

Monitoring political diversity in news reporting of Russian TV channels

Report n.3
(March - April 2011)

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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 from January 2010. 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 four nationwide TV channels.

The media monitoring project focusing on the coverage by the key broadcast media in Russian seeks to identify violations of existing legislation on TV and radio broadcasting and to promote democratic reforms and 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 some 35 countries over the past 11 years.¹

This report analyses news coverage of five TV channels in the period March – April 2011.²

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>	State-controlled	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 Russian TV channels;

¹ www.memo98.sk

² The monitoring reports are available here:
<http://www.memo98.sk/en/index.php?base=data/foreign/rus/1295562603.txt>

- 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:

- 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 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 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).

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.

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, 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 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 two two-week periods as follows: 18 – 31 March and 17 – 30 April 2011.

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 and the key trends of the coverage of political actors identified in the second monitoring report mapping coverage of political actors in autumn 2010 remained largely unchanged.

Following are the key findings:

- **The state and private mass media offer very limited range of diversity of political actors.**
- **State-controlled media and NTV dedicated extensive prime time news coverage to activities of authorities and the ruling party United Russia.**
- **There was a clear tendency to cover the activities of state officials in a positive manner while the critical reporting targeting authorities was completely absent in these TV channels.**
- **Most of TV channels continue to offer opposition no significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment.**

The State-funded broadcasters demonstrated a clear bias towards the ruling powers; the bulk of their coverage was dedicated to President Medvedev, the government and the ruling party United Russia.

First Channel offered bulk of its coverage to the president (some 49 and 40 per cent of the coverage in March and April, respectively) and government (some 46 and 43 per cent of the coverage in March and April, respectively). The United Russia received some 7 and 3,5 per cent of the political coverage in March and April, respectively.

These three entities received a combined total of 94.9 per cent (in March) and 92.8 per cent (in April) of the political news coverage which was mainly neutral and positive (there were only a few negative references about the government).

A few parties which received limited coverage in *First Channel's* news programs were LDPR (0,6 per cent and 1,1 per cent in March and April, respectively), KPFR (0,3 per cent and 0,7 per cent in March and April, respectively), *Fair Russia* (0,3 per cent and 3,9 per cent in March and April, respectively).

The Right Cause received in both periods 0,1 per cent of the coverage while Yabloko got some 0,1 per cent of the coverage in the news programs broadcast in March.

Russia 1 presented coverage of political actors similar to that offered by *First Channel*. Again, the president, government and United Russia received the bulk of the news coverage ranging from 90,3 per cent in March to 88,6 per cent in April. The portrayal of President Medvedev and the government was mainly neutral.

The remaining small share of the coverage in *Russia 1* news programs was distributed primarily among parliamentary parties KPRF (3,1 per cent and 2,7 per cent in March and April, respectively), LDPR (1,4 per cent and 4,5 per cent in March and April, respectively) and *Fair Russia* (0,5 per cent and 2,5 per cent in March and April, respectively). The Patriots of Russia received 0,3 per cent of the coverage in the March news programs. Other opposition parties were not given any notable coverage.

In comparison with the autumn monitoring periods, *TV Center* gave slightly less extensive coverage to the authorities (president and government) and pro-government party United Russia. However, these entities clearly dominated the coverage of *TV Center* as they received together 85,2 per cent of the coverage in March and 92,3 per cent of coverage in April. The coverage was overwhelmingly neutral or positive. There was a complete lack of any negative or critical reporting with TV channels failing to fulfill their watchdog role.

Other political parties which received notable shares of coverage were LDPR (9,4 per cent and 1,9 per cent in March and April, respectively), *Fair Russia* (1,7 per cent and 2,3 per cent in March and April, respectively) and KPRF (0,7 per cent and 1,3 per cent in March and April, respectively). In the March news programs, the Patriots of Russia received 0,8 per cent and the Right Cause got 2 per cent of the coverage dedicated to political actors.

Similar to the previous reports, *NTV* generally adopted a similar approach to that of the state-funded broadcasters while *Ren TV* gave less airtime to the ruling powers and occasionally provided some critical coverage of the government.

NTV allocated some 94 per cent of its political news coverage to the president and government in March and some 88 per cent of the coverage in April. In addition, the pro-government party *United Russia* got 1,8 per cent of the March news coverage and some 5 per cent of this coverage in April.

A few other parties were also mentioned in the March news programs, including the KPRF (0,8 per cent), the *Fair Russia* (0,3 per cent), the LDPR (0,3 per cent), the Patriots of Russia (0,1 per cent).

Only the LDPR and KPRF received some notable coverage in April, (5,5 per cent and 1,1 per cent, respectively).

In comparison with *NTV*, the private TV channel *Ren TV* provided its viewers with a more balanced coverage of the political entities. While also in this channel the authorities and the *United Russia* received largest shares of the news coverage, their portrayal was

more balanced, with a significant portion of critical coverage devoted to the government. The government received some 33 per cent of the coverage in March and some 37 per cent of the coverage in April. Furthermore, the president was given some 15 and 11 per cent of coverage in March and April, respectively, and the *United Russia* received some 14 and 24 per cent of the coverage in March and April, respectively.

Other parties which received some coverage in March and April news programs were LDPR (some 7 and 12 per cent of the coverage, respectively), KPFR (some 5 and 2,5 per cent of the coverage respectively), *Fair Russia* (2,8 per cent and 10,3 per cent of the coverage respectively). In addition, Yabloko got 1,8 per cent and 1,1 per cent of the coverage, respectively, and the Patriots of Russia received 1,4 per cent and 2,7 per cent of the coverage, respectively. Moreover, the Republican party received 6,4 per cent of the coverage in March and the Right cause 0,2 per cent of the coverage. The DPNI (Movement Against Illegal Immigration) received 0,1 per cent of the coverage in the April news programs. The coverage was neutral or negative.

5. Conclusion

Similar to the previous monitoring periods, this one was again characterized by an exceptionally limited range of political diversity in the main TV channels news reporting. The majority of monitored media neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment and opponents of the current establishment have very limited access to the state broadcast media.

We reiterate that the state-funded media, as recipients of public resources, have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of contestants. Contrary to their public mandate, however, they have so far failed 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.