

# **Monitoring political diversity in news reporting on the Russian TV channels**

**Report n.1**

**Composed by MEMO 98**

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## 1. Project Overview

Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (CJES), an independent, non-partisan Russian NGO dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, in cooperation with MEMO 98, has been monitoring the coverage of the Russian political scene in selected broadcast media. The project is intended to offer professional, comprehensive, objective monitoring initiative to assess the pluralism of ideas, accuracy, and balance in news reports presented on Russia's five main TV channels.

Over a period of more than a year, the project has sought to identify violations of existing legislation on TV and radio broadcasting and to promote democratic reforms and freedom of the press and expression as it relates to this sphere. CJES uses a methodology developed by MEMO 98, a Slovak organization that has conducted similar media monitoring projects in more than 30 countries over the past 11 years.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Monitoring Sample

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

*Table 1: Broadcasters monitored*

Channel	Ownership	Programmes	Geographical outreach
<i>First Channel</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Russia 1</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>TV Center</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>NTV</i>	Private	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Ren TV</i>	Private	Prime time news	Most of the country

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

- assess whether political 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 Russian television;
- 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 is supposed to:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

- 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, CJES has been assessing the media coverage against Russian legislation and internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which include:

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of information
- Accuracy and transparency
- Balance
- Impartiality
- Matter-of-fact and relevance
- Timeliness
- Clarity
- Variety

### **3. Methodology**

Quantitative and Qualitative method of Analysis

CJES monitoring team has employed quantitative and qualitative methodological tools according to international standards for media monitoring. The primary methodology used in the project has been proven and tested in more than 30 countries, including Russia. 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/themes. As such, the outcome of the monitoring will not be a set of empty and superficial data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, including concrete comparisons and analysis.

#### ***Quantitative analysis***

The quantitative component of the monitoring consists of a content analysis of a representative sample of media outlets. Media monitors measure the total amount of time devoted to selected “subjects“ and also the tone in which the relevant subjects are portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. These data are recorded for all relevant information and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.

#### ***Monitored subjects:***

- President

- Presidential Administration
- Prime Minister
- Government (all relevant Government agencies and bodies)
- Political parties (all parliamentary parties, including some which are currently not represented in the parliament)<sup>2</sup>

To monitor the broadcast media, monitors measure the actual “direct/indirect appearance time” of previously selected subjects – in seconds. They also separately record each instance where a subject is mentioned indirectly (e.g. by a news presenter or by someone else) as a “reference”.

It is important to keep in mind that it is the behaviour of media outlets that is being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not a viewer is offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors give an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by a media outlet. The evaluation mark is thus attached to all monitored subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in positive, negative, or neutral light. The five-level evaluation scale that is used for this purpose can be described in the following way: Grade 1 and 2 mean that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage is favourable. Grade 3 is a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations. Grades 4 or 5 signify that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage has negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It is always important to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context (background) of the story or item. The tone of the coverage is positive if the way the subject is presented and the context are both positive, similarly if the both factors are negative, the tone is negative. The neutral tone is the result of both factors being neutral. If the way the subject is presented and the context of the message do not match, monitors have to determine the tone according to what is the prevailing factor (so it could be either the content of the story or context).

### ***Qualitative analysis***

Qualitative analysis assesses the performance of media against specific principles/benchmarks, such as ethical or professional standards, that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors report about lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness,

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<sup>2</sup> United Russia, Fair Russia, LDPR, KPRF, Yabloko, Right Cause (ex-SPS, Civil Force and Democratic Party - considered to be pro-Kremlin "opposition"), Solidarity (movement, not a party - opposition oriented), Other Russia (opposition movement, which unites Solidarity, Left Front, Russian People's Democratic Union), Republican Party (not registered as a party - their registration was cancelled in 2007).

inaccuracy, bias and anything else that is important to presenting the quality of reporting. These data are reported separately and integrated in the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

The qualitative methodology focuses on the content of stories and the monitoring team will thus focus on important aspects of the information presented by the media, such as its quality and variety, producing findings on its structure (themes and topics) and assessing the overall quality of reporting provided by each media outlet, based on its overall informational value.

