



Press, Power & Politics

**EUROPE
MEDIA FORUM**

JUNE 22, 2000 • LONDON

Board of Trustees

Charles L. Overby, chairman
and chief executive officer

Peter S. Prichard, president

Harry W. Brooks Jr.

John E. Heselden

Madelyn P. Jennings

Malcolm R. Kirschenbaum

Bette Bao Lord

Brian Mulroney

Jan Neuharth

Will Norton Jr.

John C. Quinn

Carl T. Rowan

Josefina A. Salas-Porras

John Seigenthaler

Paul Simon

Allen H. Neuharth, founder

Editorial: Maurice R. Fliess, Rod Sandeen

Photos: Scott Maclay

Copy Editor: Christy Jerding

The Freedom Forum World Center

1101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209 USA

Tel: 703/528-0800 Fax: 703/284-3529

E-mail: news@freedomforum.org

Internet: www.freedomforum.org

Chris Wells, senior vice president/international

Susan Bennett, director/Asian and

European programs

The Freedom Forum European Center

Stanhope House, Stanhope Place

London, W2 2HH, United Kingdom

Tel: 44-171-262-503 Fax: 44-171-262-4631

E-mail: freedomforum europe@compuserve.com

John Owen, director/European Center

The Freedom Forum, based in Arlington, Va., is a nonpartisan, international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation focuses on four main priorities: the Newseum, First Amendment issues, newsroom diversity and world press freedom.

The Freedom Forum funds two independent affiliates — the Newseum, the interactive museum of news in Arlington; and the First Amendment Center, with offices at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and in New York City and Arlington. Other operating offices are in San Francisco, Cocoa Beach, Fla., Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Johannesburg and London.

The Freedom Forum was established in 1991 under the direction of Founder Allen H. Neuharth as successor to a foundation started in 1935 by newspaper publisher Frank E. Gannett. The Freedom Forum is not affiliated with Gannett Co., does not solicit or accept financial contributions, and does not accept unsolicited funding requests. Its work is supported by income from an endowment now worth more than \$1 billion in diversified assets.

The Europe Media Forum was the second in a year-long series of discussions on the news media's role in communicating information about political campaigns. The first forum was held in March in Lima, Peru. Other forums will be held in Accra, Ghana, in September and Jakarta, Indonesia, in November.

Notion of free press in Russia is deteriorating, columnist says

A Russian journalist, at odds with the direction of her country, warned that the government's handling of two recent cases involving independent media may be symptomatic of deteriorating freedoms in her homeland.

"If things go bad in Russia, no one will be safe on this continent," said Yevgenia Albats, an independent political analyst and columnist in Russia.

Albats spoke during a discussion about new Russian President Vladimir Putin and the press.

Putin figured in the arrests and detentions of Andrei Babitsky, a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent, and Vladimir Gusinsky, founder of Media Most.

Babitsky, a Russian citizen, was put under house arrest in Moscow in January. He angered the Russian government with his reports from Grozny during the most recent war in Chechnya, a region in the Russian Federation fighting for independence.

At the time, 80% of the Russian media were covering the war from the military point of view, Albats said. That imbalance helped lead public opinion to support the war, she said. Putin, who was handpicked by Boris Yeltsin to succeed him as president, won popularity by aggressively prosecuting the war.

Albats said Babitsky was hunted by the Russians "and they tried to kill him." But she also said his reports were one-sided because he was trapped in Grozny.

Babitsky, who joined the discussion via telephone from Moscow, said his coverage was balanced by the reporting being done by journalists covering the military side.

Speaking through an interpreter, Babitsky said he did not know how long his travel would be restricted to the Moscow area.

Albats said the Babitsky case "made it clear that the new Russian administration is out to create a managed democracy."

