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From Soviet to Russian Media Managers

Smashing initial hopes for more radical and speedier changes in Russia, elements of the Soviet system of managerial and ideological control proved to be obstinately persistent. Certain practices reminiscent of the informal functioning of the Soviet nomenklatura continue unabated primarily in politics, but also in Russian media. This article argues that nomenklatura practices are still a fixed part in organization management in Russian media today, securing the loyalty of journalists and controlling the output of the news media. The analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews and three case studies, scrutinizing media managers' professional biographies, directs to a non-intuitive development; namely, that it is not necessarily those who have experienced the Soviet nomenklatura closely and in person who were most active in applying and perpetuating nomenklatura practices, but also those who were either remote from these power structures or too young.

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Introduction

Monday, 9 December 2013, was a typical chilly mid-winter day in Moscow. Svetlana Mironiuk, the editor-in-chief of *ria Novosti*, the second-biggest Russian national news agency, went about her regular business: she met her editors, conducted a short meeting with a minister and went to instruct the newsroom. In the afternoon Mironiuk received a call from the Kremlin. Sergey Ivanov, Putin's Head of Administration, was calling to tell her that her services were no longer needed. Mironiuk's career was over. This all came as a big shock to everyone, not just to Mironiuk, but also to the whole journalistic community. In many respects, it looked like one of those hostile takeovers of the media outlet which had become typical of Putin's Russia.¹ One aspect, however, was unusual. It was a takeover of a state enterprise orchestrated by state officials against someone with excellent backing from within the Kremlin.²

Mironiuk, born 1969, spent her childhood in embassies across the world as the daughter of Foreign Office technical support staff. The task of the young and energetic pr specialist, who first came to *ria*

Novosti in 2003, was to reshape that secondary national state-owned wire service which had grown out of the Soviet foreign broadcasting agency *apn*. By December 2013, *ria Novosti* outnumbered all non-tv Russian media in terms of audience, brand awareness, international respect and influence.³ Although it was a state media company, *ria Novosti* followed international standards in news coverage and, in general, was committed to be a sort of public media rather than state partisan. It ran live broadcasts from courtrooms, at times even covering cases against the Russian opposition that exposed how biased the Kremlin could be towards its opponents.

However modernized and up-to-date *ria Novosti* was, it had preserved practices in its daily functioning which were reminiscent of the *nomenklatura*, the Soviet model of ideological and personnel control. During her time at *ria Novosti* even young and modern Mironiuk had established *nomenklatura*-like relations with her staff. Together with her management team she exercised a considerable amount of coercion and demanded obedience from the staff; for example, (despite some leniency) repeatedly reprimanding their journalists for speaking out in support of the opposition. Others, in turn, were generously rewarded for their loyalty. They could usually fully count on Mironiuk's support and were given free rein to carry out their work autonomously in their own manner. Mironiuk always made sure that they were safe from any pressure or interference from the Presidential Administration.

From *Nomenklatura* to *Nomenklaturnost*'

Mironiuk was just one example of how very distinct managerial practices bear *nomenklatura* features in today's Russia. This article explores the management style of other leading Russian media managers as an important pillar of Russia's system of governance by examining the career paths of leading Russian media managers from Soviet to post-Soviet times. We ask to what extent management practices, inherited from the Soviet period, have been preserved in today's Russian media.

Alena Ledeneva calls Putin's system of governance *sistema*, defined as a set of informal practices and rules familiar to every member of the ruling elite.⁴ Her analysis of *sistema* provides the grounds for our close-up analysis of Russian media managers. In contrast to *sistema*, which analyses the system of governance as a whole, we switch our lenses away from the system onto the microcosm of media organizations. Thus, taking *sistema* as a basis, we zoom into managerial styles media managers, whether *nomenklatura*-socialized or not, have developed throughout the post-Soviet period and examine to what extent Soviet *nomenklatura* practices are still prevalent in 2016.

Drawing on Mark Granovetter's approach to the cultural embeddedness of management styles, we will trace how the institutional settings of media outlets in Russia are affected by the behavioural strategies employed by their owners/managers and social relations between them, the authorities and their staff. Similar questions have been asked in management studies and organizational sociology; how structures

survive and hinder progress and whether newcomers, such as foreigners or representatives of the younger generation, can make a difference in ethics, management styles and output.⁵ These scholars' focus is, understandably, primarily on industry and finance, rather than media organizations.⁶

With this research, we attempt to demonstrate that *nomenklaturnost'* – denoting features reminiscent of the *nomenklatura* – is an important element of media management practice in modern Russia.

Nomenklaturnost' today plays an important role in the maintenance of loyalty and self-censorship. It derives from the Soviet system but differs from it. An important feature of the Soviet *nomenklatura* system was its *paralegality*. Apart from the very vague Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR (1977), which established the role of the Communist Party as 'leading and directing force of the Soviet society', no single line in the legislation recognized the existence of the *nomenklatura* system, and yet it was universal covering the whole *Sistema*. It was omnipresent and uniform in all types of organizations.

