

# Religious Impact on Media Co-regulation: a Case Study of Russia

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**Abstract.** *The proposed paper is focused on media co-regulation and civic accountability from the perspective of religious ethos. The author analyses the process of religion mediatization in the Russian public sphere and presents the findings of a case study of the project entitled “Public Council on Morality for TV”. Classifying different situations when religions face the media and vice versa, the paper presents some empirically fixed facts and trends of dysfunction and corruption in the religious life coverage in Russia. Drawing attention to several particular features of the Russian context (public opinion, autonomy of journalists, agenda-setting and management problem, etc.), the author puts forward a set of significant obstacles for the moral control of the media: the axiological problem (the lack of value consensus in the Russian society), the evaluative problem (absence of a moral monitoring in the mass media and the public sphere), and the communicative problem (the absence of a well-articulated dialogue of value systems).*

**Keywords:** *media co-regulation, mediatization, moral monitoring, religious ethos, value consensus.*

## Introduction

The current situation in the Russian TV is a permanent source of concern for many people in Russia, often expressed publicly in the media and scholar discourse (Vartanova, 2007; Richter 2007). But the first public debate on the necessity of institutional social control over the

Russian TV programs was raised by religious organizations and then supported by other groups of civil society.

Religious demand for the media civic accountability is historically rooted and has been traditional for centuries, but in the post-Soviet context, after seven decades of systematic “atheization”, the religious factor in the media co-regulation is rather new, “innovative”.

Nowadays, the Russian civil society has different instruments to control social institutions established for public service (government, the media, etc.). However, all possible instruments are not used sufficiently or effectively as the society is facing problems with the impact on and control over the TV.

The media law is very liberal but at the same time is intended rather to defend the TV produced than to control it (until now, the Russian Federation does not have a special law regulating the broadcasting activity).

In 1999, the federal law proposal “On a Higher Council for the Defense of Morality in Television and Radio Broadcasting in the Russian Federation” was passed through the State *Duma* (Parliament) and was approved by the Council of the Federation. However, President Boris Yeltsin vetoed the law proposal.

The civil society in Russia is not matured enough in general to have a strong and influential body for TV control from the moral perspective, because in fact there is no consensus on moral norms, on what is good and what is bad inside the society. To blame somebody for immorality, it is necessary to have a clear point of view on what morality is, to achieve a consensus on this question. A special group in the Ministry for Culture and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation has been working for about one year trying to define the term “public morality”, to formulate its features and criteria, the possible ways of its violation. This work was begun in order to make a constant monitoring of the violation of morality in the Russian media. However, the results of this work have not yet been made public. One of the possible reasons for this is some fundamental challenges for achieving a consensus in moral reasoning, which has not been taken into consideration.

## 1. Religious perspective of the media accountability

The interaction of the media and religion as two social subsystems in the public sphere is interesting from the perspective of the civic control of the media.

Can we precisely describe the media as a social sub-system not taking into consideration religion as another influent sub-system? The answer is rather negative in the retrospective of the so-called “cartoon scandals”, persecutions of Christians in some countries and other events, which had implicitly or even explicitly a “religious factor” in their background. “The increasing presence of religion in public life has provoked an ambivalent response from contemporary scholars trying to understand what is the nature of religion, what its proper role should be, and what its efflorescence means for our understanding of the nature of politics and society”, point out Charles Hirschkind and Brian Larkin (Hirschkind and Larkin, 2008:1).

When religion appears beyond the private sphere, it sometimes becomes an effective tool of social mobilization and solidarity (like in the USSR during World War II) and sometimes an instrument for manipulation with mass consciousness (like the wrongly and aggressively interpreted “jihad” which caused some terrorist attacks).

“We live in a world where the media, the political, and the religious cannot be seen as distinct phenomena but, rather, as mutually constitutive” (ibid: 3).

The relations between religions and mass media – their tensions, conflicts, mutual understanding and “*modus vivendi*” – make a significant factor for the social stability and modernization of post-soviet Russia in the perspective of civil society. That is why they are becoming more attractive for research – from phenomenological description to structural and functional analysis.

