

Monitoring political diversity in news reporting of Russian TV channels

Report n.2
(September - November 2010)

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Annex - Media Monitoring Findings (charts)

1. Project Overview

Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (CJES), an independent, non-partisan Russian NGO dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, has been monitoring the coverage of the Russian political scene in selected broadcast media since January 2010. The project is intended to offer professional, comprehensive, objective monitoring initiative to assess whether Russian nationwide TV channels provide for a plurality of views, accuracy, and balance in their news reporting.

The media monitoring project focuses on the political news coverage by the main broadcast media in Russia and seeks to identify violations of the existing legislation on TV and radio broadcasting and encourage important reforms in the freedom of the press and expression. CJES uses a methodology developed by MEMO 98, a Slovak organization that has conducted similar media monitoring projects in more than 35 countries over the past 12 years.¹

This report analyses the coverage of five TV channels in the period September – November 2010.²

2. Monitoring Sample

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

Table 1: Broadcasters monitored

Channel	Ownership	Programs	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>	State-controlled	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Ren TV</i>	Private	Prime time news	Most of the country

The monitoring team has observed the 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;

¹ www.memo98.sk

² The first monitoring report was mapping the period January and February 2010 - it is available here: <http://www.memo98.sk/en/index.php?base=data/foreign/rus/1295562603.txt>

- motivate citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project is 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, CJES has been assessing the media coverage against Russian legislation and internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalistic ethics which include:

- Accuracy
- Transparency
- Balance
- Impartiality
- Matter-of-fact
- Relevance
- Timely
- Clarity
- Variety

3. Methodology

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 35 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 and political movements and groupings (all parliamentary parties, including some which are currently not represented in the Parliament)³

To monitor the broadcast media, monitors measure the actual “direct/indirect appearance time” of 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).

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

³ United Russia, Fair Russia, LDPR, KPRF, Yabloko, Right Cause, Solidarity, Other Russia, Left Front, Russian People's Democratic Union, Republican Party, Patriots of Russia, Movement Against Illegal Immigration, Our Choice and others.

quantified. Monitors report about lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, 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, 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 whether principal journalistic standards are followed.

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. General Media Monitoring Findings

CJES's media monitoring findings reflected in this report include three two-week periods. They are as follows: 1 – 14 September, 1 – 14 October and 1 – 14 November, 2010.

Following are the key findings:

- **There is an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors in the state and private mass media.**
- **State TV channels and NTV devoted extensive prime time news coverage to the activities of the authorities – the President and the Government. There was also a clear tendency to their activities in a positive manner. At the same time however critical reporting targeting authorities was completely absent.**
- **Most of TV channels neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment.**

Contrary to their public mandate, State-funded broadcasters demonstrated a clear bias towards the ruling powers. Bulk of their coverage was dedicated to President Medvedev, the Government and the ruling party United Russia.

During the six weeks of monitoring, the *First Channel* constantly provided the bulk of its coverage to President Medvedev (some 45, 39 and 42 per cent of the coverage in September, October and November, respectively), the Government (some 46, 36 and 34 per cent of the coverage in September, October and November, respectively) and the ruling *United Russia* (some 5, 13 and 9 per cent of the coverage in September, October and November, respectively). These three entities received together not less than 85 per cent of the coverage in each of the monitored two-week periods and this coverage was overwhelmingly neutral or positive in tone.

The Mayor of Moscow position received also a significant portion of coverage - in October *Yuri Luzhkov* (the former Mayor of Moscow) received almost 13 per cent of the coverage, his portrayal being overwhelmingly negative. In November, a new Mayor of Moscow, *Sergey Sobjanin*, was given some 10 per cent of the coverage which was largely positive or neutral in tone.⁴

From among the other monitored subjects, the LDPR and the KPRF received rather limited coverage - ranging in the case of LDPR from 0.2 per cent in September to 2.1 per cent in November; in the case of KPRF, this party received single portions of time ranging from 0.7 per cent in November to 1.1 per cent in October. Portrayal of LDPR was neutral or negative. The First Channel briefly mentioned in its news broadcasts also the *Fair Russia* party, which got some 1 per cent of the coverage in September as well as in October broadcasts.

The opposition party Yabloko received only 0.7 per cent of mostly neutral coverage in October; the party was practically not mentioned in this channel in September and November monitored period.

Russia 1 adopted similar approach in its coverage of political actors to that of the First Channel. Also here, the President, the Government and the ruling party United Russia

⁴ Vast majority of time assigned to Others was dedicated to the coverage of Mayor of Moscow position.

received vast majority of the coverage ranging from some 83 per cent (in November) to 90 per cent (in September) . The portrayal of President Medvedev and the Government was mainly neutral with the large portion of positive stories reported along with practically no critical coverage of the authorities. Similarity as in the First Channel, the former Mayor of Moscow *Yuri Luzhkov* received large portion of coverage in October broadcasts and his portrayal was overwhelmingly negative. New Mayor of Moscow *Sergey Sobyanin* received over 6 per cent of the coverage in November monitoring period, he was portrayed in mainly neutral light.

Yabloko accounted for coverage ranging from 0.1 per cent (September) to maximum 0.5 per cent (November). Parliamentary parties KPRF, LDPR and *Fair Russia* were given limited portions of coverage, but larger ones than those offered to Yabloko. In the case of KPRF, which received the largest single portion of coverage, it was ranging from 1 percent (October) to 3.4 per cent (September).

TV Centre (TVC), a television controlled by the Moscow City Administration, reaching up to two thirds of Russia` population. *TV Centre* gave the overwhelming majority of its coverage to the President, Government and ruling party United Russia, which all together received in September some 94 per cent and October and November some 98 per cent of the total coverage dedicated to political actors. This coverage was overwhelmingly neutral, with some small amount of positive presentation. The remaining few per cent of the coverage were distributed among KPRF, LDPR and *Fair Russia*.

There was certain difference between two other monitored 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.

NTV, which covers approximately 84 percent of the country, allocated in each two-week period of monitoring not less than 95 per cent of its prime time coverage of political and elections-related information to the President, Government and *United Russia*. President received some 52 per cent, 45 per cent and 42 per cent of the coverage in monitored months respectively, and was portrayed exclusively in neutral and positive light. The portrayal of the Government was mainly neutral, with some positive and also small amount of negative coverage.

Similarly as in TVC, the remaining small portion of the political news coverage in NTV which was not given to the coverage of authorities or *United Russia* party was divided among KPRF, LDPR and *Fair Russia*. For instance the opposition party Yabloko was not presented at all.

In comparison, the private TV channel **Ren TV**, provided its viewers with a slightly more balanced coverage of the political subjects. While also in this TV channel news programs the authorities and *United Russia* party received the largest shares of the news coverage, their portrayal was more balanced, also with significant portion of critical coverage. *Ren*

TV also provided rather critical coverage of *Yuri Luzhkov* in its October and November news programs.

KPRF, LDPR and *Fair Russia* parties but also movement Solidarity, Our Choice or Right Cause were given coverage, which was somewhat larger than coverage offered by other monitored TV channels.

5. Conclusion

Similarly as in the first monitoring report, we can conclude that country's most important sources of information offer exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors and views. Opponents of the current establishment have very limited access to the state broadcast media. 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.