

# Old and new constraints in foreign news coverage in post-communist Ukraine



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**ABSTRACT:** In the 1970s, when intellectual debate in the rest of the world was preoccupied with the problem of an imbalanced, one-way information flow between Western industrialized countries and less-developed countries in South and East, people in the Soviet Union faced another problem — a problem of deficit of information from the West, which was a result of purposeful politics of the Soviet state. In 1989 the Iron Curtain fell, but it does not mean that nowadays there are no bounds and boundaries in the flow of information to and from the Former Soviet Republics. This paper deals with the issue of foreign news in contemporary Ukraine and explores constraints in making international news in the media. It analyses a set of determinants of international news production in the Ukrainian media and the way they influence the scope and quality of foreign news coverage. The research is based on interviews with about thirty media experts and news producers at major Ukrainian broadcasting organizations, as well as from print and online media. The interviewees — editors-in-chief, heads of international news' departments, foreign correspondents — were asked about the process of international news production in their editorial offices, the human and technical resources allocated for foreign news coverage, the professional standards of international journalism, as well as the main sources of foreign news and criteria of their selection involved in the news making process. Results of the study show that international news making in Ukraine is influenced by peculiar factors rooted in the Soviet past, such as journalists' inclination to one-sided reporting and poor command of foreign languages (except Russian), and by common factors determining tendencies in foreign news coverage worldwide, such as the pressure of the market which induces cost-cutting in media organizations and tabloidization of media content. An important finding of the study is the conclusion about *indirect, or circuitous movement of foreign news* from international news agencies to the Ukrainian media. Because of the peculiarities of Ukrainian news production described in the paper, news from Reuters or Associated Press regularly reaches Ukrainian editorial offices after it has been processed by Russian newsmakers.

**KEYWORDS:** international communication, foreign news production, post-Soviet media, Ukraine



## INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, when intellectual debate in the rest of the world was preoccupied with the problem of imbalanced, one-way information flow between Western industrial-

ized countries and less-developed countries in South and East of the globe, people in the Soviet Union faced another problem – a problem of deficit of information from the West, which was a result of the purposeful politics of the Soviet state. The Soviet media monopolized by the communist party were aimed at propagating communist ideology and enhancing people's loyalty to the Party and the State. They were bringing to the Soviet people only information which would strengthen their belief in the rightness of their political leaders and convince them that communist rule was the only solution to ensure wealth, justice and happiness for the masses. Therefore, content of the media was under vigilant centralized control. The Party leaders cautiously filtered information from abroad – foreign news was not aimed at bringing Soviet people information about foreign countries but to deliver ideological messages about “class injustice” in bourgeois societies and horrors of “the capitalist way of life”.

After the fall of the communist regime the Communist Party monopoly on the media in the former Soviet Union was abolished. The Statute on the Press and Other Mass Media adopted by the USSR parliament in 1990 allowed anybody to set up media outlets and to be their owner, and acknowledged the freedom and protected activity to seek, produce and disseminate information. It also banned any forms of prior censorship.

In the early 1990s, in a major part of the independent states which appeared after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, media regulations were adopted, ensuring freedom of speech and information and allowing private ownership of the media. Ukraine was among those who introduced the most liberal media regulations in the region<sup>1</sup> and, thus enabled the rise of fairly diverse and plural media outlets.

One could argue that these historical changes would have removed information barriers between the former Soviet republics and the rest of the world and open them up to other countries by letting their citizens, among others, to be informed on what was happening in the world. However, two decades after the end of communism, international news in former Soviet Republics does not meet these expectations. For example, in Ukraine, the average amount of news about foreign countries in main national newspapers is about 20%, and a large part of this news is about Ukraine's relations with these countries or affairs concerning Ukrainians abroad (Kulyk, 2010). On the TV this amount is bigger up to 20% of news is devoted to other countries, while an additional 25% covers bilateral relationships between these countries and Ukraine, and issues of Ukrainian immigrants abroad and foreign migrants in Ukraine (Kulyk, 2010). However, foreign news on TV concentrates primarily on “light” and entertainment topics – sensations, catastrophes, weather and celebrities.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Richter A. (2008). Post-Soviet perspective on censorship and freedom of the media: An overview. *International Communication Gazette*, 70 (5), pp. 307–324.

A good illustration of the deficiency of foreign news in Ukraine is the situation with news about the European Union. In Ukraine, which has declared a course towards European integration more than 15 years ago,<sup>2</sup> the media coverage of EU-related issues is unlikely to contribute to Ukrainians' knowledge and understanding of EU news and affairs. Ukrainian mass media attention to the EU is very uneven and becomes intensive only during events directly related to Ukrainian affairs. For example, in 2007–2009 the number of media messages containing phrases “European Union,” “European Parliament” or “European Commission” grew sharply during the EU–Ukraine Summit in Paris (September 2008), such as the start of negotiations on the EU–Ukraine free trade zone (February 2008) Brussels Declaration on the Modernization of Ukraine's Gas Transport System (March 2009) (Internews Ukraine, 2009). In between these events Ukrainian media expressed on average little interest in the European Union and hardly got engaged in the discussion of the events important for the EU itself.

