

Monitoring political diversity in news reporting of Russian nationwide TV channels

Report n.4
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Annex - Media Monitoring Findings (charts)

1. Project Overview

Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (CJES), an independent and 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. 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 12 years.¹

The project offers a professional, comprehensive and objective monitoring to assess the pluralism of ideas, accuracy, and balance in news reporting of Russia's nationwide TV channels overall. The media monitoring project focusing on the coverage by the key Russian broadcasters seeks to promote democratic values and freedoms and also intends to identify possible violations of the media-related legislation as well as breaches of the basic journalistic standards.

This is the fourth report and it analyses news coverage of six nationwide TV channels in the period **September – November 2011**, prior to the upcoming Duma elections scheduled for 4 December 2011.²

2. Monitoring Sample

Based on the 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	Most of the country
<i>Channel 5</i>	State	Prime time news	Most of the country
<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;

¹ See more at www.memo98.sk

² All the previous monitoring reports are available at:
<http://www.memo98.sk/en/index.php?base=data/foreign/rus/1295562603.txt>
<http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/zahr/rus/1322304936.txt>
<http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/zahr/rus/1322305281.txt>

- supply the media, political entities, regulatory organs, citizens, and international community with data to measure the objectivity of Russian TV channels;
- 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 journalism ethics and standards, 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.

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, 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 and Data entry

For each day's coverage on a channel or each issue of a publication, monitors complete a monitoring form. This form is then reviewed before entering the data into a special monitoring programme (database). It is followed by the computer processing what represents the last phase of working with data.

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 several fundamental variables such as subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total) and tone evaluation.

Monitored subjects:

- President
- Presidential Administration
- Prime Minister
- Government (all relevant Government agencies and bodies)
- Political parties registered for the 4 December parliamentary elections³
- Other political movements and groupings.⁴

4. Media Environment

There is extensive media activity in the Russian Federation. However, despite the pluralistic media environment, there is a long-standing concern over media independence, including lack of diversity of views in the broadcast media. Only a few media outlets are able or willing a more independent editorial policy which is critical of the state administration and provides objective reporting. The state control over the broadcast media resulted in a situation whereby the major media do not serve as a forum for the exchange of opinions, they do not facilitate public debate, analyses or commentary, but rather as a platform for the presentation of achievements the incumbent state administration.

³ *United Russia, Fair Russia, LDPR, CPRF, Yabloko, Right Cause, Patriots of Russia.*

⁴ Nah-Nah, Parnas, Solidarity, Other Russia, Russian People's Democratic Union and others.

In addition, the country has had for a long period of time a poor record in the field of freedom of expression (ranked as low for a long period by a number of international organizations dealing with the freedom of expression),⁵ with the violence against journalists and the impunity for those who commit these crimes as being the main reason of concern. Indeed, physical attacks on journalists are frequent and usually go unpunished. According to the Glasnost Defence Foundation, there were at least 58 physical attacks on journalists in 2010. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a total of 26 journalists have been killed in connection with their work in Russia over the last decade.

As a result, many journalists feel unsafe and tend to engage in self-censorship or avoid covering certain sensitive topics, such as corruption, methods of law-enforcement-bodies or environmental issues.⁶

However, some recent developments in the media environment give reasons for cautious optimism. These *inter alia* include a very recent decision (from 17 November) to decriminalize libel and insult, as well as a decision to specifically punish threats or violence against journalists which were welcomed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) who called them “*a breakthrough decision that will help safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Russia*”.⁷

The OSCE Representative Dunja Mijatovic also acknowledged that the numbers of civil libel lawsuits involving journalists and the amount of related monetary damages to plaintiffs have decreased, and that investigation in some prominent journalist-related cases led to encouraging developments.⁸ RFoM also expressed a hope that it “*will be followed by others and that the murderers of all other journalists killed in Russia will be brought to justice*”.⁹

While the internet is still relatively free, it is also targeted by the authorities - Roskomnadzor which is the supervisory agency for communications, information technology and mass media – developed an online filtering and surveillance system which is to be put in place in December. Given the growing frequency of website blockings and attacks on bloggers, Russia was included in the list of countries “under surveillance”, according to the report “the Enemies of the Internet”¹⁰ released by RSF in March 2011.¹¹

⁵ According to the Press Freedom Index issued annually by Reporters Without Borders, Russia is ranked 140th out of 178 countries, available at <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html>

⁶ Available at <http://en.rsf.org/report-russia,131.html>.

⁷ See the Press release available at <http://www.osce.org/fom/85154>.

⁸ Those cases include guilty verdict and sentencing of the 2009 assassination of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anastasia Baburova, as well as to the arrest and indictment of the alleged killer of *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

⁹ See the Regular Report of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to the OSCE Permanent Council, 23 June 2011, available at <http://www.osce.org/fom/78951>.

¹⁰ Available at <http://march12.rsf.org/en/>

¹¹ Available at <http://en.rsf.org/surveillance-russia,39766.html>

5. Legal Framework

The Constitution of the Russian Federation in its Article 29 guarantees the freedom of expression and speech and prohibits censorship. Additionally, the *Law on Mass Media* (Art. 3 and 58) also forbids censorship in any form, including creation and funding of any bodies or institutions to be in charge of mass media censorship.

