

### MAIN TRENDS IN MEDIA COVERAGE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES IN UKRAINE IN 2014-2017

(based on NGO Detector Media's monitoring results)





NGO · Detector Media · Kyiv - 2017

Over the years, NGO Detector Media has been monitoring the quality of the news broadcast by central and regional TV-channels. Our organization considers monitoring not only as a tool for the news content quality improvement but also as a means of promoting media literacy among population, which is aimed at increasing its ability to resist media manipulations and impacts. Since only the demanding audience is able to inspire TV-channels to consider the interests of the owners along with the interests of society. After all, the constant political and informational turbulence, in which Ukraine appears to find itself in the past few years, raises new challenges and imposes additional responsibilities on the media.

This analytical report presents the 2014-2017 monitoring results of central private TV-channels; former state-owned TV-channels being crystallised into public broadcasters; a snapshot of Russian propaganda. A several years overlook gives a more extensive and clear picture of the media. There are several key factors that can significantly influence the format of the news aired by the Ukrainian TV-channels. These are the political environment that defines the position of media owners, the Russian propaganda that often brings transformation to the information field (regardless of the ability of Ukrainian journalists to resist this scenario) and the indulgent audience. Moreover, when interpreting the same facts in different ways, Ukrainian TV-channels create various realities, and this in no way assists the Ukrainian society to overcome the today conflicts.

These media issues are likely to be addressed by the Ukrainian community in the years to come. They require complex solutions and cannot be fought with efforts of an organization or a responsible media outlet.

Main trends in media coverage of socio-political processes in Ukraine in 2014-2017 (based on NGO Detector Media's monitoring results).

Special Report. - Kyiv: Detector Media, 2017. - 42 pages.

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NGO Detector Media has prepared a special final report based on the Ukrainian TV and radio channels monitoring results. The report outlines main trends in the coverage of socio-political news by Ukrainian TV-channels, including those undergoing the reform into public broadcasters, along with the impact on the newsroom editorial policy by the political environment and interests of media owners. Special attention was paid to the assessment of Russian propaganda media and main trends in their reporting about the events in Ukraine.

The special report was prepared by NGO Detector Media supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of NGO Detector Media; the conclusions and views expressed in this report might not reflect the official standpoint of the German Government.

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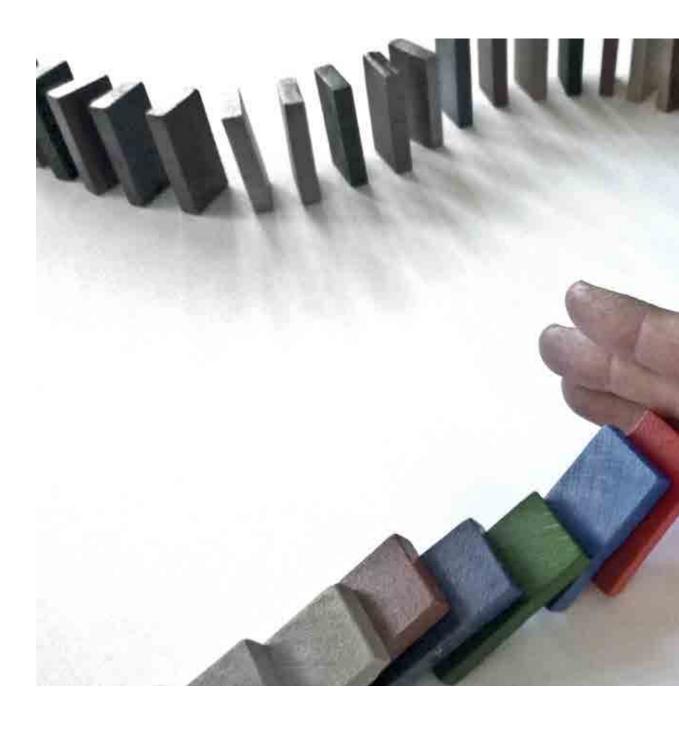
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For many years, the political standpoint of private central TV-channels in Ukraine has been and is currently being defined by the interests of their owners, regardless of who is in power. There is a lack of high-quality and unbiased news.



IMPACT OF POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL NEWS REPORTING POLICY OF UKRAINIAN TV-CHANNELS IN 2014-2017.

### **BACKGROUND**

On 3 September 2012, when inaugurating the 64th World Newspaper Congress and the 19th World Forum of Editors, the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych made a revealing slip of the tongue in his speech. "I urge journalists to maintain high ethical standards, adhere to the principles of objectivity and **political prejudice.**" – he said [1]. This lapsus linguae demonstrates the way in which for many years the media's role has been treated and understood not only by Viktor Yanukovych and his entourage, but in a broad sense by the Ukrainian political establishment, regardless of the party identification.

The Ukrainian media system was formed under the pressure of permanent political transformations. The establishment of the leading TV-channels in Ukraine, as well as large media holding companies, took place in the mid-1990s of the last century when the financial-industrial groups (named as oligarchic ones today), which accumulated their primary capital in a way often far from honest, were legitimized. Over the years of independence, these groups have matured and grown starting to influence lots of processes in the country; in effect, the business has merged with the politics. Those media that were bought or created by the mentioned oligarchic groups turned out to be a tool in the political struggles: in order to protect/hold power, to fight opponents/competitors, or to blackmail each other and state authorities [2].

Some Western experts come up with false conclusions assuming that the main bulk of pressure on the media and their editorial policy in Ukraine comes from the public authorities (no matter what political period is referred to). However, they discount the fact that the key mediaholdings comprising the largest TV-channels (according to all sociological surveys, television still remains the main source of socio-political news for Ukrainian citizens) are owned by oligarchs with their business-political interests, often competing with themselves, simultaneously adapting to and shaping the current political environment. As such, including media world, we observe the creation of conditional pluralism, or, according to Carothers, "formless pluralism" where "the competition between politico-economic groups and their political superstructures exists not exactly as a form of a widely recognized game, but as a survival strategy in a certain environment. In addition, several existing centers of power competing with themselves for authority and influence produce constant tension and confrontation" [3].

Diana Dutsyk

Actually, this did not allow any of the state authorities to build a rigid vertical of media resources management in Ukraine. Viktor Yanukovych and his immediate entourage failed in their attempt to monopolize the media space in the period from 2010 to 2014, with the onset of the Revolution of Dignity.

Thus, Ukraine entered 2014, the year of the Revolution of Dignity, the year of the Crimea annexation by Russia and the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine in Donbas, with a mixed (by type of ownership) media system. On the one hand, these are several large oligarchic media groups that have numerous audiences, and thus define the Ukrainian media market trends. On the other hand, it is a rotten system of the national media. The third player can be presented as a combination of small media (both traditional and on-line) belonging to small owners or editorial teams, who due to their limited audience, often poor quality and general inconsistency are unable to have a significant impact on the change of this environment as a whole.

For over three years, from 2014 to 2017, there have been serious changes in the national media market: actually, the state waived its media ownership. In 2014, following the adoption of the Law "On Public Television and Radio Broadcasting", the National Television Company of Ukraine (NTCU) (with all its affiliates) started its transformation into a public broadcaster. Also, in 2015, the adopted Law "On Reforming State and Municipal Print Media" envisaged denationalization of this type of media (currently, the first stage of the reform is under way).

However, the oligarchic media system and the key oligarchic media groups remained unchanged. Specifically, the largest of them are (June 2017 update) [4, 5]:

- Inter Media Group (the ultimate owner is Dmytro Firtash, Valeriy Khoroshkovskyi keeps a substantial shareholding, despite the announced sales agreement, Serhii Liovochkin has only 9% of the shares);
- 1+1 media (the ultimate owner is Ihor Kolomoiskyi, Ihor Surkis also keeps a substantial shareholding);
- Media Group Ukraina (the owner is Rinat Akhmetov);
- Star Light Media including STB, ICTV and Novyi TV-channels (the owners are Viktor Pinchuk and Olena Pinchuk);
- **UMH group** has the largest portfolio of print media and radio channels (the owner is the declared wanted oligarch Serhii Kurchenko).

Besides that, a few TV-channels should not be left unmentioned, since they in one way or another influence the political discourse in the country: **Channel 5** still owned by Petro Poroshenko, the current President of Ukraine; **112 Ukraine** channel which did not disclose its ultimate owner, and therefore has been the subject of intense speculation who it could belong to [6].

Recently founded by journalists and supported by Western donors **Hromadske TV** and **Hromadske Radio** do not fit into this oligarchic coordinate system. Though, they are not strong enough to compete with the oligarchic media.

Despite the adopted in 2015 law on media ownership transparency, the real owners of some media have remained shadowed so far.

As such, in the conditions of the oligarchic media system and the absence of a strong public broadcaster, on the one hand; the hybrid Russian war against Ukraine, on the other hand, having control over the quality of news broadcast by the central TV-channels is a crucial issue. Since, as mentioned above, television remains the main source of socio-political news for the citizens of Ukraine: according to the findings of the sociological survey conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) from 3 December to 12 December, 2016 at the request of NGO Detector Media, 87.1% of the respondents mentioned the central Ukrainian TV-channels as the main source of news covering the state of affairs in the country, the online media are in the second place - 40.7% which is a significant margin [7]. To influence the society, the politicians and state authorities often turn to the power of TV-channels.



## PROFESSIONAL COMPONENT:

# THE WAYS STANDARDS ARE VIOLATED AND TOPICS SUPPRESSED IN THE NEWS

For many years, NGO Detector Media has been monitoring the quality of the news broadcast by central and regional TV-channels. Our organization considers monitoring not only as a news content quality improving tool but also as a means of media literacy promotion among population, thus developing its ability to resist media manipulations and impacts.

### Methodology

The monitoring survey is carried out on the basis of the transcribed texts from the newscasts. The main (final) prime-time newscasts are evaluated (the unprimed newscasts – morning, noon or night – do not reach the widest audience).

The monitoring survey tracks:

- 1) materials featuring invited materials (censorship),
- 2) important topics suppressed in the newscasts,
- 3) information journalism standards observance by TV-channels: balance of views, efficiency, reliability, separating facts from opinions, accuracy and completeness of the information presented.