According to the study by Internews Ukraine (2009), characteristic features of media coverage of EU-related issues are superficiality, frequent distortion of information and rude mistakes. There is a deficit of high quality analytical content which would make the EU less abstract and more comprehensible for Ukrainian people. It is no wonder that 34.2% of Ukrainians report that media give them little information about the EU, and 43% of them think that the media offers limited and incomplete information (UCEPS, 2008). Only 10% of them are satisfied with information about the European Union they receive from the media.

What are the reasons for the poor condition of foreign news coverage in Ukraine? Are they of an economic nature and rooted in the low incomes of the Ukrainian media conditioned by low profitability of media businesses in the country? Or perhaps in Ukraine (the country became an independent state in 1991), where international journalism never existed<sup>3</sup> there is still a lack of professionals who are able to present international news competently? Or perhaps the reasons for the deficiency of international news in Ukraine are related to limited access of editorial offices to sources of information about world events?

This paper seeks answers to these questions focusing on the process of news production in Ukraine, and examining its economic (editorial budgets, media profits, market competition), professional (journalistic professionalism and standards), and information-supply (access to sources of international news) and technological (technical equipment, use of ICT) aspects. It does not deal with political determinants of international news making in Ukraine because the impact of politics on

<sup>2</sup> In the Decree of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine “On main directions of Ukraine's foreign policy” approved by the Verkhovna Rada in 1993 Ukraine's most important long-term goal is described in terms of full incorporation into the process of European integration and European political, economic and security structures.

<sup>3</sup> Moscow was the only city in the Soviet Union where international journalists were trained and employed.

international reporting in Ukraine is not direct or manifest and deserves a separate study.

I will attempt initially to indicate the main current tendencies in international communication and coverage of foreign news around the globe. Once this framework is established, I will introduce my study of foreign news production in today's Ukraine and analyse its results.

## **GENERAL TENDENCIES IN INTERNATIONAL REPORTING IN THE WORLD**

To understand to what extent Ukrainian problems with foreign news are country specific and to what extent they merely reflect the general situation in international communications around the world it is necessary to outline the main current trends in international reporting worldwide. The first of them, traditionally discussed in international communication studies since the McBride Report (1980), is a domination of Western-based global news agencies and international broadcasters such as Reuters, AFP, AP, BBC World or CNN in production and distribution of international news in the world (Boyd-Barrett, 2008, Schiller 1998; Boyd-Barrett & Xie 2008).

Since the 1990s, their dominance has been challenged, at least at regional level, by transnationally operating non-Western-based news services, of which a textbook example is Al Jazeera (based in Qatar) (Tunstall, 2008). These new players in international communication may not obligatorily address a 'global' or 'mass' audience, but, highly specific globally dispersed news communities. For example, ZEE-TV targets the expatriate Indian community worldwide, Al Jazeera addresses audiences in the Arab world (Arabic language service) and beyond (English-language service), and TV Globo International, the major Brazilian television company, operates in Latin America and some other world regions (Volkmer, 2007). Some of them, such as, for example, a Chinese English-language channel CCTV-9 pursues the aim of providing their national perspective of the news to audiences worldwide. In 2005 an attempt to create such a broadcaster was taken also by Russia, which launched a 24-hour English-language channel "Russia Today" offering audiences in Europe, Africa, Asia, the US and in the former Soviet Union international news "from a Russian perspective" (Rantanen, 2007).

Recent research (Paterson, 2006; Boyd-Barrett, 2008) shows that though international communication underwent significant changes with the enter of new 'voices' such as Al-Jazeera and rise of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) they did not alleviate substantially a problem of low diversity of international news caused by a dominance of several international news suppliers around the globe. According to Boyd-Barrett (2008), despite the growth in number of major players in international news gathering and distribution, we do not witness significant increase of their diversity in terms of their location or the interest they

represent — world majors in international news are further Western-oriented. At the same time the researcher notes that the growing role of such international broadcasters as the Chinese Xinxua and Russian Interfax “are important indicators of what may come” (Ibid.).

As for the former Soviet Union, a lack of studies on international communication in this region makes it problematic to estimate which news agencies — Western-based “majors” or any of their rivals — are the main sources of foreign information for news organizations in the post-Soviet states. Rather scarce mentions in international communication studies (Boyd-Barrett, 2008; Clausen, 2010) let us assume that traditionally popular here is the former Soviet (now Russian) state news agency ITAR-TASS, and also the commercial Russian agency Interfax established in 1989. However, the lack of detailed research does not allow us to access the scope and character of their influence on news making in post-Soviet countries. For example, Clausen (2010) considers that ITAR-TASS is influential only for information it provides about Russia, but not as a source of news about other countries. The issue seems even more complicated in view of the fact that the situation with the popularity of this or that international news source may be different in countries with so dissimilar post-communist trajectories as Russia, former Central Asian republics, the Baltic States, or Ukraine.

The next tendency widely debated in international communication studies concerns the impact of new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, on foreign news reporting. Surprisingly enough, in spite of expectations that the rise of new ICTs will lead to a greater diversity of news through opening opportunities for a plurality of news providers and threatening in this way the monopoly of provision from global news agencies (Rheingold, 1993; Seib, 2003), this is not yet the case (Paterson, 2006). To a certain extent technological change has had a negative impact on the diversity of international news. In the conditions of satellite TV and the Internet enabling instant transmission of texts and pictures around the globe, the immediacy of news coverage has become especially important for market success of a media outlet. The need for immediacy is often satisfied by the materials from news agencies and other news suppliers, many of which are available on the World Web, to the detriment of original reportage (Scott, 2005; Davies, 2008; Redden & Witchge, 2010). This hampers production of the media’s own content and reinforces the dominance of global news suppliers.