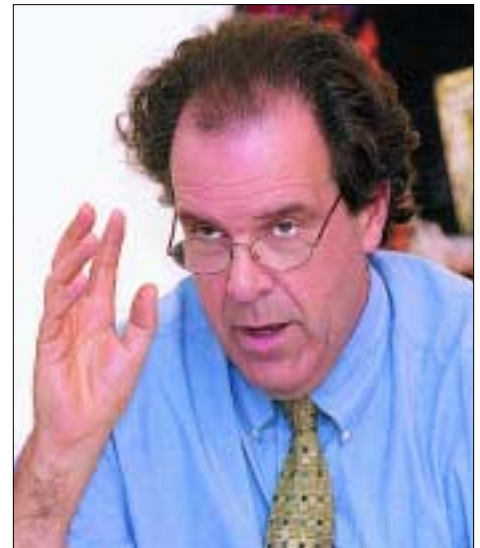
Vladimir Gusinsky of Media Most was arrested June 13 at the direction of Russia's prosecutor general and imprisoned for four days. He was released in the wake of international criticism but charged with fraud. (Charges were dropped July 27.)

Albats, citing "well-placed sources," said Putin did not order the arrest of Gusinsky, but "he didn't say no."

She said the Kremlin sees free press as a



Columnist Yevgenia Albats says the Russian government tried to kill broadcaster Andrei Babitsky.



Former *Financial Times* bureau chief John Lloyd says Russia will be weak for some time.

threat. "That was the main reason Gusinsky was arrested," she said.

John Lloyd, former East European editor and Moscow bureau chief for the *Financial Times*, characterized the Russian state as lacking control over its institutions while succumbing to the influence of rich businesspeople. He also said Putin was loyal "to the brotherhood of the KGB."

"Just because Putin was elected president (on March 26), these things didn't change," Lloyd said. Russia will be a weak state for some time, he added.

Britain's new press restrictions called bewildering

British journalists sounded the alarm over a clot of governmental actions that they say threaten freedom of the press.

Among them are moves to:

- Monitor e-mail messages and Web browsing.
- Seize news photos of demonstrations.
- Allow a libel suit against a U.S. magazine with tiny circulation in Great Britain.
- Compel a TV network to change the hour of its late-night newscast.

"The overall picture in Britain, for both broadcasters and the press, is not a happy one," said Alan Rusbridger, editor of *The Guardian* newspaper.

Rusbridger said the developments are bewildering. He is purging his newspaper's computers of e-mail messages, even as he cautions reporters to retain notes and tape recordings of interviews in the event of a libel suit. "You're caught both ways," he said. "If you don't keep your records, they can get you. If you do keep records, they get you."

In May *The Guardian* said in an article that Britain's MI5 intelligence service "is reported to be building a new [25 million pound] surveillance system ... to monitor e-mails and other Internet messages sent and received in Britain." That report followed a London judge's order that *The Guardian* and its sister *Observer* newspaper hand over any e-mails or notes pertaining to a whistleblowing former MI5 security officer, David Shayler. The newspapers successfully appealed the order.

Rusbridger told the forum he had found that it is "remarkably difficult to purge an e-mail. ... When we first had warning that the government would come after us ... I thought I had managed to purge every e-mail in the system, and then found there was some back-up copy to a backup copy."

At the *Independent on Sunday*, Editor Janet Street-Porter said e-mail has been heavily relied upon, not only for intra-staff communications but also for transmitting stories. "We're (now) looking at ways of ... receiving [such information] in different forms," she said.

Street-Porter also described as "an ominous development" the effort by British police to force news organizations to hand over photos taken at



Panelists discuss press restrictions before an audience at the headquarters of the *Financial Times*. From left: Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*; Janet Street-Porter, *Independent on Sunday*; Richard Tait, *Independent Television News*; Tony Hall, BBC; and moderator Robert MacNeil, broadcast journalist.

demonstrations.

To foil any newsroom raids, *The Guardian* now ships photos of demonstrations to a place outside Britain within 24 hours "so that they're not there and the police can't get them," Rusbridger said.

The libel case involving a U.S. publication was brought by Boris Berezovsky, a one-time associate of former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, and Nikolai Glouckov, managing director of Aeroflot airline. The House of Lords ruled that the Russian businessmen can sue *Forbes* magazine in English courts even though fewer than 2,000 copies of the magazine were sold in England.

Rusbridger said it would have "immense implications for American journalism" if the plaintiffs prevail.

On a positive note, he said the House of Lords in October 1999 sided with *The Sunday Times* in a libel action brought by former Irish prime minister Albert Reynolds. That decision might give the press some protection when commenting on matters of public interest, he said.

Forum moderator and Newseum trustee Robert MacNeil, a broadcast journalist with experience on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, asked whether British broadcasters are more inhibited by government regulation than Britain's print press. "I think probably about the same," Rusbridger replied, noting that all British journalists are affected by the e-mail monitoring threat, the libel laws, the "toothless, useless" new Freedom of Information Act, and the Official Secrets Act.