The process of *mediatization* with its conditions, reasons, effects must be taken into consideration in order to comprehend the moral role of religion in society and its impact on the media themselves. Religions are actualized not only in the modes of practice and worship, but

they also have manifestations in the public sphere of a certain society, and they have become a subject of research with a long history (Religion and Media, 2001; Mitchell and Marriage, 2003; Meyer and Moors, 2006; Stout, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

In order to avoid dysfunctions and conflicts in practice, it is highly recommended to study the media–religion relations (Hoover, 2006).

Religions and the mass media are among most influential social institutions in Russia. The role of “the forth power” is traditional for the media for at least the last century, while religions as influent agents appeared on the Russian public scene in last two decades.

### **1.1. Religions facing the media**

Religions observe the media in moral discourses (sermons, letters, official documents, etc.) giving evaluation from the normative point of view, deriving from the “creed” of each particular faith. The religious media criticism recognizes competition between Religion and the Media and is focused mostly on ethical issues, on the moral impact of the media on the audience. “*Ad hoc*” protests against some films, TV shows (“Dom”, “Za steklom”, erotic movies) and concerts of controversial pop-stars (Madonna, Satanists’ groups) happen in Russia as well.

This point is becoming more visible in Russia over the last years: religious initiatives on moral control towards the media are part of a hot public debate.

Besides the moral monitoring, religions traditionally use the media in religious formats: for spreading religious texts, transmitting events, ceremonies, etc. In the Russian context, for example, the public TV transmits Christmas and Easter Orthodox celebrations.

Religions also use their own religious media (papers, radio, TV, Internet-based media). They are developing rapidly in Russia in order to ensure the influence of religion to the audience and on compete the secular media in order to minimize its “negative” impact. The problem of “translation” from the religious language to the secular one makes this usage difficult for religion.

Religions try to expand their influence on secular media, demanding more space in the press, more time in radio and TV, insisting on the positive religious life coverage to be a must for secular media.

Religions use the media's activity for PR purposes – for promoting some big events which need support of the media (Patriarch's visits, social and charitable service of the Russian Orthodox Church, educational initiatives, property restitution).

### **1.2. The media facing religions**

There are three main ways of the mediatization of religions:

1. The media allow, enable, and help the self-presentations of religions, observe their activity in public interest keeping religious formats (broadcasting services, funerals, weddings, etc.).
2. The media cover the religious life (news reports, feature stories, etc.), having a critical approach towards some social activity or religious institutions.
3. The media use religion for their own aims selectively importing well-known religious symbols into entertainment, keeping out sacral meanings and secularizing the essence of religion. This process is out of the control of religious authorities and therefore causes many complaints and conflicts.

The first way of mediatization is more or less understandable and depends more or less on the media institutions' good will and the audience demand. In most cases it keeps the religious format "untouched", and the media are used more as a channel of transmission rather than an active subject of interaction.

The second and the third ways presume a more active role of journalists covering religion. The process is becoming more important and at the same time more problematic. Conflicts and scandals are rooted in misunderstanding or even in a bad reporting on religious issues.

The lack of knowledge about and experience in religious life among journalists gives much more space for myths and stereotypes in public opinion. There is an evident temptation for journalists to feed the au-

dience not with what is happening in reality but what fits into people's expectations, based on myths and stereotypes. The explanations of such a style of journalism may be different – from the understandable desire to become more popular and to get a higher position in rating to the political manipulation laziness and the low professionalism of journalists without any particular aims.

The current state of the mass media in terms of the correctness and validity of information is a permanent source of concern for many religious organizations in Russia.

How wide this “stereotype-oriented” journalism is spread in the coverage of religion?

The research of such kind has been conducted at the Journalism Faculty of Moscow State University since 2007. Some preliminary results give a possibility to put forward several hypotheses for proving them by the methods of a qualitative as well as a quantitative analysis.

One of the possible answers could be given thanks to new Internet-based technologies and also a new research design for the mechanisms of seeking, rewriting, and spreading of information, which we call “trace-study” (Khroul, 2009).

The research conducted in the field of the Russian media clarifies the functioning of mass information spreading mechanisms – “media flows”.