One more tendency is the commercialization of international communication in the consequence of deregulation and privatization in the communications and media in the late 1980s and 1990s, and growing competition on global media markets because of concentration of media empires and development of innovative information technologies. A market-driven approach to world news endangers, according to some communication researchers, the quality of international news (Thussu, 1997, 2005). According to Thussu (2005) in a ratings-driven news environment there is no place for investigation of the process behind a story and news

events are merely reported instead. Besides, the logic of commerce leads to the proliferation of 'infotainment' and 'tabloid news' formats, which are much cheaper to produce and are believed to be more popular among audiences.

Intense competition on media markets makes media organizations increase output and cut costs. The last especially concerns international reporting: editorial offices reduce the number of foreign correspondents and substitute them at best by a practice of "parachute journalism," which results rather in trivialisation or sensationalization of foreign events than in their in-depth coverage (McPhail, 2006). More often, however, international news making turns into in-office web surfing in search of foreign information from wire services and other media.

## **STUDY OF THE PRODUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN UKRAINE**

The present project is an investigation of the production of international news in Ukraine and possible reasons of deficiency and poor quality of foreign news coverage in major Ukrainian media. The study is based on interviews with 34 media experts and news producers at the major Ukrainian broadcasting media organizations as well as print and online news media in late 2010 and early 2011. The interviewees included: editors-in-chief, news programs' editors, heads of international news departments as well as foreign correspondents. All of them were asked about the process of international news production in their editorial offices, the human and technical resources allocated for foreign news coverage, the professional standards of international journalism and editorial requirements for international news, the main sources of foreign news and criteria of their selection. As the most popular nationwide media in Ukraine are privately owned, the majority of the interviewees were employed in private media companies (with the exception of one interview conducted with the Head of International Department at a state TV channel<sup>4</sup>). The in-depth interviews were conducted by the author in Ukrainian or Russian depending on the language choice of the respondents. The data collected was analysed in the wider context of economic, political, technological and information-supply conditions the Ukrainian media operate within.

## **ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS MAKING IN UKRAINE**

Though Ukraine with its 46 million population has a potentially big and dynamically developing media market, its weak economy cannot ensure high advertising and distribution revenues for media corporations. The advertising budget in Ukraine is low in comparison with the ad budgets of countries with a population of comparable size: for example, in 2008 total TV advertising budgets in Ukraine

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<sup>4</sup> Ukraine has not implemented the model of public service broadcasting yet. At the same time there still exist the state and municipally-owned media.

amounted to about \$500 million, which was twice as small as the total advertising budgets in neighbouring Poland, and 40 times less than in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Per capita advertising spending in Ukraine is among the lowest in Europe. In 2006 it amounted to \$15.90, whereas in Poland, The Czech Republic and Hungary it was \$100, \$173 and \$296 and in Russia \$44.20 as well as in Bulgaria \$57 accordingly.<sup>6</sup> Different from post-communist countries of Central-Eastern Europe which boosted the development of their media markets after the fall of communist governments by attracting foreign investments (mainly from Western European and Scandinavian media corporations), Ukraine did not manage to draw much-needed investment from Western media owners. They are scared away from the Ukrainian media market by a lack of stable and transparent rules for business-making, widespread corruption and uneasy relationships between the media and political powers.

Besides low advertising budgets, lack of foreign investment and deficiency of other financial sources in media organizations (such as, for example, low sales and subscription rates of news press or small state subsidies), an important economic component of international news making in Ukraine is harsh competition in the media market. The Ukrainian media market, especially its broadcasting segment, is overcrowded because media enterprises are set up in Ukraine not exclusively for gaining profits but for achieving political influence. For example, the number of nationwide terrestrial TV channels in Ukraine is 15 (of which one — UT-1 — is state-owned),<sup>7</sup> which is two and a half times more than in neighbouring Poland, where the amount of national TV broadcasters is only six (two of them are public service broadcasters).<sup>8</sup>

Too big an amount of media in the media market conditions at least two phenomena influencing foreign news production: cost-cutting and tabloidization. To outrun their competitors (or, in case of lower-rated and regional media, to merely survive in the media market), media owners drive for cutting costs and increasing productivity. A widespread practice is to save on specialists in international reporting. As Table 2 shows, only four news organizations in Ukraine have staff reporters in other countries. Among them are two TV channels, two news agencies and no newspaper or magazine.

<sup>5</sup> Kalinina, S. (August 21, 2009). Business Sense with Svetlana Kalinina. Kyiv Post. Retrieved October 12, 2011 from <http://www.cetv-net.com/en/press-center/media/94.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> Data by ZenithOptimedia, quoted in: Horizon Capital (2006). Overview of the Ukrainian TV Broadcasting Market. Retrieved November 4, 2009 from <http://www.horizoncapital.com.ua/files/sec-tors/Ukr.%20TV%20Broadcasting%20Market.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Onufriyenko, A., Mironova, I. (December 22, 2008). Televizionnyi rynek. Komu prinadlezhit Ukraina (Television market. Whom Ukraine belongs to). Kommersant. Retrieved September 21, 2011 from <http://www.kommersant.ua/doc.html?docId=1098087>.