The *nomenklatura* was based on the close bonds between patrons and their loyal cadres (control), a combination of traditional 'patron-client' relationship where the added element was the Communist Party, which wielded control over both patrons and clients. In order to enter the *nomenklatura* and make career, junior cadres had to seek out patrons in senior positions who ensured them a future within the state bureaucracy. Loyal cadres themselves accumulated their own pool of loyal cadres to increase their personal status, influence and material benefits (corruption).⁷ As the Soviet system had not relied on private economic capital as a source of wealth and power, it used access to certain levels of goods and services as a substitute. This could be access to special food stores or to the 4th Chief Directorate of Ministry of Health, which provided top medical services to the Party elite. Those who did not abide by the rules of the *nomenklatura* were subject to collective punishment (coercion). A rebellious *nomenklatura* member lost any career prospects or chances for professional development. The higher a member of the *nomenklatura* rose, the more he/ she had to lose. This meant that the accumulation of *nomenklatura* members' resources also made them vulnerable to coercion and kept them under control of senior cadres.

Having inherited some features of Soviet system, *nomenklaturnost'* today serves a similar goal; personnel control and loyalty assurance. *Nomenklaturnost'*, however, differs from the original *nomenklatura* in many ways. First, it does not exist as a uniform *sistema*-wide, omnipresent principle. Rather, it is a 'feature' of particular organizations. Second, *nomenklaturnost'* is much more a 'moneyed' practice. This is because modern Russia is, in contrast to the Soviet Union, not a scarcity-based society. Those benefiting from *nomenklaturnost'* do not receive status-related treats as a status gratification, such as access to special shops. *Nomenklaturnost'* relies on various forms of, often illegal or semi-legal, profit sharing between patron and client, e.g. state budget contracts or Kremlin contacts. Not least, *nomenklaturnost'* features some mafia-like elements, such as an oath to keep relationship under wraps. The case studies below will demonstrate these modifications.

***Nomenklatura* Research**

The *nomenklatura* has been studied both in Soviet and post-Soviet times as a crucial element of the Soviet political machinery to recruit new cadres and exercise control over the Party apparatus.⁸ In the 1970s the Soviet historian Mikhail Voslenskii produced the first close-up observation of the Soviet *nomenklatura*,⁹ which gave the impetus for research on the phenomenon and, together with the work by the Yugoslav communist Milovan Djilas,¹⁰ for a popular-academic application of the term. In our analysis, we will borrow three terms from Voslenskii which encapsulate the functioning of the Soviet system of governance: *coercion*, *control* and *corruption*.

In the late Soviet period the *nomenklatura* was vividly discussed by Sovietology, which, due to the lack of the first-hand data and reliable information, interpreted the changes in Soviet politics by analyzing the changes in its leadership.¹¹ The opening of the archives in the 1980s gave scholars, both in Russia and the West, access to previously confidential documents who subsequently produced detailed accounts of the phenomenon. In the first years of post-Soviet transition, the major concern of academics was to what extent the incumbent Soviet *nomenklatura* would reproduce itself in the new political and business elite and to what extent it would be replaced by new groups of politicians and businessmen. The rapid and non-transparent process of economic reforms caused many observers to claim that the new Russian economy was largely based on a new class of *nomenklatura* capitalists.¹² They saw the old Soviet elite weathering the transition particularly well when compared to other formerly communist countries.¹³

Many scholars attribute the *nomenklatura* re-emergence, albeit in a transformed shape, to the administrative reforms carried out in the 2000s and the authoritarian tendencies of Putin's regime.¹⁴ While some say that the basic *nomenklatura* principles of political management were either preserved or quickly re-adopted,¹⁵ other regard it an oversimplification to say that the post-Soviet elites of Yeltsin's time have entirely reproduced the previous experience of the old *nomenklatura*.¹⁶ Instead, the political stage, filled with multiple actors navigating through a set of ambiguous and non-transparent informal rules. This has created a more complex system with a great diversity of entry-and exit-strategies.

As for media, a number of studies provide a vibrant account of the Soviet media landscape and the corpus of research on the *perestroika* and post-1991 developments is especially rich.¹⁷ The state of the research on *nomenklatura* practices in the Soviet and post-Soviet media, and research on media management in general, is, however, very limited. This study aims to fill this gap.

Research Questions and Data

We trace today's *nomenklaturnost'* by dissecting the managerial practices of three leading media managers. We look at them through the prism of their professional biographies. Biography here serves

as a framework within which one can see the set of practices characteristic of a media manager and how they have evolved over time. These sets of practices will be interrogated through the three *nomenklatura* principles established by Voslenskii: *coercion*, *control* and *corruption*. The media managers scrutinized are Pavel Gusev, editor-in-chief of *Moskovskii Komsomolets*; Vladimir Sungorkin, editor-in-chief of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*; and Oleg Dobrodeev, head of the media holding *vgtrk*. We interviewed one of these three media managers, but mostly draw on a rich collection of literature and publicly available material.¹⁸

We also conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 journalists and media managers who have personally known these media managers and whose professional lives have intersected with them. They are aged between 30 and 75. Six of them preferred to stay anonymous. Four of the journalists have worked in all three media outlets led by the media managers in focus. Six journalists work or have worked for *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, three for *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* and five for *vgtrk*. Four of the journalists were members of the Soviet *nomenklatura* and, thus, are well versed in the internal rules and requirements. 11 journalists came to the profession after 1991 and, hence, learned about how the *nomenklatura* works only when it was being re-established in the post-Soviet period.