On June 22, the day of the forum, the London newspapers ran front-page stories about the Independent Television Commission's effort to force the ITV network to give up its 11 p.m. newscast and return to the 10 p.m. slot the newscast occupied for three decades until March 1999.

"We have not had a situation like this before, where a network and a regulator have been on a complete collision course," said Richard Tait, editor in chief of Independent Television News, which supplies news to ITV and to two other television channels. "I'm afraid at this stage your guess is as good as mine as to how it's going to be resolved."



The Freedom Forum's Allen H. Neuharth meets with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher after the Europe Media Forum. Neuharth wrote about their conversation in a June 30 column in *USA TODAY*.

Internet is 'salvation' for journalists suffering under oppressive regimes, speakers say

The Internet has been compared with Johannes Gutenberg's printing press as an invention that transformed communications, and journalists covering three of the world's political hot spots said that for them it was salvation.

Journalists from Sierra Leone, Algeria and Serbia told their stories during a discussion titled "Freeing the Press: The Power and Politics of Online Publishing."

Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, publisher of the award-winning *Expo Times* newspaper, fled Sierra Leone more than two years ago for fear of political persecution by a newly installed government. "We thought it was better to flee [and] to fight another day," he said.

Settling in Paris and making contact with such journalistic organizations as Reporters sans Frontières, Shaw pondered how to revive the *Expo Times*. The notion to publish online took hold in conversations with other journalists.

In March, he launched expotimes.net. The advertising-supported site, which bills itself as "Sierra Leone's independent online newspaper," contains reports filed from Africa and elsewhere.

Although he has not ruled out returning to Sierra Leone if and when the political situation there becomes conducive to newspaper publishing, Shaw said he was content to be an online publisher operating from London and Paris. "We are publishing quite well," he said. "I've been able to reach a much wider audience" via the Internet, building on a baseline of 3,000 "hits" the site received the first day it went on the Web.

Among the nations of the world, Sierra Leone in 1999 had the largest number of journalists killed in the line of duty, 10.

A Web site specializing in another African



Expo Times Publisher Ibrahim Seaga Shaw fled Sierra Leone, fearing a government crackdown on his newspaper.



Ken Kincaid of algeria-interface.com hopes to raise awareness of the political and cultural situations in Algeria.



Veran Matic, founder of Radio B92, keeps news flowing into Serbia via the freeb92.net Web site.

country that has been deadly for journalists, Algeria, went online in November 1999. Based in Paris, algeria-interface.com is published in two languages with different audiences in mind, said Ken Kincaid, deputy editor.

"I've been able to reach a much wider audience" via the Internet.

— Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, expotimes.net

There is a French-language portion with the latest news about Algeria for Algerians and Algerian emigrés. The English-language portion is oriented toward outreach, "to educate people about Algeria and to tell them just what's going on there," he said. By raising awareness, "we can perhaps [make] the government more accountable."

The launch of the Web site did not come in direct response to censorship within Algeria, Kincaid said. The press there is "the liveliest ... in North Africa and possibly in the whole Arabic-speaking world." However, there is "in-built self-censorship," he said, because Algeria in the 1990s was "the most dangerous country" for journalists, with nearly 60 killed — most by Islamic terrorists.

In Serbia, freeb92.net emerged as a Web

site and Webcasting service after the government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic silenced the broadcasts of independent Radio B92.

Veran Matic, founder of Radio B92 and now editor in chief of freeb92.net, said its Webcasts are picked up by 15 independent radio and television stations within Serbia and by other stations in neighboring countries.

Although the Milosevic government has tried to crack down against freeb92.net, Matic said the technology of the Internet and of satellite communications enables his news service to resume within a couple of hours.

"Technologically, we have created a system that can function even in the circumstances of total repression," he said, speaking through an interpreter. "So, even if the government takes over the new building we've been using right now, we will be capable of broadcasting."

Asked whether the Serbian stations that rebroadcast material from freeb92.net face possible retaliation by the government, he replied, "Absolutely. In the last four months, there have been something like 10 radio stations already closed down, but only three of them ... are really closed down. The other seven started rebroadcasting without licenses."