<sup>8</sup> Filas, R., Planeta, P. (2009). Media in Poland and public discourse. In: A. Czeppek, M. Hellwig, E. Nowak (eds.). *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe: Concepts and Conditions*. Series: Intellect Books European Communication Research and Education Association, pp. 141–163.

Table 1. The top-seven Ukrainian TV channels

Ukrainian nationwide TV channels	Type of ownership	Position in the Gfk broadcasting rating (June 2011)	Audience share (Gfk Ukraine, June 2011)
Inter	private	1	15.45%
1+1	private	2	11.39%
“Ukraine”	private	3	9.99%
STB	private	4	9.09%
ICTV	private	5	8.04%
Novy	private	6	6.51%
UT-1	state-owned	7	3.39%

Source: GfK Ukraine (June 2011).

Table 2. Ukrainian media organizations with foreign bureaus

Name of media organization	Type of media organization	Number of foreign bureaus	Location of foreign bureaus
Inter	TV channel	6	Brussels, London, Washington, Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow
1 + 1	TV channel	2	Berlin, Moscow
Ukrinform	New Agency (state-owned)	10	the EU (Brussels), Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, France, China, America, Russia and AED
UNIAN	News Agency (private)	3	Brussels, Warsaw, Moscow

Source (number and location of foreign bureaus): the author’s own study.

To compensate for a lack of their own staff reporters abroad, Ukrainian editorial offices resort to “parachute” reporting. It is practiced however, on rare occasions such as national elections in major countries, important international forums, catastrophes or popular events like, for instance, the Royal wedding in the United Kingdom. The problem is that during their foreign stays Ukrainian journalists have few chances to make rich and informative materials because of time limits and high workloads. Foreign visits last two–three days. In this time journalists have to make not one, but several news stories: the main one devoted to a target event and a couple of additional stories for future programs (such as for example a story on the operations of traffic police in a country, an interview with a famous person, and so on). Perhaps the brightest illustration of the hectic schedule of Ukrainian reporters



abroad is the story of an Inter TV channel journalist who was ordered to make a 20-minute documentary about post-communist transformations in Poland in three days.<sup>9</sup>

The next aspect of staff cost-cutting in international news making in Ukraine is saving not only on the number of foreign correspondents, but also on specialists in foreign news, who work inside the country. Only a few editorial offices in Ukraine have international news departments. They are mostly top-ranking TV channels and some nationwide newspapers. The number of employees in these departments is low, with the exception of two national TV channels (see Table 3). What is disturbing is that the news outlets which should provide for competent coverage and in-depth analysis of events around the world — the national quality newspapers — have very limited resources for the production of international news. In both Ukrainian quality newspapers the daily *Den'* and the weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* — international news is made by two people only. Compared for example, with the Polish quality daily *Rzeczpospolita*, where the international news department has ten employees,<sup>10</sup> this is too little. The majority of Ukrainian news outlets, however, are lacking departments responsible for foreign news and both international and domestic affairs are covered by the same journalists.

Table 3. Ukrainian media: number of employees in international news departments

Name of media organization	Type of media organization	Number of journalists in international news department
Inter	TV channel	16
1+1	TV channel	7
“Ukraine”	TV channel	3
STB	TV channel	3
Den'	Daily newspaper	2
Dzerkalo Tyzhnia <sup>a)</sup>	Weekly newspaper	2

<sup>a)</sup> In fact, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* does not have a separate international news department but the general department of political news in which two reporters specialise in international affairs.

Source: author's interviews with top-managers of the listed media organisations.

As media owners cut back on editorial costs, journalists have to work in conditions of high workload. It does not allow them to spend much time on information gathering, not mentioning its verification and analysis. Hence, staff use the most time- and effort-consuming ways of creating content. Therefore international news

<sup>9</sup> The interviewee who provided us with this information asked not to be identified by name. Interview with the author, December 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jerzy Chaszczynski, The Head of International Department at *Rzeczpospolita* daily, conducted by the author, November 2010.

making in most editorial offices is reduced to translation of information from wire services (in broadcast media) or to finding ready-made material on the Internet and placing it in one's paper (or Internet site) with minimal reworking.

As far as tabloidization is concerned, Ukrainian media owners and managers chase ratings and do their best to attract the widest possible audience. International news is approached by them as an unpopular genre. Almost all the editors and heads of international news departments who were interviewed in the course of the study presented here considered it necessary to note that world news does not catch up with audiences in Ukraine. The TV editors claimed that TV ratings predominantly fall during international blocks of news programs. They believed that a remedy against these downfalls were the proven "Western" methods such as light news and infotainment style.

