



## **Monitoring of Russian TV channels January & February 2017**

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MEMO 98

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.	Executive Summary.....	3
2.	Methodology .....	3
2.1.	<i>Quantitative analysis</i> .....	6
2.1.1.	<i>List of monitored subjects</i> .....	7
2.1.2.	<i>List of topics and top stories</i> .....	9
2.1.3.	<i>List of geographical coverage</i> .....	11
2.2.	<i>Qualitative analysis</i> .....	12
3.	Monitoring Findings .....	12
3.1	<i>Monitored subjects</i> .....	12
3.2	<i>Monitored subjects</i> .....	15
3.3	<i>Topics and top stories</i> .....	14
4.	Conclusion .....	16

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The news programmes of *First Channel*, *Russia 1* and *NTV* offered very similar editorial content, both in terms of selection of political actors presented as well as the tone of their coverage. This suggests lack of editorial independence and editorial policy being externally coordinated.
- Once again, the three main TV channels concentrated their coverage on the authorities - president and government. Following the recent US elections, a newly elected US president was also prominently featured in their news programmes. While Russian president and government were consistently portrayed in a neutral or positive way, with practically no negative coverage, the foreign subjects were portrayed in a very negative way. The coverage of President Trump was an exception from this trend as he was portrayed in a neutral and sometimes even in a positive way.
- *RBK* offered slightly different picture when it comes to its coverage of political actors – it was less propagandistic when compared to the state-controlled TV channels.
- *Dozhd* also provided significant portion of its coverage to the authorities. However, by contrast to the state-controlled TV channels and *NTV*, its coverage was more diverse and included also critical views on the performance of the authorities.
- *Russia Today* focused primarily on institutions and affairs outside of Russia, presenting them overall in an extremely negative light. This editorial approach does not apply to the coverage of Russian authorities which are portrayed positively.
- Ukraine and fights in Donetsk and Luhansk featured again prominently on almost all TV channels, while the Syrian conflict was given much less coverage in comparison with the previous monitoring period (September and October 2016) - except on *Russia Today* where it continued to feature prominently.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the media monitoring was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar monitoring projects in more than 50 countries in the last 19 years.<sup>1</sup> It included quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focused on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assessed the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see also [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, it is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and topics. The main goal was to evaluate if the Russian TV channels provide their viewers with objective and balanced information about important international and local issues. As such, the outcome of the monitoring is a detailed analysis of the quality of selected channels' news programming.

Based on criteria such as media ownership, coverage, and impact, the following media were included into the monitoring:

**Table 1 | Monitored media**

Media	Ownership	Programmes monitored <sup>2</sup>	Coverage
<b>First Channel</b>	51% Russian State 25% National Media Group 24% <i>Roman Abramovich</i> <i>[reportedly under sale]</i>	Vremya   Voskresnoe Vremya Mo-Su (21:00)	98,8% of Russian population <sup>3</sup> ;  Rebroadcast also by <i>ONT</i> (Belarus), <i>TV1</i> (Armenia), <i>TV Prime</i> (Moldova); First Channel - Eurasia (Kazakhstan); First Baltic Channel (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). Also broadcasted worldwide via Satellite and selected cable networks.
<b>Russia 1</b>	Russian Government	Vesti   Vesti Nedely Mo-Su (20:00)	98.5% of Russian population <sup>4</sup> ;  Available internationally as <i>RTR-Planeta</i> via Satellite and selected cable networks.
<b>NTV</b>	Gazprom Media Holding <sup>5</sup>	Segodnia   Segodnia: Itogoviy Vypusk Mo-Fr, Su (19:00)	98.3% of Russian Population <sup>6</sup> .  Also Available Internationally via Satellite and selected cable networks as NTV-Mir. Also local editions are broadcast in US, Canada and Belarus. <sup>7</sup>
<b>Russia Today</b>	ANO TV-Novosti <sup>8</sup>	News RT Mo-Su (23:00)	RT has a global reach of over 700 million people in 100+ countries. <sup>9</sup>  Available worldwide via Satellite and selected cable networks. Programs are shared with sister channels RT UK, RT USA that are broadcasted via terrestrial