A “trace-study” as a research design could be applied from the moment of its birth or creation “comets” of the media reality which “trajectory” researchers could follow and study due to the modern “optics” of high quality – computer-indexed news data bases and searching systems (such as world well-known *Google*, *Yahoo* and the *Russian leaders Yandex*, *Integrum* etc.).

For the “trace-study” of religion coverage, we chose the media flow about “seven new mortal sins declared by Vatican”. Most of news on this subject have been published in the Russian media during one week – from 10 to 16 March 2008.

We have analyzed 233 texts about “seven new mortal sins”, published in the Russian media (news agencies, newspapers, weeklies, ra-

dio, TV and the Internet). We have analyzed the texts using several categories – time, region, the type of the media, the genre of the text, the reliability and correctness of links and sources, the grade of distortion of the original publication, etc.

The main conclusions are the following:

- the authentic sense and reliability seem to be secondary criteria for spreading the information on religious topics through the mass media. The primary one is the sensational character of the news, their correspondence to the mass myths and stereotypes. *Even after appearing in the Russian mass media the authentic and truthful information stressing the fact that Vatican did not announce any “new seven mortal sins”, during the next several days this topic was developed as a “snow-ball” misinforming the audience;*
- quite often the mass media invite as experts in diverse problems the people who are not competent experts. *In the searched story, just in three cases Catholic priests were the experts, in five other texts – priests of the Russian Orthodox Church. In most cases journalists did not apply for the comment at all;*
- very often journalists have no critical attitude to the religious news from abroad. They are not intended to check the information looking for independent information sources. *Just reading the initial article in “L’Osservatore Romano” could be enough to understand the aberrations and mistakes made in “La Repubblica” which “created” this “sensation”, transmitted later on by BBC, Reuters and “The Times”;*
- having the Internet as a powerful tool for obtaining the information and checking it, Russian journalists instead of this use it for the further immediate spreading of unproven facts and opinions.

The uncritical media become the space for the birth, growth, and support of myths and stereotypes regarding the religious life – a very delicate and sensitive sphere. Such a practice has already caused many problems and may cause them in future.

The “trace-study” results give us an opportunity for the concern about the role of a journalist in the dialogue between religions and

society. Among three main roles of journalists – peacemaker, mediator and provocateur – the last one, with “sharpening” the picture and making it more “scandalous”, becomes the leading one. Our research results show exactly the crisis of professionalism and responsibility.

The results of the research confirm some empirically fixed facts and trends of dysfunction and corruption in the religious life coverage in Russia almost ten years back (Kashinskaya, Lukina, Resnianskaya, 2002):

- the biased approach by journalists, tolerated by their colleagues;
- the lack of education in religious issues and therefore the lack of understanding of what is really going on;
- urgent need of specialized media focused on religious life;
- secular media dependence on political and influential Russian Orthodox Church elites;
- and, therefore, religious minorities are underexposed in the public sphere.

In order to describe this very sensitive aspect, we made a survey on the Catholic minority (1% of Russian population) as an example illustrating the general situation with religious minorities media coverage in Russia.

We conducted a study of news agencies materials about religious life. The main conclusion is that the media appear to be the instrument of the marginalization of “strangers” (e.g., they describe Catholics just as a Western phenomenon).

The media texts represent the Catholic Church as the Church of foreigners. Journalists systematically use words adopted from foreign languages, despite the masses use Russian, the majority of Catholics are ethnic Russians using Russian in everyday life; Russian is used in Catholic publications and documents. This creates the stereotype that Catholics in Russia are foreigners who do not want to integrate into the local culture.

The media strengthen the opposition of “*our faith*” and “*faith of outsiders*”. The ethnical and geographical determinism takes place, myths and stereotypes of mass consciousness dominate in agencies’ publications.



There is the dependence on the state policy in the religious sphere. It is not strongly articulated but could be seen in signs of attention to religious organizations (to the so-called “*traditional*” religions – Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism).

The Russian media has formed the image of the “*church-stranger*” in the mind of ordinary audience and in the perception of decision-making officials.

The analysis of the Russian media system, focused on religious life coverage, the qualitative analysis of the religious content of the press, the quantitative analysis of the representation of religious topics in Russian news agencies, a “*trace-study*” of religious news in the Russian information space give us a strong argument to suggest that the mass media play a rather negative role both for religion organizations and for the audience.