One should admit here that at least two major Ukrainian media organizations — TV channels Inter and 1 + 1 the introduction of "Western" approaches to news making was a result of deliberate and consistent efforts aimed at an improvement in their market positions. For example, when in 2008 channel 1 + 1 was bought by the international corporation Central European Media Enterprises Ltd (CME), the company's managers, having profound experience in post-communist media markets<sup>11</sup> introduced a number of measures aimed at gaining the leadership in the Ukrainian TV market.<sup>12</sup> In the realm of information programmes this meant that international managers and coaches were invited into the 1 + 1 editorial offices to introduce journalists to the new channel's policy of news making. As for news programmes, it was proposed to switch to "yellow," entertaining news, named by the new managers as "news for a Bonzo dog."<sup>13</sup> Journalists were advised to choose primarily the news dealing with sensations, scandals, sex, death, fear and laughter.<sup>14</sup> In Inter news managers were invited in 2006 after the channel's ratings began to slide significantly for the first time in its history. Considerable changes were introduced in news programmes the channel hired new managers who brought in new rules and demands. The new Editor-in-Chief of News and Analytical Service claimed that he wanted international news stories to be nice and elegant decorations at the end of newscasts, with minimum politics and maximum interesting, entertaining and "catchy" topics (such as murders, catastrophes and the like).

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<sup>11</sup> At the moment of purchase of 1 + 1 TV Channel CME was already an owner of TV channels in several post-Communist countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>12</sup> Otar Dovzhenko (July 22, 2009) Ty ne odyn: u tebe 49% (na 1 + 1 pochynaetsia doba Kolomoys'koho) (You are not alone: you have 49% (a Kolomoys'ky's era starts in 1 + 1)) Retrieved October 12, 2011 from [http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/otar/read/2994/Ty\\_ne\\_odyn\\_u\\_tebe\\_49\\_na\\_11\\_pochynajetsa\\_doba\\_Kolomojskogo?a\\_srt=2&a\\_offset=959](http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/otar/read/2994/Ty_ne_odyn_u_tebe_49_na_11_pochynajetsa_doba_Kolomojskogo?a_srt=2&a_offset=959).

<sup>13</sup> The phrase was pronounced by Adrian Surby, then managing director of CME at the meeting with 1 + 1 staff in 2008. Retrieved October 12, 2011 from <http://www.telekritika.ua/redpolitics/2008-03-18/37214>.

<sup>14</sup> In Ukrainian language all the enumerated nouns begin from the letter "s" therefore the whole conception is named "the rule of six "s."

Avoidance of “serious” news in international blocks and decisions in favour of light topics is practiced today almost at all major Ukrainian TV channels.

However, it would be a simplification of the problem if we claimed that the poor condition of international reporting in Ukraine is chiefly of an economic nature. As a matter of fact, technical and technological equipment of Ukrainian media organizations (at least the private ones, which tend to be the most popular in the country<sup>15</sup>) is rather decent. Ukrainian media owners, who tend to save money on the number of employees and journalists’ fees, are much more generous in their spending on technical equipment and new technologies. Editorial offices and newsrooms of major broadcast and print media in Ukraine are computerised. Newsmakers report that they have no problems with access to the Internet or telephone calls within the country and abroad. Media owners, especially those engaged in broadcasting media happen to invest in the very latest equipment. For example, Ukrainian business oligarch and media baron Rinat Achmetov invited for the design and equipment of his recently launched TV Centre for Information Programmes international companies and specialists which took part in building TV studios for FOX, CBS and RTL.<sup>16</sup>

## **JOURNALISM STANDARDS AND EDITORS’ DEMANDS**

It has already been emphasized that the standards of international news coverage in Ukraine are on average rather low. Reports of international affairs in Ukrainian media quite often contain rude mistakes and distortions of information. For example, in articles concerning the EU it is common to discuss the subject of “associated membership of Ukraine in the EU,” which is not existent in the EU, or even name the EU-Ukraine negotiations on free trade agreement by “negotiations on Ukraine’s membership in the EU” (Internews, 2009, UCEPS, 2008). International events are also scarcely contextualized and rarely provided with competent commentary and analysis.

This may be a consequence of a poor knowledge of the subject and lack of professionalism in international reporting, mere carelessness, and low standards of journalism in general. As for the professionalism of journalists covering international events, in the majority of editorial offices in Ukraine foreign events are covered by non-professionals — because of a lack of international news departments both Ukrainian and world events are reported by the same journalists.

In the media which manage to have international news units (mostly big TV channels) there is a high turnover of journalists. The age of Ukrainian interna-

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Table 1.

<sup>16</sup> myNews-in.net (June 10, 2011) Marina Mirgorodskaia pokhvastala svoim bogatstvom (Marina Mirgorodskaia bragged about her wealth). Retrieved July 20, 2011 from <http://mynews-in.net/news/society/2011/06/10/2508113.html>.

tional reporters rarely exceeds 30–35 years. For example, in the Ukraine's biggest international reporting team at the Inter TV channel not one of its 16 members (except the Head of the Department) is older than 33.<sup>17</sup> Comparatively low salaries and lack of professional perspectives throw good specialists out of international journalism. The journalists who were interviewed in this study expressed a conviction that an international reporter cannot become a “star” in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this opinion is based on fact.<sup>18</sup>

As far as journalism standards are concerned, they are far from Western standards of journalism. News monitoring conducted by Ukrainian media supporting organizations, such as Telekritika or the Academy of Ukrainian Press register a permanent tendency to violation of basic journalism standards objectivity, balance, accuracy and comprehensiveness.<sup>19</sup> It is rather the rule than the exception for Ukrainian journalists to include their opinion in their coverage.<sup>20</sup> This characteristic, together with biased reporting, which is also widespread,<sup>21</sup> indicates that the tradition of Soviet-era advocative journalism is still alive in Ukraine. Unfortunately, the current political situation in the country only enhances the bad habits of the past among journalists.<sup>22</sup> For example, the study of newscasts at seven nationwide TV channels in December 2010–June 2011 showed that the share of news coverage dedicated to the ruling coalition exceeded the news focusing on opposition parties by more than double (64% against 26%) (AUP, 2011). Most reports on political events are one-sided: the share of news presenting only one point of view is around 80% (Ibid.).