In addition, we conducted interviews with four former security service officers to understand the underlying relations between *nomenklatura* members in the kgb and the Soviet and post-Soviet mass media. One of them was a kgb general responsible for ideological issues. Another kgb officer worked as a senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1990 onwards. One was a diplomat who also occupied a high-ranking position in a research institution and, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, became a senior official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The fourth person was part of the operational staff gathering insider information about employees in media outlets. We conducted three further interviews with political technologists.

We selected the three media managers for their very different backgrounds and the varying career paths they represent. Gusev was born into a *nomenklatura* family and, thus, imbued with their principles from infancy. He was already high-up in the *nomenklatura* hierarchy in pre-*perestroika* times. Sungorkin (born 1954) was not from a privileged family background. He slowly climbed up the ladder and adopted *nomenklatura* principles to get access and success, which he eventually achieved during Gorbachev's *perestroika*. Dobrodeev was never listed as Soviet *nomenklatura* member.

These different trajectories are despite the fact that the three managers represent the same generation, born between 1949 (Gusev) and 1959 (Dobrodeev), with the older two being early post-war baby boomers and the youngest one a late baby boomer. They are old enough to have experienced several periods of Soviet life, from Khrushchev's Thaw in their childhood to Brezhnev's stagnation in their youth.¹⁹

Three cases make a small sample, but the population of media managers they represent is small too. A second reason to choose only three arose from our methodological approach, as biographical studies require going into considerable depth. Despite its small size, this set of cases represents a variety of career paths. This does not allow us to extrapolate the results and generalize about the wider population; however, the analysis provides us with valuable indicators and a sound starting point for a possibly larger project about the strategies media managers applied to become successful in the 1990s and in the 2000s.

The Soviet Media *Nomenklatura* and Changes during *Perestroika*

Media were the core ideological tool of the Soviet regime. Journalism was considered a service to the state. Senior ranks in most Soviet press organizations required Party membership, at least until 1989. The Kremlin heavily relied on censorship. The Soviet Union's censorship agency, Glavlit, exercised control over every single media product. At the level of editors and influential journalists, media staff were fully commanded and controlled by the Party. Editors-in-chief in particular could not possibly be assigned to a post without consent and approval of the respective Party committee. The Party also exercised full authority over the removal of editors, who would be blacklisted once fallen out of favor. The chosen individuals usually accepted their appointment or dismissal without resistance.²⁰

Depending on their rank, *nomenklatura* members in the media exercised, and were exposed to, coercion in the form of direct pressure, blackmailing and the fear of job loss. Loyalty was strengthened via special rewards, such as promotion and access to privileges, which opened the gates to various forms of corruption, but the members' close personal networks was the biggest guarantee. If someone stopped playing along, they lost everything with the consequence that all their loyal cadres lost their positions as well.

Being the Party's main newspaper, *Pravda* enjoyed special status. Its editors-in-chief were appointed by the Politburo.²¹ This level of importance and attention was otherwise only attributed to the Chairman of the Television and Radio Committee (Gosteleradio sssr). Most department editors and some top reporters at *Pravda* were senior *nomenklatura* members.²² As were the editors-in-chief at *Izvestiia*, the newspaper of the Soviet Union's Supreme Council, their deputies and executive editors. *Izvestiia's* editor-in-chief was usually also a member of the Party's Central Committee.²³ In television and radio, *nomenklatura* participation was less pervasive and much less systematic than in the print press, although the most important positions there were also ranked as *nomenklatura*. Some major political commentators on Soviet television concurrently held positions at the Central Committee.²⁴

The policies of *glasnost* and the demands for freedom of speech under Gorbachev emerged in part because of opposition to the privileges of the *nomenklatura* and the inequalities these privileges created.

From 1985 onwards, ideological pressure began to ease noticeably. Some key appointments Gorbachev made triggered radical changes. Alexander Yakovlev, who was exiled as ambassador to Canada in 1973, returned to the Soviet Union in 1985 and was appointed as the head of the Party's department of propaganda. These events caused some major rotation and reshuffling of cadres. Yakovlev got rid of a whole generation of Brezhnevites. The liberally-minded cadres he appointed were instrumental in the process of democratization in late Soviet society. Journalists now suddenly had the freedom to express their thoughts, to design new programs and even to set up new media outlets. Now it became possible rise to influential positions based on talent rather than being closely linked with the *nomenklatura*.

Post-Soviet Developments

While power was transferred from Gorbachev to Yeltsin in late 1991, the old media *nomenklatura* made great efforts to cling onto power. As Arkady Ostrovsky observes, many media managers in the early 1990s were 'the ultimate golden youth of the Soviet elite'.²⁵ Among them were well-known names such as Vladimir Yakovlev, founder of the newspaper *Kommersant* and son of Egor Yakovlev, the editor of *Moscow News* and later head of *Ostankino tv*; and Alexander Lyubimov, one of the presenters of *Vzgliad*, a progressive and liberal *perestroika* television news programme, and son of Mikhail Liubimov, a high-ranked kgb intelligence officer.²⁶ Although in favor of a new, democratic Russia, these people were Soviet in their moral, ethical understanding. The majority of people working for them in the newsrooms were also not new, continuing their old practices.

When the economic crisis of 1992 set in, major figures in the media *nomenklatura* – some of whom will be described below – appealed to Yeltsin for financial support. Yeltsin was happy to grant them large subsidies, as this provided him with an opportunity to force them into loyalty and conformity.²⁷ Yeltsin's strategy worked. As soon as the Kremlin was powerful enough, it returned to a *nomenklatura* style of media management, including direct command and control.²⁸ As early as the 1990s, by inviting leading media managers to attend regular meetings with the presidential administration, the Kremlin created a media elite with access to all the benefits that closeness to power centers provides.