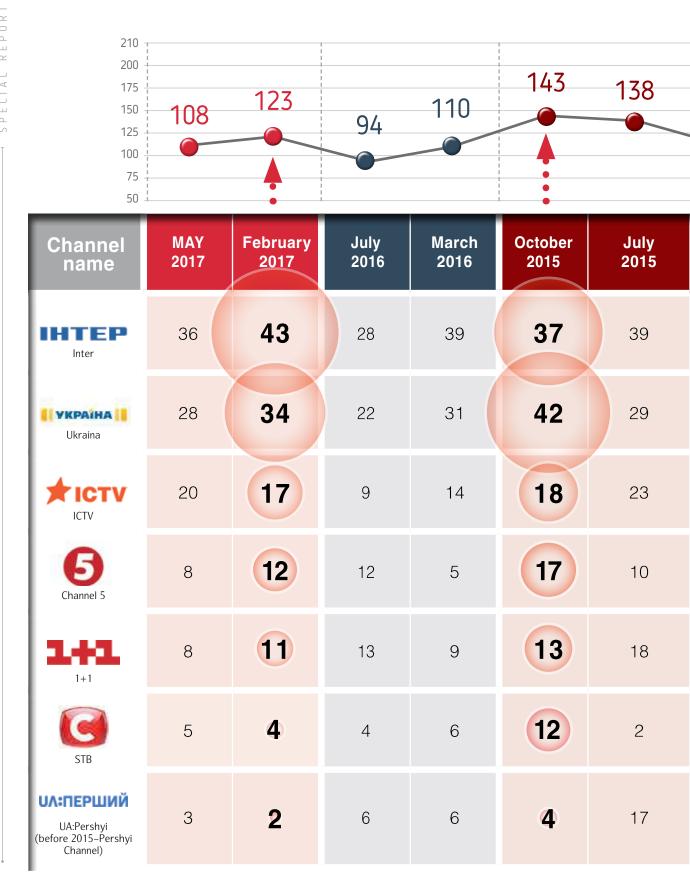
A detailed description of the methodology can be found on the MediaSapiens web-platform (osvita.mediasapiens.ua) in the Methodology Section (available at: http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/methodology/).

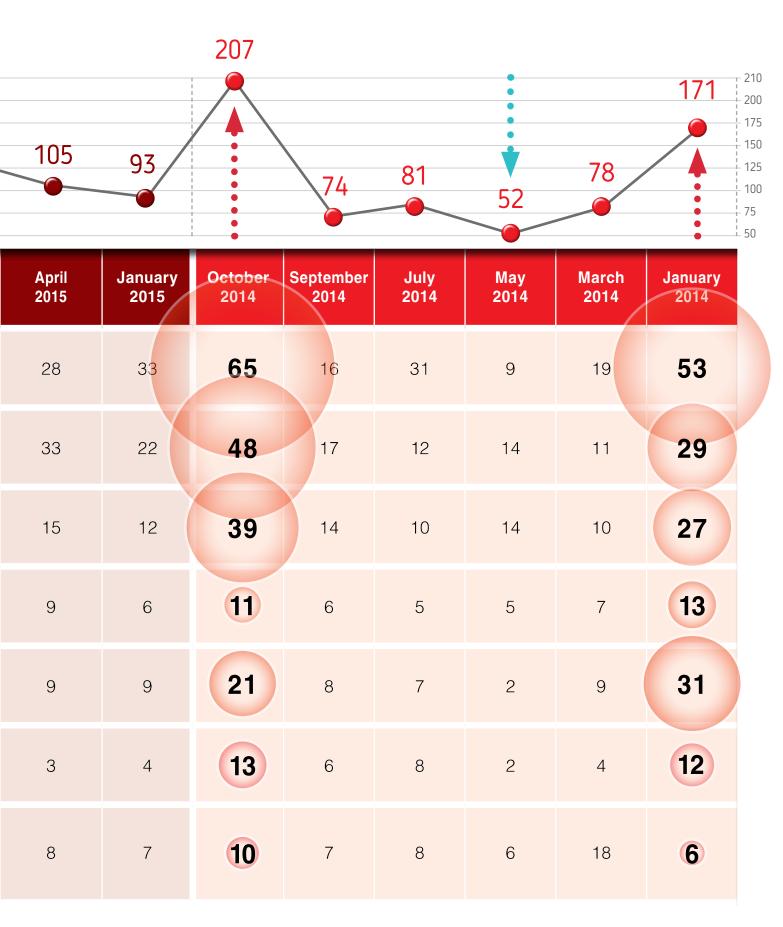
### Key Trends of 2014-2017

This report is a summary of the monitoring results obtained from daily TV news broadcast by central TV-channels with the largest audience over the period from 2014 to May 2017: 1+1, Inter, Ukraina, ICTV, STB, Channel 5. The infographics contain the data on UA:Pershyi (for details on the public broadcaster's content quality, see the next section of this analytical report) for comparison.

The events of late 2013 – early 2014 is the starting point for this report. On 21 November, 2013 the Ukrainian government headed by Mykola Azarov decided to suspend the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement preparation process. This led to protests on Maidan in Kyiv, and later in other cities. On 29 November, the

### Overall number of piece shaving the professional standards violation at may feature invited (or censored) materials:





then President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign the Agreement at the Vilnius summit. This decision fueled public protests. However, the point of no-return was crossed when the protesting activists and students had been severely beaten by the Berkut, the special squadron of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on the night of 30 November – 01 December, leading thousands of people to take to the Kyiv streets. The three-month confrontation with the acting authorities ended with Viktor Yanukovych runaway to Russia and the change of presidential and parliamentary power. The role of the media (both negative and positive) in this dramatic period of Ukraine's history has not been sufficiently evaluated and analyzed yet.

#### 

- In 2013, prior to the Maidan events, the state-owned Pershyi Natsionalnyi channel was the first violator of professional standards; the experts reported this channel to have the largest number of materials with the signs of being invited ("jeansa"). Channel 5 had the best performance, owned then as well as now by Petro Poroshenko [8].
- The largest number of professional violations were recorded during the periods of highest political activity:

**January-2014** (this period is remarkable for the shootings on Maidan in Kyiv during the Revolution of Dignity; the Verkhovna Rada, materially breaching the parliamentary procedure, adopts the dictatorial "Laws of 19 January" that restrict the freedom of speech, introduce such notions as "foreign agent", "extremist activity," etc.);

**October-2014** (the country goes through the extraordinary parliamentary election; traditionally, during the election period, the media increase the number of custom-made materials ("jeansa") promoting certain political parties and politicians);

October-2015 (the country goes through the local elections);

**February-2017** (an exception to the rules, since this month did not any notable political events, TV-channels owned by the representatives of the former Viktor Yanukovych team widely "tackled" the issue of the Parliament's incapacity, imposing on the society an idea of possible early elections).

- Inter and Ukraina channels owned by the former Viktor Yanukovych team members were anti-rating leaders (i.e. the worst standards violators) during the entire period indicated. In the Maidan protests period, only **Pershyi Natsionalnyi** channel, state-owned at that time, was ahead of the above noted ones, but when its transformation into the public broadcaster started with the change of power in 2014, its news became more qualitative and almost free of custom-made materials.
- The largest number of manipulations and violations relate to the coverage of Maidan protests in 2014. Pershyi Natsionalnyi channel (state-owned), Inter (owned by Dmytro Firtash/Serhii Liovochkin), Ukraina (owned by Rinat Akhmetov) presented information in a harsh unbalanced manner, in favor of the then government and President Yanukovych. Quite the opposite, 1+1 (owned by Ihor Kolomoiskyi) and Channel 5 (owned by Petro Poroshenko) openly took up the protesters' positions, so the misbalance here was falling to the other side, though not so frankly and not as much as the pro-government TV-channels [9, 10]. The editorial policy of these TV-channels was completely in line with the political views of their owners. Firtash, Liovochkin, Akhmetov are former members of Yanukovych team, whilst Kolomoiskyi and Poroshenko were in opposition to the then President.
- The rhetoric of Pershyi Natsionalnyi, Inter and Ukraina channels changed to neutral in a few days literally after the Yanukovych runaway from the country and appointment of Oleksandr Turchynov as the acting President. This fact only reaffirms the thesis on the ability of the political establishment (including media owning oligarchs) to mimic and quickly adapt to the political environment in order to survive [11].

- The presidential election 2014 was the only election over the last decade when the TV-channels kept apart from "jeansa" stories in nobody's favor. Although, the analysis of the newscasts of that period demonstrated the journalists' sympathy to Petro Poroshenko [12].
- At the outset of the Crimea annexation, Ukrainian channels unknowingly followed the lead of Russian propaganda when calling Russian militaries as "unknown", or "green men", or "self-defense of the Crimea", in fact using manipulative terms imposed by Russia.
- With developments being unfolded in the east, TV-channels kept on repeating the mistakes made when covering the Crimea annexation issue, by using neutral terminology towards separatists.
- Strong overall criticism of the government, and at the same time, absolutely uncritical coverage of the activities of President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Groisman, become trends of 2016-2017 [13, 14]. This gives grounds to assume that these persons might be in agreement with large media owners in return for certain preferences.
- Throughout the whole period, the TV-channel owners use newscasts to settle accounts with political opponents or business competitors. The war between the Firtash/Liovochkin and Kolomoiskyi groups sorting out their relationship directly in the newscasts of their TV-channels, either because of the conflict around Ukratransnafta company, or the one related to PrivatBank, was a showcase event [15, 16]..
- Following the ban of Russian TV-channels, the Ukrainian TV-channels often turned out to be the broadcasters of Russian propaganda messages. Inter channel was a leader here. The pro-Russian position was most apparent in coverage of decommunization related topics, the Donbas events and Russia's viewpoint. Thus, Inter broadcasts the most the pro-Russian messages about the damage caused by the economic "blockade of Donbas". The channel is also having a targeted campaign (like the Russian media) for accusing the Ukrainian leaders in corruption, whereas staying silent about Putin's corruptive environment or its owners, since one of them Dmytro Firtash was arrested in Austria for corruption charges; in the United States he has been accused of attempting to obtain permits for titanium extraction in India with the bribes for a total amount of \$ 18.5 million [17, 18].

## POLITICAL COMPONENT:

# THE WAY EDITORIAL POLICY IS CORRELATED WITH CHANNEL OWNER'S INTERESTS

Manuel Castells, a well-known sociologist and developer of the theory of information (network) society, in his work Communication Power, noted that the most important source of influence today is transformation of human consciousness. And these are media, the main suppliers of messages and symbols, that have the greatest influence on people's consciousness. This fact is actively used by politicians and oligarchs around the world. Ukraine is not an exception. However, in the absence of powerful, popular alternative sources of information such as public broadcasting and the main TV-channels of the country often form an irrelevant picture of reality. Interpretation of events gains in importance compared with the event itself, thus formatting a society's idea about this event or person. Channel owners are constantly taking advantage of media power when defending their businesses and political interests, imposing a corresponding vision of events and processes, and society has not yet learned to offset this process.

