

Good evening and thank you for inviting me to speak.

It is very good NOT to be surrounded by men with semi-automatic guns wearing balaclavas, but then thankfully this is Scotland, the land of Enlightenment.

I am delighted to be at a conference of distinguished editors and writers in Glasgow in the country which has done so much to sow the seeds of independent thought and where journalism has always thrived freely and vigorously.

As we all know, the Scottish Enlightenment was the period in 18th century Scotland characterised by an outpouring of intellectual and scientific accomplishments.

The thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment stressed the importance of human reason combined with a rejection of any authority which could not be justified by reason. They held to an optimistic belief in the ability of man to effect changes for the better in society, guided only by reason.

Well, we could have done with some of that in the 1970s and 1980s when I was growing up in the Soviet Union and where the two papers available were PRAVDA (Truth) and Izvestia (the News). A popular saying at the time was 'v Prade net izvestiy, v Izvestiyakh net pravd' ('In the Truth there is no news and in the News there is no truth.'

I was essentially brought up in a country where an awful lot of journalism was a bunch of lies. We were told in the newspapers and on television in the 1970s that we were "liberating" Afghanistan and witnessing one of the greatest victories. We learnt almost nothing of lives lost in the war, or fatalities, or the suffering and certainly not of any dissent by our own soldiers, or what insufficiencies of equipment they had. We learnt of no setbacks. We were led to believe that our hero-soldiers were being welcomed in Afghanistan in their efforts to better the world. How wrong that was. It was a major deception for our nation.

No one here at this conference takes for granted the freedom of the press. But it is always worth noting that such freedoms can crumble and must be fought for

and protected. For me, that above all else is why I am proud as well as humbled to be a proprietor and investor in newspapers and digital media in this country with the London Evening Standard, the Independent and its new baby sister "i". Newspapers have crucial roles in bringing information to millions of people in a clear, concise way, putting out what is often the first rough-edged page of history. But it is also a defence against tyranny, corruption, injustice and, at times, can and should be a source of light, shining into the dark areas where the powerful and corrupt want to keep things hidden.

Good journalism is, as has memorably been said, about afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted. The press does crucially act as a brake on wrongdoing by exposing it and the repercussion is that makes not just Britain but other places all round the world realise that wrong deeds can and will be uncovered. This leads to better justice, governance, policing, business practices and so to a more truthful, fair and honest society.

In the Soviet Union we lived in a society where there was no free press. To find out what was happening in our own country we needed the foreign media, or to have access to dissident literature and newspapers which were illegal. The distributors of these poorly printed pamphlets risked jail, the writers and editors and publishers risked their lives. It was always inspiring to be able to read of the stories of people fighting or risking their lives to report repression, torture, wrongful imprisonment or even simple accounts of banned religious faith. It struck a chord with me that journalism was not just random information blithely read or passed around; it was the key to a free society. It was and is a fundamental structure of a democracy.

President Gorbachev made the biggest sacrifice of power of any one man in the 20th century when he disbanded the Soviet Union and ushered in an era of perestroika and glasnost. He wanted change and openness, rather than a blinkered and shut society. He wanted to allow people to make choices in their lives for themselves and he risked his life and liberty to do so.

I am pleased to be a shareholder with President Gorbachev of Novaya Gazetta. It is a paper that employs journalists who every day try to push back the boundaries of what is allowed to be told. Some of our journalists have been

murdered as a result of what they discovered and then wrote about. We have had intimidation and threats but yet every day these journalists go into their offices or into the streets to be able to report on what is happening. It was no accident that I was unable to be in London on the day I bought the Evening Standard; I was attending a funeral of three colleagues who were murdered simply for doing their job.

Even today Gorbachev has been calling for greater democracy and change in Russia so that there is not so much stifling state control. The power of the state when unbridled is frightening. Men in masks are just a small taste of that. They can snuff out hope, liberty, freedom and human happiness. Being able to report what is happening in the corridors of power, on the battlefield, behind closed doors is an un-negotiable principle of journalism, to hold people up to account so that they will behave and so bring about more good things in society for more people.

When I was in my 20s after I joined the Intelligence Service my access to uncensored information accelerated. I could read anything I wanted and suddenly I saw the full extent of two sides of reporting, one censored and distorted by government interference and the other (often risk-taking, dissident, pro democracy literature) free, often chaotic and yet so courageous in holding up mirrors to often unpalatable truths.

