

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT BY TELEKRYTYKA NGO

Monitoring television channels in March-May 2014

In March-May 2014 the situation in the Ukrainian television broadcasting space was not typical for the time of election campaign. The key reasons were the recent dramatic changes of government in Ukraine, changes in the public mood due to Maidan events, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and fuelling of the separatist movement in the East and the West by Russia which led to military confrontation. The election race in Ukraine has fallen wayside as a result of anti-terrorist operation in Donbass Region, the situation in the Crimea annexed by Russia and international relations between Russia and the West. Despite the election time, the political pressure faced by journalists of most central television channels is not intense and there are few paid political reports. At the same time, the changes which are going on in the national media cannot be called either final or dramatic.

Russia's information war. Most participants of public media discussions agree that Ukraine is losing the "information war" to Russia both inside and outside Ukraine. Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine Victoria Syumar stated that the national authorities plan to deliver quality overseas broadcasting to fight the Russian international propaganda. This service would be provided using BTB TV channel facilities (which belong to the National Bank of Ukraine). Still, no action has been taken so far.

The ban to transmit Russian TV channels imposed on cable operators has been an efficient tool to fight the Russian information expansion. (However, not all cable operators have stopped carrying the Russian channels. On the contrary, in the areas controlled by terrorists, Russian TV channels replace the Ukrainian ones. Radio Era FM keeps broadcasting Radio Golos Rossii.)

To see the latest news about the switching off of Ukrainian channels go to:
<http://www.telekritika.ua/rinok/2014-05-15/93670>

Certain mass media in Ukraine act as direct agents of Russian propaganda. In particular, these are Vesti media holding owned by Igor Huzhva, 2000 Newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda in Ukraine and some other editions and websites. There are some Russian print media in Ukraine including in Kyiv: <http://www.telekritika.ua/kontent/2014-04-11/92543>. In particular, these are Rossiyskaya Gazeta v Krymu [Russian Newspaper in the Crimea] and Rossiyskaya Gazeta v Kieve [Russian Newspaper in Kyiv]. Last year UMH was purchased by Serhiy Kurchenko and now almost all editions of the group have Russian senior managers. The same situation is with Ukraina TV channel which belongs to Rinat Akhmetov.

Quite many mass media are owned by allies of Yanukovych or are under their control: for example 112 Channel (most experts believe that it is controlled by Vitaliy Zakharchenko), UNIAN website (Pshonka), etc.

On the other hand, some representatives of media space are holding extensive discussions to stop transmitting series and films with Russian propaganda on TV channels. First of all this refers to those materials which glorify Russian military and force structures (in particular, this was the intention of 1+1 TV Channel) http://video.telekritika.ua/show/intervu/1982-oleksandr_tkachenko_mi_ne_ogoloshuemo_poljuvannia_na_vidom_12.05.2014).

Most common violations in media coverage of the crisis in Ukraine after February 26, 2014:

Recognizing the self-proclaimed and occupational authorities. Retransmitting all messages, even insignificant ones; giving airtime to its representatives as a "conflict party"; providing information about the referendum, the government, the *people's* ministers, mayors and governors as if they were legitimate.

Providing broadcasting access to terrorists and separatists or retransmitting their messages. Thus, on March 9 the self-proclaimed Prime Minister of the Crimea Sergey Aksyonov had about 30 minutes of non moderated airtime in the prime time show Shuster Live on the First National Channel.

Recognizing politicians who show open support for the separatists and terrorists as a conflict party and inviting them for discussion with the pro-Ukrainian politicians. TV channels and newspapers still issue episodes and materials about Petro Simonenko, Oleg Tsaryov and others.

Excessive attention to the position of Russia, in particular, live broadcasting of the speech of the Russian President and propaganda episodes. The same refers to the speeches of former President Viktor Yanukovych and his fellows Viktor Pshonka and Vitaliy Zakharchenko. Despite their insignificance for the Ukrainian society, their speeches have been broadcast in a reality show format.