The monitorings by the experts of NGO Detector Media show clear correlation between the interests of large media owners-oligarchs and the editorial policy pursued by their channels. We will demonstrate this on the examples of four major media groups.



### Inter Group and its owners Dmytro Firtash and Serhii Liovochkin

Dmytro Firtash, one of the richest oligarchs in Ukraine, the co-founder of RosUkrEnergo, a scandalous gas distribution company, is currently under arrest in Austria on corruption charges. His partner Serhii Liovochkin, an ex-member of the Party of Regions, former head of the administration of President Viktor Yanukovych, is presently a member of the Opposition Bloc.

TV-channel Inter was in the lead as to the political standpoint of the Opposition Bloc since it was founded following the Yanukovych's runaway. Deputies of this political force commenting all events in Ukraine were shown almost on a daily basis in the channel newscasts; in particular, Yuriy Boiko and Oleksandr Vilkul paid frequent visits as commentators [19, 20]. For example, in May 2017, the Opposition Bloc was on the PR top list among other political forces: 41 pieces (34 of them on Inter channel, 7 - on Ukraina channel). Any other political force is not so much broadcast by Inter. In addition, in certain periods the channel's news contained items aimed at promoting new political projects created by Serhii Liovochkin – the Party of Development and the Institute New Ukraine.

The on-air visits by the channel's owner, Dmytro Firtash, (Serhii Liovochkin is a rear guest) are frequently observed. His arrest in Austria was described as a matter of political nature. The TV-channel has by no means ever revealed the wealth of its owner, as well as the corruption charges against him in the USA.

Inter, together with TV-channels belonging to Viktor Pinchuk and Rinat Akhmetov, makes up a conditional coalition opposing another oligarch, lhor Kolomoiskyi. The newscasts of this TV-channel often suggested pieces targeted either directly against Kolomoiskyi and his people or against his business (against the Privat group before the PrivatBank nationalization, or against Ukrnafta). These materials, being of a frankly accusatory nature, completely lacked the balance of views, had numerous harsh journalistic conclusions and evaluations along with a large number of facts from unproven sources [21, 22]. "Oligarch wars" had also a political component. After all, during the Maidan events, or the Crimea annexation, and from the start of the Russian aggression in Donbas, Kolomoiskyi took a frankly patriotic position, unlike, for example, Rinat Akhmetov who cozied up to separatists, or the Opposition Bloc representatives who had to justify their actions connected with Maidan shootings.

Another constant target of criticism at Inter channel was Narodnyi Front (People's Front Party), and above all else, Arsenii Yatsenyuk, the ex-Prime Minister, and Arsen Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs [23]. Thus, in May 2017, this TV-channel broadcast 16 news pieces against this political force, with 12 pieces broadcast every month of April and March. The channel owners and the aforementioned politicians repeatedly exchanged accusations against each other in the public spotlight. Specifically, Firtash believed that the channel suffered intimidation from the Minister of Internal Affairs Avakov, they did not broadcast any pro-Russian news, and he himself had no influence on the editorial policy. Nevertheless, the tone and presentation of Narodnyi Front in Inter newscasts were absolutely correlated with the standpoint of its owner.



### 1+1 media and its owner Ihor Kolomoiskyi

Starting from 2014, Ihor Kolomoiskyi took a proactive, patriotic, sometimes even radical position, and this was followed by the newscasts of his TV-channel 1+1. Following his appointment as the governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast in March 2014 (he held this position for a year - until March 2015), the Kolomoiskyi's media actively promoted his activities as a governor. He also became the character of Russian as the epitome of "radical Uke" who swept into power.

Consequently, both Kolomoiskyi and 1+1 blamed other oligarchs, in particular Rinat Akhmetov and his people, for the Donbas war.

Kolomoiskyi also actively used his media to promote his political interests or protect business.

For example, 1+1 extensively defended Kolomoiskyi's partner and companion, businessman Henadii Korban, arrested for the alleged creation of an organized criminal group and the kidnapped chairman of the State Land Agency Serhii Rudyk. On 31 October 2016, the TV-channel devoted almost the entire news release to this event, which included comments supported with Petro Poroshenko's critical judgments concerning the said arrest and in favor of Korban himself [24, 25].

Kolomoiskyi's resignation from the governor's post, Korban's arrest – these events changed the initial channel's loyalty the current government to the critical approach. In fact, with his media Kolomoiskyi ran a war on several fronts, in such a way protecting his business and own interests – against the government and a number of other oligarchs, first of all against the Firtash-Boiko-Liovochkin group.

In 2016, due to the nationalization of PrivatBank, which belonged to Ihor Kolomoiskyi, these trends were only reinforced in 1+1 releases. When covering this topic, the channel omitted the reasons for nationalization associated with the bank's position, focusing on the infowar and pressure put upon the group [26]. The TV-channel also criticized Valeria Hontarieva, the then head of the NBU [27]. Traditionally, 1+1 newscasts produced pieces aimed at protecting its owner's business interests, for example, in the air transportation market: the channel disputed the introduced in Ukraine cheap low-costers obviously because of the fact that Kolomoiskyi is the owner of UIA – the monopolist in the Ukrainian air transportation market [28].



### Star Light Media and its owner Viktor Pinchuk

In recent years, the oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, who is the son-in-law of the former President Leonid Kuchma, tried to refuse from being so frankly opposed to the acting government, unlike the owners of Inter and Ukraina.

As such, this position was represented in the newscasts of the three TV-channels comprising the group: ICTV, STB and Novyi. They were also trying to maintain neutrality, and, in comparison with Inter and Ukraina, were better at complying with professional journalistic standards, though in particular periods ICTV-channel used excessive PR practices in favor of individual political forces or politicians, such as the Opposition bloc [29], or the Prime Minister Volodymyr Groisman [30].

To this end, whenever possible, these TV-channels appear to have advertised Pinchuk and his family, including all his projects, political and cultural. The example is the Davos Ukrainian breakfast. Though, this 2017 year, following Viktor Pinchuk's controversial column in The Wall Street Journal where he proposed to compromise with Russia, in particular, to hold elections in the ORDLO area [Separate Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts] and abandon the idea of joining EU and NATO, this event was ignored by the top Ukrainian politicians. However, Pinchuk's channels forgot to report this fact [31].

Pinchuk's channels extensively cover the activities of his father-in-law, Leonid Kuchma, who is the member of the Minsk negotiation group. In fact, he often provides comments on the events related to the situation in eastern Ukraine, even if there are no serious reasons to do so.

At some points, there were some situational overlaps of Viktor Pinchuk's and Rinat Akhmetov's positions, namely, in the confrontation with Ihor Kolomoiskyi. Then ICTV and Ukraina TV-channels would unanimously criticize the latter, as in the case with blocking volunteer transport battalions carrying humanitarian aid provided by the Akhmetov Foundation in 2014 [32].



### TV-channel Ukraina and its owner Rinat Akhmetov

Being nearly the richest Ukrainian oligarch with an odious reputation, having the status of the "master" of Donbas, Rinat Akhmetov belonged to the main sponsors of the Party of Regions, and was the one who had a great influence on Viktor Yanukovych. Following the latter's escape, Akhmetov found himself in a very uncomfortable position, but he made a number of false decisions which cost him personally as well as the whole country.

At the beginning of the war in Donbas, the political standpoint of Rinat Akhmetov, who effectively supported separatists and urged "to hear Donbas", was also expressed in the newscasts of the TV-channel Ukraina. The bulk of manipulations and interpretations (which were also correlated with the messages of Russian propaganda) were broadcast by this channel in 2014, from the beginning of the Crimea annexation, and later – Russian aggression in the eastern Ukraine. Specifically, the on-air broadcasts repeatedly hosted the participants of separatist meetings with Russian flags, the journalists called for "establishing a dialogue with South-East", even fake news were spread about the "burned alive Berkut officer" in Lviv, together with other Russian mythologemes [33].

Today, TV-channel Ukraina, as well as Inter, actively promotes the interests of the Opposition Bloc and the representatives of the former Party of Regions on the whole.

Every day, the channel's newscasts have one or even few (with the record of 9 pieces in one issue) pieces advertising Rinat Akhmetov's Foundation and the humanitarian aid brought by the Foundation to the regions in war [34, 35, 36]. However, not even once did the channel's journalists say on air that part of responsibility for the dramatic events unfolded in the east of the country lies also with their owner.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The monitorings of the main national TV-channels carried out by NGO Media Detector on a regular basis clearly demonstrate that private TV-channels disregard the interests of society and give the first place to the interests of their owners, thus, leading to a distorted presentation of reality. For the very reason, this situation in combination with the news quality decrease has led to a significant decline of confidence in the central Ukrainian TV-channels in recent years, as confirmed by various sociological studies. So, according to the results of the sociological survey carried out by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, the dynamics of confidence in the Ukrainian media is negative, showing a drop: from +26% in 2010 to +2% in 2015.

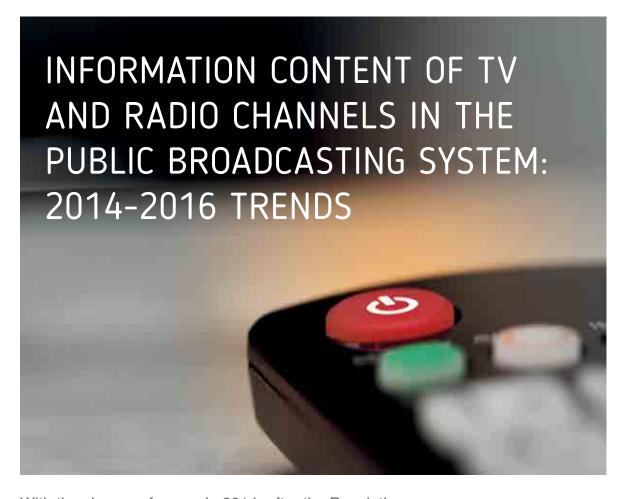
Apparently, in the context of aggressive informational space Ukraine has been experiencing recently and with the dominance of oligarchic media in the market, there is a great need to expedite the reforming process of the public broadcasting system channels. In parallel, media literacy among various social status groups should be actively promoted. It would raise the society's demand for the high-quality content, thus encouraging TV-channels to cater to the needs of the audience rather than just to their owners.

