



АДЬМО НЕБЕСНУ СОТНЮ

СЛАВА  
НЕБЕСНА СОТНЯ

# FACING REALITY AFTER THE EUROMAIDAN

## THE SITUATION OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA IN UKRAINE

JUNE 2016

**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION



## CONTENTS

Introduction	4
An Overview	6
The media oligarchy in the television business	12
Public service broadcasting	16
Print media in crisis	22
Online media and social media in the ascendant	26
Identity crisis at <i>Hromadske TV</i>	30
«Jeansa» – Surviving thanks to paid-for content	34
The war and the media	38
Journalistic training as part of the problem	45
Recommendations	48
List of interviewees quoted in this report	50

## INTRODUCTION

Anyone who travels around Ukraine these days will see a country in crisis. The crisis is also reflected in the media. Important legislative measures such as the law on transparency of media ownership or on the conversion of the state broadcaster into a public service broadcaster exist only on paper and are still awaiting implementation.

The Ukrainians' trust in the media increased slightly in 2015 compared to 2014. A survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology at the National Academy of Sciences in 2015 showed that 32.3 percent of Ukrainians trusted the media while 38.9 percent didn't. The survey from the previous year showed that only 25.2 percent trusted the media while 45.4 percent said they didn't.

Cover and ↓  
In February  
2016, Ukrainians  
commemorated the  
Euromaidan protests  
two years prior in the  
center of Kiev.

During the research for this report most of the people Reporters Without Borders (RSF) talked to expressed concern that faced with the triple challenge of the war in the east of the country, the economic crisis and the digitization of mass media,




Ukraine would be unable to develop the kind of media landscape a democratic society needs to form political opinions and develop a culture of public debate and to provide its citizens with reliable information. Many obstacles still stand in the way of these goals, the main one being the lack of a functioning media market.

Television is the most important information medium in Ukraine. The private channels are concentrated in the hands of a few oligarchs who use them for their own political and business interests. The country so far lacks a public media authority to act as a counterweight, and the conversion of the state broadcaster into a public service broadcaster is still in its initial stages.

This report is based on approximately 30 interviews conducted by RSF Germany board member Gemma Pörzgen in January/February 2016 with journalists, media experts and observers in Kiev, Lviv and Odessa. It deals with the situation of journalists and the media in those areas of Ukraine over which the Ukrainian government has sovereignty. The situation in Crimea, annexed by Russia in March 2014, and in the separatist-controlled areas of Eastern Ukraine is not dealt with here. It deserves its own separate report, particularly since access to these areas is extremely difficult for foreign observers at present.

We thank all the interviewees for their openness and willingness to tell RSF about their working life and its opportunities and obstacles and to share information with us. Our special thanks go to our correspondent in Kiev, Oxana Romanyuk, and her colleagues at the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), and also to our colleagues Maryna and Otar Dovzhenko in Lviv, as well as Julia Sushenko in Odessa, all of whom supported the research for this report with their expert advice. We also thank the Lviv-based journalist Yuri Durkot and the chief editor of German magazine *Osteuropa* Manfred Sapper for their careful editing and critical comments. Thanks to Alison Waldie for translating the report from German into English.

This report and the research for it were made possible by the generous support of the Robert Bosch Foundation. We are very grateful to the dedicated team there for supporting this project.



# 1 AN OVERVIEW

Twenty-five years after the break-up of the Soviet Union independent Ukraine's media landscape is still closely intertwined with the Russian media market. Ever since the country first gained independence the strong influence of the dominant media in its big neighbour Russia, whose media almost all Ukrainians understand, has led to an asymmetric competition situation and for many years hindered the establishment of independent media in Ukraine.

Statistics published by the Kiev International Institute for Sociology (KMIS) show that 72 percent of Ukrainians mainly use Ukrainian television and online media to stay informed. Only a fifth of the population regularly uses Ukrainian and Russian information sources, whereby a high level of distrust of Russian media prevails.

*According to the KMIS only four percent of users trust these media.*



For foreign observers the bilingualism of Ukraine's media users is one of the country's special features. In the broadcasters' news programmes Ukrainian is the main language but interview partners in the same programme may speak in Russian as well. *Ukraina* and *Inter* broadcast in Russian, and some other channels show a news programme in Russian once a day, while the rest of the programmes are in Ukrainian. Since many of the movies aired on Ukrainian television are Russian imports they are mostly broadcast in Russian. In both print and online media regional differences can be observed. In Lviv, for instance, the media publish in Ukrainian, while in Odessa Russian-language media are more common. Many newspapers and online media offer their content in both languages.