Covering religion, journalists in Russia with a widely developed “*copy-pasting*” practice without checking the facts in independent sources are still far from these principles.

Questioning journalists for the spreading of myths and stereotypes, we have to be objective and look to religions in Russia themselves: are they transparent and active enough? Are they intended to feed journalists with sufficient information to be transmitted to the audience? There is a set of problems which seems to us to be a significant context for religious life coverage.

Not only the mass media but also religions themselves have to contribute to agenda setting and to the elaboration of mediatization mechanisms in this very sensitive sphere.

Besides the difficulties of translation from the old-fashion “*dogmatic*” language into the modern Russian and also the problems with understanding the internal functionality of churches and other religious organizations, there are some expectations from the Russian society religions do not fit, and this causes a lack of confidence in religions.

Openness and transparency in terms of values presume also the moral voices of different religious organizations. But in fact the religious “*ethos*” is actually visible and heard in the Russian public sphere just from time to time.

## 2. Religion ethos as a reference point for moral accountability

Is the religious ethos and – in particular – religious normative approach to the media known and taken seriously by practicing journalists?

In case of journalism, the formation of the professional ethos could be a factor of integration through the virtues and the true origin of professional competence, but the practice in Russia is still far from the described model.

The notion of “religious ethos” in fact has a very narrow area of use because it is a speculative generic concept for different kinds of “ethoses” – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc. – which derive from the “creed”, the fundamental commandments of a particular religion.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to focus the future studies on the impact of religious ethos on the journalistic culture, on a particular ethos dominating in the society – Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.

According to the results of our research conducted over the last years, the contradictions are mostly located not among the religious normative models and the ethical codes of journalism, but among the religious understanding what journalists are expected to do and what they do in real practice.

Dysfunctions in the implementation of ethical codes lead to a strong criticism of the Russian media and journalists from different perspectives, religious as well. However, the criticism from the religious perspective in Russia has several particular features rooted in the local context.

**Public opinion.** Religion concepts and values after many decades of systematic “atheisation” by state authorities are low-profiled in the Russian public opinion (the level of awareness of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc. “creeds” and cultural heritage is still low and self-contradictory in comparison to Western countries).

**Publicity.** Problems with religious ethos and social doctrine articulation in the public domain:

(a) internal problems – the lack of production. The moral monitoring of social life from the religious perspective is minimal;

(b) interaction problems – the lack of understanding. The translation not only of words but also of concepts and normative models from the ecclesial language into secular is still problematic in Russia (the recent initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church to launch the “media mistakes collector” seems to be a friendly step towards mutual understanding);

(c) external problems – the lack of channels to translate, so the voices of religious leaders are not heard in society.

**Autonomy of journalists.** According to the recent studies, journalists in Russia do not enjoy their autonomy, because of their political and economic dependence. (Without proper autonomy, they are not free enough to take into consideration the religious ethos and sometimes even professional codes – when the superiors enforce them to write stories “pre-paid” by third parties).

**Agenda-setting and management.** The agenda-setting process in the media is not ethics-oriented (the main players are mostly focused not on the audience, not on public interest, but on political subordination and commercial profit, therefore the moral issues are secondary).

**Objectivity.** The poor and stereotyped coverage of religious life in the secular media leads to the marginalization of religious ethos (and this dysfunction is not a concern issue because of the minor weight of religious subjects in comparison with “heavy weight” political and economic aspects).

**Content.** Ethical ignorance in the media content (“infotainment” - and “advertainment” - oriented media decision makers do not seem to be concerned with fitting their products into even secular moral norms, so religious norms as more strict are ever more ignored).

The above-described problems and conditions, taken seriously, do not leave too much space for the religious ethos impact on journalism culture in Russia in general. Therefore, several attempts to make an impact on the mass media from religious moral perspectives failed in Russia. One of them was the Orthodox initiative of the public council for morality in TV, which finally was not established.

