



Monitoring of Russian TV channels September & October 2016

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MEMO 98

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **The state-controlled channels - First Channel and Russia 1 - as well as NTV, controlled by the state-owned company Gazprom Media Holding, offered its viewers extremely limited range of political diversity. They concentrated their coverage of political actors and devoted extensive news coverage to the authorities, especially to President Putin, followed by the government.**
- ***First channel, Russia 1 and NTV* were only the official position and neglecting to offer any independent and alternative views or critical reporting challenging the performance or views of the authorities. This is a long-term trend identified also in the previous monitoring periods in 2015 and 2016.**
- ***RBK* also focused its coverage on the Russian authorities, especially the incumbent president, but its coverage of authorities was more neutral compared to the state-controlled TV channels.**
- **While *Dozhd* also provided significant portion of its coverage to the authorities, in contrast with the state-controlled TV channels as well as with NTV and RBK, its coverage was more diverse and included also critical views.**
- ***Russia Today* focused primarily on institutions and affairs outside of Russia, presenting them overall in a very negative light.**
- **As for the coverage of topics, *First channel, Russia 1 and NTV* focused their news coverage mainly on *politics and foreign affairs*. By contrast, the second most featured topic in *RBK and Dozhd* was *business and economy*, followed by *foreign affairs*. As for the coverage of topics on *Russia Today*, *foreign affairs* clearly dominated the news broadcasts.**
- **While the *First channel, Russia 1, NTV and Russia Today* concentrated their coverage on the *conflict in Syria*, *RBK and Dozhd* gave more coverage to *Russian economy*. Apart from the *Russia Today*, all monitored TV channels also provided extensive coverage of the 2016 *parliamentary elections in Russia*.**

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.¹ 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.

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 ²	Coverage
First Channel	51% Russian State 25% National Media Group 24% <i>Roman Abramovich</i> [reportedly under sale]	Vremya Voskresnoe Vremya Mo-Su (21:00)	98,8% of Russian population ³ ; Rebroadcast also by <i>ONT</i> (Belarus), <i>TVI</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.
Russia 1	Russian Government	Vesti Vesti Nedely Mo-Su (20:00)	98.5% of Russian population ⁴ ; Available internationally as <i>RTR-Planeta</i> via Satellite and selected cable networks.
NTV	Gazprom Media Holding ⁵	Segodnia Segodnia: Itogoviy Vypusk Mo-Fr, Su	98.3% of Russian Population ⁶ .

¹ For more information, see also www.memo98.sk

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

³ <http://www.1tv.ru/total/pi=5>

⁴ http://russia.tv/article/show/article_id/7481/

		(19:00)	Also Available Internationally via Satellite and selected cable networks as NTV-Mir. Also local editions are broadcast in US, Canada and Belarus. ⁷
Russia Today	ANO TV- Novosti8	News RT Mo-Su (23:00)	RT has a global reach of over 700 million people in 100+ countries. ⁹ Available worldwide via Satellite and selected cable networks. Programs are shared with sister channels RT UK, RT USA that are broadcasted via terrestrial networks in USA and UK. Programs are also shared on sister channels in other languages (Rusiya Al-Yaum, RT Deutsch, RT Français).
TV Dozhd	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 ¹⁰
RBK	Pragla Limited (Cyprus) – indirectly controlled by Onexim (Mikhail Prokhorov) ¹¹	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. ¹²

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

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

http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/spisok_13012015.pdf

⁶ http://www.gazprom-media.com/ru/actives/index/area_id/1/id/1

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

⁸ ‘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>

⁹ <http://rt.com/about-us/>

¹⁰ <http://tvrain.ru/connecting/>

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

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

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
- 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

¹² http://rbctv.rbc.ru/about/static/general_info.shtml



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

Novorossiya (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)

Novorossiya

Donetsk People's Republic - Representatives

Donetsk People's Republic - Citizens

Luhansk People's Republic - Representatives

Luhansk 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 Kingdom
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 bulk of its prime-time news coverage to the activities of President Putin (3 hours 28 minutes). The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral and positive, with no negative coverage. The incumbent president also received a large amount of the so-called *direct time*.¹³ The next most covered monitored subject was the government (1 hour 28 minutes), followed by the Prime Minister Medvedev (1 hour 7 minutes). Also their coverage was only neutral or positive. As far as other subjects who were allocated relatively significant time of coverage, they included the Russian Army, the United Russia party and the governors who were all presented in a neutral or positive light.

On the other hand, the US Democratic and Republican parties as well as the US government, which all received more substantial coverage, were mostly presented in a negative light, with the exception of the Republican party that was at times presented also in a positive manner.

First channel acts as a government's mouthpiece. Its coverage of political developments is skewed towards authorities and lacks balance. First Channel reports extensively about activities of the president and government, but fails to report issues that might be challenging the positions of the authorities or their policies. Its journalists tend to express opinions in the news reports.

