyber Crime by "setting up a framework for security cooperation between members and ... for the prevention of cyber terrorism, in the form of large-scale attacks on computer systems ... which threaten national security, public safety or the economic well-being of a state."

Today we have accumulated a large number of documents and resolutions related to the critically important the media-terrorism issue. Time has come to work hard to implement them.

Time has also come to think about a new format of pooling the efforts of the world journalist community: it seems that a World Media Congress that would also unite parliamentary, government and public communities of all coun-
tries, international organizations patterned on the 1989 London Information Forum is the right answer. It should discuss the role of the media in opposing terrorism.

This forum might call on heads of state and government as well as international organization to create a single anti-terrorist front; its might concretize the tasks that states, society and the media should address in view of the challenges and globalization. It would be advisable to recommend the states to take resolute measures in relation to those organizations that abet and encourage international terror with financial, organizational and technical means and provide terrorists with information facilities.

It has become obvious that in Russia the efforts to re-adjust the anti-terrorist and anti-extremist laws and to improve the media-related laws should be coordinated. This equally applies to all relevant ministries, departments, the media and experts who should take into account the latest international legal standards in this sphere.

One would like to hope that the further improvement of international and national legal norms that register the rights and duties, conduct, responsibilities of power and the media in crisis situations and their skillful practical implementation will bring our efforts to contain terrorism and oppose other modern threat and challenges to a higher level.