- The problem with terms. Mass media deliberately misinform the audience by calling armed militants "federalization supporters", "activists", "protesters", "militants", "rebel fighters", etc. and Russian military men as "little green men". Consequently, the terminology used in the Russian propaganda was effectively imposed upon the Ukrainian public. Even the allegedly high-profile mass media promoted a positive if a bit comic image of the illegally appointed public prosecutor of Crimea Nataliya Poklonska also affectionately known as *Nyasha*. Such TV channels as *STB*, *ICTV*, and *I+I* were relatively more careful with the terminology used in their news programs.

Several NGOs have developed their recommendations regarding the preferred terminology to be used

<http://www.telekritika.ua/kontent/2014-05-12/93545>

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They have also developed their recommendations on how to work in time of war:

<http://www.telekritika.ua/profesija/2014-04-16/92703>

- Unabashed criticism of the government's actions, particularly power ministers, based on mere assumptions and incomplete information. The acting Minister of Defense Ihor Tenyukh became one of those who had fallen victim to such criticism for his alleged indecisiveness in the face of the Russian occupation of Crimea.

- Reports about the military movements and deployments, the composition of military forces and police units, and disclosure of other information that the Russians and terrorists could take advantage of. The Ministry of the Interior and the anti-terrorist operation staff have asked mass media many times not to publish such information.

- Using unverified information from unreliable sources that often turns out to be deliberately faked by Russia to spread its propaganda. Particularly, many times TV channels aired YouTube videos of unverified and unconfirmed origin and used posts on social media as their source of information. It should be pointed out that in addition to lack of professionalism among journalists, the situation should be attributed to actual difficulties in accessing original sources of information and lack of their own sources in the occupied territories or territories controlled by separatists.

- Lack of qualified expert opinions or asking expert opinions from unqualified people. Often, it is politicians or journalist themselves that act as experts when discussing the anti-terrorist operation, a military threat from the Russian Federation, or actions of terrorists. There has also been a multifold increase in media attention to the opinions of previously little known unaffiliated military experts such as Dmytro Tymchuk and the *Informatsiynyi Sprotyv* (eng. *Informational Resistance*) group.

Position of TV channels. Several TV channels still present **information about the new government** as if using the same templates as in the case with the previous government, i.e. in a manner that is

unbalanced and skewed in favor of members of the government as well as inconsistent with a number of other standards. There is a possibility that in the current *transitional period*, in fact, internal editorial censorship or self-censorship may be to blame for this as opposed to any sort of systemic external censorship. For example, the *First Channel* was exactly like that before Zurab Alasania and his team stepped in. As of now, the channel's news programs are getting more balanced and the amount of taboo subjects has decreased significantly.

For a long time, the *Ukraina TV* channel was the closest to **supporting pro-Russian separatists**. In fact, up until the point when an open armed conflict broke out in the Donbass, the channel would play down the threat from their protest actions by painting them as peaceful and urging *to hear the voice of the South East* which really meant, to seek a deal with Rinat Akhmetov, the channel's owner. The position of other TV channels was more or less patriotic and generally pro-Ukrainian. The *Inter TV* channel consistently displayed full support of the government's actions except the investigation of various offenses committed by members of the previous government thought to be affiliated with the channel's owner Dmytro Firtash. Among those most critical of the government and selectively loyal to the separatists were the mass media owned by Yanukovich's *Family* which include the *UMH Group* owned by Serhiy Kurchenko, the *112 Ukraina TV* channel owned by Vitaliy Zakharchenko, etc. These, however, were reluctant to make openly anti-Ukrainian statement. On the other hand, the *I+I TV* channel took an aggressive pro-Ukrainian position by making an effort to counteract and debunk the Russian propaganda and myths in its news programs and special projects such as the *Classified Files* documentary TV series.