In order to eliminate any elements of subjectivity present in qualitative analysis, CJES does frequent checks on how individual monitors analyze the media. For the qualitative analysis, monitors are asked to:

- evaluate the placement of relevant stories and items in comparison with other reported topics and issues;
- evaluate the level of political diversity in media reporting;
- evaluate journalist's knowledge and his/her ability to work with facts and information;
- evaluate the ability of the author to engage audience;
- in case an interview is conducted, are the questions fair or "loaded;"
- how does the language shape the audience's understanding and perception of politics;
- does the media outlet use certain language, graphics and camera angles to influence the audience's perception of the monitored subjects and topics;
- Evaluate journalist's involvement in the story.

### ***Data collection***

For each day's coverage on a channel or each issue of a publication, monitors complete a monitoring form. This form is then reviewed by a data enterer who enters the data into a special monitoring programme (database).

### ***Data entry and Monitoring Database***

The last phase of working with data is data processing – computer data processing and storage has several advantages:

- Possibility to store data in PC;
- Flexibility and simple data manipulation, e.g. specific data selection and evaluation;
- Graphic abilities and its direct use in presentations.

Since the monitoring forms consist of a relatively small number of different data types and the data can be easily organized according to the given criteria, Microsoft Excel (in combination with the whole Microsoft Office package) is suitable for processing the results of monitoring process. The data that is acquired during the monitoring consist of

subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic and its time.

#### **4. Legal Framework**

There are a number of relevant legal documents that together form the legal framework for the media environment in Russia.

##### **Constitution of the Russian Federation**

Article 29 of the Russian constitution forbids censorship and guarantees the freedom of opinion, expression, communication and the press.

##### **The Law on Mass Media**

Article 3 and 58 of the Law on Mass Media also forbids censorship in any forms, including creation and funding of any bodies or institutions to be in charge of mass media censorship. Article 35 of the law stipulates that upon receiving a request from a State body or institution to broadcast official information, the State-funded media are obliged to do so in accordance with the Russian legislation. Importantly, this article also obligates the State-funded media to broadcast and publish official statements made by the state authorities, including the president and the government.

##### **The Law on Political Parties**

Article 26 of the Law on Political Parties gives any political party equal right to use state and municipal media outlets. In addition, Article 32 of the law stipulates equal access to state and municipal media to any registered political party.

##### **The Law on the Order of the State-funded Media Coverage of the activities of State officials**

Articles 6 and 8 of the Order of the State-funded Media Coverage of the activities of State officials provide for the president, the Council of Federation and the State Duma activities to be broadcast in the state-funded media news programs. However, while the law gives quite a specific list of information which is to be covered in the state-funded media news programs, the law also obligates the state media outlets to cover “other important facts about activities of the Federal Government”.

##### **Presidential Decree on Guaranties of the Informational Standards and Requirements towards TV and Radio Broadcast.**

Signed by the former President Yeltsin in 1993, this decree requires the state-funded media outlets to respect the minimal standards for TV and radio broadcasting. In particular, Article 2 of the standards demands from the media to respect the right for a reply or refutation. In addition, Article 4 urges the media to avoid defending interests of political groups and refuse any political pressure exerted over its informational programs.

##### **The Criminal Code**

According to Article 129 of the Code, defamation is punished with up to 3 years of imprisonment.

**Federal Law on “Guaranties of Equity of Parliamentary Political Parties during the coverage of their activities by publicly-available state TV and radio broadcasters.**

Adopted in May 2009, this law guarantees equal coverage of each parliamentary party by those state-owned TV and radio broadcasters which are included on the list published by a media regulatory body on the national level and local authorities in the regions. This law also provides for state control over the media coverage of the activities of parliamentary parties and guarantees independence of the media outlets. The law also stipulates that during non-election periods, the Central Election Commission (CEC) is supposed to monitor the national and regional state-owned TV and radio broadcasters for their compliance with the law.

In accordance to this law, State Agency for Supervision of Communications, Informative Technologies and Mass Media (Rossvyaznadzor) on 10 August 2009 listed TV Russia1, Russian Informational Channel, Russian Radio, Radio Mayak, and Vesty FM as state-owned TV and radio broadcasters on the national level.

As of September 2009, the CEC has been conducting a media monitoring of national and regional state-owned broadcasters and it regularly issues orders for time compensation to political parties by the state-owned media.