Shortly afterwards, in the early 2000s, the Kremlin started replacing independent media owners and managers by ones loyal to them and installed trusted editors. The Presidential Administration started sending out representatives to media outlets, private as well as state-aligned, to define their agenda and participate in management questions. A government proposal from 2000 – entitled *Edition Number 6* – envisaged the monitoring of all commercial and political activity any media outlets and journalists engaged in. The aim was to disclose their financial sources to cut off money flows if deemed necessary. *Edition Number 6* also envisioned the return of security agents' infiltration in the newsrooms.²⁹ The Kremlin has never confirmed the authenticity of this document. However, some subsequent changes during the Putin era media, suggest that the document exists. Since then, Russian media have been

under constant political pressure from the Kremlin, exercised primarily through economic enslavement and restrictive legal means. These oppressive policies can only succeed when the owners, editors and journalists comply with the overall political framing. We suggest that such strong compliance could only be reached with the re-installment of the *nomenklatura* model, which was familiar to both media managers and their staff and has since provided efficient obedience.

The following part of the article will explore in detail how *nomenklatura* practices have resurfaced in the careers of the three major media managers of the post-Soviet period.

Case i: Pavel Gusev (*Moskovskii Komsomolets*)

Moskovskii Komsomolets is Moscow's most popular daily. Since 1983 it has been edited and, after 1991, owned by Pavel Gusev. Gusev stems from a prominent Party family: his father, Nikolai, was the director of *Vneshtorgizdat*, a publishing house related to the Ministry of Foreign Trade.³⁰ Between 1975 and 1980 he served as secretary of the Moscow Party Committee and from 1980 to 1983 as the deputy head of the International Department of the Komsomol Central Committee.³¹

Moskovskii Komsomolets used to be distributed only in Moscow. The few *nomenklatura* positions within the newspaper were given to members of the Moscow Party Committee. Apart from the editor-in-chief, his first deputy and executive editor, all other positions were filled by professional staff, regardless of their Komsomol or Party affiliation.³² This freedom allowed Gusev to run his own staff policy as he wished. Shortly after becoming editor-in-chief, he replaced most departmental editors and deputies with well-trained and talented journalists and editors.³³

Within his publishing house, Gusev exercised a strict management style. Very few have ever challenged his editorial decisions and practices and for those who did this would be their last day at *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. The former deputy editor Ayder Mudzhabaev, for example, criticized Gusev's decision to comply with the Kremlin's rules as to how to report on Crimea and Ukraine. As a Crimean Tatar Mudzhabaev was very much opposed to the Russian annexation of the peninsula. He was forced to resign, as his opinions on social media representation would apparently harm the newspaper.³⁴

Although *Moskovskii Komsomolets* is much less exposed to coercive pressure from the authorities as, for example, the openly oppositional *Novaia Gazeta*, or even the two cases to be discussed below, Gusev and his team nevertheless faced numerous attempts by bureaucrats at local and federal levels to manipulate the newspaper's agenda. Under the rule of Moscow's long-term mayor Yurii Luzhkov from 1993 to 2011, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* journalists felt regularly very much 'obliged', if not directly instructed, to positively cover certain initiatives launched by the mayor's office. Columnists were asked to provide opinion pieces that supported the mayor's point of view or defend him from federal government

criticism.³⁵

Many of Gusev's journalists later carved out influential careers outside the media, something Gusev has always encouraged because he realized the important role such people can later play to protect him and his media outlet. Among the most notable figures who started their careers at *Moskovskii Komsomolets* is Natalia Timakova, once the newspaper's political reporter. In 2000 she became Putin's press secretary and then Dmitri Medvedev's deputy in the Presidential Administration; currently Mrs Timakova serves as press attaché of the Russian Government. Alexander Budberg used to be *Moskovskii Komsomolets's* political editor. Today he heads the Bolshoi Theatre Board of Trustees, an important institution in Moscow city life and a springboard to influential social networks. Alexander Khinstein, formerly *Moskovskii Komsomolets* legal and crime editor, was an influential State Duma deputy (2003–2016) and currently advises the head of the Russian National Guard. Alexander Perov, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* news editor (1983–1993), is a co-owner of Russia's most influential pr and reputation management agency Raikhlín & Partners who specialize in character assassination. These influential and prominent figures form important social capital for Gusev, which became particularly important when the pressure on independent journalism increased. Attacking Gusev would mean vicariously attacking an old friend of someone who moves in the circles of Putin and Medvedev, which many bureaucrats would rather leave well alone.

Gusev also proved capable in financial matters. The privatization of the newspaper in 1992 gave him the chance to build his own media empire: as of today, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* publishes 15 titles in Russia and 12 abroad. Even with a decline in copy sales, it remains the city's largest paper (up to 700,000 copies daily) and second largest nationally. This expansion has provided Gusev with the opportunity to reward his most loyal cadres generously. For example, and in a similar fashion to *ria Novosti*, Gusev appointed some of them to head newly created sub-contractors, which allowed them to enrich themselves.