As an intelligence officer stationed in London, I read a lot, including the Evening Standard. It was part of my job and I could see as much information and analysis as I wanted. I was no journalist but I was good at news analysis. That was my job. Sorry to disappoint those who think that everyone connected to the KGB is involved in James Bond plots of derring-do. Every morning I would read seven or eight newspapers and mark the pages.

The British papers in particular opened up to me a whole world of opportunity through their freedom to write and report. This is the way that I learnt how your country worked, from its agriculture to its decision-making at the highest level. In

particular I learned about how to run businesses from what was written in the papers. I found it a key to changing my life. The power, freedom and flow of information can be taken for granted in a country where there is a tradition of freedom of the press but for me this was not just an exercise in commerce or story telling. This was a life-changing device which provided oxygen essential to a free society.

I think that it is essential that journalists retain the power rather than the proprietors. I have always pledged to keep at arm's length from my editors in their decisions about what goes in the papers. Because journalism is a fundamental structure on which democracy and freedom of the individual is built, it is essential that the power of the media is not tied too closely to any single individual. In fact, I have made sure I have very limited influence on my papers in the UK or Russia.

I am very proud to be the owner of the Independent, the Standard and our latest newspaper "i". With all of them "i" and my family are pledged to a policy of non-interference to allow independent journalism to thrive. For instance, with the Evening Standard the Editor, GG only telephoned me the day before the General Election to tell me which party his paper was going to support. I do not want to interfere. I want facts and arguments to be freed from control. I knew I did not, and do not want, to live in a country with the same restrictions and conditions that I had experienced as a young man.

And the good news is that we have seen great change in Russia. It is far from perfect but we have moved on, generally for the better. There is a freedom to travel, to talk, to print, but still there are state controls - there is still a long way to go. If I have one particular message to move us forward from Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika: it is Transparency - to act as an agent against corruption. Investigative journalism is something I want to invest in more.

The economics of newspapers have never been more precarious as we all try to work out how to survive. With the Standard our answer was to go free. The paper tripled its circulation to 700,000 copies every working day in London.

We simplified our business model by cutting costs and focusing on what we are

best at; and then we increased our yield by 65% and advertisers supported our strategy. All this meant that the Standard can survive and thrive. One interesting fact for me is always the hunger of people for news. We used to sell 700 copies of the Standard every night at Oxford Circus tube station. Today we distribute at that same underground station 32,000 copies every single night. We do not have the magic formula for everyone but we hope that this will keep alive London's paper.

With the Independent we have one of the great newspaper brands and reputations in the world for freethinking independent reporting and analysis. We have widened our franchise with the "i", a popular, concise and accessible new paper which allows us to use our resources to keep this great title going.

Thomas Jefferson famously said, "Our liberty cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press, nor can that be limited without danger of losing it." And he was right.

I want to invest further in ways to stop corruption on a global scale. The millions of bank accounts held by shady people in sunny places are not the right way for our countries to run their economies. We need transparency and for the international community of journalists to be able to work together, to report on the billions of dollars that are hidden and often stolen. Russians pay bribes totalling \$300 billion a year, equivalent to almost a quarter of Russia's gross domestic product, according to Kirill Kabanov, head of the National Anti-Corruption Committee.

The whole world was astonished and full of admiration for the way British newspapers held to account your MPS for their corrupt behaviour over expenses. This was an example of journalists demanding the right to know how public figures are using public money. They sought basic facts under the Freedom of Information Act and then used them to deadly effect to expose the bloated corruption and lack of moral bearings that politicians had when they spent taxpayers' money on themselves.

In Russia, I would welcome such openness and access to information: it is what journalists do best: seeking to expose things that are wrong. If there is a way to

help newspapers in these difficult times, when some are closing and many are finding it difficult to survive, I pledge that journalism and the basic freedoms that it brings will continue to have my support.

But journalists and proprietors need to be bold. We need to be inventive, but, above all else, we need to guard our right to express views, expose facts and to keep journalists able to do what they do best: shining lights in unwelcome places and making the most powerful accountable to the public.

I would like to end with a quotation from Anton Chekhov, our great Russian playwright:

“Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice”.

This is what every editor here does. It is not only good journalism, but it is an essential fabric of democracy.