#### **4. General Media Monitoring Findings**

CJES’s media monitoring commenced on 11 January 2010. After four weeks of monitoring, the monitoring team did not find discernable differences between the media’s portrayal of the political subjects, the president and the government. Following is the first of reports:

- The principal general trend from the media monitoring is that there is an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors in the state and private mass media.
- All state channels and NTV devoted extensive prime time news coverage to activities of the authorities. There was a clear tendency to cover the activities of state officials extensively, pointing out achievements and successes.
- Most of TV channels neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment.

#### ***State-funded broadcasters***



Contrary to their public mandate, state-funded broadcasters demonstrated a clear bias towards the ruling powers and devoted the bulk of their coverage to President Medvedev, the government and the ruling party United Russia, largely ignoring any opposing views and opinions.

In the four weeks of the monitoring, the state-funded *First Channel* provided more than 95 per cent of its political and election news coverage to the activities of President Medvedev (39.5 per cent), the government (26 percent), Prime Minister Putin (21.8 per cent), the presidential administration (1.8 per cent) and the United Russia (6.7 percent). This coverage was overwhelmingly neutral or positive in tone. By contrast, the opposition party Yabloko received only 0.1 per cent of mostly neutral coverage.

The other two state-funded TV channels, *Russia 1* and *TV Centre*, adopted a similar approach. *Russia 1* (formerly known as *Russia Channel*) is a state-owned TV channel which broadcasts all over Russia and reaches 99 percent of the population. Unlike *First Channel*, which is not fully owned by the state (51 percent of the shares), *Russia 1* is a part of 100 percent state-owned media holding. The channel devoted altogether more than 94 per cent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Medvedev (37 per cent), Prime Minister Putin (21.5 per cent), the government (24.8 per cent), the presidential administration (5.3 per cent) and the ruling United Russia (5.6 per cent). 84 percent of President Medvedev's coverage was assessed by the monitoring team to be neutral and 16 percent to be positive in tone. Similarly, the government and United Russia were presented mainly in a neutral or positive tone. By comparison, Yabloko accounted for some 0.5 percent of mainly neutral coverage. The KPRF received some 2.1 percent of the coverage which was also mainly neutral in tone.

*TV Center* is a television controlled by the Moscow City Administration and its potential audience comprises of approximately 68 per cent of Russia's population. In one month of monitoring, *TV Center* gave the bulk of its coverage to activities of the government – almost 36 per cent and to Prime Minister Putin (21 per cent). This coverage was overwhelmingly neutral. The incumbent president received almost 25 percent of the coverage which was also primarily neutral. As for political parties, the most coverage was devoted to the United Russia at 10.1 per cent followed by the Right Cause with 3.4 per cent of the coverage. Yabloko accounted for some 0.3 percent of mainly neutral coverage.

### ***Nationwide private broadcasters***

In the four weeks of monitoring, the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations found discernable differences between the monitored private broadcasters' portrayal of the political parties, the president and the government. While *NTV* (part of the Gazprom Media holding which is a subsidiary of the state controlled Gazprom) generally adopted a similar approach to that of the state-funded broadcasters, *Ren TV* gave less airtime to the ruling powers and at times provided some critical coverage of the government and also some political parties.

*NTV*, which covers approximately 84 percent of the country, allocated as much as 92.8 per cent of its prime time news coverage devoted to political and elections-related information to the current establishment. Between 11 January and 11 February 2010, *NTV* devoted 23.2 percent of the coverage to the government, 19.8 to Prime Minister Putin, 35.7 percent to the president, 4 per cent to the presidential administration and 10.1 percent to the United Russia. This coverage was overwhelmingly neutral in tone. The next most covered political parties were LDPR and Fair Russia receiving 1.6 and 3.6 per cent of the coverage respectively. Yabloko accounted for some 0.3 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral.

In comparison with the other four monitored TV channels, the second monitored private TV channel, *Ren TV* (68 percent owned the pro-government National Media Group and 30 per cent by the RTL Group), provided its viewers with a slightly more balanced coverage of the political subjects. While the channel devoted the bulk of its prime time news coverage to activities of the government (16.7 percent), Prime Minister Putin (8.7 percent), the president (13.3 percent), the United Russia (20.6 percent) and the presidential administration (1.5 per cent), it was much less than the other four nationwide TV channels. The qualitative analysis also shows that this broadcaster was more balanced in its coverage of majority of the monitored entities, including some critical coverage of the ruling party. The political opponents of the ruling powers Yabloko and the Right Cause received a combined total of more than 4 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral in tone.