Article 35 of the law also 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 requests the State-funded media to broadcast and publish official statements made by the state authorities, including the president and the government.

The Law on *Order of the State-funded Media Coverage of the activities of State officials* (Art. 6 and 8) stipulates that activities of the president, the Council of Federation and the State Duma are to be broadcast in the state-funded media news programs. While the law provides for a quite detailed list of information that is to be covered in the state-funded media news programs, the law also obliges the state funded media outlets to cover “other important facts about activities of the Federal Government.”

The *Law on Political Parties* gives political party equal right to use state and municipal media outlets (Art. 26). In addition, the law provides for equal access of any registered political party to state and municipal media (Art. 32).

Moreover, the *Law on Guarantees of Equitable Coverage of Parliamentary Parties by State Broadcasters* guarantees equal coverage of each parliamentary party by major state-owned broadcasters that are defined by a media regulatory body on the national level and by local authorities in the regions. However, the law limits its application only for period outside the official election campaign (Art. 2).

The law also stipulates that the Central Election Commission (CEC) monitors national and regional state-owned TV and radio broadcasters for their compliance with the law. As of September 2009, the CEC has been conducting a media monitoring of national and regional state-owned broadcasters. Regrettably, the CEC does not conduct similar monitoring activities during the current election campaign. Such monitoring would assist the CEC in identifying biased coverage on state broadcasters.

6. General Media Monitoring Findings

CJES’s media monitoring findings reflected in this report include eight weeks divided into two periods – the pre-election period (26 September – 4 November) and two weeks of the official election period (5 - 19 November 2011).

In comparison with the previous monitoring periods (in 2010 and 2011), the monitoring team again did not find discernable differences between the way how media presented

political subjects. On the contrary, the trends identified in the previous reports remained largely unchanged.

Following are the key findings:

- **Monitored broadcast media offered a very marginal coverage of the campaign with a limited range of diversity of political actors. Only *Ren TV* offered its viewers a different picture with an attempt to cover a more diverse spectrum of political opinions, including critical reporting of the ruling structures.**
- **State-controlled media dedicated extensive prime time news coverage to the activities of the authorities, focusing primarily on the activities of the president and the prime minister. *Russia 1*, however, tried to limit the coverage of ruling forces and allocated more coverage to electoral contestants.**
- **There was a clear tendency to cover the activities of state officials in overwhelmingly positive and neutral manner, while the critical reporting challenging their performance was completely absent.**
- **In general, the Russian broadcast media failed to pursue an independent editorial line that would enable citizens to gain impartial, objective and comprehensive information enabling voters to make an informed choice at the ballot box.**

Media Monitoring Findings

Similarly to the previous monitored periods, the State-controlled broadcasters demonstrated a clear bias towards the ruling powers; the bulk of their coverage was dedicated to President Medvedev, the government, often personalized by Prime Minister Putin, and the ruling party *United Russia*.

First Channel offered the bulk of its coverage to the president (some 41 and 45 per cent of the coverage before and during the campaign, respectively) and to the government (some 37 and 39 per cent respectively). The *United Russia* received some 16 and 8 per cent of the political coverage before and during the campaign, respectively.

These three entities received a combined total of 94 per cent (before the campaign commenced) and 92 per cent (after the official campaign started) of the politically-relevant news coverage (which is thus almost the same portion as during the last monitored period in March-April 2011). In addition, the coverage was exclusively positive and neutral.

After the commencement of the campaign, *First Channel* doubled the coverage of other six political parties, however, it still remained to be marginal - a combined total of their coverage increased during campaign from 3 to 7 per cent. The LDPR and the CPRF

received some 3 and 2 per cent, respectively, and the other three parties - the *Yabloko*, the *Fair Russia* and the *Right Cause* - received each less than 1 per cent of the coverage.

Russia 1 adopted a slightly different approach to that of *First Channel*. Again, the president, the government and the *United Russia* received the bulk of the news coverage - some 78 per cent before the campaign and 72 per cent during the campaign (with the president being the mostly covered entity – 36 per cent in both periods). However, when comparing to the previous monitored period (March-April 2011), the coverage devoted to the ruling forces has decreased from 88-90 per cent. At the same time, similar to the previous period, the tone of the coverage was neutral.

In a positive development, the channel limited its news reporting of the activities of state authorities and instead covered more intensively the electoral contestants. Since the commencement of the official campaign period, it allocated comparable coverage to several political entities, namely to the *Fair Russia* (7 per cent), the CPRF (6 per cent), the LDPR, the *Yabloko* (both 5 per cent respectively) and the *United Russia* (4 per cent). As for the other two contesting parties, they were not given any notable coverage.

The coverage of the president and the government clearly dominated the newscasts of *TV Center* (TVC) and St.Petersburg-based *Channel 5* (both during the pre-electoral period as well as during the campaign). The portrayal of presented subjects on both TV channels was mainly neutral.

