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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Reaction from Russia to Proposed Elimination of VOA Russian Radio Programs Calls Attention to U.S. Neglect of Free Media in Eurasia**

**FreeMediaOnline.org Urges the Bush Administration and the Broadcasting Board of Governors to Reverse All Recent Program Cuts at Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty**

[FreeMediaOnline.org](#) Dublin, CA, July 13, 2006 -- As the G-8 summit meeting gets underway in St. Petersburg, Russia, **FreeMediaOnline.org** urges the Bush Administration, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the U.S. Congress to reverse the decision to eliminate Voice of America Russian radio programs and to cut or reduce other VOA and RFE/RL broadcasts to media-at-risk countries. These decisions show a gap between public statements from the Administration officials, BBG members, and members of Congress and the actual support given to international broadcasters who provide information to audiences in Russia and throughout Eurasia. VOA and RFE/RL broadcasters cooperate with independent journalists in the region who are under pressure from government authorities and regulators trying to restrict media freedom. Voice of America radio broadcasters have conducted numerous interactive call-in shows with radio stations in Russia and in other CIS countries on a wide variety of subjects dealing with human rights, democratic development, and freedom of the press. The end of VOA radio broadcasts in Russian would be a severe blow to media freedom in Eurasia. Such a drastic, dangerous, and unnecessary move would betray the promises of support which the Administration officials and BBG members have been making to independent journalists in the region in recent years.

**FreeMediaOnline.org** makes available a selection of letters and emails from Russian NGOs, human rights activists, political parties, Voice of America (VOA) affiliates, and VOA listeners in Russia and Central Asia protesting the Bush Administration's decision to eliminate VOA Russian radio programs. The decision to terminate VOA radio broadcasts to Russia was announced earlier this year by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, a bipartisan body in charge of all U.S. civilian international broadcasting. [[Link to BBG Announcement](#)] In response to the BBG decision, one of Russia's NGOs working to defend media freedom and human rights wrote to VOA:

*"Today VOA still presents timely news. Russian society lacks balanced opinions, varying viewpoints, all of which your journalists have mastered. VOA for all these years has been a symbol of freedom of speech. The closure of the Service would lead not only to less truthful*

*information on the air, but will be a meaningful signpost on the way to Russia's crawling back to the epoch of silence and lies."*

For the past several years the BBG has been closing down VOA and RFE/RL services in order to pay for expanding U.S. broadcasting to the Middle East. While increasing broadcasts to the Middle East is supported by **FreeMediaOnline.org**, we have criticized the Board for failing to secure more money from the Administration and the Congress and for being too eager to cut broadcasts to many other countries with little or no free media. After its decision to eliminate VOA Russian radio programs and to reduce other VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) programs, the Broadcasting Board of Governors was caught by surprise when the Russian authorities forced more than 60 stations in Russia to stop using VOA and RFE/RL news broadcasts. [[Link to 07/07/06 WP Report](#)]

**FreeMediaOnline.org** is a California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to the defense of media freedom worldwide. In connection with the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg, **FreeMediaOnline.org** has appealed to the Bush Administration, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the U.S. Congress to reverse their neglect of the suppression of independent media in Russia and throughout Eurasia. **FreeMediaOnline.org** is urging the Bush Administration and the Broadcasting Board of Governors to reaffirm their commitment to continuing U.S. broadcasts to the region and to reverse all recent program cuts at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

To learn more about this issue and to read an [analysis](#) of the BBG decisions on VOA and RFE/RL program cuts, please go to **FreeMediaOnline.org** website: <http://www.freediaonline.org> .

FreeMediaOnline.org welcomes comments and suggestions. Please send them to: [contact@freediaonline.org](mailto:contact@freediaonline.org) . **FreeMediaOnline.org** is looking for support and volunteers to carry on its mission of defending media freedom worldwide. If you would like to help, please send us an email.

[See below](#) for a selection of letters and emails from Russian NGOs, human rights activists, political parties, Voice of America (VOA) affiliates, and VOA listeners in Russia and Central Asia protesting the Bush Administration's decision to eliminate VOA Russian radio programs.