### ***Conclusion***

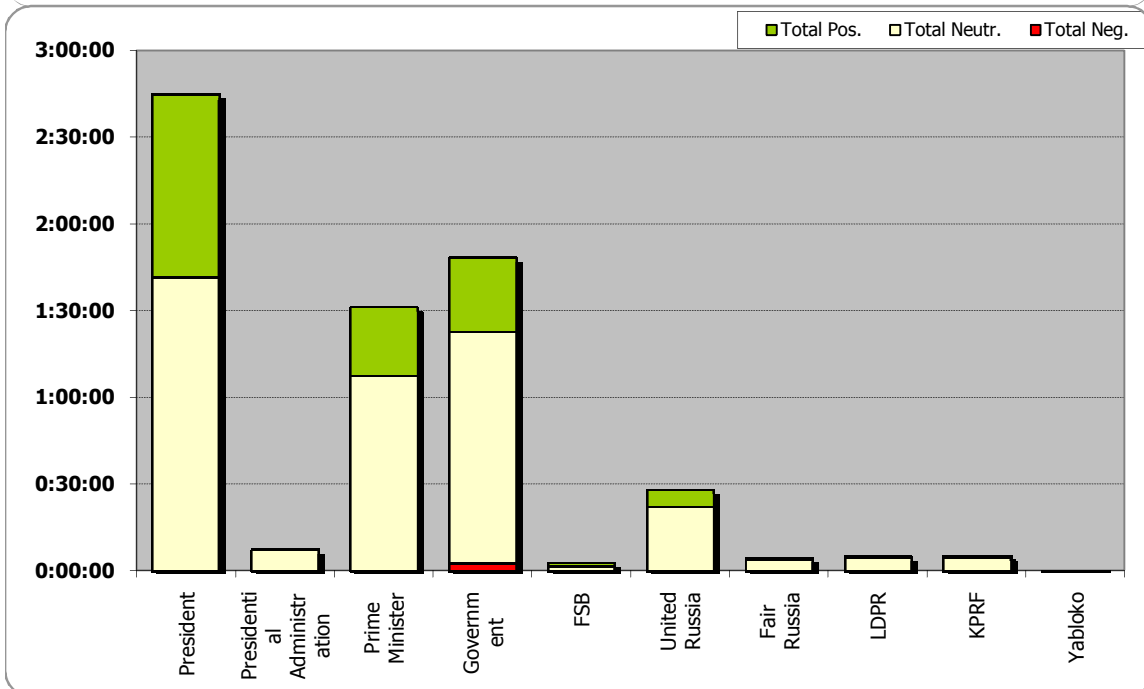
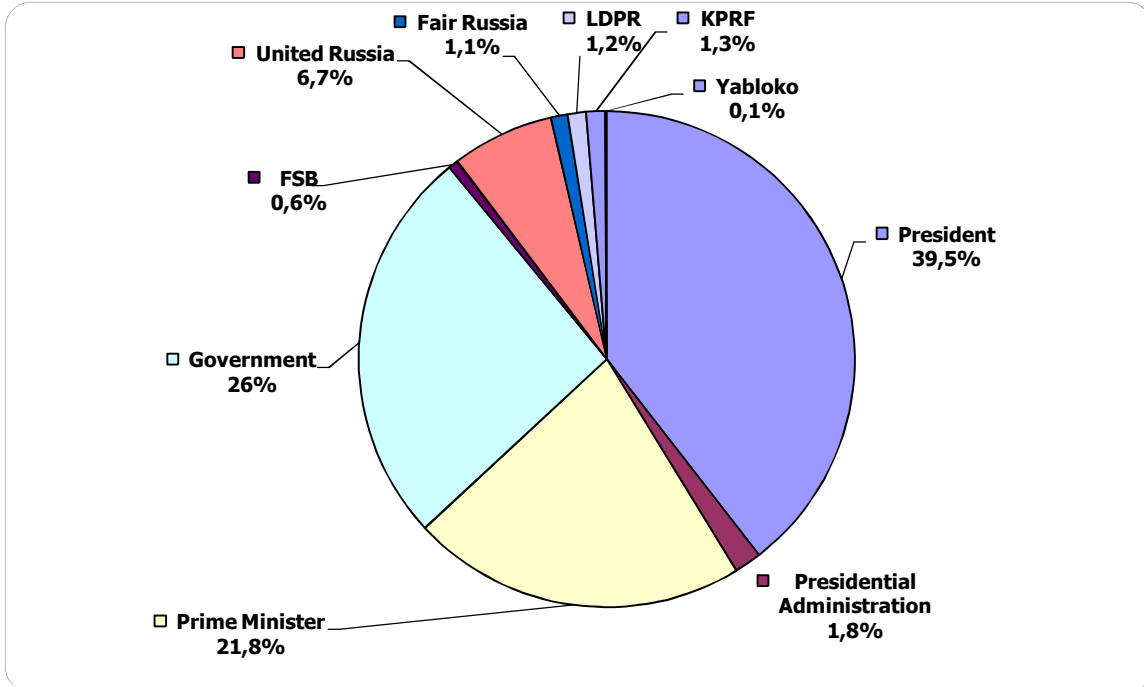
Data from the first month of monitoring by CJES reveals that there is an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors, with opponents of the current establishment having very limited access to the country's most important sources of information. The data also shows that majority of the monitored media frequently neglects to offer Russian citizens opposing views on particular stories. It is also apparent that several disturbing trends in the way the Russian mainstream media covers political parties, the incumbent President and the government (unveiled by the CJES during the previous monitoring projects) were not the result of short-term anomalies, but genuine trends in the Russian media that continue in 2010.

