



Russian political scene in the media

2nd report

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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 are determined through a well-defined and rigorous methodology and are not intended to support any one political party, but the integrity of the political and media environment as a whole.

On March 1, Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations commenced the monitoring of five TV channels (State-funded *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 *Komsomolskaia Pravda*) 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.

To date, monitoring has taken place over two periods, 1-31 March (the first monitoring period) and 1 April – 31 May (the second monitoring period). As for the print media, the monitoring covered three months – March, April and May. In the first monitoring period, CJES unveiled several disturbing trends in the way the Russian mainstream media covered political parties, the incumbent President and the government. In particular, the data showed that the monitored media neglected to offer opposition any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment. In particular, the State-funded media fails comprehensively to grant opposition significant airtime to express its political views. Based on the data from the second monitoring period, it is apparent that these data are not the result of short-term anomalies, but appear to reflect genuine trends in Russian media. Following is the second of the reports that CJES will issue through the project.

¹ The monitoring of the electronic media focused on the prime time news, whereas monitoring of the print media focused on all politically relevant articles.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Most of TV channels neglected to offer opposition with any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment**
- **Contrary to their public mandate, all monitored State-funded media showed heavy bias towards the State administration**
- **President Putin, the government and the ruling party United Russia received more than 91 percent of *1st channel* and *TV Russia* prime time news coverage**
- **The coverage of President Putin on the three State-funded TV channels was exclusively positive or neutral in tone**
- **The Russian print media offers a wider range of views than the nationwide TV channels**
- **State-funded newspapers showed their strong support to the ruling powers, largely ignoring any opposition views.**

State broadcasters

The State-funded broadcasters continue to devote the bulk of their prime time news coverage to the activities of the incumbent President, the government and United Russia. In the two months of the monitoring, the State-funded *First Channel* provided 93 percent of its political news coverage to the ruling powers. 99 % percent of this coverage was assessed as either positive or neutral in tone. In the same period, the opponents of the current establishment (KPRF, Union of Right Forces, Yabloko, Republican Party and others²) received a combined total of some 1 % percent of mostly negative or neutral coverage.

TV Russia, another State-funded broadcaster with a nationwide outreach, devoted altogether as much as 91 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (30 percent), the government (40 percent), the ruling United Russia (19 percent), the presidential administration (1 percent) and FSB (1 percent). This coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral in tone. By contrast, the political opponents of the current ruling powers (KPRF, Union of Right Forces, Yabloko, Republican Party and others) received only 1,5% percent of such airtime, which was mainly neutral in tone.

TV Center, a television controlled by the Moscow City Administration, allocated 84 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (33 percent), the government (24 percent), United Russia (25 percent) and the presidential administration (2 percent), of overtly positive or neutral tone. The political opponents of the current establishment received some 3 percent of the coverage, which was mainly

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

neutral in tone. The Communist Party (KPRF) also received some 3 percent of the coverage, which was mainly positive or neutral in tone.

Nationwide private broadcasters

Similarly as during the first monitoring period, *NTV* continued to devote the bulk of its coverage to the ruling powers. The channel gave 85 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of President Putin (25 percent), the government (44 percent), United Russia (13 percent), the presidential administration (1 percent) and FSB (2 percent). The qualitative analysis showed that while the coverage was, once again, mostly positive or neutral in tone, *NTV* depicted the ruling establishment in a more neutral way than the three State-funded broadcasters. However, similarly as the State-funded broadcasters, in its prime time news, *NTV* covered President Putin in an exclusively positive or neutral light.

In contrast, the second monitored national private broadcaster, *Ren TV*, showed a different approach. While the channel devoted the bulk of its prime time news coverage to the activities of President Putin (21 percent), the government (29 percent), United Russia (18 percent), it was much less than the other four nationwide TV channels. The political opponents of the ruling powers along with the KPRF received a combined total of 15 percent. The qualitative analysis also shows that this broadcaster was more balanced in its coverage of the government and the principal political forces.

Print Media

The Russian print media provides a wider range of views in comparison with the nationwide TV channels. While there are generally less strict criteria applied to the behavior of print media, the State-funded newspapers do have an obligation to serve interest of the general public. However, similarly as the monitored State-funded TV channels, the two monitored State-funded newspapers, *Rossiskaja Gazeta* and *Parlamentskaja Gazeta*, showed their strong support to the ruling powers, largely ignoring any opposition views. As for the two monitored private newspapers, *Komsomolskaja Pravda* adopted a similar approach as the State-funded newspapers, whereas *Kommersant* enabled its viewers a more balanced picture of the current Russian political scene.