An additional problem is expert commentary of reported facts. Both internal and international news is often commented on not by true experts and field special-

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with an Inter TV channel international reporter Ganna Gorozhenko, December 2010.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the makers of probably the most successful and professionally made program of international news in Ukrainian television, *Vikna v svit* (1997–2003) at STB channel founded by Internet news network, are all out of international journalism today. They have become media managers, TV anchors, university lecturers, or even professional film translators.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, AUP (2011), Ivanov, V., Syumar, V., Ligachova, N., Kostenko, N. (October 8, 2011) *Kurs na steril'nist'* (In the direction of [news] sterilization). *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, Retrieved October 10, 2011 from <http://www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2011-10-08/66309>.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, “Ocinky zamist' faktiv” (“Assessments instead of facts”), *Telekrytyka*. Retrieved October 10, 2011 from <http://osvita.mediasapiens.kiev.ua/material/1628>.

<sup>21</sup> Ivanov, V., Syumar, V., Ligachova, N., Kostenko, N. (October 8, 2011) *Kurs na steril'nist'* (In the direction of [news] sterilization). *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, Retrieved October 10, 2011 from <http://www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2011-10-08/66309>.

<sup>22</sup> The change of power in Ukraine in 2010 after Victor Yanukovych won presidential elections brought the rise of control over the media. Over the course of 2010 and 2011 a number of reputable international organizations such as Reporters without borders, Article XIX, International Federation of Journalists, Association of European Journalists, Human Rights Watch, the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe addressed the Ukrainian government or published statements regarding their concern over the decline of freedom of speech in Ukraine.

ists but by politicians (or their spin doctors) who promote a certain political viewpoint.<sup>23</sup>

Ukrainian media organizations have adopted Western standards of journalism rather slowly. Besides the violation of balance and objectivity norms, Ukrainian journalists have also problems with accuracy. According to the monitoring of evening newscasts at eight major Ukrainian TV channels carried out by the public organization “*Telekritika*,”<sup>24</sup> journalists happen to report unverified facts and are often non-transparent about their sources.<sup>25</sup> Neglect for the accuracy standard makes journalists unscrupulous about sources of information. For example, they often learn the news from world news agencies on the Russian Internet.<sup>26</sup> The problem is that according to Natalka Gumenyuk, “a Ukrainian journalist will rather not click on the link of a primary source [a global news agency] to verify information found elsewhere, for example, on a Russian news website.”<sup>27</sup> In this way “Russian bias” in presentation of world events can enter Ukrainian newsrooms.

An unexpected result of our study was a conclusion that following standards is not supported in Ukraine’s international news making institutionally. During the interviews with international reporters and their bosses we found that with very rare exceptions<sup>28</sup> media managers and news programmes editors had little interest in international news and did not require high-standard reporting from the journalists. One of the interviewed newscast editors confessed that he had several very good specialists in international affairs in his team but their skills were not called upon because of the lack of audience demand for international news, at least in their ‘hard’ version. In a similar way the bad state of international reporting was also commented on by the editors and managers from other channels.

On the one hand, the lack of the managers’ interest in decent quantity and quality of international news may be in fact called by a general tendency for tabloidiza-

<sup>23</sup> Interviews with Ukrainian media experts: Diana Dutsyk, editor-in-chief of a news website Glavred and news magazine *Glavre* and lecturer at School of Journalism at the Kyiv Mohyla school of journalism, Victoria Syumar, the director of the Institute of Mass Information, Serhiy Solodky, first deputy director of the *Institute of World Policy*.

<sup>24</sup> Regular results of the monitoring are published online at the *Telekritika* web-page: <http://www.telekritika.ua/>.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, *Mediahramotnist’* (April 12, 2011) *Jeansa povernulas’, movchannia posylylos’* (Jeansa came back, silencing increased). Retrieved October 12, 2011 from <http://osvita.mediasapiens.kiev.ua/material/2238>.

<sup>26</sup> See, for ex., Gumenyuk, N. (April 13, 2011). *Pryntsyropy roboty zhurnalista-mizhnarodnyka* (Work principles of an international journalist). *Telekrytyka-VideoTeka*. Retrieved October 10, 2011 from [http://video.telekritika.ua/show/masterclass/421-natalia\\_gumenjuk\\_printsyropy\\_roboty\\_zhurnalista-mizhnarodnika\\_%28chastina\\_2%29\\_17.04.2011](http://video.telekritika.ua/show/masterclass/421-natalia_gumenjuk_printsyropy_roboty_zhurnalista-mizhnarodnika_%28chastina_2%29_17.04.2011).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Natalka Gumenyuk, chief of international news department at Inter TV channel in 2007–2009, December 2010.