These trends include the fact that the monitored media neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment. As recipients of public resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of contestants. Contrary to their public mandate, however, the state-funded media have so far to grant opposition any meaningful opportunity to express their political views. The results indicate that media does not serve as a forum for the exchange of opinions, public debate, confrontation, investigation and commentary that would offer the public objective, analyzed and assessed views of persons managing the public funds.

# RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MEDIA - 2010

## First Channel

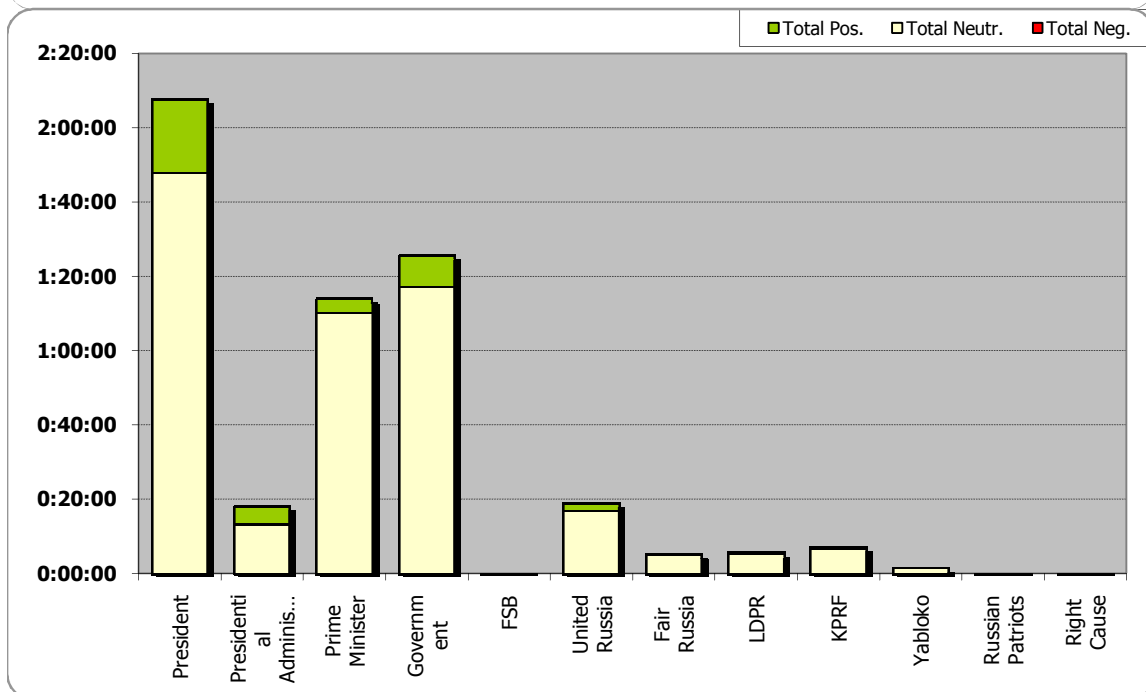
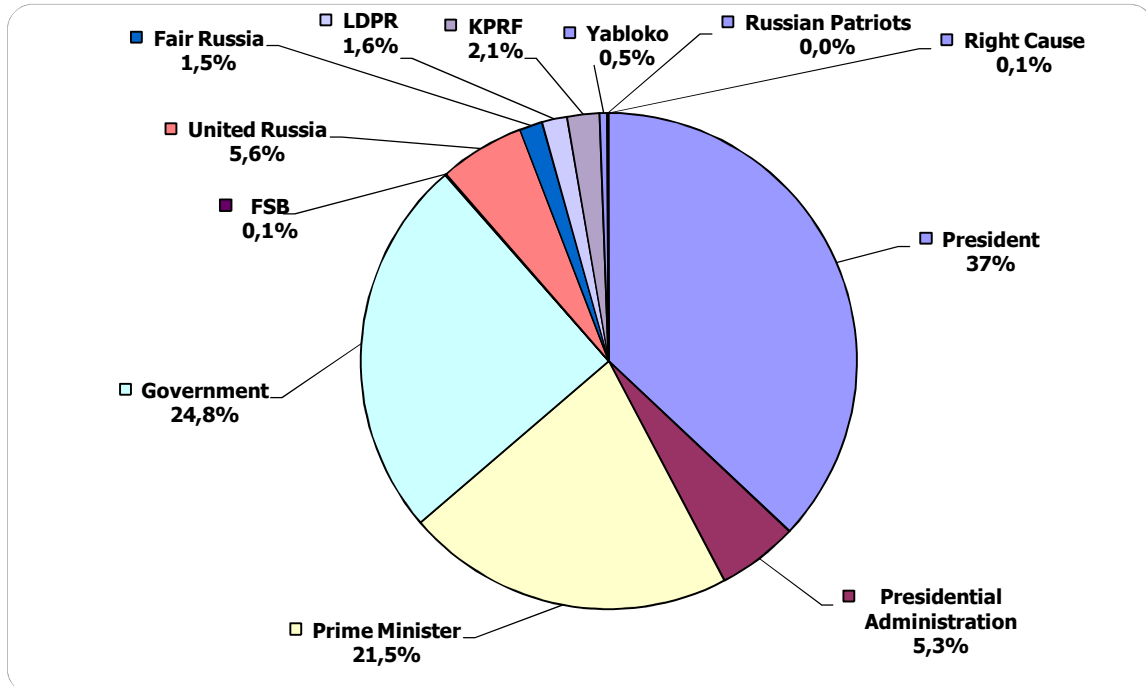
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# RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MEDIA - 2010