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With the change of power in 2014, after the Revolution of Dignity, new opportunities opened up in Ukraine for the establishment of a public broadcaster being derived from the system of state-owned broadcasters. This reform had no success in the Viktor Yushchenko years, due to the lack of sufficient political will, and in principle was impossible to be implemented under the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych whose people considered the media as a tool for holding power and, therefore, made a lot of effort to monopolize the Ukrainian media.

The need for stablishing an independent and efficient Public Broadcaster in Ukraine has become particularly relevant. Amid the oligarchized media market and the information product quality degradation, aggressive Russian propaganda, it is up to the Public Broadcaster to be a model for observing professional standards, objective reflection of reality and – just as importantly – consolidation of the Ukrainian society around common values.



### Diana Dutsyk Public Broadcasting Reform: Antonina Mnikh How It Started

The regulatory framework for the establishment of public television in Ukraine was set up by the Verkhovna Rada [Parliament] with the adoption of the Law "On Public Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine" on 17 April 2014. According to this law, the Public Broadcaster (formally – the Public Joint Stock Company "National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine", or PJSC NPTRCU) evolved from a number of state-owned TV and radio companies, both central and regional. At present, PJSC NPTRCU includes: central TVchannels UA:Pershyi and Kultura, 26 regional affiliates, and the radio channels of Pershyi, Promin and Kultura. In addition, SE Studia Ukrtelefilm, in accordance with amendments to the law on public broadcasting added in May 2016, shall be transformed into a public joint stock company and merged with PJSC National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine.

The Law "On Public Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine" was amended in 2015/2016. These amendments regulated the issues of property, advertising, legal status, etc. of the Public Broadcaster.

On 7 April 2015, the Public Broadcaster was presented to the public. A new brand UA:Suspilne was introduced then, the TV-channel's logo was changed live to UA:Pershyi as well the Ukrainske Radio's call sign.

During this presentation, Petro Poroshenko, the President of Ukraine, signed the Law "On Amending Certain Laws of Ukraine on Public Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine" (Draft law No. 1357) which in fact enabled the establishment of PJSC NPTRCU [1].

"Ukraine has been waiting for this law for 23 years. Either the government lacked the will or there was almost always no desire to deal with this issue, since the government has always sought for control over the media world and thought that introducing the public television simply meant releasing the genie out of the bottle. This is the price that the government has to pay for the democracy", the President said.

Furthermore, Petro Poroshenko mentioned: "Now we are starting a very promising road from Pershyi Natsionalnyi to BBC. Hopefully, the news will also be professional and objective" [2].

### The news: how broadcasting of the TV and radio channels undergoing the reform changed over the period from 2014 to 2016

During the specified period of time, the non-governmental organization Detector Media (formerly Telekritika) had regular monitorings of the news broadcast on the TV and radio channels to be reformed into the public broadcasting system.

As of today (at the time of drafting this report), there are no uniform formal requirements to the quality of the information content produced by a public broadcaster. The elaboration of guides for the journalists intended to work in a public broadcaster's system is one of the challenges to be met by a new team headed by Zurab Alasania, the elected chairman of PJSC NPTRCU (on 10 April 2017, the Supervisory Board of PJSC NPTRCU based on the contest results elected Zurab Alasania a Chairman – author's note).

However, the evaluation of the news quality was carried out in line with the methodology developed by the experts of NGO Detector Media. The key evaluation criteria are:

- adherence to the professional standards (accuracy, efficiency, completeness, balance of views, separating facts from opinions, reliability);
- absence of suppressed topics;

absence of materials featuring invited materials ("jeansa").

Before the change of power in Ukraine in 2014 following the escape of President Viktor Yanukovych to Russia, the national broadcasters were totally controlled by the government and the president. The local (regional) state-owned television and radio broadcasters were also influenced by regional leaders (governors). Hence, this approach determined their editorial policy and the way of reporting about the key socio-political events of the country. The situation altered after the change of power: the state-owned channels entered the process of reformation into the public broadcasters. The approaches to the news coverage were some way revised.

### **UA:Pershyi**

Pershyi Natsionalnyi (since 7 April 2015 – UA:Pershyi) had a symptomatic reporting of the Maidan protests in Kyiv during the Revolution of Dignity. This TV-channel appeared to choose topics, facts and comments in such a way that they would not contradict the official version of the events presented by the authorities in the person of Viktor Yanukovych. In their newscasts, the journalists of Pershyi Natsionalnyi completely or almost completely hid the facts showing the excessive use of force against protesters by the government (from the facts of using fire-arms and unjustified violence against those detained by security forces to the judicial prosecution of the wounded and often simply random people). The confrontation chronicles focused more on the death toll among the security forces rather than among the protesters. Also, during the whole period of protests, Pershyi Natsionalnyi uncritically (in particular, in an unbalanced way) presented various statements by the authorities members, whereas the responses from the opposition or representatives of the protesters were principally or completely suppressed. When covering the reaction of western countries to the Ukrainian situation, the journalists of Pershyi Natsionalnyi used only those expressing extremely mild and diplomatic assessments of the then Ukrainian government [3].

Although, in March 2014, it took the national TV-channel a few days to completely change its position heading towards the new power as represented by the acting President Oleksandr Turchynov (whom they recently biased when he was in opposition). Pershyi Natsionalnyi started producing materials predominantly containing opinions of new officials, and the standard of balance of views tilted to their side. However, at that time Pershyi Natsionalnyi suppressed lots of topics revealing the offences committed by the previous government [4]. It is therefore evident that the TV-channel journalists who were accustomed to working under the "official discourse" always imposed by the government in previous periods, even in the absence of pressure could not change their attitude to work, since the new government took power after the Revolution of Dignity.

The events of the winter of 2014 were covered in the same way by the majority of state-owned TV and radio broadcasting companies in the regions (in particular, being described as rebellions attended by a radical marginal contingent) [5].

On 25 March 2014, Zurab Alasania, who was greatly supported by the public and media community, was appointed to the post of Director General of the National Television Company of Ukraine by the new government headed by Arsenii Yatseniuk (elected as Prime Minister on 27 February 2014).

NGO Detector Media's experts started tracking positive changes in the newscasts produced by Pershyi Natsionalnyi. As such, during the presidential election campaign of April-May 2014, Pershyi Natsionalnyi, unlike the oligarchic TV-channels, completely refused to accept invited stories ("jeansa"), as well as "black PR" to be used against certain candidates. When releasing newscasts at this TV-channel, the journalists also tried to adhere to professional standards, although the complaints about the quality of news were still observed [6, 7].

Finally, Pershyi Natsionalnyi, and later on UA:Pershyi, managed to stick to this line in 2015 and 2016: the air was fully cleared from custom-made materials, the number of suppressed topics reduced, the channel improved its news quality. However, the adherence to standards was still in question, and from time to time

experts noticed the so-called "parquet" in the newscasts (uncritical coverage of the activities of the President, the Prime Minister or other high officials). As an example, in 2015, the monitoring conducted by NGO Detector Media noted that the poorest compliance with the standard of completeness of information, as well as separation of facts from opinions, was in the newscasts produced by the journalists of UA:Pershyi. At the press conference held on 22 October 2015, when sharing thoughts about the process of raising standards, Daria Yurovska, Deputy Director General of UA:Pershyi, said that it was quite easy to get rid of "jeansa": "To get rid of "jeansa", you should simply not produce it". However, she explained that it appeared difficult to comply with the standards of completeness and balance because it took time to collect all viewpoints, though she believed this should not be an excuse, since "if we want to build a public broadcaster that would lead the way in the media environment, we must set the highest standards for ourselves" [8].

### As such, over a three-year period the following changes have taken place at UA:Pershyi:

- the relations with the authorities underwent changes: despite the inertial desire of representatives of the government or political forces to influence the content of UA:Pershyi, the journalists of this TV-channel managed to maintain the distance remaining relatively neutral in coverage of the socio-political news;
- placement of invited materials of political or commercial nature ("jeansa") was abandoned;
- the number of suppressed topics gradually reduced every year, the TV-channel presented a really complete news picture of the day in 2016;
- however, experts record the so-called "parquet" in the newscasts (uncritical coverage of the activities of the President, the Prime Minister or other high officials);;
- improvements in the standards observance, though the failure to comply
  with the completeness of information (this commonly relates to the lack of
  details and facts about a particular event) and the reliability (a large number of
  fuzzy or overgeneralized references to information sources) standards remains
  a crucial issue;
- on the whole, the TV-channel still demonstrates the insufficient quality of its information content.

### Regional affiliates (formerly – RNTRC [Regional National Television and Radio Companies]

As already noted, the majority of local state-owned television and radio companies reported about the events of the winter 2014 in the same light as the central channel Pershyi Natsionalnyi, playing nice with the then regime of Viktor Yanukovych. Even upon the end of the Maidan protests, the state-owned television and radio companies in the east and south of the country continued presenting these events as a rebellion calling their participants a radical marginal contingent; this could not but affect the public mood in the concerned regions having inspired the Russian Federation to fuel the anti-Ukrainian sentiments and support (the military as well) to separatists in the eastern Ukraine.

It is much harder for the regional broadcasters, unlike UA:Pershyi, to go through reforms, and thus to change approaches to working with news content.

The main reasons for that are:

- insufficient professional level of local journalists, which can partly be attributed to extremely low wages (with the lowest rate of salaries in the media market which in the dollar equivalent varies from \$ 100 to \$ 200 per month);;
- the lack of positive team competition (because of low wages, hardly anybody wants to work in this system, the staff normally retained is either of preretirement age or inexperienced youth);



- the need to survive in the conditions of long-term political pressure put by local and central governmental bodies (this leads to the self-censorship, and the lack of critical coverage of the authorities' actions);
- "jeansa" practices (producing custom-made content that brings additional revenues to local broadcasters, which allows to meet certain extra-budget needs of local editors offices), and the local broadcasters see no harm in that.

So the experts of NGO Detector Media have more comments to the news broadcast by the regional affiliates rather than to the newscasts of UA:Pershyi.

Experts record that during the period from 2014 to 2016 the outright "jeansa" materials promoting the top public officials and local influential politicians were repeatedly observed in the news of local broadcasters.