Compared with the current situation in the Russian Federation journalists in Ukraine have far more freedom in their work. There is no state censorship and the country has a pluralistic media landscape. Ukraine moved up 22 places in RSF's latest World Press Freedom Index and now ranks 107<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries.

✓  
Journalists during a mass demonstration at Kiev's Independence Square on 9 February 2014.



A positive development is that the number of offences committed against journalists in Ukraine dropped considerably in 2015 compared to the high figures for 2014. The Institute of Mass Information (IMI), RSF's partner organisation in Ukraine, recorded 310 incidents last year – less than a third of the number of incidents reported in 2014 (995).

Most of the incidents, which mainly involved violations of journalists' rights, occurred in the run-up to the elections in autumn 2015. Fifty-eight cases of physical violence against journalists were reported, just a fifth of the number of attacks reported in 2014 (286). The assailants were for the most part private individuals, and in some cases they remain anonymous. State repression directed against representatives of the media is not an everyday occurrence for journalists in Ukraine. During the entire period in which the research for this report took place not a single journalist was in prison in Ukraine for activities related to their work as a journalist.

However, the murder of journalist Oles Buzyna, who was killed by unknown persons in the middle of Kiev on 16 April 2015, remains unsolved. According to police records two men wearing masks got out of a car and shot him. Buzyna was known for his pro-Russian views and was seen as a fierce opponent of the new Ukrainian government. His murder coincided with the violent deaths in spring 2015 of several Ukrainians who were mainly followers of the old regime.

These incidents, however, are not representative of the situation for Ukraine's journalists and media. In comparison with Russia in particular, where independent journalism is confined to a few niches of freedom, the working conditions for journalists are far better. Our colleagues in Ukraine can report freely and carry out investigations and media projects without interference by the state.

«We used to have difficulties under Kuchma and Yanukovych,» explains Stefan Kurpil, editor of the Lviv-based regional paper *Vysoky Zamok*. «Under Kuchma our printing offices were raided, and under Yanukovych we had the tax inspectors breathing down our neck for a whole year.» But that's all over now, he says. «Nowadays the state doesn't exert any pressure and we feel free in our journalistic work.» These days, Kurpil points out, the mayor of Lviv only calls when he has a question and the relations with representatives of the authorities have also changed entirely.

Some of those interviewed nonetheless admit that there are certain politicians who still believe they can treat representatives of the media as they did in the old days. «I don't feel that Ukrainian politicians have changed their attitude to the media,» says Denis Trubetskoy. The 22-year-old journalist believes that for that to happen a new generation will have to take over because even politicians that are considered reform-oriented, like the current president Petro Poroshenko, are still too caught up in the Soviet way of thinking. Trubetskoy points out that in the media, too, journalists who were socialised and educated in the Soviet Union still set the agenda. He hopes that members of his own generation will bring about real change. So far, however, he still sees a «struggle between old and new ways of thinking» in the country's media and politics.

This is confirmed by the difficulties Serhiy Popov, news director at the Ukrainian TV station *1+1*, says his station is having in obtaining an interview with Poroshenko. Popov says that for more than half a year it has been impossible to get an interview because the presidential administration still wants to dictate the terms like it did in the times of Yanukovych's presidency. He explains that the standard procedure is for all the questions to be sent to the Administration first and coordinated before the interview takes place. Then it isn't the channel's camera team that films the interview





but a camera team from the presidential apparatus, which also takes care of the editing and then sends on the finished product for broadcasting. Ever since **1+1** began refusing to go along with this and insisted on doing the filming and editing itself, he says, the channel hasn't been given any more interviews. «This is a matter of principle for us,» Popov stresses.

↑  
Kyiv in 2016,  
commemorating those killed  
during the Euromaidan  
protests in early 2014.

After the Euromaidan protests in 2013/2014, which saw a high degree of politicisation in Ukrainian society and a surge in the public's desire to stay informed, media experts now observe that interest in politics and journalistic content has waned considerably. «People are tired of the news and afraid of the news,» Popov concludes. Many of those interviewed believe that disappointment with the government's inadequate reform policy and the people's weariness of the difficult economic situation are also translating into a lack of trust in the media.