The case of Gusev proves that a late-Soviet *nomenklatura* cadre is perfectly capable of turning into a successful capitalist and private owner of large media assets. Gusev used the methods of the *nomenklatura* – control, coercion and corruption – to run a complex business, which is fairly safe from the attacks of competitors or the Kremlin. Gusev has raised generations of highly professional cadres. The organizational autonomy of his media outlet and his apparent autonomy from the Kremlin have enabled him maintain respect from his former cadres, many of whom have moved on to powerful positions.³⁶ This in turn has helped him sustain an independent media outlet.

Case ii: Vladimir Sungorkin (*Komsomol'skaia Pravda*)

The case of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda's* veteran editor-in-chief and manager Vladimir Sungorkin shows

the robustness and longevity of *nomenklatura* practices. *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, the mouthpiece of the Komsomol Central Committee, is one of the oldest Russian newspapers still in print. As at every other national mass media in the Soviet Union, the newspaper was managed according to the *nomenklatura* model. Despite this, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* was a greenhouse for young journalistic talent and maintained a certain level of professional freedom throughout the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. During *glasnost'* and *perestroika*, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* made big leaps to break with the old *nomenklatura* practices by introducing elections of their editors, collective ownership and a transparent management. This internal democracy remained in place till the late 1990s. In the 2000s, Sungorkin, editor-in-chief since 1997 (and majority owner from 1994 to 2007), made a complete reversal and went back to a *nomenklatura*-like system. As of today, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* is a politically servile, agenda-manipulating, pro-Kremlin media.

Sungorkin began his career in 1975 as a reporter for *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, covering the construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline, a massive project spanning several Siberian regions. As a young journalist, he was determined to be promoted and move to Moscow. That meant that he had to demonstrate that his ideological loyalty was uncompromised and, more importantly, he had to find a patron among higher *nomenklatura* members, someone who would launch and nurture his early career steps. His initial patron was Evgenii Tyazhel'nikov, the head of Agitprop from 1977 to 1982, who often visited the construction site where he always met with Sungorkin. These regular meetings provided the young correspondent with a unique opportunity to forge an important bond amongst high-ranking *nomenklatura* circles.³⁷

A high-ranked Soviet official and Brezhnevite, Mikhail Nenashev, formerly deputy head of Agitprop, was made editor-in-chief of another daily, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*. The newspaper business was new to the *nomenklatura* heavyweight who now had to form an editorial team from scratch. He asked Tyazhel'nikov for staff recommendations. Tyazhel'nikov recommended Sungorkin. With his well-established links to the regional authorities in Siberia Sungorkin was attractive to potential patrons. Sungorkin was moved to Moscow to work for Nenashev. However, the return of Aleksandr Yakovlev in 1985 brought inevitable changes to the Brezhnevite elite. In 1986 Nenashev was downgraded to a position with little importance. As Sungorkin was associated to Nenashev, he had to leave *Sovetskaia Rossiia*.

Sungorkin was transferred back to *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* and, surprisingly, appointed department editor and editorial board member. Departmental editors enjoyed benefits equal to those usually provided only to *nomenklatura* members. Thus, Sungorkin, whose career prospects had briefly looked grim after his former patron was cast out, now became a listed member of the Komsomol *nomenklatura*.

With onset of *Glasnost* many heads also started rolling at *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* which opened a corridor of further opportunities for Sungorkin. In 1990 he was promoted to deputy editor-in-chief. The same year, everything was collapsing, including the Komsomol. *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* cut off its links

to the Party. Between August and December 1991, the media outlet was privatized by the editorial collective and Sungorkin became chief executive director of the joint stock company kp, an acronym of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. Proving himself as a capable entrepreneur, he was put in charge of the company's commercial side.

In 1991 and 1992 a debate about the newspaper's future arose. One group of journalists wanted to establish a quality paper, whereas the other, headed by Sungorkin, opted for a tabloid. Sungorkin won and, thus, several journalists left the newspaper in protest.³⁸ Some disloyal cadres were, however, still left. By 1995, Sungorkin managed to eliminate them. From now on Sungorkin was in full control of all business and editorial fields.

Between 1997 and 2007 Sungorkin focused on maximizing his profits trading in kp shares. This phase in his career showed that Sungorkin reasoned and behaved like many of the big businessmen of his generation, albeit dealing with media assets rather than oil and nickel. Sungorkin established himself further by taking on official positions. In the 2000s he became a member of the public councils of several ministries. In 2013, he joined a committee that selects the nominees for Russia's official media awards.

Sungorkin has actively sought control over his competitors by placing his most talented and ambitious cadres in competing media outlets. Vladimir Mamontov, formerly executive editor of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, later became editor-in-chief of *Izvestiia*, one of Sungorkin's main rivals. Alexander Strakhov started a managerial career at *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. In 2007 he was appointed ceo at Sungorkin's arch-rival *Argumenty i Fakty*. Later he changed to *Populiarnaia Pressa*, a Russian division of Ukrainian Media Holding which directly competes with kp in the tv guide market. The benefits of this strategy for Sungorkin have been two-fold: first, these editors, managers and journalists, trained and raised by Sungorkin, reproduce his professional approach in their new work places, which makes these competing media outlets far more predictable. Second, his former cadres are still loyal to him and, therefore, a rich source of insider information. In this way, Sungorkin, aiming at maximum expansion, has secured a large network of influence.