In the last few weeks in the run-up to the presidential election, there was an increase in negative advertising on several TV channels, specifically in news programs and special projects, directed against various oligarchs supporting certain candidates or the government. For instance, the *Inter* and *I+I TV* channels have been exchanging weighty blows focusing on the business activities of their owners, i.e. Mr. Firtash and Mr. Kolomoysky, respectively. *I+I* and *ICTV* also conducted their investigations into the alleged support and funding of the separatists by Akhmetov and Yefremov but more in compliance with journalism standards.

Access of presidential candidates to television. In the last few years of the Yanukovich regime, most TV channels had dropped all political talk shows. As of the end of February, only one such show was aired regularly by the *ICTV* channel. After the regime change, a number of talk shows were launched again, i.e. *Maidan. Tochka vidliku* (eng. *Maidan. The Starting Point*) on the *Ukraina TV* channel, *Chorne dzerkalo* (eng. *The Black Mirror*) on the *Inter TV* channel, *Shuster Live* on the *Pershyi Natsionalnyi* (eng. *First National*) TV channel, etc. This has broadened the opportunities for presidential candidates to promote their action plans and views on TV.

If any TV project was a real runaway breakthrough, it would be the *National Debates – 2014* project that was launched on the *First National TV* channel. For the first time ever, TV viewers were offered an opportunity to hear to-the-point answers of presidential candidates to the truly important questions, many of them posed by TV viewer themselves as well as journalists and experts as opposed to excessive self-promotion. All presidential candidates were given perfectly equal access to the national TV channel. Conversely, disproportionately large amounts of airtime on the *Shuster Live* talk show were dedicated to Yuliya Tymoshenko who was several times given the most convenient airtime. It should be pointed out, though, Petro Poroshenko who is Tymoshenko's main rival backed out of any debates with her on TV. Private TV channels seem to favor certain candidates based on political preferences of their key investors. The *Ukraina TV* channels dedicated the largest portion of its airtime to the Party of Regions nominee Mykhaylo Dobkin. *Inter* seemed to be specifically more loyal to Petro Poroshenko but tried to formally preserve some balance. The TV channels making up the *StarLightMedia* group owned by Viktor Pinchuk dedicated much airtime to Yuliya Tymoshenko. Obviously, Petro Poroshenko was dedicated excessively

large amounts of airtime on the *5 Channel* owned by Poroshenko himself. The *5 Channel* also seemed to belittle the significance of Yuliya Tymoshenko who is Poroshenko's main rival.

Hidden election advertising. Compared to previous election campaigns, the overall amount of election advertorials on both national and regional TV channels has decreased significantly. However, all major candidates use advertorials as part of election campaigns, with Yuliya Tymoshenko, Sehiy Tihipko, and Petro Poroshenko clearly leading the way in that respect. As far as the national TV channels are concerned, the *First National* TV channel had dropped all advertorials entirely, and STB and 1+1 had dropped advertorials almost entirely since late April. *Inter*, *Ukraina*, and *ICTV* still continue to air quite a few programs about presidential candidates that have signs of paid advertising. On the other hand, even despite dropping advertorials, TV channels still fail to come up with effective ways to inform their viewers about the objectives, personal histories, and action plans of presidential candidates. Particularly, not enough focus is given to the importance of participation in elections and the nuances of the existing election laws.

Personnel purge. After many protests from media and civil activists, administrations of the *Inter* and *First National* TV channels eventually suspended their most controversial journalists and presenters notorious for their active role in the propaganda campaign against Maidan. However, some of those people have not been fired and are still involved in other TV projects. Particularly, former news presenters Roman Kademin, Anastasiya Daugule and Andriy Danylevych host holiday TV shows on the *Inter* channel. The efforts to urge investors to purge senior managers of TV channels have so far been fruitless. The only exception has been the *First National* TV channel. Since Zurab Alasania was appointed General Director, the quality of news programs and political shows has significantly increased despite the fact that as recently as in March, the publicly-owned national channel, along with *Inter*, were sharing the highest negative ratings of all TV channels in terms of the number of violations of professional integrity standards. The recently passed Law *On Public Broadcasting* offers hope for further progress in this regard.