As a result Ukrainian journalism is going through a difficult post-revolutionary phase in which its own role within society needs to be redefined. The spirit of optimism that prevailed during the Euromaidan and which saw the launch of many new media projects has been replaced by a widespread sense of disillusionment in the media community. A number of good journalists have switched to politics, hoping to influence the future of their country in a different way. The war in the east of the country, the dramatic state of the economy and political developments perceived by many as stagnation are making it difficult for journalists and the media to redefine their position and at the same time face the additional challenges of digitization.




The widespread distrust of the media is above all a consequence of the fact that the leading media companies, and in particular the influential private television channels, are still controlled by oligarchs. Media experts talk of a «media oligarchy» in Ukraine in which the power of the media, political influence and capital are closely interwoven. The media's dependence on funding from the oligarchs has also increased because **Ukraine's advertising market halved in size in 2014 and was expected to shrink by more than 40 percent again in 2015**. The billionaires don't need to make money out of their media; they run them only as a kind of PR department to protect their other businesses, and finance their media outlets as a sideline.

Also worrying is the widespread practice among editing departments of using paid-for stories, commonly referred to in Ukraine as «jeansa» (from the word «jeans»), and not clearly designating them as such. Due to the fact that the owners of the media companies are also active in other economic sectors, there is a strong willingness at media outlets to mix PR and journalistic content without clear labelling. At the same time many editing departments lack the money to invest in modern technology and an attractive online presence or to offer journalists decent pay. And in view of the economic crisis and dwindling incomes consumers can barely afford to spend money on information products.

Nevertheless Ukraine has several promising media projects most of which, however, are only surviving thanks to foreign support. Particularly noteworthy examples here are websites like *Hromadske TV* and *Hromadske Radio*, which thanks to their live coverage of the Euromaidan protests became the voice of the movement and of a new generation of journalists, gaining international respect. Moreover, with websites like *Telekritika*, Ukraine, unlike other post-Soviet states, has a lively media journalism culture which facilitates constructive debate about standards and professional issues within the industry. And also in the struggle against Russian propaganda, politically active journalists have developed impressive media projects like Stop Fake which have resonated far beyond Ukraine's borders.

A major deficit is evident in the area of journalistic training, which still takes place at universities as it did in Soviet times and is too academically oriented. It fails to provide future journalists with adequate training in either the classic tools of journalism or in dealing with the new technological challenges they face in this increasingly multimedia-based profession. Nonetheless, both the Catholic University in Lviv and the Mohyla School of Journalism in Kiev are setting new standards with their journalism programmes.



# 2

## THE MEDIA OLIGARCHY

## IN THE TELEVISION BUSINESS

Television plays the main role in informing the public in Ukraine. According to a survey conducted in March 2016 in Kiev by the Gorshenin Institute, a Ukrainian thinktank, 88 percent of Ukrainians mainly use television to stay informed about current affairs.

Private stations dominate the television business. They are owned by four leading media groups (*DF Group*, *1+1 Media*, *StarLightMedia* and *SCM*), all of which are in the hands of oligarchs: the TV station *Inter* belongs to Dmytro Firtash and Serhiy Lyovochkin; the TV station *1+1* belongs to Ihor Kolomoysky; *STB*, *ICTV* and *Novy Kanal* are owned by Viktor Pinchuk and *Ukraina* by Rinat Akhmetov. However, the ownership structures remain non-transparent and a look at the respective websites does not provide clarity.

Each holding company also owns special interest channels which, however, do not play a major role. The most popular channels are *Inter*, *Ukraina*, *1+1*, *STB*, *ICTV* and *Novy Kanal*, which have a clear lead in terms of viewing figures. Then there are around 30 national channels which vary widely in terms of coverage, including several special interest channels (for music, films, etc.) [Ukrainian International Nielsen Company has been tasked with measuring viewing figures since 2014.](#)

The Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko also owns his own TV station, *Channel 5*. However, its ratings lag far behind those of the other oligarchs' channels. Contrary to what he promised before he became president Poroshenko has neither withdrawn from his companies nor has any intention of giving up his TV station. «Poroshenko is afraid of negative coverage,» says media expert Valeri Ivanov, president of the Academy of Ukrainian Press in Kiev. This is why the head of state doesn't want to give up his own means of exerting influence through the media, Ivanov suspects.