<sup>2</sup> All broadcast time indicates is UTC+3 (Moscow Time) unless stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.1tv.ru/total/pi=5>

<sup>4</sup> [http://russia.tv/article/show/article\\_id/7481/](http://russia.tv/article/show/article_id/7481/)

<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1873630;>

<http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/Schema31042015.pdf;>

[http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/spisok\\_13012015.pdf](http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/spisok_13012015.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.gazprom-media.com/ru/actives/index/area\\_id/1/id/1](http://www.gazprom-media.com/ru/actives/index/area_id/1/id/1)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ntv.ru/kompania/veschanie/>

<sup>8</sup> 'ANO TV-Novosti' NGO was established by state-owned news agency Ria Novosti. For 2015 it will receive about Euro 300 Mln from the Russian state budget.-

<http://www.fapmc.ru/rospechat/newsandevents/media/2014/09/item42.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://rt.com/about-us/>

			networks in USA and UK.  Programs are also shared on sister channels in other languages (Rusiya Al-Yaum, RT Deutsch, RT Français).
<b>TV Dozhd</b>	100% Natalia Sendeeva & Alexandr Vinokurov	Daily news show / Mo-Fr (21:00) Zdes I Seichas / Sa-Su (21:00)	Available as pay-per-view via Satellite (Russia and Europe), Internet and selected cable networks in Russia <sup>10</sup>
<b>RBK</b>	Pragla Limited (Cyprus) – indirectly controlled by Onexim (Mikhail Prokhorov) <sup>11</sup>	Itogi   Itogi Nedeli. Mo-Fr, Su (20:00)	Available in Russia and Europe via Satellite and in selected cable networks. Technical outreach – 102 mln viewers. Monthly viewership 25 mln viewers. <sup>12</sup>

The monitoring team observed media coverage of the Russian and international political scene in order to:

- assess whether different local and international entities are granted fair access to the media;
- supply the media, political entities, regulatory organs, citizens, and international community with data to measure the objectivity of the monitored media;
- raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe standards of balanced reporting;
- motivate citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project was supposed to:

- enhance the capacity of the civil and academic communities in conducting the advanced media researches;
- put public pressure on journalists, editors and media owners to provide information that is more accurate, impartial and fair.

To achieve these objectives, the implementing partners evaluated the media coverage against internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which include:

- Balance
- Accuracy and Exactness
- Clarity
- Matter-of-fact

<sup>10</sup> <http://tvrain.ru/connecting/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.e-disclosure.ru/portal/files.aspx?id=24832&type=6;>

<http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2013/11/13/oneksim-sobiraet-rbk>

<sup>12</sup> [http://rbctv.rbc.ru/about/static/general\\_info.shtml](http://rbctv.rbc.ru/about/static/general_info.shtml)

- Timely
- Transparency
- Relevance
- Variety
- Omission of facts

The monitoring assessed different types of programmes which were monitored both quantitatively and qualitatively. The enclosed results reflect only the quantitative results of the monitored news programs.

### **2.1. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Quantitative analysis focused on the amount of time allocated to selected political and other local and international subjects and the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral and negative. The monitoring also focused on thematic and geographical structure of the news, evaluating the thematic and geographical diversity by measuring the actual time devoted to different topics and focusing on the geographical area from where the news is broadcast. In addition, the monitoring focused on what were the top stories in the monitoring period.

It is the behaviour of media outlets that was being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not the viewer/reader was offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors gave an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by each media outlet. The evaluation mark was thus attached to all monitored subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in a positive, negative, or neutral light.

The description of the five-level evaluation scale was as follows:

Grade 1 and 2 meant that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage was favourable.

Grade 3 was a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations.

Grades 4 or 5 meant that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage had negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It was important for monitors to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context of the story or item.