## Russia 1

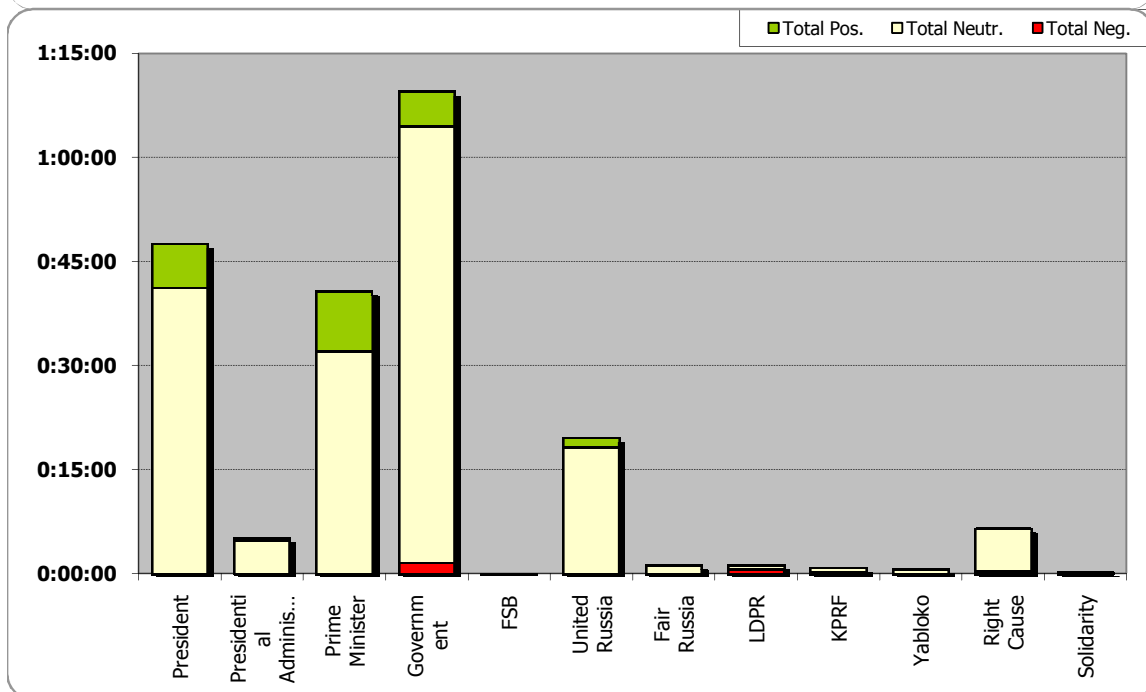
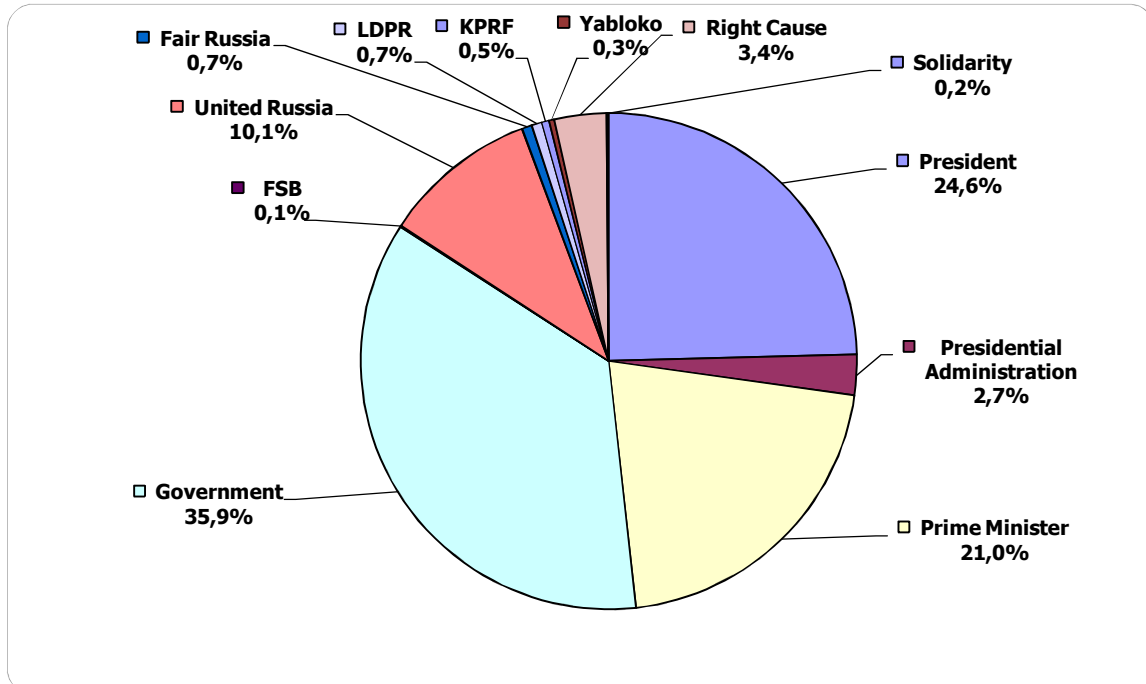
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# RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MEDIA - 2010