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*Names of some individuals and stations have been left blank to prevent further intimidation of the few remaining stations which may still be using VOA and RFE/RL programs.*

Dear Sirs,

The St. Petersburg regional chapter of the Russian Democratic Party Yabloko learned with dismay about the possible closure of VOA Russian radio broadcasts. For decades, citizens of the Soviet Union, then Russia and other countries of the post Soviet area got timely information and objective commentary about events going on both inside their country and outside it from the journalists of the VOA. Thanks in part to these radio broadcasts, the Soviet government was forced to start implementing Glasnost, which laid the groundwork for necessary reforms. Unfortunately, lately we have observed a tendency towards a rollback on the road to democracy. One of the first victims of this backsliding is "glasnost" Today pluralism of opinions and different viewpoints have given way to aggressive propaganda of one and only one viewpoint, the ideology of "searching for the enemy" is back, as are witch hunts and spy mania just like in the time of communist totalitarianism. The cancellation of gubernatorial elections and the efforts of the incumbent Kremlin administration to hang on to power come what may forces the opposition to forget about its internal disagreements and act collectively to prevent our country's returning to the times when it was called the "Evil Empire"

In view of all this, VOA Russian radio broadcasts are needed by all Russian-speaking listeners in Russia itself as well as beyond its borders.

We would like to reemphasize that Russian language VOA broadcasts are picked up by listeners in Belarus, Uzbekistan Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In other words, in those countries where to one degree or another autocratic regimes persist. Finally, many graduates of Soviet (Russian) colleges and universities from the Middle and Near East for now live there and they are of course fluent in Russian. They no less than the Russian populace itself need the output of the staff of the Russian Service of the VOA.

Therefore, we hope that the decision will be made to preserve VOA's Russian Service which epitomizes high professionalism, competence and objectivity.

Respectfully ,

Chairman of the St. Petersburg regional chapter of the Yabloko party Maksim Reznik

- \_\_\_\_\_ Director and Owner of \_\_\_\_\_ (VOA TV affiliate)

"I will soon turn 50 and all my life I went to bed listening to the Voice and woke up with it as well. This gave me not only a different perspective on the news, it showed a different life and a different perspective. When I come to Washington, I will publicly talk about this on every channel. I intend to make everyone cry. I will not let them close you."

- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of \_\_\_\_\_ (VOA affiliate in Central Asia)

"There will be no more America in Russian for us. We had a monthly joint call-in show which was very successful. I support VOA Russian fully and completely."

- \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ (VOA affiliate) wrote:

"This step which your directors are planning is not well thought out...In Russia for the last 60 years you have a devoted army of fans numbering in the millions...VOA's radio programming is highly professional, democratic and unbiased. It allows us to see what is really going on. Of course you have to develop TV as well but not at the expense of radio broadcasting, which is on a high professional level."

- \_\_\_\_\_ of affiliate \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ wrote:

"Lately we have heard on the mass media through radio and television about the closure of VOA Russian radio. THIS IS VERY BAD!!!! I would very much like if the question of VOA Russian radio's closure would be revisited by the highest authorities. We support you and will try to do everything we can to help you stay on the air."

- \_\_\_\_\_, the MC of \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ (with whom VOA conducts radio call-in shows on AIDS) said:

“In order to achieve UNAIDS goals for universal access to prevention and treatment of AIDS in Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union, it is essential for the public to get information. VOA Russian's call-in show on AIDS fills a huge gap in the Russian media, who seldom discuss these issues. It's very alarming to hear the news that VOA Russian radio might possibly be completely eliminated.”

- Ella Polyakova, Co Chairman of the Soldiers Mothers Committee:

“The Soldiers Mothers Committee appeals to you not to close down the radio programs of VOA. In Russia today there are not that many outlets available to human rights activists to make their views known to their fellow citizens. The Soldiers Mothers Committee has often appeared on VOA Russian radio and we know for sure that they produced quite a reaction in our country. We feel that it is imperative to keep the radio broadcasts of VOA Russia alive to Russia and other Russian speaking countries.”

- From a VOA affiliate (a regional station in Russia)

Dear Mrs. Oeltjen,

About two weeks ago, our Russian web-sites have reported on the upcoming shut-down of the VOA Russian radio. It's hard to believe that these reports are really true.

In my opinion, the station's management is committing an unforgivable error. The Russian audience, including my generation, has gotten used to the VOA broadcasts, having listened to them for over 40 years.

Ceasing these broadcasts, the VOA management is depriving a massive audience of its favorite shows, and is lowering the station's otherwise customary high rating.

