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Этническая и религиозная интолерантность в российских СМИ. Результаты мониторинга 2001-2004 гг. Под редакцией Александра Верховского и Галины Кожевниковой [Aleksandr Verkhovskii, Galina Kozhevnikova (eds.) *Ethnic and religious intolerance in Russian mass media. Results of a 2001-4 monitoring project*], Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2005, 246 pp., EUR 29.90, ISBN: 3-89821-569-5 (pbk)
Reviewed by Mischa Gabowitsch (Berlin)

Fortunately for students of extremism and the far right, ibidem's book series on Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society is edited by Andreas Umland, himself a well-known and prolific expert in the field of post-Soviet extreme-right movements. The three books under review are part of a whole range of volumes in this series that are relevant to the topic of nationalism and xenophobia.

The third book is a joint product of several Moscow-based research centres specializing in human rights and xenophobia issues. It includes several reports on hate speech in the Russian media between 2001 and 2004, based on four quantitative studies of nationwide and regional newspapers, magazines, web sites and TV channels. The period covered was a crucial time in the ongoing rise of popular xenophobia, coinciding with a gradual clampdown on a number of freedoms and a tougher political rhetoric against all kind of 'enemies', much of which is supported by, and reflected in, media outlets across the country. The editors of the book, Aleksandr Verkhovskii and Galina Kozhevnikova, are respectively the director and deputy director of the SOVA Centre, which has been instrumental in importing the American term 'hate speech' into Russian. In a useful introduction that briefly outlines the methodology used, they discuss the uses and limitations of the term, rendered literally as 'hostility speech' in Russian, given the differences in legal and cultural context between Russia and the United States. They also caution against finger-pointing at journalists and over-reliance on exact figures in connection with sources as difficult to quantify as media discourse.

However, the massive work carried out by the team does indicate certain general tendencies. Here are some of them: firstly, Americans remain the most-hated group, and deep-seated anti-American prejudice easily surfaces during times of real or imaginary crisis. Secondly, hostile feelings towards foreigners (American, Western, Muslim etc) and ethnic groups within Russia (especially Chechens and other so-called 'Southerners') are mutually reinforcing, often fuelled by a more or less conscious belief in a global conspiracy against Russia. Thirdly, the study also monitored hate speech against Russians and Orthodox Christians, as well as against political parties during the 2003 Duma election. The results show that hate speech remains mainly directed at minority ethnic and religious groups rather than political organizations or the ethnic majority, although the latter may have something to do with regional sampling bias. Fourthly, the study found that while journalists often repudiate xenophobia in general, they rarely have qualms about relaying expressions of hostility towards specific groups, such as Tajik migrants, Chechens, or 'gypsies'. This attitude is surely rooted in the Soviet view of ethnic groups as objective entities with specific qualities: irrespective of their own ethnic background, many journalists believe there is nothing xenophobic in pointing out what they think are inherent features of particular groups.

The team also specifically monitored conscious media efforts to avoid hate speech, and the book includes a short essay by Galina Kozhevnikova and Kseniia Izotova that discusses attempts to de-ethnicise coverage of the Beslan tragedy. Thus, rather than an indictment, the book is actually a constructive contribution to a crucial debate about media-endorsed intolerance which has once again flared up in Russia in recent months. However, the authors should have summarised their findings and recommendations in a general conclusion – it is doubtful whether many journalists will have the patience to wade through pages of tables to pick out the many useful observations made throughout the book.