For a little while, the situation was improved due to the events of February 2014 and aggressive public refusal to accept the pro-government "jeansa" stories, and even the presidential campaign 2014 could not increase the number of custom-made materials. They reduced by half (up to 5-16% on different channels), though for a short while. Within a few coming months, having recovered from social upheavals, the state-owned broadcasters being accustomed to working with playbooks, reversed to thoughtless direct broadcasting of pieces devoted to the activities of the top officials. These newscasts were usually incomplete, unbalanced, irrelevant to the local audience and provided no valuable information for the residents of certain localities.

As such, the political "jeansa" returned to the screens of regional state-owned broadcasters a few months after the Revolution of Dignity – with the names of politicians, political flags and centers of influence changed.

However, this time the regional broadcasters prioritized the interests of their local officials. We therefore note the mimicry in the news production with the signs of invited materials: now these pieces presented the leaders of a specific region or city, accompanied in their trips by journalists from the regional affiliates, and instead of covering the issue addressed in a respective meeting, just mentioned its subject, etc.

For instance, according to the monitoring results of October, 2014, only one of the five assessed regional state-owned TV-companies – Sumy RNTRC - did not use "jeansa" at all. The rest of the RNTRCs produced "jeansa" issues mostly of a "parquet" type [9]. The channels broadcast "parachute" scenes beamed down. They showed (as a rule, without any reference to a specific region) Petro Poroshenko, his wife visiting the ATO zone, the ministers of the Yatseniuk government and the Prime Minister himself. Volodymyr Groisman also featured, this time on the background of a banner with the symbols of the Petro Poroshenko Bloc when presenting the Presidential Strategy-2020 in Vinnytsia. On the whole, from 19 to 25% of the news broadcast on the four regional TV and radio companies covered by the monitoring in the reporting period were of a "jeansa" type.

The monitoring of the last week's news of the then parliamentary campaign



(the early parliamentary election in Ukraine was held in the autumn of 2014 – ed.) had symptomatic findings about five regional state-owned TV and radio companies: Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Sumy, Zaporizhzhia and Vinnytsia. Despite the regional specifics, all these channels had several trends in common. First of all, this is a strict self-censorship applied to all issues concerning the coverage of the authority's actions. The RNTRC journalists often practiced the "parquet" format of reporting about the officials of all ranks. Moreover, such information was brought to the level of official statements made by the authorities, or broadcasts from numerous meetings. Normally, they have one speaker who actually is the main truth holder: i.e., the Mayor, the Governor, the Prime Minister or the President.

The tendencies of late 2014 prevailed also in 2015. When analyzing the January news content of the regional television companies in Odesa, Kharkiv, Kherson, Cherkasy and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts, the experts noted no changes in their information policy: the recorded previous year's rate of 10-25% of custom-made materials kept in 2015. The pro-government "parquet", especially the news related to the central authorities, became even less motivated and meaningful. "Reporting" pieces covering the meetings attended by officials in the format of "it (i.e. the authority) works" migrate from month to month [10].

It was also evident that the government had no intention to lose its influence over the RNTRC resource just before the local elections in October 2015. So, depending on the extent of influence the governors had in the regions, the state-owned broadcasters explicitly made it clear who was master in the house. The newscasts promoted officials as well as close to them people's deputies.

Whereas right after the Revolution of Dignity the RNTRC's newscasts presented almost no stories aimed at promoting the interests of certain political forces, in 2015 the experts noted more pieces in favor of the pro-government party – the Petro Poroshenko Bloc "Solidarity".

However, in 2016 gradual changes were under way. When considering the news content they created, we see two remarkable tendencies: the materials with the signs of an invitation hardly vanished, but they were mostly of a "parquet" nature. And during some months, the experts noted the "jeansa" free news produced by the Do TeBe channel from Donetsk and OTB channel from Kharkiv; the unbiased content was constantly broadcast by UA:Sumy with their Khmelnytskyi colleagues showing similar results, etc.

Nevertheless, the share of "parquet" materials was still critical. However, the experts of NGO Detector Media noted that the materials of this kind came out not because of the apparent intention of journalists to please the officials, but because of lack of professionalism in the news preparation along with neglect of information journalism standards, in particular, ensuring a balance of opinions and viewpoints and completeness of information.

As for the "jeansa" content which could promote somebody's commercial interests, such stories were almost in low regard among the NTRC regional affiliates.

Despite the progress demonstrated by regional broadcasters in the gradual abandonment of the custom-made content, there was no progress in compliance with the standards of information journalism, the experts say.

The 2014-2016 news monitoring results showed that the professional standards compliance level had not significantly improved, ranging from 1.7 to 5.2 (out of six possible points) with averages of 3.9-4.4 points. These TV-companies demonstrated the growing awareness of journalists about the criteria of information journalism per se, but they lacked efficiency and commitment from the management staff of regional companies requiring strict compliance at the local level.

#### Consequently, the main trends of 2014-2016 are:

A decrease in custom-made content and a change of its nature: the outright political "jeansa" replaced with the pro-government "parquet", mostly for the benefit of local authorities representatives.

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- A decrease in the number news pieces about the top public officials irrelevant to the local audience.
- Insignificant volume of "jeansa" in the NTRC regional affiliates' newscasts.
- The regional broadcasters' information policy and the TV-companies management position as to custom-made content broadcasting are not homogeneous, have regional peculiarities and range from total rejection of "jeansa" to tolerance and friendship with the government.
- No progress in the professional standards observance, the news are still of low quality.
- Only one of the local companies the Sumy affiliate of the National Television Company of Ukraine began broadcasting under the logo "UA:Sumy" since 1 January 2016 (the main requirement for obtaining such a logo by a local broadcaster is the news quality standard observance). The rest of the companies did not receive this logo during the specified period



### Ukrainske Radio

In 2016, NGO Detector Media, for the first time in 25 years, monitored the news produced by Ukrainske Radio. The experts noted the incompliance with the standard of balance and completeness of information as the main problem in the news content on the radio station. In addition to the balance violations (normally, in favor of the authorities), the monitoring recorded a large number of evaluative judgments used by the journalists in their newscasts [11, 12].

Having analyzed the broadcast schedule of Ukrainske Radio, the NGO Detector Media experts made a number of comments to the line of information programs [13].

#### The main comments are:

- the most of the news pieces have violations of the basic technological principle of the news presentation, being the imitation of the spoken language structure. It was apparent that radio presenters borrow event coverages from information agencies, web-sites, press-releases, etc., they are copied into a newscast without any adaptation, so such news resemble an expanded newspaper article or a web-site post rather than radio news;
- there is a disproportion in reporting about the most crucial social pieces both on domestic and foreign subjects. 80-90% of airtime is allocated to the events in Ukraine while the share of international events is only 10-20%;
- the journalists prefer two genres: an information message and a correspondent's narration combined with some interview elements. Sometimes they have an archaic genre of a speech in front of a microphone (a monologue presentation of an expert opinion about a certain event, phenomenon, process, etc.). The newscasts are lacking for such genres as reportages and interviews which by no means would add some dynamism, vitality and dialogueness.

### CONCLUSIONS

From 2014 to 2016, the reformed NTCU and its regional branches were progressively approaching the public broadcaster format. The newsrooms made some positive progress in introducing the news reporting standards, the conditionally invited content are being gradually abandoned.

However, the pace of these changes is extremely slow, and the results achieved are unstable.

Therefore, quite evident is a need for further monitoring of the content of channels within the public broadcaster system, a meticulous analysis and public coverage of achievements and shortcomings in their work as well as methodological assistance, trainings, professional master-classes, etc., in order to establish professional approaches in the formation of information content common for the public service television.

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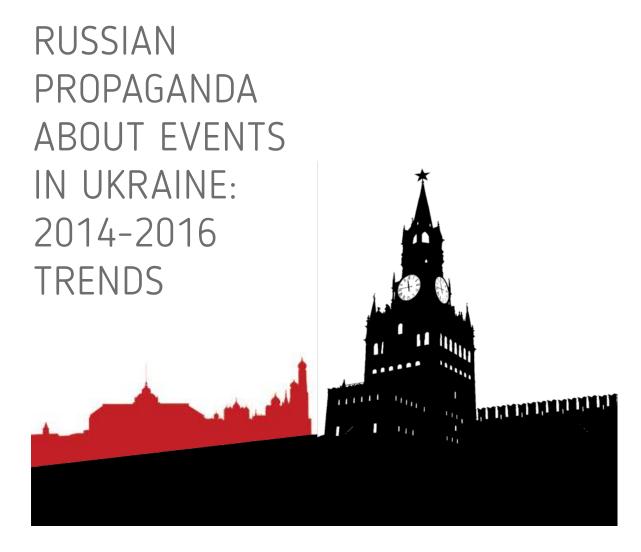
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Propaganda efforts of the Russia-controlled media (printed and online) in terms of reporting about the events in Ukraine during 2014-2016 were an important tool for legitimizing and implementing of Russian plans to undermine the unity of Ukrainian society and destroy the Ukrainian state. In some cases, the political impact of such propaganda was as important as the Kremlin's military decisions. This is especially true for the Crimea annexation period. At the same time, without a clear strategy from the Russian decision-makers, the manipulations were becoming less acute and turned into the routine, ritual practice of naming "friends" and "foes" of Russia, "opportunities" and "threats" that arise in Ukraine against the RF. The propaganda nature of the Russian media efforts over these years has two distinctive features: the monotony of messages and synchronous spread of messages through all available channels.

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### Petro Burkovskyi

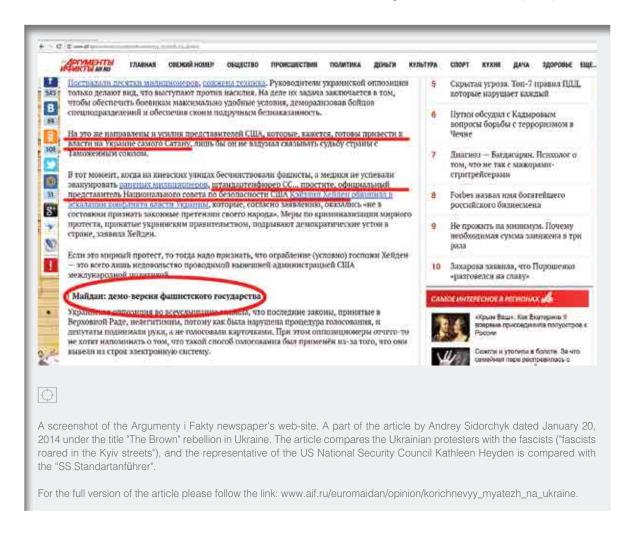
In terms of chronology, we can see several major phases of Kremlin's information attacks against Ukraine:



### December 2013 - February 2014

December 2013-February 2014: major efforts are aimed at discrediting the protest movement and inciting hostility between locals of different Ukrainian regions. For internal and international audiences, they repeat almost every day the messages about the presence and later the predominance of "fascist ideology" and "fascist methods" supporters among the EuroMaidan's protesters. The identification and support of the pro-Russian forces and politicians go along with the stigmatization and humiliation of anything that opposes Russia.