Sincerely yours,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Producer,  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(VOA affiliate)

- Letter from Vladimir Soloveychik, Communications Director, Civic Initiative NGO in St. Petersburg, Russia:

“The decision to close down the Voice of America's Russian radio service (if it happens) is a shortsighted one and mistaken one. The funds you pay for Russian broadcasting are well worth it if you take into account the impression they make on your listeners. I think that at this point when

alternate points of view are not published by the mass media, closing down VOA's Russian Radio Service will not help the cause of diversity of opinions and freedom of speech in our country.”

- E-mail to VOA Russian from listener Oleg Kisilev:

“Why are you planning to close down VOA's Russian radio broadcasts because of the necessity of expanding broadcasts to the Muslim world? Don't you realize that VOA Russian broadcasts are heard not only in Russia, but in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc. and in Muslim countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzia, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Azerbaijan, etc.?”

- VOA Russian listener in Austria sent in the following e-mail about the proposal to cut VOA Russian radio:

“Are the rumors of your impending closure true? If so, it's a shame. You are needed more than ever now when there is far less freedom of speech in our country. You are a positive influence not only on average citizens, but on those in power (but don't advertise this, they listen to you, too). I lived in the Soviet Union (not by my own will) for 55 years and for the past 8 have lived in Austria, but am still deeply concerned about what is going on in Russia.

- From Mikhailo Mirochnik in Germany by regular mail:

Dear Members of Congress, I am writing to you concerning the proposed closure of VOA Russian radio. If you close the radio down, you will be making a huge mistake. Why?

1) VOA Russian radio for years showed the fallacy of Communist ideology and helped people strive for democracy and justice.

2) Not all those who live in Russia and the CIS can afford their own antenna to watch VOA Russian TV programs. Not everyone has a computer or access to the Internet. Most people listen to the radio regularly and with great interest through their radios.

3) The Russian press which is full of anti-American and anti-Semitic statements is regularly read by Russian speakers not only in Russia and the CIS, but also in Europe and even the US. They want to implant those ideas into mainstream thinking. Only the VOA can actively resist this trend, because of the implicit trust listeners give it and because it is readily available.

4) The Russian press carefully but insistently fosters nostalgic feelings towards the wonderful good old days of communism and the Soviet Union.

5) Democracies should make it their mission to defend the rights of individuals to express their opinions. The VOA successfully carried out and continues to carry out this mission. I will be happy if the members of Congress heed this message.

- Denis Peterburgsky, a listener to VOA Russian programs wrote:

I heard an editorial on VOA Russian about the possible closure of your radio station. As a long time listener and fan (since the 1970s) I have some points I want to make about this:

Speaking for the multi-million Russian speaking audience in Russia and the CIS, we would like to express how sorry we are about the closing of VOA Russian. Many of us are not dissidents, but like American ideas, fashions, and styles, British and American culture. Although we are not rich by American standards, we consider ourselves intellectually developed; we are realistic about ideologies and power. Most of us don't wish to emigrate to the West. But we do value the Russian language radio provided by VOA. Many of us who often listen to VOA don't keep up an active connection to VOA, but we do feel that we are connected. Here are some figures on the minimal audience for VOA Russian:

- 1) Russian Federation: 28-30 million listeners
- 2) Belarus: about 1 million
- 3) Caucasus: about 1 million
- 4) Ukraine and Moldova: 3-4 million
- 5) Baltics: about 500,000

By closing VOA Russian, official Washington loses a lot, and loses that which you cannot buy. Prestige and values you can accumulate only with time and objectivity. Of course, this kind of audience is not a mandate to the Congress to keep your station, but to ignore these numbers is impossible.

- Vladimir from Kirov wrote:

My name is Vladimir and I live in Kirov. Human rights violations occur here often, but we lack any decent human rights organizations. The only real human rights organization can be found on shortwave. This organization is VOA Russian radio. I would like to organize a VOA club, so that people can gather together and listen to you and your shows about the importance of human rights in Russia. I would love it if VOA could talk about Kirov. I wish you success.