<sup>28</sup> There are several media outlets in Ukraine offering competent and professional analysis of foreign affairs, such as daily *Den’*, weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, and some magazines, such as *Ukrains’kyi Tyzhden’* and *Profil*.

tion and commercialization of news in Ukraine. On the other, it is also rooted in the basic mechanism of the Ukrainian media business. The owners of the most popular Ukrainian media — industrial and financial magnates — treat their media as the means to gain political and economic power. The main type of media content which may be used to influence politics and gain political power is coverage and discussion of domestic politics and internal affairs. It is this kind of content that can impact public attitudes to government and opposition, promote some politicians and make unpopular others. In its turn, coverage of foreign affairs has potentially rather little impact on the audience’s attitude towards the Ukrainian government and politicians. This is why the editors care little about quality and content of overseas news. For example, according to the testimonies of international news reporters, even top-ranking international news can easily be thrown out of a newscast in case an editor has some urgent order “from above” for a certain domestic story or interview with a “friendly” politician.<sup>29</sup> Lack of interest of media owners in in-depth coverage of world news is reflected in their choice of editors (including editors-in-chief of information programmes) and managers of information services. The editors are not expected to have knowledge of foreign affairs or international policy (not to mention foreign languages). For example, the editor-in-chief of the News and Analytical Service of Ukraine’s top-ranking TV channel Inter in the mid-2000s, confessed overtly that he understood nothing of foreign affairs and felt comfortable about it. This is not surprising, insofar as the main demand for news desks editors and managers in main Ukrainian TV channels is loyalty to their bosses (media owners) and readiness to pursue their political interests.

Table 4. Subscription to international news agencies among Ukrainian TV channels

TV channel	Subscription to Reuters	Subscription to other international news agencies
Inter	Yes	APTN
1+1	Yes	APTN
“Ukraine”	Yes	APTN
STB	Yes	No
ICTV	Yes	No
Novy	Yes	No
UT-1	Yes	No <sup>a)</sup>
Channel 5	Yes	APTN

a) State TV channel UT-1 is a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) which enables exchange of audiovisual content between its members.

Source: author’s interviews with top-managers of the listed media organizations.

<sup>29</sup> The international reporters at one of the top Ukrainian TV channels who provided us with this information asked not to be identified by name. Interview with the author, December 2011.

## SOURCES OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS

It is rather difficult to evaluate to what extent is information from global news agencies used in Ukrainian media. On the basis of this study we can assume that subscription to big news agencies like Reuters, Associated Press or France Press is affordable to only big nationwide TV channels. Half of them are subscribed to one agency only, which is Reuters (see Table 4). As for printed and Internet-based media, at the time of study they were not subscribed to big Western international news agencies, though some editors (*Den'*, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, *Segodnia*) noted that before the 2008–2009 financial crisis they had a subscription to Reuters. For these media the main source of information about overseas events was the Internet.<sup>30</sup>

Internet sources used for international news making in Ukraine may be divided into several groups. The first group is foreign-language (mostly English-language) webpages of international news agencies and renowned Western print media such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and others. This group of sources is accessible only for journalists with a good command of foreign languages (except Russian)<sup>31</sup> which can be met chiefly in editorial offices of big news-making TV channels (Inter, 1 + 1, ICTV, STB, Canal 5) and quality press. It should be noted however, that whereas international journalists at these channels have a knowledge of foreign languages at least “good enough to translate Reuters,” their editors as a rule lack foreign language skills.

The majority of Ukrainian journalists engaged in reporting on international news have rather weak (or no) command of foreign languages and have therefore to rely on Ukrainian or Russian-language sources. For that reason Internet pages of Western sources are available to them only in case they have Ukrainian or Russian-language versions. The sources of this type are few and include Ukrainian and Russian services of international broadcasters BBC, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle as well as the Russian-language version of Euronews.

The next group of sources is online versions of Russian media and news services. Their evident advantage for Ukrainian journalists is a lack of the language barrier.<sup>32</sup> Besides, they commonly bring the news faster than the Ukrainian media because of

<sup>30</sup> It should be mentioned that such newspapers as *Den'* and *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, which internationally have a reputation of Ukrainian quality newspapers often give a floor to foreign and Ukrainian politicians and ambassadors, representatives of international organizations, scientists and experts with their commentaries on foreign affairs. This widens to some extent the number of sources of foreign information at their disposal.

<sup>31</sup> We exclude Russian from the group of foreign languages here because Russian is widely used in Ukraine. Moreover, inhabitants of Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine commonly consider Russian their native language. For more see: <http://www.ukr.cen.sus.gov.ua>.

<sup>32</sup> In case of print and Internet-based media, one more reason to prefer Russian Internet sources is that the material from Russian sources can be unproblematically used unaltered (or slightly altered) for making a media's own news content. This is because a lot of Ukrainian online news platforms and newspapers operate in Russian (or have Ukrainian and Russian versions).

a much bigger network of own correspondents abroad. In addition, Russian media, different from Ukrainian, have enough resources to quickly translate and process information from foreign news agencies. The problem is that Russian media do not merely translate the news reported by global news agencies, but also present them via the prism of Russian “national interests.” Consequently, a journalist for whom the Russian media are a major source of foreign news has little chance of seeing any other perspective of world events except the Russian one.