The pro-Russian orientation are compared to the forces of law, rule of law and development (special ops unit Berkut, the industrial, highly developed regions and cities in the east and south of Ukraine), and the protest forces are chaotic and decaying, depending on anonymous EU and the USA "puppeteers". Since then and till the end of 2016, they are constantly citing the "examples", "evidences", "proofs" of various forms and scale of Western interference in the Ukraine's internal affairs. For example, the official information from the US Department of State on the amount of US aid for the development of democracy in Ukraine of \$ 5 billion over the whole period of Ukraine's independence is repeated. Russian mass media use this figure without mentioning the time frame of assistance, calling this assistance a Maidan prerequisite.





### Late February-March 2014

Late February–March 2014: information special operation accompanying the military operation of the Crimea occupation. The major difference from the previous stage: massive release of fake news about the deadly threat by the Maidan victors to all those who identify themselves with Russia.

At the same time, the servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and their families serving in the Crimea suffer the informational pressure: there are news of the Crimea's massive and "popular" resistance to the new Ukrainian authorities; there are multiple traitor declarations calling the military to "stand with the people"; the aggressive actions of the RF's special forces are being disguised and, at the same time, the stabilizing role of the Black Sea Fleet, who can count on the support from compatriots" in Sevastopol and Crimea, is being underlined; the crucial role of "volunteers" (Cossacks, bikers, anti-Maidan people, former Berkut officers, self-defense activists) in defense of the Crimea and victory over the "Kyiv junta" is being emphasized. The RF President decision regarding possible use of the Armed Forces in the territory of Ukraine is mentioned solely in the context of a possible response to Western interference in the Ukrainian events.

This kind of a struggle against the "fascist forces" in the Russian media's version becomes the main factor distinguishing the Crimea locals from the rest of Ukrainian citizens. Media build a separate identity of the "Crimeans" as a part of the "Russian people" as opposed to the "Ukrainian people." This operation produces an alternative elite from minor, little-known pro-Russian leaders in Crimea (Aksyonov, Chalyi). They are given the right to speak on behalf of the "Crimeans", to express the will of the "whole people," to justify this "will" through the referendum and the "reunification" of the Crimea and Russia.

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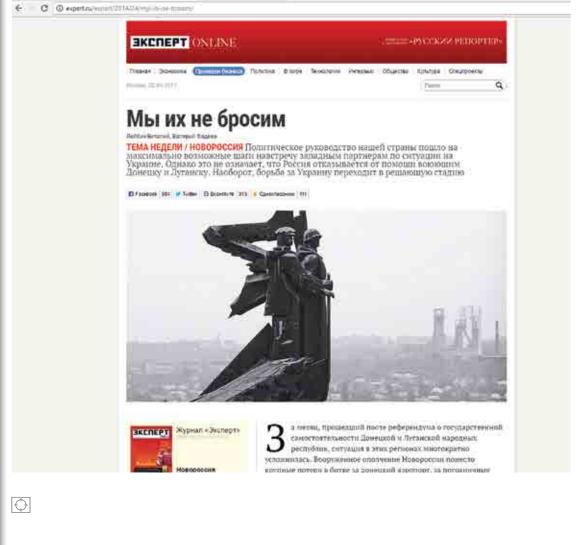
### April-June 2014

April-June 2014: the information special operation covering the interference of Russian special services and special-purpose units in civil unrest in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. Having a successful example of the separate "Crimean identity" construction, the media efforts set to the creation of a separate "Novorossian identity." Such actions are authorized by Vladimir Putin directly who at the press-conference in April 2014 outlines the imaginary boundaries of "Novorossia" – from the Kharkiv oblast in the east to Odessa oblast in the south.

The already mentioned "law-abiding" and "hard-working" features are accompanied by such identity traits of command and constant use of Russian language, cultural and social integration into the "Russia's space", the Orthodox faith and the commitment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate. With the protest intensification and first violence escalations and armed clashes, the carriers of this new "Novorossian identity" are characterized as more humane, having better mental and physical development, deeper loyalty to traditional family values (love for children, long life, respect for the elderly people, and heterosexual orientation), greater honesty and peaceful disposition compared with representatives of other regions of Ukraine and EuroMaydan participants.

As the Russian TV-channels at that time were well-represented in the cable networks of the eastern and southern regions, it is fair to say that the broadcasting of such messages was intended to encourage citizens to get mobilized against the new Ukrainian authorities, to convince them of the threats

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A screenshot from the web-site of the Expert Russian business magazine. The magazine issue No. 24 (9 June -16 July, 2014) had an article that became the topic of the issue "Donbass is the heart of Russia"; it presented a detailed plan to destabilize the Donbas situation and ways of joining Russia (the authors of the article suggest the scenario that was actually implemented by the Russian authorities later, in particular, the organization of the "insurgents", Russia's humanitarian aid to the local population, the establishment of "DPR/LPR" financial system, etc.). The authors also persuaded their audience that "the question should be about the actual re-establishment of the state of Ukraine."

For the full version of the article please follow the link: http://expert.ru/expert/2014/24/myi-ih-ne-brosim/.

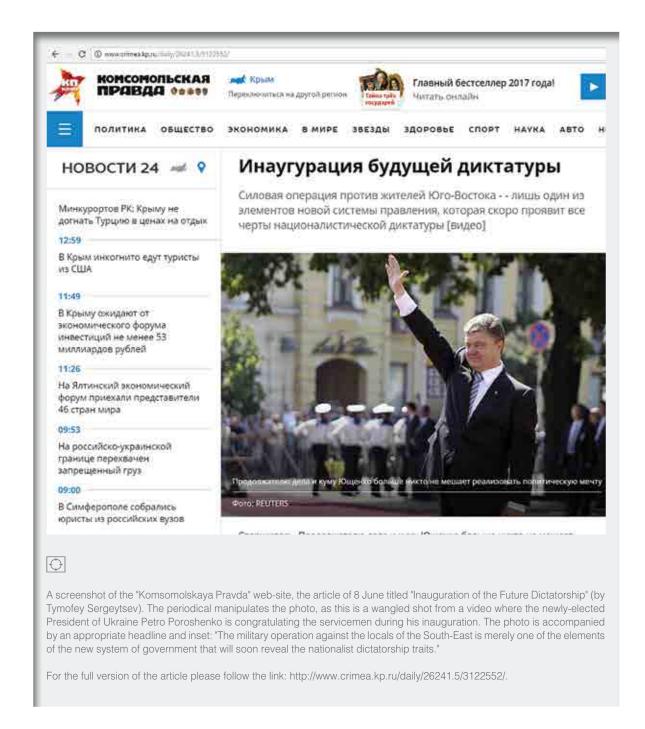
to their identity from the citizens of other regions, and to seek for protection either in violent actions or in assisting to the RF representatives.

Like in the Crimea, the Russian propaganda starts promoting alternative "public opinion" leaders who should lead the pro-Russian movements. At first, former members of the Party of Regions, its representatives in local councils, mayors, directors of enterprises are in focus. But their constant hesitation and persecution of their own interests force Russia to resort to new methods of "elite cultivation."

At this time, they revive the term **"insurgents"** that has clear connotations of the heroic struggle of the "Soviet people" against the German aggression during the Second World War, so that to mark and at the same time to justify the rebellion against the Ukrainian state. They introduce a meaningful marker of "insurgents" – the **St. George Ribbon** that since the mid-2000s has been actively used by the Russian authorities to popularize their version of the Second World

War events in the former USSR territory. From now on, this ribbon is getting a new meaning: a symbol of the new struggle of the Russian people against the allegedly real "fascists" in Ukraine. The actions of the "insurgents" are presented as "exploits" following the feats of Soviet soldiers and partisans; such stories are widely circulated and used to recruit volunteers and to provide with the ideological justification of the "voluntary" presence of Russian servicemen in Ukraine.

It is from the 'insurgent' leaders, the citizens of Russia, the Kremlin propaganda begins shaping the "Novorossia" leaders (Igor Strelkov, Igor Bezler, Nikolay Kozitsyn); they are entrusted to vocalize the goals and objectives among the Russia supporters in Ukraine: from federalization to the establishment of a new state in the Donbas area. They are legitimized, in particular, for contacts with foreign media and for mentioning in Russian media (RussiaToday, Sputnik) for foreign audiences. They launch the process of "bottom-up" establishment of



"public authorities" and disreputably "democratic" procedures of will-expression in the form of "referendums" for self-determination of "peoples" of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. It is worth noting that these "referendums" are targeted at the inhabitants of the Ukraine's administrative-territorial units and not to the media-invented construction of "Novorossia". It is obvious that the informational and ideological coverage of the rebellion outpaced significantly the information situation on site so the Kremlin curators had to make adjustments along the way and, at the same time, to spread messages understandable both for the Russians and for the Donbas Ukrainians through the same channels.

The term "insurgents" also served to legitimize the guerrilla tactics against the Ukrainian troops and, at the same time, to disguise professional sabotage methods of the special units of the RF Armed Forces, in particular, the Russia's military intelligence service. They are hiding in all possible ways the facts of captured Russian servicemen, agents and deep-cover agents of Russian special services or of recently produced Russian weapons as confiscated by Ukrainian law-enforcement officers from the "insurgents".

At the same time, they are demonizing the new Ukrainian authorities, enlists and volunteers who begin fighting the separatists in the east and south of Ukraine. To this end, they turn to hyperbolizing of the influence and significance of right-wing radical organizations like "Svoboda" ("Liberty") and "Pravyi Sector" ("Right Sector") that have allegedly taken control over the public authorities. The Russian media even compare "Pravyi Sector" to the Nazi special unit SS, scaring with mass repressions and massacres against the Russian-speaking population. Subsequently, the very mention of 'pravosek' (right-sector member) in the information pieces or news reports becomes a sufficient evidence of the involvement and responsibility of the Ukrainian authorities in the most incredible crimes and incidents.