- Letter from Leonid Romankov, Union of Right Forces:

"For the last ten years I have been a faithful listener of VOA Russian broadcasts. I do this because of the high professionalism of the anchors, the timeliness of the correspondents and the objective commentaries of this radio station. A couple of years ago, VOA radio programs became available on FM through Kanal Melodiya. This was happy news, although we only heard half an hour of your programming. I and many of my friends hoped that soon VOA Russian would expand its presence on this FM frequency. This is important especially now, when local mass media are starting to have trouble with censorship. Now I found out that the U.S. Congress is planning to stop financing VOA Russian. They say that this is due to the necessity of spending more money on broadcasting in Arabic and Farsi. Although we understand the importance of this move, we would like to mention that the current Russian administration, unfortunately, has become the international defender of odious regimes like the Iranian (the leader of Iran as you know is a rabid anti-Semite and hates the U.S.) and is starting talks with the terrorist group Hamas. Does it make sense then to stop broadcasting in Russian in this current climate? Remember that the Russian press does not objectively report the position of the U.S., European Union, NATO, Israel, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other countries with whom the Russian government doesn't agree. While I

was beginning to write this letter, I found out that VOA Russian programs on FM have now ended because Kanal Melodiya was seriously encouraged to stop them for political reasons.

Given all this, does it make sense for the U.S. government to stop VOA Russian radio broadcasting to Russia, given that today's authoritarian tendencies might lead in two-three years to the U.S. government restarting Russian language programs to the region? Look at Belarus whose regime exists now solely due to the financial and ideological support of the Kremlin. The European Union has already financed the creation of special radio programs to Belarus, which are broadcast from Germany on Deutsche Welle. Also planned is a new radio station for Belarus, which will broadcast from either Lithuania or Poland. A similar situation might arise in Russia. In this connection, we would ask to reconsider your decision about ceasing to finance VOA Russian radio programs.

- From the chief editor of Radio Rossii St. Petersburg, Vladimir Izotov:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the VOA Russian Service for the excellent reports they have provided us for the program "St. Petersburg Viewpoints", broadcast on Radio Rossii from St. Petersburg, the biggest radio station in the Russian Federation. I would like to speak for all our St. Petersburg listeners when I say I hope for continued mutual cooperation between Radio Rossii and VOA Russian.

- Appeal of Russian Citizens to Secretary of State Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and Leaders to both Chambers of U. S. Congress with Request to Continue Broadcasting of VOA Radio Station, Washington, D. C. in Russian

"We, under-signed, ask You, Ms. Secretary of State of USA and You, Leaders of Both Chambers of the U. S. Congress, to continue radio broadcasting of the VOA in Russian Language. We are interested in true, correct political information about events in United States and all over the world."

Signed: Nikolay Zykov, chief editor of Depeche newspaper in Moscow

58 other Moscovites signed the appeal

- VOA Russian Service received a letter, in English, from Citizen Watch, an NGO in Russia. Here are excerpts:

"Please allow me, on behalf of the St. Petersburg human rights community, to express our deep concern about the possible developments in the US overseas broadcast programs aimed at Russian audience in many post-Soviet countries. It would be logical if these developments had taken place in mid-nineties when many radio and TV stations independent of the government had sprung up in Russia, when people in every town and city had access to unbiased information. But we are astonished that it takes place at the time when we have to wipe off dust from our old radio-sets and again start tuning to Russian-language VOA programs, if we want to know what's really going on in the world, first of all in our own country. Today, there is not a single independent radio or TV program in 5-million St. Petersburg and only one independent weekly newspaper. Informational "Iron Curtain" is again descending upon Russia, and it is Voice of

America and Radio Liberty programs that keep us "in the know." Now we are told that the VOA is planning a considerable cutdown in spending on its Russian programs. This means that many Russians who cannot afford satellite antenna will be deprived of the only available professional source of information...We hope very much that we shall continue to pick up your programs. Any reduction in time or frequency range will leave many of our fellow citizens politically ignorant."

- Noted author and professor Richard Pipes told VOA Russian Service:

"I think that it would be a great shame to close down VOA Russian radio. Russians continue to listen to VOA because they get a lot of information there that they don't get from their TV. I read Izvestiya every morning, but don't see the same kind of news there. In Russia you can find out what's going on in the world only through Western radio stations. I think that liquidating the Russian Service radio would be a great mistake."