Neutral and ambivalent research data are not enough for the explanation and analysis of latent motivations and intentions of journalists. Value-oriented and ethos-focused interpretation theories, based on fundamental normative models, seem to be more suitable and heuristically promising for the explanation of the media trends and the “fluctuations” of the journalistic culture.

### **3. The Public Council on Morality for TV: censorship or call for accountability?**

A Public Council for Morality on TV was proposed by the Club of Orthodox Journalists in November 2007, with support from the Moscow Patriarchate.

One of the most respected men within the Russian Orthodox Church, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin (Head of the Synodal Church and Society Department), believes that “the Council must not forbid anything, but should formulate a reason which will be brought to the viewers’ notice as to why something should be prohibited”.

“Establishing a public council to supervise the performance of federal TV channels would be a great thing to do. We have already agreed on its composition and range of authority”, the Glasnost Defense Foundation President Alexei Simonov said. He is a well-known defender of freedom of speech in Russia. But he also insists on the necessity of journalists’ responsibility for the content presented and for the mass media.

What are the reasons and arguments of those who are against the Council?

An opposing viewpoint is found among professional media public circles which are far less concerned about the spiritual side of the problem. The National Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters President Eduard Sagalayev stressed: “There is too little truth and too much vulgarity on our television”. The information policy that has taken shape in Russia “does not provide for open debate and in fact does not provide for live broadcasts”.

Pavel Gusev, Chairman of the Public Chamber's Media and Freedom of Speech Commission, said that the media law had no clauses pertaining to the activity of publishers and media owners.

The main point of "contra" voices is a "phobia" of the renewal or re-birth of strong ideological control over the media endured in the USSR. The *contra* voices, having invested into "immoral" business on TV, very often claim that any attempt to regulate the media is an offensive step against the freedom of speech.

#### **4. Fundamental obstacles for moral control initiative**

The case for the Public Council for Morality on TV can be considered as an indicator of relations among the mass media, religions, and civil society in Russia. The evolution of civic attention to the Russian television means that its participants are moving from the opportunity of participation in the agenda-setting process, or at least influencing this agenda setting and the media contents formation, to the necessity of control. The systematic neglect of citizens as active subjects in the information process, the imitation of their participation in the TV activity (as crowd scenes at talk-shows), and the arrogant reluctance to work with the audience have led to a situation where the most active citizens and public institutions that have expressed the desire for social control cannot participate in it.

Within the frames of public debates over the idea of the Public Council for Morality, the major objections refer to practical questions, while the main obstacles significantly complicating the essence and sense of future activity of the council have not yet been articulated. Surely, the presence of obstacles in such a society as Russia's calls for the principles of establishing such a council as problematic.

There is a set of problems in regards to the Public Council for Morality on TV project which seem significant to us as we consider the possibility for this project to be realized.

There is a set of problems that seem significant in the analysis of the possibility of the realization of the Public Council for Morality on TV project.

#### **4.1. The axiological problem: the lack of value consensus in the Russian society**

In a multi-normative society in which different values and normative models caused by poly-confessional and poly-ethnic social structure coexist and which would be affected by other factors of diversity, the activity of any council for morality would be successful only if there would be a critical level of agreement of what is “good” and what is “bad.”

Moreover, reaching the “zone of agreement,” a minimum of “axiological unity” seems to be increasingly remote at the present time. According to my observations, during the last decades centrifugal forces damaging the values and normative space of social life are more evident than the centripetal forces gathering and uniting society, leading it to the agreement on the question of values. Here, we do not mean the vertically forced indoctrination, the attempts of a normative uniting of values made “from above.” These attempts – if we look at the possible consequences – are seemingly the catalysts of “centrifugal forces”.

The modern world offers a great variety and variability of ethical norms and ideas about what is moral and what is not linked to the most important world view categories of a person – the attitude toward death, the idea of family, the understanding of social justice, etc. The conditions of relativist occasional ethics in pluralism destroyed the fragile social unity in the Soviet Union quite rapidly (if we assume that such unity existed at all).