The Odessa tragedy on 2nd May 2014 becomes a turning point for the establishment of the image of ultra-right organizations. The fatalities in Odessa House of Trade Unions are used to level the fire and death toll in the Kyiv House of Trade Unions on 18-19 February 2014.

This is a period when the Russia media start making active use of mistakes and errors of new authorities. For example, the most popular stories of that period are: no sure information about the investigation of Maidan crimes, incompetence and faulty economic and social decisions, exaggeration of radical nationalists' intentions to have forced Ukrainization under the pretext of decommunization (mentions of Lenin monuments dismantling), new authority corruption.

There is another direction of such information efforts: reports about mass war crimes committed by Ukrainian servicemen. To make this task easier another World War II term is reconstructed – the "punisher" (castigator). This is an umbrella concept used to denote the Nazi war crimes against the USSR's peaceful people; now it is used to describe any real or fake facts about actions. At the same time, the term "punisher" is used the most often about Ukrainian volunteer squads that were officially integrated in the National Guard of Ukraine. As a result, by late 2014, new clichés "punisher", "pravosek" (right-sector member) and "national guard" are used almost as synonyms, complementing and substituting each other regardless of the content of messages.

Even more, the Kremlin directs personal information attacks against some Ukrainian politicians seen as its most fierce opponents. To this end, they use negative clichés and stereotypes of the Russian mass consciousness: a bias against representatives of the newest Protestant churches and cults that brainwash the population (against Oleksandr Turchynov acting President of Ukraine from 23 February till 7 June); traumatic memory of the first Chechen war (against the leaders of "Svoboda", UNSO, "Parvyi Sector"); anti-Semitism (against Igor Kolomoiskyi, Ukrainian oligarch, owner of 1+1 Media Holding); hostility against the rich (against Igor Kolomoiskyi, Petro Poroshenko). Since then such techniques of humiliation, demonization of certain representatives of the Ukrainian establishment become a permanent element of the Russian information space.



4

### July 2014 - February 2015

July 2014 - February 2015: suppression and denial of the facts of armed aggression against Ukraine and the support to separatists, information support to favorable for Russia conditions of putting an end to the Donbas conflict. During this time, the Russian authorities had to respond to the unexpectedly high level of mobilization and resistance from the Ukrainian people and troops, and to go more intense to earn the loyalty of the Donbas locals. The most difficult and most important task is to conceal the use of regular military units of the Armed Forces of Russia against the Ukrainian troops, the provision of large-scale military, technical, consulting and training assistance to the rebels. On the other hand, the Kremlin uses mobilization, patriotic messages to prepare its people for an open war with Ukraine scenario.

This period is marked with the most reports by the RF central periodicals and TV-channels correspondents from the territory controlled by separatists and Russian troops. One of the main goals is to show the aftermath of shelling, tremendous details of the civilian deaths, harsh living conditions of citizens blocked by the Ukrainian forces, the "evidence" of mass executions of "insurgents" and "civilians" by Ukrainian "punishers". The Russian mass media simultaneously with the Kremlin (the President Vladimir Putin, the Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the RF Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, the Presidential Chief of Staff Sergey Ivanov, the Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov) begin describing and identifying the situation in Ukraine as a "genocide", in particular, against the "Russian-speaking population". The permanent repetition of this term in central periodicals and on TV, on the one hand, justifies the Russia's support and condolences to people as about the rebels and, on the other hand, serves as a potential justification of open Russian armed intervention in the Donbas developments in the eyes of the Western audience.

The names of Ukrainian volunteer squadrons: Donbas, Aidar, Azov, Shakhtarsk (Tornado) become new anchor symbols of the "genocide" policy. It is worth noting that after the llovaisk mousetrap the Donbas squadron mentions vanish. The most attention is focused on the units with foreign citizens sharing the ultraright, xenophobic views (Azov), or fighters accused of crimes and tortures of Donbas civilians (Aidar, Tornado).

Along with repeating of the hidden threat of open force, the RF is trying to avoid the public outcry about the events and facts confirming the involvement of the Russian regular troops in battles against the Armed Forces of Ukraine and volunteer battalions. So they turn to the methods of information blockade and "plausible denial" are predominantly used (e.g., when over ten paratroopers were captured during the llovaisk mousetrap, they spread the version that the paratroopers "got lost" during the military training exercises in the Rostov oblast).

The involvement of Russian citizens as volunteers must be explained by their participation in multinational volunteer squadrons along with the Serb, Czech, Spanish, French, and even American people, or membership in so-called paramilitary "non-governmental" movements or radical parties such as the Don Cossacks or the "international detachments" of the former national-bolshevik party of Eduard Limonov beyond the control the Russian officials.

Further, the Kremlin starts reducing the information activity of the first "Novorossia leaders" associated with the RF special services in favor of local rebel leaders (Aleksandr Khodakovsky, Yevgeny Kononov, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, Alexei Mozgovy, Igor Plotnytsky, Aleksandr Bednov, Pavlo Dryomov) who were citizens of Ukraine. These "speakers" are used to spread messages that "insurgents" seized all the weapons of the Ukrainian army; about successful military operations against the larger but demoralized Ukrainian army; about the importance of "humanitarian aid" and the participation of "Russian volunteers" in the battles on the side of "insurgents"; about the reestablishment of peaceful life in the settlements "liberated from Ukraine". On

several occasions, the propaganda revealed true intentions of the aggressor: after the Malaysian Boeing shot-down and during the shelling of Mariupol on 24 January 2015, a number of Russian information sources (LifeNews and TV Center) reported a "DPR" offensive on Mariupol. Later on this information was removed or substantially corrected by means of dissemination of unconfirmed facts about the involvement of the Ukrainian military in these incidents [1].

At the same time, there is a clear identification of the Ukraine's events as a "civil war" that was provoked by the Western intervention during the Maidan and keeps being stirred up with the US and EU support to the new Ukrainian authorities. They are forcing the idea that **the "Ukrainian scenario" is an illustrative example of the West's intentions regarding Russia in case of internal problems or riots against the authorities.** These are mainstream messages in late 2014 – early 2015, when the Russian population starts feeling the economic recession. In this context, the Kremlin, and Putin personally, imposes on the audience a causal link between the Russia's attempts to have an independent policy and protect its interests in the former Soviet Union area and the West's desire to "dissolve Russia" following the example of Yugoslavia and to immerse the country in economic depression through the sanctions (Vladimir Putin's press-conference of 18 December 2014) [2]. From the point of the Kremlin's view, such behavior of the West confirms that the charted course, regarding Ukraine in particular, is correct.

Meanwhile, in order to distract attention, the TV, press and the Internet start spreading information about the economic crisis in Ukraine (energy, food and banking) and growing chances of a "nationalist third Maidan" so Ukraine as a state might disappear. Such a fake comparison effect is used by propaganda to present the Russian reality as much better, more stable, and more predictable.

In addition, the Russian media are intensely pointing at the RF leaders as the main peacekeeper and initiator of realistic peace plans. They are claiming that it is Putin who managed to conclude the first and second Minsk agreements that stopped the bloodshed and shelling of the Donbas settlements. Whereas the main blame for the cease-fire breaking and combat actions provoking is put on the Ukrainian side: the national radicals and politicians seeking for making use of the war to seize the power or to win the parliamentary election.

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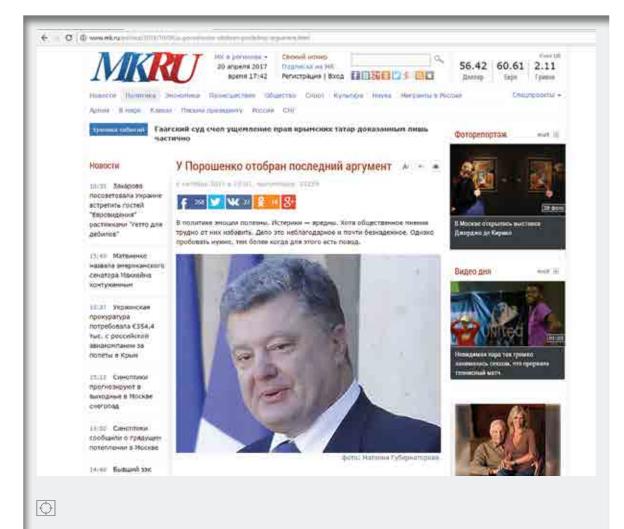
### March-August 2015

March-August 2015: information pressure on Ukraine and Europe regarding the full satisfaction of Minsk agreements conditions.

This is a kind of transition period when the **attention is getting shifted from the situation in the Donbas region to the international and Ukraine's internal context of the war.** At the same time, the Ukrainian topic in the RF information space is becoming a part of a wider campaign – getting the Russia's population prepared to a long confrontation with the West, regardless of the Crimea issue and Donbas situation.

On the one hand, Russia is shown as the only consistent participant in the peace process doing its best to persuade other Normandy Format participants – Germany and France – to take the US independent stand and to force Ukraine to adhere to the terms of peace. There are more reports about European politicians and political forces who advocate lifting of sanctions against Russia and resuming of cooperation; the impact influence of Russian counter-sanctions against the EU is exaggerated. The propagandists artificially promote the interpretation of the peaceful Minsk process time frame: either by the end of 2015 Ukraine fulfills the political requirements and implements a constitutional reform that recognizes the "special status" of the Donbas, or "self-proclaimed republics" are going to take action. And they consider the options of "liberation" of the whole territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts from the Ukrainian troops and the independent existence line.

On the other hand, since March 2015 and later on, they keep on discrediting the Ukrainian president as a member of the Normandy Four and a party to peace negotiations. For example, in light of the clash of the "Pravyi Sector" fighters with an armed group of the people's deputy in Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia), Russian mass media are predicting a rapid armed coup in Kyiv, and separatist leaders urge the Right-Sector members to agree upon peace and spheres of influence in Ukraine. This campaign reached its climax with a bloody clash near the Verkhovna Rada on 31 August during voting in the first reading of the amendments to the Constitution on a special status for certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Even more, Putin interpreted the 31 August events as the Ukraine's inability to comply with the Minsk agreements; this point is picked up by all central Russian-TV channels and periodicals, and it was being repeated by March 2017. For example, Channel One the evening news on September 6, 2015 gives the following Putin's quote: "If we are talking about the Minsk agreements implementation – I would like to remind that the Constitution amendments must be coordinated with the Donbas; the law on elections to local authorities must be coordinated with the



A screenshot of the Moskovsky Komsomolets web-site. The text is rich in phrases "Kyiv orange squash", "maidanned up beau monde", etc. An article by Aleksei Chesnakov of 6 October 2015 says: "Yes, Ukraine is a defective state Russia will still have to deal with. You can't pick and choose neighbors. Yes, Poroshenko is a liar but he is not the worst option against his competitors. Ukrainian society has fallen into such decay that it is easy to imagine Turchynov or even Lyashko at this post. The Ukrainian game for Russia is a long game where every step has many dimensions. Moreover, now this game is in full swing."