### ***2.1.1. List of monitored subjects***

President  
President Administration  
Prime minister  
Government  
Governor  
Local Government  
Federal Council  
United Russia  
Communist Party  
Liberal-Democratic Party  
A Just Russia Party  
Patriots of Russia  
Rodina Party  
Jabloko  
Civic Platform  
Party of Progress  
Republican Party of Russia – People's Freedom Party  
Other parties  
Opposition  
CIS (without Moldova and Ukraine)  
Georgia and Moldova  
Novorossiia (New Russia)  
Other separatist territories and breakaway states in the CIS (Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh)  
OSCE  
United Nations  
Red cross  
International community in Russia  
Russian army  
Military volunteers from Russia

Ukrainian President  
Ukrainian Prime Minister  
Ukrainian Government  
Ukrainian authorities (Kiev official)  
Ukrainian ruling coalition  
Ukrainian parliamentary opposition  
Ukrainian former authorities  
Ukrainian former special forces (Berkut)  
Medvedchuk (Ukrainskyi Vybor)  
Ukrainian refugees to Russia  
Military volunteers from Ukraine  
Ukrainian regular army

Ukrainian special military forces  
Foreign military personnel  
Insurgents (opolchenci - separatists)  
Novorossiia  
Donetsk People's Republic - Representatives  
Donetsk People's Republic - Citizens  
Luhans People's Republic - Representatives  
Luhans People's Republic - Citizens

Turkey  
Turkish President  
Turkish Prime Minister  
Turkish Government  
Turkish authorities (Ankara official)  
Turkish ruling coalition  
Turkish parliamentary opposition  
Turkish army

Syria  
Syrian President  
Syrian Prime Minister  
Syrian Government  
Syrian authorities (Damascus official)  
Syrian ruling coalition  
Syrian opposition  
Syrian army  
Syrian rebels

United Kindgom  
UK Prime Minister  
UK Government  
UK authorities (London official)  
UK Conservative Party  
UK Labour Party  
UK Liberal Party  
UK Independence Party  
UK army

USA  
US President  
US Vice-president  
US Government  
US authorities (Washington official)  
US Democratic Party  
US Republican Party



US army

European Union

Austria  
Belgium  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Cyprus  
Czech Republic  
Denmark  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Ireland  
Italy  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Luxemburg  
Malta  
Netherlands  
Poland  
Portugal  
Romania  
Slovakia  
Slovenia  
Spain  
Sweden  
UK

Shangai Cooperation Organization (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)

Eurasian Economic Union (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia)

Collective Security Treaty Organization (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)

### **2.1.2. List of monitored topics**

Agriculture  
Army/military  
Business, economy  
Culture  
Catastrophes, incidents, accidents  
Charity  
Crime

Pro-government civil society  
Civil society  
People with disabilities  
Education  
Environment  
Foreign affairs - Ukraine political  
Foreign affairs - Ukraine non-political  
Foreign affairs - conflict in Ukraine  
Foreign affairs - political (other world)  
Foreign affairs - non-political  
Health care  
Judiciary  
Media  
Minorities  
National (ethnic) minorities  
Religious minorities  
Sexual minorities  
Politics  
Religion (Russian orthodox church)  
Social issues  
Sport  
Others

***List of monitored top stories***

Crimea  
Battles in Donetsk  
Battles in Luhansk  
Separatists  
Separatists' republics  
MH-317  
Humanitarian aid  
Russian soldiers  
Western soldiers  
Economic sanctions  
Oil prices  
Russian economy  
Eurasian Union  
EU  
USA  
NATO  
Minsk peace agreements  
Weapons for Ukraine  
Peace negotiations/talks

International relations  
Victims of the battles  
Refugees  
Russian nationalism/imperialism/patriotism  
Western plot against Russia  
Chaos in Ukraine  
Fascistic and Bandera-related rhetoric  
Nostalgia for Soviet Union  
Legitimacy of Ukrainian authorities  
World War II  
Maidan  
Russian gas supplies to Ukraine  
Russia's relations with separatists republics  
Brexit  
Grexit  
US elections  
Karabakh conflict  
Elections in Georgia  
Deployment of NATO troops in Eastern Europe and Baltic States  
Eurovision song contest 2016