The results of this study show that Russian wire services and news media (especially the online media outlets) are one of the most significant sources of international news for Ukrainian media. According to editors and journalists engaged in the production of foreign news, Russian sources are broadly used in editorial offices for learning about international events. The same conclusion is made by Ukrainian media experts, for example Victoria Syumar, director of Kyiv’s Mass Media Institute, claims that “Russian-language materials are the major traditional source for Ukrainian journalists [...]. This is the famous disease of Ukrainian journalism.”<sup>33</sup>

What is important, for many journalists Russian media are also a trusted source of analysis of foreign affairs. As Natalka Gumenyuk, chief of the international news department at the Inter TV channel in 2007–2009, claims if a TV journalist is proficient in English language (s)he prefers Western news agencies to learn about world events, but for their analysis (s)he refers nevertheless to Russian sources.<sup>34</sup>

Our conclusion on the significant place of Russian sources in Ukrainian international news making is consistent with the findings of the study of Ukrainian media coverage of the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008, conducted by the consulting company ProMova.<sup>35</sup> According to the study, during the war Ukrainian media used mostly Russian sources to provide coverage of the conflict. Especially during the first days of the conflict, Russian media reports accounted for up to 66% of the war coverage in Ukrainian outlets. At the same time, Western sources were used in barely 10% of the coverage (only starting from the fourth day of the war did this amount grow somewhat) (Bryndza & Bezverkha, 2008). The study results showed that Ukrainian media borrowed from Russian reports not only facts about the war but also interpretations. For example at the beginning of the war Ukrainian media uncritically used the phrase “Georgian-Ossetian conflict” introduced by the Russian side to avoid any mention of Russia itself in its branding of the events. Besides, Russian troops were referred to as “Russian peacemakers” and the Georgians as “the aggressor.” It was only after several days that these names were put aside, for

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<sup>33</sup> Bondarchuk, O. (September 8, 2008). *Virtual Empire*. Business Ukraine. Retrieved May 5, 2009 from <http://www.businessukraine.com.ua/virtual-empire>.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Natalka Gumenyuk, December 2010.

<sup>35</sup> See the study report in Bryndza & Bezverkha (2008); and the study analysis in Business Ukraine magazine: Bondarchuk, O. (September 8, 2008). *Virtual Empire*. Business Ukraine. Retrieved May 5, 2009 from <http://www.businessukraine.com.ua/virtual-empire>.



example the conflict was finally defined by Ukrainian media as “the Russian-Georgian war.”

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper rather starts a discussion on problems and opportunities of international news making in Ukraine (and, partly in the region of the former Soviet Union) than gives exhaustive answers to the proposed questions. It outlines some bounds and boundaries in the production of foreign news and indicates directions for future research.

The results of the study show that in Ukraine a number of constraints on the coverage of foreign news have, as in many other countries, an economic nature. However, the process of media commercialization which makes media organizations cut down the expenses of international reporting worldwide is aggravated in Ukraine by low advertising budgets. In addition, the Ukrainian media market hosts a too large amount of media, which makes competition very intense. This forces media owners to strictly save costs. As a result, Ukrainian media companies rarely invest into overseas bureaus and in hiring journalists specializing in foreign news. Little money is invested also in subscription to overseas wire services.

Coverage of international news is a minor subject of editors’ care in Ukraine. One of the reasons for this reported by newsmakers themselves is a low viewership/readership of international news. In chasing ratings, they minimise the scope of “serious” foreign news in the newscasts and impose an entertaining and tabloid approach on the choice and reporting of world news.

The impact of economic determinants on the scope and quality of international news has a specific character in Ukraine, where the media are not only market-driven, but also (if not primarily) politically-driven. As media corporations are for their owners — Ukrainian financial and industrial oligarchs — not only business, but also the tools of political influence, there are primarily political interests of owners that decide about priorities of the news making process. It is via the coverage of domestic, not foreign affairs that the media can influence political attitudes of their audiences and correspondingly make an impact on politics. Therefore, international news is on the margin of editors’ interest and gains minimum time/space and effort.

Similar to their colleagues in many countries, Ukrainian journalists get information on international events mainly from the Internet. One of their primary news sources is websites of Russian wire services and other Russian online news spaces. As the average command of English among Ukrainian journalists is rather low, they commonly get from Russian sources news not only about Russia, but also about other countries. Even information from major Western news agencies often reaches Ukrainian editorial offices after it was processed by Russian newsmakers. Because of time pressure and neglect of journalistic standards, journalists rarely look for

alternative sources of information and commentary or address original sources referred to on Russian web pages. The resulting excessive use of Russian sources in the production of international news in Ukraine has the risk of distorting the picture of international events presented to Ukrainian audiences.

The chances of the Ukrainian audience in getting quality coverage of overseas events are reduced by a lack of public service broadcasters. The state broadcasters (especially the state TV channel UT-1) make attempts to move aside from a soft-news approach to foreign news practiced by commercial media. The problem is that the popularity of state TV and radio is rather low because of its poor (compared with privately-owned channels) financing and ineffective management. Hence, Ukrainian audiences remain doomed for the news produced within the sensation-scandal-sex-sport formula applied in the national commercial media.

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