In the pre-campaign period, *Channel 5* gave respectively 43 and 40 per cent of the coverage to the government and the president. As for the campaign period, they received even more substantial coverage amounting to 51 and 42 per cent, respectively. As for the coverage of the parties, only the *United Russia* received more significant coverage – 10 per cent in the pre-campaign period and 4 per cent during the campaign. While in the pre-campaign period *Channel 5* offered some small coverage to the *Fair Russia* (3 per cent), the CPRF, the LDPR and the *Yabloko* (getting 1 per cent respectively), during the campaign period only the LDPR received at least minimal coverage (less than 1 per cent).

TV Center news coverage in the pre-campaign period was, as in the other state-funded channels, dominated by three subjects – the president (42 per cent), the government (41 per cent) and the *United Russia* (11 per cent). All other parties (which were at least mentioned or received limited coverage) were all together given less than 4 per cent of the politically and election-related coverage. During the campaign, TVC again gave largest amount of the coverage to the authorities – the president received 55 per cent and the government 29 per cent. The remaining coverage was distributed among seven parties as follows: the *United Russia* (4 per cent), the CPRF (3 per cent), the *Fair Russia* and the *Yabloko* (2 per cent, respectively) with other three contesting parties 1 per cent each.

Similar to the previous reports, the state-controlled *NTV* generally adopted a similar approach to that of the state-funded broadcasters (with the exception of *Russia 1*). During the campaign, the broadcaster offered its viewers one-sided coverage, showing clear bias in favor of the current establishment and ignoring all other existing political forces.

During the campaign, *NTV* allocated 99.9 percent (before the campaign 99 per cent) of its political news coverage to the ruling forces, granting as much as 51 per cent to the president, 31 per cent to the government and some 18 per cent to the ruling party. The tone of the coverage was exclusively positive and neutral.

Private broadcaster *Ren TV* provided its viewers with a more diverse range of political views in comparison with the other TV channels, offering more coverage to all contesting parties as well as some other political forces. At the same time, the broadcaster also showed clearly different approach to the authorities by allocating them approximately half of the coverage (when compared to other monitored channels). As for the tone, the broadcaster also showed a different approach by presenting some critical information about different political forces.

Of the political parties covered in the *Ren TV* newscasts, the *United Russia* received the biggest share - in both the pre-campaign period as well as during the campaign (15 and 31 per cent, respectively). The coverage was overwhelmingly negative or neutral.

In the period before the start of the campaign, the LDPR received 6 per cent, the Right cause and the Fair Russia 5 per cent of the coverage respectively. Other parties to receive some notable coverage were the *Solidarnost* and the *Other Russia* (both non-contesting political subjects received 4 per cent) and the CPRF (3 percent). After the campaign start, the party which received the second largest share of coverage was the CPRF (13 per cent of coverage), followed by the *Fair Russia* - 8 per cent of the coverage. Further, the LDRP received 6 per cent. The parties were in general portrayed in a neutral way, with exception of LDPR (campaign period) which was neutral or negative.

Before the start of the campaign, *Ren TV* gave 24 per cent of the coverage to the government, and 20 per cent to the president. In the first two weeks of the campaign, these two subjects received much less coverage - 15 and 14 per cent of coverage, respectively. Overall, the portrayal of the *United Russia*, the president and the government was quite balanced during the pre-campaign period. During the campaign the president was portrayed neutrally, while portrayal of the government was slightly negative (as mentioned, the *United Russia* was presented in rather negative way).

7. Conclusion

Regrettably, similar to the previous monitoring periods, this monitored period was again characterized by an exceptionally limited range of political diversity in most of the principal television channels. The majority of the monitored media neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime within their news programs. As such, to get information about the campaign, the public had to rely on paid political advertisement and the allocation of free airtime (half of this time was allocated also in the form of debates among candidates). As a result, such editorial approach restricted opportunities of

contesting political parties to challenge opinions of the ruling establishment and limited voters' ability to make a better-informed choice on election day.

Such media policy is even more worrying given the fact that this report covers the period of election campaign, during which a vibrant political discourse is expected, possibly intensified by a declared switch-over between two top state officials, President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. While the President decided to perform his official duties rather than to be engaged actively in the campaign, his presidential activities often featured along with slogans of United Russia, conducted in parallel to the election campaign and covered extensively by the media, blurred the line between his formal activities and the electoral campaign.

It is worth to reiterate that the state-funded media, as recipients of public resources, have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of all contestants. Contrary to their public mandate, however, they have failed to comply with their public service mandate by promoting ruling authorities and denying opposition any meaningful opportunity to express their political views.

With respect to freedom of expression during elections, the European Court of Human Rights has called for governments to “display restraint” and to accept that even offensive, shocking, and disturbing speech can contribute to pluralism and must usually be tolerated in a democratic society. This is especially true during electoral campaigns and of speech that “targets” government authorities, elected officials, and candidates for office. However, the results of the media monitoring indicate that Russian broadcast media, funded or controlled by State, do not serve as a forum for a genuine exchange of opinions, public debate, analysis or commentary that would offer the public objective, analyzed and assessed views of persons managing the public funds.