- Alexander Smolyansky, a listener for the past 35 years, who also claims to be a media analyst, wrote:

"If the decision to close VOA radio came about 10 years ago when everyone had the illusion that the US and Russia would have common ideals and strategic goals, that would have made some sense. But to close it now when almost no one reads the newspapers, independent media practically no longer exist, and when all one can hear for objective news are Echo Moskviy and three foreign broadcasters (VOA, RL, BBC) is more than a mistake. I work as an analyst of mass media, and I can say for certain that without VOA Russian radio airwaves will lose a lot. And the Russian public will believe even less that there might be any objective, independent analysis of Russian life and conditions, and of America as well. Just try to read the Russian press and see how your country is portrayed. If your decision is dictated by low ratings, then give it more money so it can flourish. Please try to influence those who made this wrong and senseless decision. VOA is necessary for both the US and Russia so that both countries can save face."

- Letter from the St. Petersburg research and information center Memorial:

"We read on several news sites in February and then heard on some TV shows the news about the possible closure of VOA Russian radio. To make such a decision during our current internal political situation seems to be shortsighted. In fact, what is needed now is an independent, balanced viewpoint which has always been provided by VOA. Freedom of speech, which grew during the 90s has lessened under pressure from the administration. There are still some print newspapers and magazines which are not under the government's control. But there are fewer and fewer of them, and it's very possible that by 2007-2008 there won't be any left at all. The authorities are not interested in providing people with truthful information and does everything in its power to make sure that unapproved information, especially that which shows it in a bad light doesn't make it on print or on air. Of course, there is an alternate source of information: the Internet, but according to the latest polls, only about 7% of the population mostly in the big cities has access to the Internet. The Voice of America has remained the source of truthful information for over 60 years.

In the 1980s VOA with its 60-year example of truthful, objective information was the example that Russian journalists tried to emulate; Today VOA still presents timely news. Russian society lacks balanced opinions, varying viewpoints, all of which your journalists have mastered. VOA for all these years has been a symbol of freedom of speech. The closure of the Service would lead not

only to less truthful information on the air, but will be a meaningful signpost on the way to Russia's crawling back to the epoch of silence and lies.”

- Letter from Alexander Nikitin, the chairman of the St. Petersburg branch of the Norwegian environmental NGO "Bellona". Alexander Nikitin was a Naval captain in the Soviet Northern Fleet and was among the most prominent Russian citizens to be arrested and tried for high treason for publishing a report on radioactive contamination from Russia's Northern Fleet. He was eventually acquitted and efforts by the Prosecutor to try him again for the same incident were overturned by the Russian Constitutional Court:

“I ask you to change your decision to close down VOA Russian radio. From my own experience, I know how important it is for Russian citizens to get truthful, balanced and timely information which is provided by VOA and other radio stations, working in the US and Western Europe. I myself had the opportunity to speak out on VOA at a time when I couldn't get on the air in Russia.

Unfortunately, in Russia today there is virtually no press which objectively covers such critical issues as Russia's overture towards rogue regimes like Iran, the Yukos affair, the role of NGOs in protecting the environment, spymania, Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Georgian relations and last but not least the rehabilitation of Stalinism. Moreover, I believe that the situation in Russia can become much worse in the near future. The strongest indication of that is the proposed legislation to censor the Internet.

In this regard, my colleagues and I believe that it would be much more appropriate to expand (and not close down) VOA Russian broadcasts, which, by the way, are eagerly received and listened to in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. This would help Russia to overcome obstacles on the road to building an open and democratic society.”

- VOA Russian Service received a copy of the letter that “Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union” send to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Here are excerpts:

“Dear Madame Secretary: UCSJ: The Union of Councils for Jews in the former Soviet Union, having been working in Russia and other post-Soviet states since 1970 (as you know), is shaken by the Administration's 2007 budget item whereby Voice of America (VOA) broadcasting to Russia and its former Soviet neighbors would be effectively cancelled. During the Cold War the VOA broadcasts to the FSU, primarily in Russian, called to account the Soviet government and the so-called national patriots, who spread anti-Semitism and other forms of xenophobia, neo-Nazi ideology and anti-Western views and propaganda. It provided to the vast Russian public uncensored news and commentary about America and democracy worldwide, thereby providing political and moral support and nourishment to Refusenik, dissident and human rights activists in ways that ultimately contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union.