## **2.2. *QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS***

Qualitative analysis evaluates the performance of selected media outlets against ethical and professional standards, such as balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language that cannot be easily quantified. These data are reported separately and integrated in the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

## **3. *MONITORING FINDINGS***

### **3.1 *Monitored subjects***

#### ***First Channel***

*First Channel* devoted the single largest portion of its prime-time news coverage to President Putin (2 hours 4 minutes). He was portrayed in a neutral or positive way. In contrast with the previous period (September/October 2016), the next most covered monitored subject was not a Russian institution, but the US President, who received over one hour of airtime and was presented mainly in a neutral manner (although with a significant portion of positive as well as negative coverage). The next most covered subjects were the government (58 minutes), the Russian army (54 minutes) and Prime Minister Medvedev (34 minutes) which were all presented in a rather positive light (particularly the Army). The former US President Obama, the

Ukrainian President Poroshenko, the European Union and the Ukrainian regular army also received significant portions of coverage, but were portrayed negatively.

### ***Russia 1***

*Russia 1* adopted similar approach to that implemented by the First Channel. It also devoted most of its prime-time news coverage to the incumbent Russian Putin (1 hours and 26 minutes) followed by the US President who received 1 hour 9 minutes of the coverage. The coverage of President Putin was only positive or neutral and President Trump was also presented in a positive manner. The next most covered subjects were: the government (40 minutes), the Russian army (33 minutes), the governors (27 minutes) and Prime Minister Medvedev (27 minutes). All these subjects were presented in a neutral or positive light. By contrast, the former US President and the Ukrainian President received respectively 11 and 10 minutes of the coverage which was mainly negative.

### ***NTV***

*NTV* (controlled by the state-owned company Gazprom Media Holding) similarly as two state-controlled channels allocated single largest portion of its news airtime to the incumbent Russian president, 1 hour 7 minutes, of positive or neutral coverage. The next most covered subject was the government that was allocated 55 minutes of the coverage which was neutral and positive. The next most covered subject was US President Trump who received 47 minutes. He was portrayed in a positive light (he received more with more positive than negative coverage). The Russian army was given 40 minutes of airtime and was portrayed similarly as in the previous two TV channels - very positively. The EU, USA and former US President (18, 12 and 11 minutes, respectively) were also presented, in a somewhat negative light. On the other hand, the Ukrainian former authorities (16 minutes) were presented in a neutral manner.

### ***RBK***

The RBK's news coverage differed to some extent from the three TV channels controlled by the state. RBK allocated the bulk of its coverage to US President (1 hour 35 minutes), followed by EU (1 hour 11 minutes). The government received 1 hour and 3 minutes of the coverage, followed by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, without Moldova and Ukraine) allocated 51 minutes of the coverage. President Putin was allocated 41 minutes, followed by USA with 34 minutes of the coverage. The US President, EU and CIS were presented in an overall neutral manner. However, in contrast with the previous period, the tone of the coverage was more diverse. President Putin as well as other Russian institutions was portrayed in a neutral and positive manner, with a very small amount of negative (critical) coverage.

### ***Dozhd***

Dozhd, similarity as state-controlled channel, allocated the largest portion of the coverage to President Putin (54 minutes) and US President Trump (30 minutes). They were portrayed in a rather neutral manner, overall, however, the tone of the coverage differed compared to state-controlled TV channels, particularly in allocating rather significant shares of positive or negative coverage to different subjects. The next most covered subject was the Party of Progress (26 minutes) which was presented in a rather positive manner, followed by the government which received 22 minutes and was portrayed in an overall neutral way.

### **Russia Today (RT)**

Russia Today concentrated its coverage on institutions and affairs outside of Russia, presenting them overall in a very negative light. However, the US President, who received by far the largest single share of news coverage (3 hours 46 minutes), was portrayed in an overall neutral manner. The Russian authorities that received over 2 hours of the news coverage also received mainly neutral coverage. USA (1 hour and 16 minutes) and EU (1 hour and 11 minutes) were presented overwhelmingly negatively, while the Russian Government (56 minutes) was portrayed in a positive manner.