In conditions of growing variability, the elaboration of a joint and united idea of *good* and *evil* becomes more and more problematic. For instance, a TV program where polygamy is represented in a positive way could be acceptable for Muslims but would provoke protests by Orthodox believers. The publication supporting the family status of homosexual couples becomes the reason for indignation for the followers of traditional religions but fits well enough within the frame of liberal worldviews of modern youth. A public discussion over euthanasia has already divided several European countries. The list of examples could

be continued. It is hard to imagine them as subjects of discussion at the meeting of the Public Council for Morality on TV, and it is even more difficult to think about the possibility to arrive at one, united, judgment of its members. It is a more realistic possibility in mono-confessional, mono-ethnic, and theocratic countries.

That is why it is not surprising that two “test” sessions of the Council took place in the atmosphere of discussions in which the opinions of participants became divided. This is quite natural in the above-described context.

“What criteria will the members of the Public Council use in order to define what is moral and what is not?” was the question raised by N. Gevorkyan, a journalist of “Gazeta”. Does Saveliy Yamshikov use the same criteria as Vitaliy Tretiakov, and does Mikhail Leontiev use the same ones as Pavel Lungin does? I’d like to understand – whether the words and actions of boys and maids from the “Dom-2” project are more immoral than the jokes which are offered to TV viewers for many hours per month trying to change them into brainless cretins? Do they consider such a “humor” immoral? Do they consider the bloody and morbid nightmare and horror translated by the NTV channel more moral than the “Dom-2” project”? (Gevorkian, 2008).

The problem of the fundamental possibility of consensus on values is very rarely mentioned in the Russian mass media. To our mind, this is the main obstacle to analyzing this initiative. It is the main but not the unique barrier.

#### **4.2. The evaluative problem: absence of moral monitoring in the mass media and public sphere from value defined groups**

We are convinced that the highest level for aggregate judgment in the moral sphere is not the society of the entire country, but a *morally united monolithic homogeneous community* whose members have a consensus about *good* and *bad*. The uniting factor of such community is exactly common morals. That is why they could be named “crystallization centers” of the society if we use ethical indication, they could be also named the “magnets” or “leading lights.” Religious organizations and

other institutions with an explicitly expressed moral “credo” should be put in this group.

They should be the main participants of a social dialogue in the moral sphere accumulating and articulating the value judgments rooted in fundamental normative models (such as of Torah, the Bible, Qur’an, the Book of Mormon, the oath of Hippocrates, etc.) used in different situations of the modern practice and activity. The total weight of these voices in the polyphonic choir would be admittedly louder than the voices of particular followers of some exotic ethical system.

Political parties and trade unions, clubs and other organizations where the uniting factor towards ethical issues is external (fight for power, assertion of professional interest, getting income, love for football or sauna, etc.) are not, and fundamentally cannot be, morally homogeneous social institutions. Maximally, it is possible to discover their conventional professional ethics. The idea of *good* and *evil*, apart from official activity, is removed from the discussion to the private autonomous sphere of the members’ life.

The problem is that there is no system of the “moral monitoring” of events and phenomena of social life in the media and the public sphere made by acting and value-defined communities. The light of “moral leading lights” is not seen, they are poorly visible, poorly evident on the horizon of public consciousness. In this context, the moral navigation of citizens is hardly realizable. Being confused in conditions of value diversity, quite often Russians are not able to make sensible choices; they are liable to the normative pressure of different forces.

Even the voice of the most powerful of sources and opportunities and theoretically the most united community in modern Russia – the Russian Orthodox Church – is not heard regularly and systematically. The Church gives estimations in an *ad hoc* manner – when some scandalous and extremely immoral thing happens, as it was, for instance, with “The Last Temptation of Christ” film release, with the concert of pop-singer Madonna crucifying herself on a cross, etc.

In ordinary life, there is no regular production and distribution of morally evaluated judgments of TV production and a wider enuncia-



tion of diverse socially significant problems and situations made by the Russian Orthodox Church. Moreover, as a press officer of the Russian Orthodox Church (priest Vladimir Vigilyanskiy) said that the Moscow Patriarchate did not plan to establish the structures for regular moral evaluation of cinema and TV production like ones created by the Roman Catholic Church (Orthodox Council, 2008). Meanwhile, at the Catholic Bishops Conference in the USA and in some Catholic countries there are special institutions constantly monitoring the cultural life (primarily monitoring the film and television industry) and publishing a list of the main events and news of this or that sphere with reviews every week. From time to time Muslim leaders also publish the texts of normative and value contents – *fatwa* – actualizing dogma in the social sphere. The aim of such an activity in the field of TV consumption is to support believers in making decisions of what is worth seeing and what is not. These cases might also be found in other religions.