## TV Center

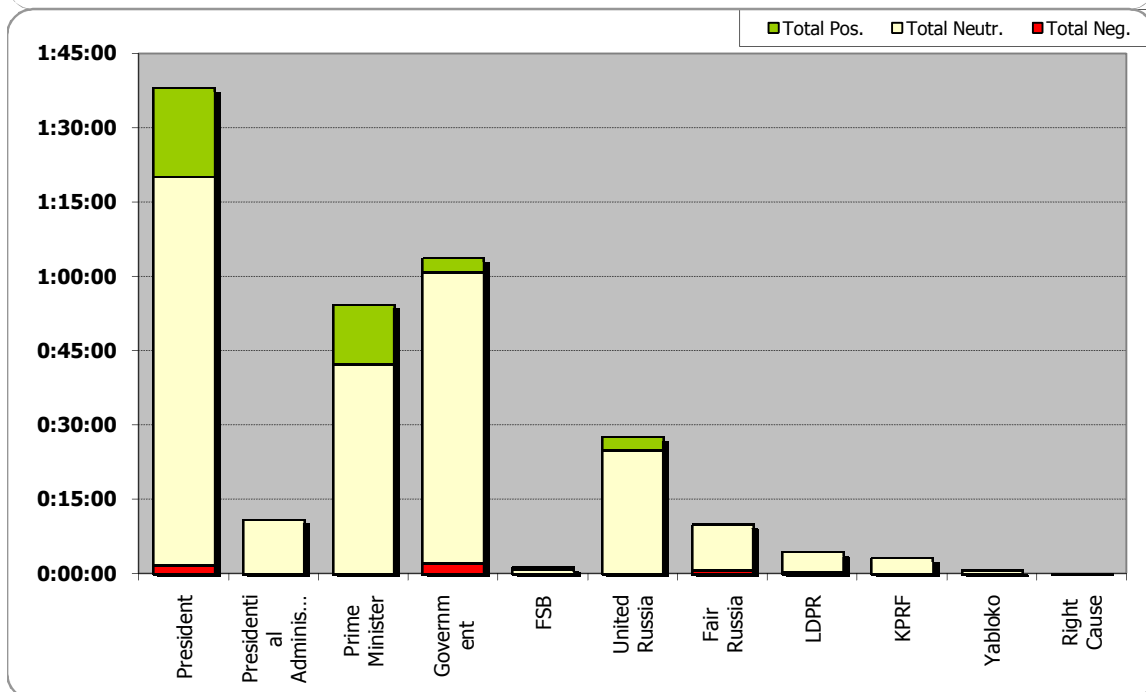
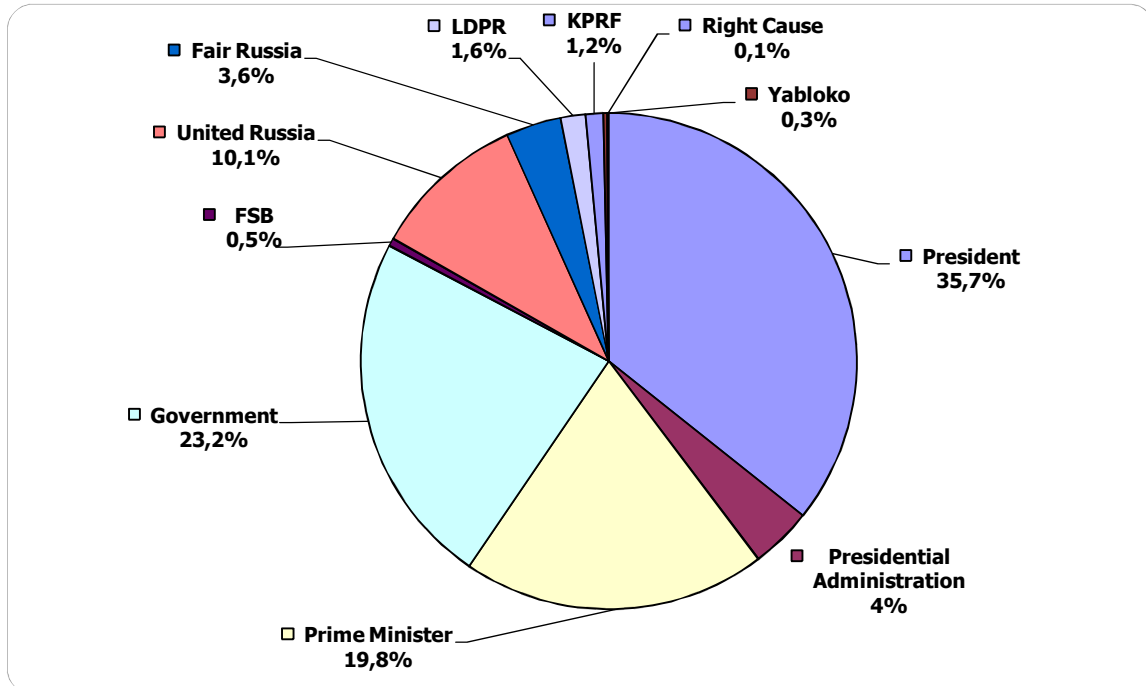
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# RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MEDIA - 2010

NTV

11-01-2010 -- 11-02-2010



# RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MEDIA - 2010

**Ren TV**

11-01-2010 -- 11-02-2010