### **3.2 Topics and top stories**

On *First Channel*, the most covered topic was *Foreign Affairs - Political* that was allocated 22 per cent of news, followed by *Foreign Affairs Non-Political*, allocated 13 per cent and then domestic *Politics* (9 per cent of coverage). *Culture* was allocated 7 per cent of the overall news coverage.

As for the top (hot) stories, the **First Channel** focused primarily on an issue of *Chaos in Ukraine* (1 hour and 50 minutes), followed by *International relations* (1 hour and 39 minutes), and *Battles in Donetsk* (1 hour and 4 minutes), *NATO* (over 1 hour) and *Battles in Luhansk* (47 minutes).

As for the coverage of topics on **Russia 1**, the most covered topic was *Foreign Affairs – political* (20 per cent of coverage), followed by local *Culture* (8 per cent), *Politics* (7.5 per cent) and *Foreign Affairs Non-Political* (7 per cent) and *Business and economy* (6 per cent).

Top stories presented by **Russia 1** featured most prominently *Russian economy* (1 hour 42 minutes), followed by *Battels in Luhansk* (1 hour), *International relations* (59 minutes), *Chaos in Ukraine* (54 minutes) and *NATO* (53 minutes).

On *NTV*, the most covered topic was *Foreign Affairs - Political* that was allocated 15 per cent of the coverage, followed by *Foreign Affairs Non-Political*, allocated 13 per cent, and then domestic *Politics* (13 per cent of coverage). *Business and Economy* that is in this channel usually covered rather extensively was allocated only 6 per cent of the overall news coverage.

As for the top stories, **NTV** prioritized *Battles in Luhansk* (56 minutes), *NATO* (54 minutes), *Battles in Donetsk* (49 minutes), *Russian economy* (48 minutes) and *International relations* (42 minutes).

On **RBK**, the most covered topic by far was domestic *Politics* (9 hours 40 minutes), followed by *Foreign Affairs - political* (6 hours 20 minutes). The **RBK**'s list of top stories included *International relations* (1 hour 38 minutes), *Battles in Luhansk* (1 hour 33 minutes), *NATO* (1 hour 14 minutes) and *Battles in Donetsk* (56 minutes).

As in the previous period, **Dozhd** focused on *Politics* (31 per cent), followed by *Foreign Affairs - political* (10 per cent), *Business and economy* (8 per cent), and *Crime* (5 per cent).

Its list of top stories includes *Russian nationalism/imperialism/patriotism* (57 minutes), *Battles in Donetsk* (56 minutes), *EU* (39 minutes), *International relations* (53 minutes) and *Russian economy* (33 minutes), followed by *Battles in Luhansk* (33 minutes).

**RT** coverage fully focused on *Foreign Affairs*. *Foreign Affairs -political* received 74 per cent of overall news coverage while *Foreign Affairs – non-political* received 19 per cent.

**RT**'s top stories focused on *Daesh* (so-called ISIS) that was allocated 3 hours and 17 minutes, followed by *Anti-western rhetoric* (1 hour 33 minutes), *Battles in Donetsk* (56 minutes), *Malaysia Airlines flight 317* (1 hour 4 minutes), *Battles in Luhansk* (53 minutes) and *Brexit* (51 minutes).

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The three main Russian TV channels provided very similar content in terms of coverage of the political actors as well as topics presented, again, like in the previous monitoring periods. Almost complete lack of any critical views targeting government and President Putin in particular, demonstrates that their primary goal is to serve as instruments of authorities to promote their policies. The same conclusions could be drawn from the monitoring of RT, targeting international community. RBK is the only channel available widely that offers slightly different editorial content. However, it does not at all offer genuinely critical coverage of political developments and authorities. Russian viewers continued to have only very little opportunities to receive objective and balanced portrayal of the political developments through national broadcast media.