



From: Rostov Oblast

Dates: April 19 - May 11, 2007

Host Organization: International Visitors Council of Philadelphia

Host Community: Philadelphia, PA

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND CORRUPTION PREVENTION

program

On April 19, 2007 a group comprised of ten Rostov journalists left for the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to take part in the Community Connections - Russia: Investigative Journalism and Corruption Prevention program.

Program participants were accepted from 17 different organizations, including the editorial departments of local newspapers, universities, professional associations, and community and political organizations. Rostov journalists met with colleagues from print and television media organizations in Philadelphia, and with political figures, university lecturers, and cultural workers. In total, more than 200 people took part in these meetings.

The group visited the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, where they met with the Director of the Center for Global Communications Monroe Price.

One memorable event was the meeting with a senior academic in the Faculty of Communications, Professor David Eisenhower, grandson of the former president of the United States, and an expert on recent Russian history. Instead of the planned one-hour meeting, discussions with Professor Eisenhower continued for almost double that time.

Program participants were given an insight into the work of local media and visited the television studios of NBC-10 TV, where they learned how TV and print media cooperate in journalistic research. Famous American journalist Herb Denenberg led a masterclass for delegates on the methodology of journalistic research, showing that journalistic research is possible even with the most minimal resources, the most important being inventiveness and courage.

In the words of Victoria Nikitchenko, the meeting with editors gave Russian participants the opportunity to consider their own publications as a part of the global media network. The Russians were able to evaluate, discuss and appreciate what they and their American colleagues have in common in facing global threats (the falling interest in reading in general, and in newspapers, in part, the threat posed by the Internet, etc.)

It was also interesting to learn that the specific problems facing journalists in both countries are remarkably similar: pressure from publishers, the whims of advertisers, and the unwillingness of officials to disclose information.

SUCCESS STORY



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A New Newspaper for Crucial Issues

Anna Lebedeva, a correspondent for Novaya Gazeta and the Southern Russia Glasnost Defense Foundation, during her visit to America further strengthened her conviction that corruption and nationalism are the two greatest evils threatening Russia. Anna decided to launch her own newspaper, *Moi Kavkaz* (My Caucasus), highlighting the problems of "Caucasus phobia" or prejudice which, in her opinion, has now reached a critical level in Russia.

Anna is certain that her professional training under the "Investigative Journalism and Corruption Prevention" program marked a turning point in her life, with a direct bearing on her world view, and she is certain that it will, ultimately, have a significant impact on both her personal and professional future.

During her trip to the United States, this alumna was able to see, with her own eyes, that a similar situation would simply never be allowed to arise in the United States - racist, chauvinistic pronouncements carry criminal liabilities in civilized countries. And yet Russian nationalists are quite at liberty. But scariest of all is the fact that they feel the support of a significant part of the population. Sadly, "Caucasian phobia" has become a part of the body and blood of Russian citizens; it sometimes seems it seeps in through their mothers' milk. Yet not so long ago people in Russia loved Caucasians and the Caucasus; Caucasian style was even quite fashionable, and interracial marriages were considered quite normal.

Is it possible to return to those times? In order to facilitate at least a small improvement in the consciousness of the public of the image of

"Caucasian nationality," Anna came up with her "My Caucasus" project. It will print material portraying the truth about Caucasians and the Caucasus, their lives, human difficulties, sorrows and joys.

The most difficult thing for this alumna was finding the money to realize the project, insofar as she had no startup capital whatsoever. But her American mentors during her professional training taught her not to be afraid, and to try to solve any problem. They had taught her not only how to negotiate the problems inherent in any new business, but also trained her in techniques for doing so - gradually, step by step, following a previously drafted and steadily carried-out plan. Anna Lebedeva put together a step-by-step plan for herself, and started moving forward in finding likeminded colleagues and launching the first issue. As she says, "Even in childhood I had read many classics, in which many run to the riverbank and then ask - "How do I get across?" instead of simply jumping in and starting to swim. I very much hope I will not be among that number."

THE CIVIL SERVANT ON A BICYCLE

Gorod N Weekly
By Elena Stroiteleva

Wouldn't you like to go for a bike ride with the mayor of Rostov? Riding side by side, chatting away, maybe giving him the benefit of your opinion on what might be worth changing in municipal services...

A ride with the mayor - a fantasy, surely? For the average Rostov resident, yes. But in America's Philadelphia, quite recently, anyone who wanted to could buy (for \$400 in a charity auction) a ride of up to 50 miles with the mayor. I was told about this by Brett Mandel, executive director of the Philadelphia Forward citizens' organization. He had previously worked at the Town Hall, but had become disillusioned with the authorities paying no attention to his - quite reasonable - proposals. He therefore decided to become a community worker, helping Americans get their opinions across to those in authority. When Philadelphia residents decided to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with high income taxes, they sent text messages to the cell phones of members of the city council, expressing their disagreement. In response to my question as to whether representatives were then prompted to change their numbers, Brett replied that they do not have the right to do so - these numbers are paid for out of the budget, and taxpayers are therefore quite entitled to express their opinions through them. Incidentally, in the face of community pressure, taxes were reduced.

A bike ride with the mayor or text-attacks on civil servants are not yet viable in view of current Russian realities. But the general public's opinions of the work of those in authority may soon become a matter of some interest - and, moreover, the opinions not of average Russians but of those in each of the regions, without

exception. This is in the cards as a result of a recent decree by Vladimir Putin concerning the introduction of 43 indicators evaluating the effectiveness of the Governors appointed by him. These indicators are highly varied, the majority of which - the provision of sports facilities, per capita costs for healthcare, unemployment and even "the level of public involvement in leisure activities" - demonstrate federal government's desire to know the nation's quality of life under one governor or another. The last point - at No. 43 - concerns "Public satisfaction with the work of executive agencies, including accessibility of information." The level of public sympathy for civil servants locally will be measured with the aid of social surveys; of course, the question of whether these will be led by local or external sociologists is important, although this is a separate issue.

The mere fact of the existence of such criteria, and the desire to obtain a snapshot of the public mood, is testimony to the fact that it is becoming ever more difficult for the President and his administration to understand what is actually going on in one administrative region or another. This effort will, at least, allow some degree of feedback. There are already several ways through which to receive an indication of the actual situation and discover the public mood. These are elections, publications in a free media, and civic participation in meetings or other public demonstrations. But we currently have major problems with these instruments of democracy. Russians do not have the same experience of civic expression and participation that they do in the West; they do not create or support community organizations ("Philadelphia Forward," for example, is supported through the donations of local townspeople); they do not believe in the validity of elections, nor do they bother participating in such elections as they now exist. Preferring to read the "yellow press," and watch escapist TV programs, they are not really worried about the constraints on the freedom of the media. But although our people may be passive, the authorities appreciate, nonetheless, that this does not necessarily mean they are content.

In any event, government transparency is not just a readiness to inform citizens of its activities and work (there are never any problems with officials' "advertisement" interviews), but rather a willingness to listen and correct decisions in line with public opinion. In this respect,

certainly, no amount of newly-introduced criteria is likely to be of any use.

However, that it's not worth idealizing American civil servants either. The mayor of Philadelphia, discovering that riding alongside him would not be an average citizen, but activist Brett Mandel, preferred to abandon the bike ride altogether.