Sungorkin has had his journalists publish numerous scandalous tabloid-type materials, engaged them in propaganda, made them write ethically questionable commentary and provide information support to various government institutions.³⁹ This has had a negative effect on the portfolio and reputation of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* journalists, whose credibility and professional authority has been undermined. Other media outlets tend to avoid hiring former *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* staff, unless they share the same tabloid-like reputation. These circumstances have made the journalists quasi-hostages of Sungorkin, who desperately cling on to their jobs.

Similar to *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* has had few scruples when it comes to

printing pre-paid and compromising materials.⁴⁰ More importantly, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* has repeatedly received huge financial subsidies from the Kremlin and regional governments for positive coverage of their activities.⁴¹ When, with the rise of Putin, the Kremlin system of media management strengthened, Sungorkin positioned his newspaper and himself close to the Kremlin. *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* journalists were among the first to subscribe to Putin's ideological narratives, such as anti-Americanism, the chase of 'foreign agents' and the intimidation of opposition. During the 2012 presidential campaign the newspaper gave huge amounts of space to pro-Putin articles.⁴² Putin personally gave permission to feature in the newspaper's advertising campaigns.⁴³ The journalists who have no scruples about actively engaging in this type of journalism get generously rewarded, both materially and with increased internal powers.

Similar to Pavel Gusev, Sungorkin has established subsidiaries where he places his most valuable staff, providing them with the opportunity to organize their own loyal followers. A typical example for this is *Express Gazeta*, a sensationalist tabloid owned by kp, which in 2001, Sungorkin handed to his old friend Alexander Kupriianov. Another example is kp radio and television, a small and barely visible agency which Sungorkin used as a payoff to senior staff whom he decided to replace with more ideologically-aligned newcomers.⁴⁴ Subsidiaries positions could be highly lucrative, especially in the early 2000s, when large cash flows and at least half of revenues from advertisements ran through these semi-autonomous organizations. This cash was difficult to trace and, therefore, 'tax-free'.

Unlike Gusev, Dobrodeev and partly also Mironiuk, who entrust power to managers who are personally attached to them and who they leave in the same position for decades, Sungorkin regularly renews his team. Many sub-editors and section editors at *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* have only recently joined the media outlet. This serves less the purpose of innovation rather than a question of trust. Sungorkin employs and promotes people whom he trusts ideologically and whose compliance he can be sure of. They need to hold similar patriotic pro-Kremlin views, not require any cajoling or persuasion to do something in the name of Putin and the state and be very quick to adjust their writing to the latest Kremlin policy.⁴⁵

The case of Vladimir Sungorkin and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* demonstrates how the *nomenklatura* system is capable of regaining control over 'lost assets'. In the early 1990's, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* was among the champions of democratization and liberal values in journalism. Sungorkin gradually and successfully eliminated the internal democracy at *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* and established instead a system which strongly resembled the temporarily buried practices of the *nomenklatura*. As Russian politics requested in 2000's, Sungorkin obediently turned his newspaper over to the Kremlin, demonstrating ideological conformity over any type of political or professional values. Whereas Gusev's business model aims at protection and moderate growth, Sungorkin's approach is to continuously and aggressively expand his business assets and political influence.

Case iii: Oleg Dobrodeev (*vgtrk*)

Unlike Sungorkin and Gusev, Oleg Dobrodeev was not a *nomenklatura* member; neither was he born into a *nomenklatura* family nor did he find a patron in the Soviet *nomenklatura*. Only in the early 1980s, during his time as a PhD student and then researcher at the Institute of International Labour Movement did he first encounter *nomenklatura* members. This Institute had close connections with the Party's more liberal wing and, from 1968 onwards was home to some dissenting voices in the Communist Party. Little is known about Dobrodeev's personal development during this time, but it was clear that he was neither particularly fascinated by the dissident movement nor did he make sustainable connections to any *nomenklatura* members.

Dobrodeev left academia shortly after finishing his PhD and became an editor at the prestigious *Programma Vremia*, the country's major television news programme. In the remaining years of the Soviet Union, Dobrodeev worked his way up to the post of deputy head of the *First Channel* news desk. Whilst before *perestroika* this position was highly ideological and politically controlled, now, in the late 1980s, it was no longer *nomenklatura*.⁴⁶

In 1991 Dobrodeev was invited to run his own daily news programme, *Vesti*, on the newly established state-owned television channel *vgtrk*. In summer 1990s, Dobrodeev became the head of *vgtrk*'s information department. He stayed in this position until shortly after the failed putsch of the conservative Soviet forces in August 1991, when Dobrodeev was invited back to the *First Channel* to head the news service. Dobrodeev's major task was to reorganize the newsroom in a way that it would be loyal to Yeltsin rather than the old elite.⁴⁷

The biggest milestone in his career came when he, together with a few colleagues, set up the news programme *Itogi* in 1992. This programme became the cornerstone of the independent news channel *ntv*, which was set up in 1993, with Vladimir Gusinkii as the largest investor. The programme design was an emulation of Western television. When Dobrodeev became a top manager at *ntv*, he radically renewed the channel's editorial structure. Instead of hierarchically-organized departments and specializations (e.g. politics, culture) *ntv* relied on a pool of reporters who were free to work for any show and newscast and, if they wanted, they could even produce their own shows. The editorial process was – as much as it can be – democratic. As Boris Koltsov, one of *ntv*'s most famous reporters, recalls, Dobrodeev maintained a sense of equality among the staff up until 1996.⁴⁸ In the second half of the 1990s, however, *nomenklatura* practices emerged, even at this brand-new media outlet. Within just a year the last vestiges of 'democracy' in the newsroom were effectively eliminated. Dobrodeev appointed deputies to overlook the news reports production and choose loyal and predictable journalists to produce reports.