#### **4.3. Communicative problem: the absence of a well-articulated dialogue of value systems**

If the moral monitoring of current events and facts does have a place, if the “leading light” works properly, it would be possible to speak about an articulated dialogue of value systems within the framework of constructing a normative model. In particular, communication about moral norms and their implementation for codifying facts and events in society is a fundamental and necessary condition for the formation of a balanced broadcasting policy.

Naturally, this communication of value systems in the public sphere might be problematic, difficult and even conflicting, but it would contribute to the agenda setting and to elaboration of mediating mechanisms in the sphere of moral values. Moral dialogue in society is seen more naturally as a polyphony of voices of mutually respecting axiological homogeneous social institutions than as a dissonant choir of voices of members of the Public Council who may be respected in society but are personalities singing in different keys.

## Conclusion

The former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's decision to establish the Public TV channel (April 17, 2012) faced an immediate critical discourse (also from religious organizations) focused on the principal "architectonic" mistake: the public TV established "from above" can not be really independent (i.e. public in *stricto sensu*). Despite the predominantly negative reaction of civic activists and media professionals, a bill that creates a legislative base for the public television was passed in the Russian Parliament (June 2012), the new President Vladimir Putin approved members of the Public Television Supervisory Board and appointed its general director (July, 2012). Later on, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed a document establishing the Public TV (*Obshchestvennoe televidenie Rossii – OTR*) as an independent non-commercial organization (September 2012).

In contrast to the European "success stories", the history of the attempts to create the Public TV in Russia and to implement it in the existing media system for the last two decades has been the history of failures.

Formally, the public television could become a powerful tool for the modernization of Russia and of its traditional "vertical" practices of political decision-making. But in fact, if the plan is being implemented without a huge public debate and corrections from the expert community, *intelligentsia*, and from the *grassroots*, it may become one more *simulacrum* in order just to look like a democratic institute of a civil society.

Formally, the Public TV in Russia does exist and started to broadcast on the 19th of May 2013, but there are many unclear things and unanswered questions – legal, ethical, financial, social, professional, etc. Not only experts but also ordinary people would like to know more about the place of a new channel in the general broadcasting policy, its structure, funding and – most of all – guarantees of its independence, but the lack of transparency makes the first steps of the Public TV a rather "un-public" and not influential actor within the Russian media system.

According to the results of the representative of all Russian population public opinion poll conducted in August 2013 by the fund “*Obshchestvennoe mnenie*” (FOM), only about a third of Russians (32%) knew that the OTR channel began broadcasting. However, only 9% of the citizens have seen a transmission of the OTR, and only 6% of these respondents said that they liked the new TV channel. At the same time, 10% of the OTR audience disliked it.

Dean of the High School of Economics Faculty of Media Communications Anna Kachkaeva has reminded that “public television implies conversation with society, not with 6% of the population”. In her opinion, the OTR conceptually “has no way to increase its audience” (Kachkaeva, 2013).

So, the mission of the Public TV in Russia could be preliminarily described as providing an attractive alternative to the state-commercial broadcasting establishment, creating conditions for overcoming the social and political apathy of the Russian population, involvement of public broadcasting viewers who have lost motivation for watching television and listening radio and building the culture of participation in the public life.

The factors described above seem to be essential for the developing of the Russian Public TV “*fail-safe*” model in order to orient the Russian media system towards public interest and to take into consideration the religious initiative for its co-regulation.

Religious attempts to influence the media and to control them from the moral perspective in Russia are still weak and unsuccessful because of the described above factors. However, cases in some European countries with a strong religious “lobby” in the public sphere (Poland, Italy, Ireland, Greece, etc.) efforts of such kind are much more successful. Therefore, the religious factor in the media regulation in Russia still has a significant potential in the media regulation – but under the principal condition of developing towards a civil – not autocratic – society.

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