State-funded newspapers

In the two months of monitoring, *Rossiskaja Gazeta* gave 88 percent of its politically relevant articles to cover the activities of President Putin (15 percent), the government (51 percent), the ruling United Russia (18 percent), the presidential administration (3 percent) and FSB (1 percent). This coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral in tone. By contrast, SPS received only less than 2 percent of such space, which was mainly neutral in tone.

Another State-funded newspaper, *Parlamentskaja Gazeta*, allocated more than half of its space devoted to politically relevant articles to one party – United Russia (53 percent).

This coverage was exclusively positive or neutral in tone. By comparison, independent MPs of both chambers of the Parliament, including Akhmedov, Dragunkina, and Nickolaev, received a combined total of 6 percent, which was mostly positive in tone.

Private Newspapers

During the monitoring period, *Komsomolskaja Pravda* allocated the bulk of its political coverage to cover the activities of President Putin (30 percent), the government (23 percent), the ruling United Russia (10 percent) and the presidential administration (3 percent). The qualitative analysis showed that while the coverage of the incumbent president, his administration and the party in power was mainly positive or neutral, the government received only slightly more positive than negative coverage. Two prominent parties, Rodina and KPRF, received only negative or neutral coverage.

Another private newspaper, *Kommersant*, devoted 78 percent of its political coverage to the activities of the government (38 percent), United Russia (15 percent), President Putin (22 percent) and the presidential administration (3 percent). However, *Kommersant* gave roughly equal proportions of positive or negative coverage of the above mentioned political entities. KPRF received 4 percent of the coverage, which was mostly positive or neutral in tone.

Regional Media – St. Petersburg

TV channels

Similarly as during the first monitoring period, there continued to be a wide divergence between the two monitored St. Petersburg TV channels' portrayal of the political subjects, the incumbent President and the state administration.

St. Petersburg Regional Administration funded 5th channel allocated 89 percent of its political prime time news coverage to activities of pro-government forces: St. Petersburg Regional Administration (57 percent), President Putin (12 percent), the government (11 percent) and United Russia (9 percent), of exclusively positive or neutral tone. By contrast, the Democratic Faction, consisting of Yabloko and Union of Right Forces, received only 1 percent of such coverage. This coverage was exclusively positive or neutral in tone.

The privately owned *STO* continued to provide its viewers with a more balanced coverage of the principal political forces and the State officials. During the second monitoring period, *STO* allocated 7 percent to the government, 29 percent to the St. Petersburg Regional Administration, 13 percent to United Russia and 4 percent to President Putin. The political opponents of the ruling forces and KPRF received respectively 35 and 2 percent of the channel's prime time news coverage. The monitoring team evaluated that as much as 20 percent of the President Putin's coverage was negative in tone. The coverage of the government was also mostly neutral.

Newspapers

In the three months of monitoring, St. Petersburg Regional Administration funded *St. Petersburgskie Vedomosti* allocated as much as 85 percent of its political relevant articles to cover the activities of President Putin (27 percent), the government (16 percent), the ruling United Russia (9 percent) and the St. Petersburg Regional Administration (33 percent). The qualitative analysis showed that while the coverage of the incumbent president and St. Petersburg Regional Administration was exclusively positive or neutral in tone, the federal government received roughly equal proportions of positive and negative coverage.

The privately owned *Delovoi Petersburg* was the only monitored media outlet to give more negative than positive coverage to the incumbent President and his administration. As for the tone of the coverage of other political entities, the Regional Administration and the government received slightly more positive than negative, whereas United Russia was devoted almost equal proportion of positive and negative coverage. By comparison, the Democratic Faction, consisting of Yabloko and Union of Right Forces, received some 5 percent of such coverage, which was overwhelmingly positive or neutral in tone.

Conclusion

It is becoming apparent that several disturbing trends in the way the Russian mainstream media covered political parties, the incumbent President and the government unveiled by the CJES monitoring are not the result of short-term anomalies, but appear to reflect genuine trends in Russian media. These trends include the fact that the monitored media neglected to offer opposition with any significant airtime and opportunities to challenge the political opinions of the current establishment. Furthermore, contrary to its public mandate, the State-funded media fails comprehensively to grant opposition significant airtime to express its political views. The results confirm that Russian media generally lacks investigative and critical reporting that would offer the public an in-depth analysis and assessment of political subjects or State officials.