Amongst the public, Dobrodeev's name still stood for professionalism in Russian journalism. During the information wars, starting in 1997, an internal division in the *ntv* management emerged. People now were compelled to choose their patron. While Kiselëv and Malashenko were supporting Gusinskii's manoeuvres, Dobrodeev stood up against the abuse of *ntv* as a tool to promote business and political interests.⁴⁹ In 2001, when the Kremlin snatched *ntv* from Gusinskii, Dobrodeev, participating in a debate between different sides of the conflict, wrote a treatise every ethical journalist would sign up to.⁵⁰

Already at that point, however, Dobrodeev had sensed very clearly that it would be highly advantageous to secure Putin as patron. In 2000 Dobrodeev accepted the position as director-general back at the state-owned *vgtrk*. By now that media holding had hugely expanded, incorporating among other things Russia's second most important television channel, several radio companies and branches all over the Russian Federation. Those loyal to Dobrodeev followed him, leaving *ntv* in the hands of a team loyal to Kiselëv.

In Soviet times, it was the norm for *nomenklatura* patrons to move their clientele from one appointment to another. In a similar fashion, Dobrodeev took along many of his staff in 2000. He appointed the former *ntv* presenter, Yevgeny Revenko, as his deputy. Revenko started recruiting other former *ntv* cadres. Several senior *ntv* managers came to take up leading positions at *vgtrk*.

As with Sungorkin and Gusev, Dobrodeev has made sure that his cadres get positions in competing media outlets. For instance, in 2005 he suggested to Putin that he should appoint Margarita Simonian, who worked as the *vgtrk* Kremlin correspondent, as the head of *Russia Today*. Dobrodeev personally backed Simonian's admission to the infamous Friday meetings at the Presidential Administration three years later in the wake of Russo-Georgian war.⁵¹ He energetically supported the appointment of his deputy Dmitrii Kiselëv, the notorious anchor of the weekly *Vesti Nedeli*, as the head of *Rossii Segodnia*, a media holding which was established in 2013.⁵² (Kiselev has simultaneously remained deputy to Dobrodeev, and still runs his weekly show on the channel *Rossii*.)

Typically for a *nomenklatura* patron, Dobrodeev has undermined competing patrons and their cadres. For instance, Svetlana Mironiuk belonged to a 'hostile' patron's clan. In the years from 2008 to 2013, Dobrodeev attempted several 'takeover' bids, suggesting that *ria Novosti* should be incorporated into *vgtrk*. When these plans failed, he consistently devoted *vgtrk* resources to undermine Mironiuk's position; for example, by reporting 'disloyal behavior' among *ria Novosti* staff to the Presidential Administration.⁵³ Dobrodeev and Mironiuk constantly and fiercely competed for budget money. Even though *vgtrk* attracted 60 to 65 percent of state subsidies from a pot reserved for federal media and *ria Novosti* much less, the performance (in terms of income, steady growth and internet dominance) of Mironiuk's *ria Novosti* was much stronger at the time of her dismissal. In the 'clan fighting' within the Presidential Administration, Mironiuk won a greater number of supporters for her cause. However, in the end,

Dobrodeev turned out to have greater impact and won. He took over *ria Novosti* and Mironiuk was sacked overnight.

The examples of *ntv* and *vgtrk* show that *nomenklaturnost'* can re-emerge even in newly set up media outlets. Although Dobrodeev himself was never part of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, he borrowed many elements to build up his empire. He had already applied some *nomenklatura* practices while heading the private channel *ntv*: corruption to increase loyalty and dependence, coercion between different parts of his staff to keep them 'busy and engaged'.⁵⁴ When Dobrodeev sided with the Kremlin and moved to *vgtrk*, he immediately brought along loyal cadres to strengthen his positions at the state-owned media holding. He has continued to corrupt staff ever since by assigning lucrative contracts to production companies loyal to *vgtrk*.⁵⁵ He has increased his influence and control through placing loyal cadres in good posts at rival companies.

As a pro-Kremlin media outlet, *vgtrk* does not raise any criticism of government policies or allow out-of-line statements. The editorial routine, from agenda setting to content production, is fully controlled by the management.⁵⁶ *vgtrk* journalists are not supposed to pitch stories to their editors, but, on the contrary, their editors (and sometimes a Kremlin representative) assign them their jobs. They usually pick a journalist whose opinion is most compliant with the story that is to be written. The whole system relies on self-censorship; anybody who joins the ranks of *vgtrk* is supposed to be compliant. In the end, it is, however, the editors' obligation to Dobrodeev to make sure that no hint of disloyalty and incoherence appears on screen.⁵⁷