Russia 1

Similar to the *First Channel*, *Russia 1* also devoted most of its prime-time news coverage to President Putin (2 hours and 53 minutes). This coverage was only positive or neutral. Further, the most covered subjects which received comparable amount of coverage were Prime Minister Medvedev, the government and the Russian army. They received 55, 54 and 53 minutes of news airtime respectively. Their coverage was mainly positive or neutral.

¹³ *Direct time* means that a monitored subject speaks directly on camera.



The three next most covered subjects were: US Democratic Party, US Republican Party and US president which received 34, 24 and 22 minutes of news airtime, respectively. US Democratic party and US President were presented in a negative or neutral manner, whereas the US Republican Party was at times also presented in a positive light. None of the US actors received any *direct time*.

Russia 1, similarly as the First channel appears to serve the government as its PR agency and fails to comply with the basic journalistic standards. Its stories usually present the reality from a certain angle, while never presenting critical or alternative views. Use of pictures and music to increase emotional effect is common in the reports covering conflicts. Inflammatory language, and mixture of journalists' views and facts is not unusual.

NTV

Similar to the other two state-controlled channels, *NTV* (controlled by the state-owned company Gazprom Media Holding) allocated the largest single portion of its news coverage to the incumbent president who received 1 hour 46 minutes. Again, this coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral. The next most covered subject was the government which received 1 hour 19 minutes of the coverage which was mainly neutral and positive. As far as the other subjects which were received some more substantial coverage are concerned, the Russian Army was allocated 38 minutes, the United Russia 21 minutes and the prime minister 20 minutes. They were all presented in a neutral or positive light.

The next most covered subject was the Unites States which was allocated 42 minutes of mainly negative coverage. The European Union received some 36 minutes of airtime the coverage which was also mainly negative.

NTV also largely fails to offer information that would be alternative to positions of the establishment. Its reports lack balance and diversity of views. While TV channel tries to appear as more balanced, the used sources of opinions are vague and general; like 'experts say that...'. In the reposts on foreign affairs, the channel uses the same pattern as in the coverage of local political scene; it persistently presents (and focus on) few selected political actors while others are constantly ignored.

RBK

The coverage offered by the private TV channel *RBK* somewhat differed from the three above described TV channels, especially in terms of the tone of coverage. *RBK* also allocated less coverage to the president and more to the government. *RBK* allocated the bulk of their news coverage to the government (1 hour 50 minutes of airtime) which was mainly neutral. The second most presented subject was President Putin who received 59 minutes of the coverage and was portrayed predominantly in a neutral light. The third most presented subject was Prime Minster who was allocated 16 minutes of news coverage. Other subjects presented in *RBK* news programmes were: the European Union, the Local Governments, and the US Republican Party,

USA, US Democratic party, Russian President's administration and the US Government. The time they were allocated in comparison with the most presented subject was significantly lesser. They were portrayed primarily in a neutral light, with exception of USA which also received more significant portion of negative coverage.

RBK does not air a blatant propaganda, but it is far from being an objective source of diverse or critical views. It also fails to follow professional journalistic standards. Its reports, similarity as those presented by the previous TV channels, lack balance, mix opinions and facts or fail to allocate substantial airtime to important developments or to sensitive political or other issues.

Dozhd

Dozhd also allocated the largest amount of its news coverage to the president and the government which received 47 minutes and 44 minutes respectively. By contrast with the other TV channels, Dozhd offered a greater variety of views, with mostly neutral, but also positive and negative (critical) coverage. Similarly, the diverse tone of coverage was observed in case of other subjects presented, including the local government, the United Russia, the insurgents (opolchenci – separatists), the US Republican party, the prime minister, the US Democratic Party, the Russian army and Jabloko. In case of the insurgents, the portrayal was almost exclusively neutral or positive.

If compared with all other monitored TV channels, Dozhd is by far the most professional in terms of its compliance with journalistic standards and it also does not shy away from presenting critical views. However, it is also not free from occasional biases or flaws.

Russia Today

Russia Today (RT) focused primarily on institutions and affairs outside of Russia, presenting them overall in a very negative light. USA and Syrian rebels received the largest shares of coverage, 1 hour and 49 minutes, and 1 hour and 25 minutes, respectively. Both were presented overwhelmingly negatively. The third most presented subject was the Russian authorities (general) who were also portrayed in a rather negative light, but less so in comparison with all other subjects. Other subjects presented in RT news programmes were as follows: US Democratic Party, US Government, Terrorists, UK and UN.