Today Putin's Russia has reinstated many indices of its totalitarian past, thus obscuring for the Russian public an appreciation of the benefits of market democracy. There remain no effective, pro-Western political opposition parties and the direct election of governors and mayors has yielded to presidential appointments. Russia's rule of law, the essence of human rights and democracy, is now exemplified by a dysfunctional justice system that tolerates and/or foments pervasive corruption and the sheer impunity of anti-Semitic and xenophobic violence and propaganda as well as persecution of religious minorities, especially Evangelical Christian and Roman Catholic confessions deemed competitive with the all-but-official Russian Orthodox Patriarchy. Most recently, the Kremlin has initiated a strong campaign against independent civil society institutions, i.e., the new anti-NGO law. UCSJ views VOA today as being more important to promoting democracy across the former Soviet Union than at any time since the collapse of the Iron Curtain. The VOA remains one of the few Russian voices that objectively broadcasts

programs that explain to Russian listeners the basic principles of the American and international policy so important at a time of very wide anti-American propaganda spread by many Russian and foreign mass media (one example being Iran radio in Russian). What's more, VOA's Russian language broadcasting constitutes virtually the only source of credible information about current events and democracy for listeners in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan!

We find it as dangerous as it is regrettable that today the VOA has only three hours of broadcasting in Russian, including one hour that repeats the previous day's programs, let alone contemplating the demise of the entire offering. We urge the Bush Administration and the Congress to not only preserve this level of broadcasting to Russia, but to double the air time for listeners on the territory of Russia and some other post-Soviet states. The serious deterioration of democracy in Russia and across the former Soviet Union argues forcefully for assertive public diplomacy, not its demise. We have no doubt that VOA's unique contribution to the orientation and education of Russian society now is no less important than it was in the Soviet past."

-Copies of this letter were also sent to 35 members of both the Senate and House of Representatives

- VOA Russian received a letter, in English, from two prominent Human Rights activists: Zinovy Antonuk, member of the Helsinki Human Rights Group and former prisoner of conscience, and Irma Krein, of the International Research Association "Global Problems of the Development of Intelligence and Humanization of International, Ethnic, Confessional and Interpersonal Relations." Here are excerpts:

Deeply alarmed by the news that it is planned to terminate broadcasting of "Voice of America" in Russian, we support the appeal of Russian human rights defenders to the Congress of the USA in connection with the offers to stop broadcasting of "Voice of America" in Russian. The "Voice of America" was truthfully illuminating events during Ukrainian Orange Revolution, being almost a unique source of the independent information for the population of Russia, as it still remains for the most countries of the former Soviet Union. We do believe that conscious of the utmost importance of the radio "Voice of America" for encouraging the efforts in favor of the civil society in Russia and ex-Soviet republics with totalitarian regimes, the Congress of the USA will find it possible not only to maintain it but also to expand both its broadcasting and telecasting, as well as the presence of Russian service "Voice of America" in the Internet."

- \_\_\_\_\_, a caller into the Russian Service call-in show, told the screener that he is a professor from the Moscow Faculty of Journalism. According to \_\_\_\_\_, members of his faculty have already collected 250 signatures from students, professors, journalists, etc. for a letter protesting the proposed closure of VOA Russian radio.
- \_\_\_\_\_, an art critic, wrote the following to VOA Russian Service:

"I was extremely sorry to hear about your decision to close down VOA Russian and Georgian radio. I think we don't even have to remind you that an enormous number of people, whole generations waited for your broadcasts and listened to them attentively. With the fall of the Soviet Union, many things changed both in Russia and in Georgia. Both these countries state that they are on the path to democracy, but we have not yet even seen the beginning of this road. Speaking of the press, we want you to know that the newspapers and television are feeling great

pressure from the authorities. Those of us living in Russia and Georgia need truthful information and analysis of events especially now when the governments of these two countries (but not the people) are in opposition to each other. We hope that our voices will be heard and that you will postpone the closure of these Services at least for a couple of years!"

- Letter from Andrey in Russia:

"The presidential elections in Belarus have come and gone and everything is clear. What your guests and analysts said would happen, did happen. Don't you think that Russia will follow the same path as Belarus? It seems to me that everything is pointing towards that. Already there is practically no freedom of speech. And what they broadcast on TV and radio is false. The country is reverting to its past, which it has tried previously to shake. All of our news shows trumpet the improvements in our lives, about the right course the administration is taking both politically and economically. And what do we see really? Moscow and Moscow oblast are Russia, and the rest is insignificant... It's too bad that your show (Focus) is so short and hard to get for Russians. You help the scales fall from our eyes and give us the opportunity to hear the truth. Thanks for your work!"



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