Both *Moskovskii Komsomolets* and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* are in-house content producers. *vgtrk* and many of the television channels (*Rossiya-1*, for example, but not *Vesti-24*) produce only 10-12% of the content they put on air in-house. The rest is commissioned to (dependent and independent) production companies. This procedure opens up substantial corruption leverage for managers. As a state enterprise, *vgtrk* must publish tenders and allow for an open competitive process. However, public tenders cover less than 15% of production time and costs⁵⁸ while most purchases are processed through an exclusive purveyor. Usually, the 'trusted' purveyor is connected to 'trusted' people within *vgtrk*. Once these intermediaries receive the funding, they outsource the job to a subcontracting company while pocketing the kickback for the operation. *Moskovskii Komsomolets* and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* are not fundamentally different in their approaches; the scale, however, is very different as *vgtrk* is a budget-based state enterprise.⁵⁹

For example, *Rossiya's* most notorious propaganda programs, *Vesti.doc* with Ol'ga Skabeeva and *Special Report* with Evgenii Popov, are produced by the agency *Tsentral'naia Studiia*. This legal entity is affiliated to *vgtrk*; the state enterprise holds minority shares in this agency. The remainder is owned by a shell company that is believed to belong to Skabeeva and Popov, who benefit from their productions

twice; firstly, as employees of *vgtrk* and, secondly, as owners of the company that sells the productions to *vgtrk*. Most of Dobrodeev's important staff are involved in double profiteering. The case of Oleg Dobrodeev is curious in as much as he was never a *nomenklatura* member in the Soviet Union and not even close to it, but has meticulously reproduced *nomenklatura* principles in the 2010s. Dobrodeev has exercised all required components of a *nomenklatura* management model (command, control, corruption) and, like the Communist Party in Soviet times, he runs a media outlet which is part of the state's propaganda machine.

Conclusion

In accordance with Granovetter's theory of cultural-historical embeddedness of market mechanisms, we can see how patterns of social relations within large media organizations are being perpetuated along the way to a market economy in Russia. Although the *nomenklatura* as a system of privileged positions disappeared with the break-up of the Soviet Union, certain managerial practices typical for the Soviet *nomenklatura* have been adopted by the members of Putin's media elite. We use the term *nomenklaturnost'* to encapsulate the major *nomenklatura* practices visible today. The three cases discussed in the article indicate how the principles of *nomenklaturnost'* can be successfully applied in Putin's Russia. Having been familiar with the Soviet *nomenklatura* from the very beginning of their careers, Gusev and Sungorkin learnt the basic *nomenklatura* skills from scratch and modified them throughout the years, adapting them to the changing times.

More interestingly, however, *nomenklatura* practices have persistently been re-employed not less by media managers who belong to the younger generations, have never been part of the Soviet *nomenklatura* and run highly technological and modern organizations. The case of Dobrodeev (and to a lesser extent Mironiuk) shows that someone who was never familiar with the Soviet *nomenklatura* might nevertheless embrace very similar practices in his management and networking style.

All three of them can look back to a long-term rule (from 16 to 32 years). For all three of them personal loyalty to their respective patrons throughout the years has been the key foundation for their success. Equally important for them has been to create personal bonds with loyal cadres inside their companies. All three media managers have pursued a strategy of spreading their loyal cadres into competing media outlets and political structures with the aim of protecting themselves and increasing their influence in the Russian media system.

Once Gusev became the head of his newspaper, he chose to remain independent. Throughout his career he has positioned his loyal cadres in powerful positions outside the media so that they form a safety net, which helped him protect his company and sustain his weight as someone the authorities ought to see as an equal. This gives him a leeway to criticize the authorities, but may bring him into

conflict with members of Putin's elite. Sungorkin, in contrast, turned his newspaper into a resource loyal to the Kremlin and always at its disposal. His journalists and editors can quickly change their political views in agreement with the state line. This approach has secured Sungorkin a lucrative business and a place in the highest echelons of power. As for his loyal cadres, he has used them to expand within the media market and to receive insight into competitor media outlets.

In the Soviet Union the violation of ideological principles promoted by the Communist Party could ruin a bureaucrat's career and, thus, ideology, played a crucial role in disciplining and controlling people. In post-Soviet Russia, ideological ideas have been widely absent. Instead, the major tools of control are informal and corrupt practices. The state allocates money to the major media outlets, thus enforcing the media managers' loyalty. In turn, media managers control the loyal cadres through financial perks. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Sungorkin and Gusev quickly turned their assets into private property. For Dobrodeev, the issue of financial success has become the driver to oust Mironiuk and gain control over *ria Novosti*.

Unlike in Soviet times where privileges have played an important role but money was secondary, in today's Russia the importance of financial incentives to ensure the loyalty and compliance of one's cadres is hard to underestimate. Financial benefits are rewarded directly and indirectly. This is often done through seemingly independent production companies and subcontractors, personally affiliated with key cadres in the head company, who benefit from lucrative contracts. As long as the actions of loyal cadres do not contradict the current Kremlin line and the patron's personal interests, cadres are free to do what they want.

Tracing the origins and perpetuation of *nomenklaturnost'* can contribute to a better understanding of why professional and ethical values in the media world have deteriorated very quickly in post-Soviet Russia. People's compliance (in exchange for material benefits and career opportunities) is a key factor here. The *nomenklatura* practices Gusev and Sungorkin were socialized into never envisioned replacing the basic organizing principles, obedience and loyalty, with professionalism and ethical standards. The only exception here is Dobrodeev whose approach to news production used to be very professional, until his arrival at *vgtrk* in the early 2000s. However, his views changed dramatically as soon as he had moved up the political hierarchy. In his case, *nomenklaturnost'* replaced very directly the democratic mechanism he had previously introduced himself.

Endnotes

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