For the full version of the article please follow the link: http://www.mk.ru/politics/2015/10/06/u-poroshenko-otobran-posledniy-argument.html

Donbas; the amnesty law must be adopted. But it is not. And the law on a special status of these territories should be also implemented. It has been voted, but its implementation is postponed again. All of these four cardinal terms of political settlement are not fulfilled, unfortunately, by our today's colleagues in Kyiv, they are simply not being fulfilled. As for these tragic events, I believe that this has nothing to do with the Constitution changes. Because everything that they are offering us today as a change is of absolutely declarative nature and does not change the structure of power in Ukraine. What we are seeing today is another version of the political confrontation in Ukraine. And the Constitution changes are used exclusively as a pretense of exacerbation of the political power struggle."

In addition, the Russian propaganda is still one of the tools to assist armed aggression against Ukraine. In particular, in May-June and August, with the intensification of combat actions near Mar'inka and Shyrokine, where the Ukrainian troops managed to repel the separatist offensive and to hold their positions, the number of reports and publications devoted to military actions in the Donbas and "violations" of the cease-fire regime by the Ukrainian Army grows. Moreover, the successes of the Ukrainian military are concealed while reports of victims of massive shelling by Ukraine are spread around.

Main conclusion of the information activity during this period is the intrusion of an idea that the 'self-proclaimed republics' will not be given to Ukraine under the West's pressure, and that 'DPR/LPR' are getting more and more similar to other unrecognized states like Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia actually being under the Russia's wing.

6

### September 2015 – July 2016

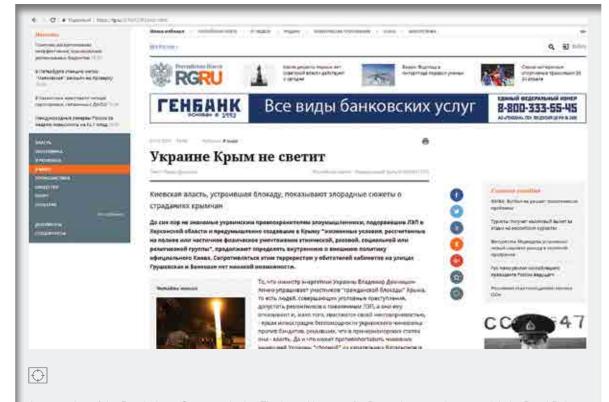
September 2015 – July 2016: information coverage of the Russia's switch from full confrontation with the West to gradual establishment of cooperation and de-escalation. The Russian military actions in Syria, the confrontation with Turkey after the Russian bomber shot-down, attempts to create an international coalition with the participation of Russia to combat the "Islamic State" overshadow the messages from Ukraine. There are no new messages in terms of quality but the old ones repeated stubbornly:

- the authorities in Ukraine are illegitimate and controlled by the profascist politicians and the US 'external management";
- Ukraine is not able to fulfill the Minsk agreements and strife for peace;
- Ukraine is at the edge of falling apart due to social and economic problems causing new round of the "civil war".

At the same time, there is quite a number of topics being actively concealed. With more and more obvious military presence in Syria, the Kremlin does not give up on rejecting accusations of armed aggression against Ukraine. Stories to discredit the OSCE observers who report about shelling by separatists are one of the instances of such information work. Instead, the Russian media are trying to present Ukraine as an "aggressor". The pretext is the civic blockade of the Crimea and the power supply shutdown of the annexed peninsula (November-December 2015).

And since the launch of the Syria action, the attempts to construct a "Novorossia" identity almost cease. **However the propaganda activity for the fabrication of the "peoples of DPR/LPR" is getting more intense.** For this purpose, they use alive and dead insurgent leaders as examples of "real" Donetsk and Luhansk locals. They setup a kind of "DPR/LPR" martyrology that is supposed to justify further struggle for the independence of these entities from Ukraine.

It is symptomatic that along the new identity constructing, the Kremlin



A screenshot of the Rossiyskaya Gazeta web-site. The issue No. 272 of 2 December 2015 has an article by Pavel Dulman "Ukraine is not gonna have Crimea". The inset says: "Intruders that have never been identified by the Ukrainian law enforcement bodies and that have blown up the power line in Kherson oblast and deliberately created "living conditions meant for the full or partial liquidation of ethnic, race, social or religious group" in the Crimea keep on shaping the domestic and external policy of the official Kyiv. Residents of bureaus in Hrushevskoho and Bankova streets have no faintest chance to resist to these terrorists." Similar messages were transmitted by other Russian media.

For the full version of the article please follow the link: https://rg.ru/2015/12/02/krim.html

practically conceals the facts of economic relations and smuggling between the occupied areas and Ukraine, the dependence of the stable existence of these entities on cooperation with Kyiv. On the contrary, it emphasizes the advanced economic relations between the "self-proclaimed republics" and the Russian Federation. Due to the introduction of the DPR/LPR transport blockade by the ATO veterans in January-February 2017, the Russian media had to invent a "plausible explanation" for such situation. For example, there was a prevailing version that the radicals used the blockade to force President Poroshenko to escalate the armed conflict (the blockade took place along with the Avdiivka escalation) as well as that Ukraine was highly dependent on "voluntary" coal supplies from the "DPR/LPR".

The undisguised distortion of facts and wishful thinking is observed in the reports about the European and American sanctions. Especially in the second half of 2016, there appear dozens of stories alleging that the United States would return to cooperation with Russia in the event of Donald Trump victory. And they underline that Ukraine will be "exchanged" for the Russia's consent to cooperate with the United States in the Middle East.

As about selective focus and fact concealing, **the Russian TV-channels begin active use of different internal crisis stories** for that. For example, the conflicts between Petro Poroshenko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk (Mikheil Saakashvili and Arsen Avakov, Petro Poroshenko and Yulia Tymoshenko with Oleg Lyashko) are reported to show the image of "stable" "DPR/LPR". **The propaganda leitmotiv in 2016 is "prophesying" of the extraordinary parliamentary and presidential elections that would result in a chance for pro-Russian** 

politicians (representatives of the "Opposition bloc" are constantly quoted in a favorable light) and a nationalist coup (using any political performances, torchlight processions, assaults on gay pride marches, and barely noticeable in Ukraine declarations of leaders of the "Pravyi Sector", "Azov", "Svoboda"). Ukrainian corruption scandals also add to a pool of facts for "sub-truth" circulation: they are actively commenting Poroshenko's offshores along with disproving of evidence against Putin. With the lack of new stories, Russian media start casting new "speakers" of Ukrainian politicians who make contradictory, populist statements. Oleg Lyashko and Nadia Savchenko are among them. The Kremlin propaganda presents them as "petrels" who prophesy a new sharp civil conflict that will swallow the regime of the war party supporters lead by Poroshenko and Turchynov. And they turn the blind eye to the contradiction between the reports of the President's interest in corruption and business in Russia and his aggressive plans.

Since July 2016, the flow of news reports on shelling and combat actions in the Donbas is resumed. This can be explained, to a large extent, by the fact that the prophecy on a new wave of internal destabilization and elections in Ukraine has not come to life. So the separatist leaders calling to support the "Donbas" and help to defeat the "Kyiv junta" come back in the air. This makes an obvious contrast with the official Kremlin's conciliatory position that makes declarations about its willingness to re-launch the relationship with the West after the US presidential election. The August anxiety due to the alleged attack by Ukrainian special forces on the Russian border guards in the Crimea, the January escalation in the Donbas is presented by the Kremlin just as a Kyiv's attempt to break the dialogue between the United States and Russia and to justify new loans with the support of the new Donald Trump's administration. Any force pressure plans against Ukraine are rejected and refuted. This means that a new intensive information campaign may be launched any time in 2017 to justify new aggressive actions against Ukraine.

Finally, it is fair to say that the Russian propaganda has made a significant progress in constructing in Russia a stable image of Ukraine and Ukrainians as "enemies" of Russians. At the same time, the history of Russian-Turkish escalation and reconciliation shows significant propaganda opportunities for deconstruction of man-made stereotypes and rapid reorientation of society to new bogeymen.

One of the important propaganda brainwashing aftermaths for the Russian population in 2014-2016 was the establishment of mechanisms for citizen mobilizing to support any unexpected military decisions of the Kremlin. The main purpose of such actions was and still is to maintain the high rating of Vladimir Putin. So one would better leave open the possibility of military aggression and associated aggressive propaganda during the presidential election campaign 2018, especially with the recent anti-corruption protests.

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Non-governmental organization Detector Media is a media platform and an influential think tank.

NGO Detector Media (DM) is the successor of the NGO Telekritika which was founded back in January 2004.

On 27 April 2016, NGO Telekritika changed its name to Detector Media.

Unchanged head of the organization is its founder and inspirer, known Ukrainian journalist and media expert Natalia Ligachova.

The mission of NGO Detector Media is to promote the development of democratic, free and professional media in Ukraine and the formation of critically thinking and informed media consumer.

The organization has its own group of online media, the main of which is the web portal Detector Media (detector.media), which began to work in February 2016. Slogan: Detector Media is the Watchdog for Ukrainian media.

There are also themed websites: MediaSapiens (osvita.Mediasapiens. ua), Ukraine's only internet resource dedicated to media literacy; Public Broadcasting (stv.detector.media), the only resource on which all the information on the reform of public broadcasting in Ukraine is accumulated; Videoteka (video.detector.media).

The target audience of the website are journalists, top management of mass media, media experts, civil society organizations, public authorities, politicians, donors organizations, think tanks, academics and students of specialized educational institutions, and media consumers.

NGO Detector Media also produces other own informational products (movies, talk shows, analytics, infographics, etc.), participates in the work groups and advisory structures at government bodies, conducts monitoring and research, trainings and various public events.