3.2 Topics and top stories

On the *First Channel*, the most covered topic was the domestic *Politics* (20 per cent of coverage) – to a large extent due to the 18 September parliamentary elections. However, topics related to *Foreign Affairs (Political as well as Non-Political)*, each allocated 19 per cent) were the next most covered topics. This approach was usual also during the previous periods, as these topics received extensive coverage. MEMO 98 reports in the past periods concluded that there was a *trend of diverting attention from important domestic issues and challenges and focusing*

instead on the international affairs. The fourth and fifth most presented topics dealt with *business and economy* (8 per cent) and then *crime* (4 per cent).

As for the top (hot) stories, the First Channel focused primarily on the *conflict in Syria* (3 hours 16 minutes) that received more coverage than the 2016 *parliamentary elections in Russia* (2 hours 42 minutes). The next most covered hot stories were the *international relations* (2 hours 34 minutes), the *US elections* (2 hours 6 minutes), *Russian economy* (1 hour 19 minutes) and *USA* (1 hour 15 minutes). Other issues received significantly less airtime. Similarly, as during the previous periods of monitoring, the coverage of political and international affairs on the First Channel was one sided and heavily biased.

As for the coverage of topics on **Russia 1**, the situation was similar to First Channel, though the order of topics was different. The most covered topic was *Foreign Affairs – political* (21 per cent of coverage), followed by the local *politics* (18 per cent) and with a bigger gap followed the *Foreign affairs – non-political* (10 per cent). The fourth topic was *the crime* (8 per cent)

Regarding the coverage of stories, **Russia 1** adopted a similar approach to that of *First Channel* and devoted most significant portion of its coverage to the *conflict in Syria* (3 hours 34 minutes) followed by the *parliamentary elections in Russia* (3 hours 4 minutes), *International relations* (1 hour 57 minutes) and *US elections* (1 hours 41 minutes). The fifth most presented story was the *chaos in Ukraine* (59 minutes) followed by the *Russian economy* (59 minutes).

On **NTV**, like on First channel, the most covered topic was domestic *Politics* (28 per cent of coverage) followed by *Foreign Affairs - political* (18 per cent) and *Foreign Affairs – non-political* (12 per cent), and the fourth one was *Business and economy* (6 per cent).

As for the top stories, **NTV** similarity as previous TV channels prioritized *Conflict in Syria* (1 hour 41 minutes) closely followed by *Russian nationalism/imperialism/patriotism* (1 hour 40 minutes), *Parliamentary elections in Russia* (1 hour 17 minutes), *International relations* (57 minutes) and *US elections* (55 minutes). The sixth most presented story was the *Russian economy* (45 minutes).

On **RBK**, the most covered topic was domestic *politics* (26 per cent), followed by *business and economy* (21 per cent) and then *foreign Affairs - political* (12 per cent) and *foreign Affairs – non-political* (11 per cent), while the fifth most presented topic was the *Social issues* (5 per cent).

The **RBK**'s list of top stories is in contrast with all three above-mentioned TV channels led by the *Russian economy* (2 hours 19 minutes) and followed the *Parliamentary elections in Russia* (1 hour 20 minutes), the *conflict in Syria* (1 hour 18 minutes) and then the story of *Malaysia Airline flight 317* (40 minutes).

Dozhd focused its coverage on *politics* (32 per cent), followed by *business and economy* (8 per cent), *foreign Affairs - political* (8 per cent) and *foreign Affairs – non-political* (7 per cent).

In their coverage of the top stories, the channels clearly concentrated on one particular topic – the *parliamentary elections in Russia* (4 hours 41 minutes), followed by the *Russian economy* (1 hour 37 minutes) and the *conflict in Syria* (1 hour 9 minutes), *international relations* (53 minutes) and *US elections* (35 minutes).

Finally, **RT** topics largely concentrated on one topic - *foreign affairs - political* that received 44 per cent of overall news coverage. Further, *foreign affairs – non-political* (20 per cent) and *Politics* (12 per cent). Others were as follows: *Army/military* (6 per cent), *Minorities* (5 per cent) and *Media* (3,5 per cent).

RT's top stories also clearly focused on a particular story – the *conflict in Syria* that was allocated 5 hours 26 minutes, followed by *US elections* (2 hours), the *influx of migrants to Europe* (1 hour 15 minutes) and the *bias of the Western media* (42 minutes).

4 CONCLUSION

The three main Russian TV channels continued to show very limited range of views in their reporting of international and local topics and issues, thus depriving their viewers of receiving more objective and balanced coverage. Very similar content of these three channels and a complete lack of any critical views targeting government or challenging the performance of the authorities indicate that they all share the same objective - to promote the views of the authorities. RT, targeting audience outside of Russia, is on the other hand extremely critical of the foreign institutions and actors who are opposing the Russian government or who are perceived as such by the Russian foreign policy makers. It is unfortunate that the only channel offering diverse coverage of political actors -Dozhd - is not available in the regular networks and is accessible to only a limited number of viewers.