



Russian political scene in the media

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Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, the informational and analytical center of the Russian Union of Journalists, has been systematically monitoring the coverage of the Russian political scene in the selected media. This project is conducted with the support of MEMO 98, a Slovak based media monitoring organization.

Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations seeks to evaluate the mass media's performance in providing an objective portrayal of public affairs and in disseminating balanced information about the most important political developments in the society. The project's findings will be determined through a well-defined and rigorous methodology and are not intended to support any political party, but the integrity of the political and media environment as a whole.

The media should serve as a forum for exchange of opinions, public debate, confrontation and criticism, offering the general public a chance to gain a better understanding of opinions presented by individual political parties, the president and the government. By enabling the access for political subjects to communicate their messages and in presenting information about political parties and matters of political importance, the media serves as the primary source of information about politics.

The media should therefore follow the principles of journalistic ethics, objectivity, and editorial independence common in the democratic countries professing principles of freedom of speech and of the press, and it should resist potential outside or inside pressures leading to doctoring or adjusting stories which might favor or disfavor political entities. Principle of the freedom of speech requires of journalists, editors, producers and proprietors that they take responsibility for the content and form of their messages as well as consequences they entail.

The media should be assured by the government of the right to gather and report objective information without intimidation and of no arbitrary or discriminatory obstructions or censorship. State authorities should refrain from interfering in the activities of journalists and other media personnel with a view to influence their work.. Media management and owners should accept the principles of journalistic ethics and independence and they should not exert pressure on their employees to act at variance with these principles.

While all the media should offer responsible coverage, it is particularly incumbent upon State media to observe even more rigorous criteria since they are publicly funded. The citizens pay fees and the public media have therefore legal and moral obligation to serve interest of the general public, not partisan or private interests.

On March 1, Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations commenced the monitoring of five TV channels (State controlled *First Channel*, *Russia TV* and *TV Center*; two nationwide channels *NTV* and *Ren TV*) and four newspapers (two State newspapers *Rossijskaja Gazeta* and *Parlamentskaja Gazeta* and two private newspapers *Kommersant* and *Novaja Gazeta*) using qualitative and quantitative analysis¹. Quantitative analysis measures the total amount of time and space devoted to relevant political subjects in the monitored media outlets. The qualitative analysis evaluates whether the information about political subjects, the president and the government is positive, negative, or neutral in its content.

After four weeks of monitoring, Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations 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 that Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations will be issuing periodically.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **President Putin, the government and the ruling party United Russia had an overbearing presence in all the monitored nationwide TV channels.**
- **Of the seven monitored TV channels, five gave the ruling powers more than 85 per cent of their prime time news coverage.**
- **The coverage of President Putin on the three State-funded TV channels was exclusively positive or neutral in tone.**

State broadcasters

The State-funded broadcasters devoted the bulk of their prime time news coverage to the activities of the incumbent President, the government and United Russia. In the four weeks of the monitoring, the State-funded *First Channel* provided 91 percent of its political news coverage to the ruling powers. 71 percent of this coverage was assessed as positive and 28 as neutral in tone. In the same period, the opponents of the current establishment (Union of Right Forces, Yabloko and others²) received a combined total of only 2 percent of mostly negative coverage.

¹ The monitoring of the electronic media focused on the prime time news, the most important source of information. The monitoring of the print media, which will be presented in the next report, included all politically relevant articles.

² The category others consists of known persons who are not members of any registered political party such as Berezovskiy, Kasparov, Khodorkovskiy, Khakamada, Limonov etc.

The other two State-funded TV channels adopted a similar approach. For example: *TV Russia*, the broadcaster with a nationwide outreach, devoted altogether 88 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (19 percent), the government (53 percent), the ruling United Russia (14 percent) and the presidential administration (2 percent). This coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral in tone. By contrast, the political opponents of the current ruling powers (Union of Right Forces, Yabloko, Republican Part and others) received only 0,6 percent of such airtime, which was mainly negative in tone. The Communist Party (CPRF) received some 4 percent of the coverage, which was mainly positive or neutral in tone.

TV Center, a television controlled by the Moscow City Administration, allocated 90 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (31 percent), the government (42 percent), United Russia (16 percent) and the presidential administration (1 percent), of overtly positive or neutral tone. However, unlike the other two State-funded broadcasters, TV Center showed some negative coverage (8 percent) of the government. The political opponents of the current establishment and the Communist Party (CPRF) each received 2 percent of the coverage, which was mainly negative or neutral in tone.

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 subjects, the president and the government. While *NTV* (owned by State company Gazprom) generally adopted a similar approach to that of the State-funded broadcasters, *Ren TV* gave more airtime to the political opponents of President Putin and his ruling party United Russia.

NTV devoted 88 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (25 percent), the government (51 percent), United Russia (11 percent) and the presidential administration (1 percent). This coverage was, once again, mostly positive or neutral.

While *Ren TV*, another national private broadcaster, devoted the bulk of its prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (10 percent), the government (38 percent), United Russia (16 percent), it was much less than the other four nationwide TV channels. The political opponents of the ruling powers along with the CPRF received a combined total of 19 percent. The qualitative analysis also shows that this broadcaster was more balanced in its coverage of the government and the principal political forces. For example, the monitoring team evaluated that while 19 percent of the prime time news coverage was assessed as positive in tone, as much as 23 was assessed as negative.

Regional Media – St. Petersburg

The media situation in the regions varies significantly from more liberal to a very restrictive environment. Most regional media outlets are economically dependent on local

authorities. There was a wide divergence between the two monitored St. Petersburg TV channels' portrayal of the political subjects, the incumbent President and the state administration.

5th channel, a television funded by the St. Petersburg Regional Administration, allocated 94 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of pro-government forces, including St. Petersburg Regional Administration (63 percent), President Putin (11 percent), the presidential administration (7 percent), the government (5 percent) and United Russia (8 percent), of exclusively positive or neutral tone. By contrast, the Democratic Faction, consisting of Yabloko and Union of Right Forces, received only 4 percent of such coverage. This coverage was mainly positive or neutral in tone.

The privately owned *STO* provided its viewers with a more balanced coverage of the principal political forces and the State officials. In the four weeks of monitoring, *STO* allocated 17 percent to the government, 33 percent to the St. Petersburg Regional Administration, 9 percent to United Russia, 6 percent to President Putin and 3 percent to the presidential administration. The political opponents of the ruling forces, including the Democratic Faction and CPRF, received respectively 15 and 1 percent of the channel's prime time news coverage. The monitoring team evaluated that as much as 40 percent of the President Putin's coverage was negative in tone. The coverage of the government was also mostly negative.

Conclusion

This is the first of reports that Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations will be issuing periodically. Data from the first month of monitoring by CJES reveals that there are wide differences in the amount of time and the way political subjects are portrayed. Our data also shows that majority of the monitored media frequently neglects to offer Russian citizens opposing views on particular stories. 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 political subjects or State officials. The next report will also contain monitoring of selected newspapers.