«After both revolutions all they did was to restore the status quo in the media,» comments the Lviv-based journalist and media expert Yuri Durkot. «The oligarch system has proven to be alive and kicking, and although it ensures a little pluralism it also distorts the competition.» The television stations, he points out, were originally created as company PR departments to assist the oligarchs' other business operations.

The Ukrainian public knows who owns which station, even though the ownership structures remain non-transparent. This is why one of the key media reform projects is a law aimed at ensuring greater transparency of ownership which has been under debate for years. Poroshenko signed the law in autumn 2015 and garnered international praise for this important step. «Prevention of undue concentration of media ownership and full transparency of media regulation are important prerequisites of media pluralism and freedom of expression in a democratic state,»

the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovi said, welcoming the new law. In Ukraine too, the new legislation has raised hopes of change, but there are also those who are sceptical about its implementation. «By 1 April 2016 all the TV broadcasters are supposed to name their owners on their websites,» says Oxana Romanyuk of the Institute of Mass Information in Kiev. **But so far only a handful of media companies, for example TV station 1+1, have implemented the new rule.**

Unfortunately, the law doesn't foresee harsh penalties for companies that don't reveal their ownership structures. «They must face the withdrawal of their licence, otherwise we won't be able to achieve transparency,» says Romanyuk, who like many other media experts considers the current measure inadequate. She explains that a regulatory commission has been appointed but that it is too lax on violations, with the result that the law has failed to achieve its objectives so far.

Meanwhile television audiences are increasingly witnessing full-blown «information wars» in which competing oligarchs fight out their private feuds via their television channels. The editing departments tend to simply follow the instructions of their respective owner in these feuds. So at one point it was Kolomoysky vs. Firtash, then it was Pinchuk vs. Kolomoysky, or *1+1* vs. the president and *Inter* and *TRK Ukraine* against individual ministers. «The television channels are aimed at a broad-based audience,» says Ivanov. «The channels are constantly going to war with each other because their owners are at war with each other.» Ivanov cites a scandalous dispute between Kolomoysky and Pinchuk which, after Kolomoysky had been accused of

↓  
President Petro Poroshenko is also the owner of a TV station, *Channel 5*.



© PICTURE ALLIANCE / DPA



↑  
Multi billionaire and oligarch  
Ihor Kolomoysky is the  
owner of TV channel 1+1.

fraud and even murder, was settled amicably by a London court. After that the editorial line at the two stations became overtly conciliatory, Ivanov explains. «This is a huge problem and unfortunately the new law does nothing to remedy it,» he says commenting on this form of media influence.

During election campaigns certain media outlets openly or covertly support all-out disinformation campaigns against other parties – sometimes with the help of paid-for content – and undermine the journalistic credibility of their political opponents' broadcasters. The editors become nothing more than marionettes in the battles waged by the owners of their station. Fellow

journalists report that sometimes during a programme the owner's instructions are relayed directly through the headphones: «Be gentler with your questions!» they might be told, depending on who the studio guest is. True to the motto «He who pays the music calls the tune», this also influences the guest policy of certain talk shows, these journalists observe.

The fact that the media companies are owned mainly by oligarchs has several negative repercussions. These owners have little interest in how the media market develops or in effective business models. They operate their media mainly as subsidized firms. Because of this «the problems in Journalism remain the same as ever,» says Kyrylo Lukerenko, chief editor at *Hromadske Radio*. «Rich people push through their own interests thanks to their media.»

Katya Gorchinskaya, CEO of *Hromadske TV*, also sees a vicious circle of interests at play in the «oligarch media». She explains that on the one hand the oligarchs need their media as part of their power system; on the other hand these media can't survive without the oligarchs, with the result that lobby interests and advertising revenues are all mixed up in a very unhealthy combination. «The individual TV stations are made to look highly professional to boost viewing figures,» Gorchinskaya explains commenting on the modern furnishings and equipment at many of these stations. «They look like modern TV stations are supposed to look, but at their core they are rotten.»

Kolomoysky's TV station *1+1* is among the most successful nationwide channels. It serves the interests of a controversial multibillionaire who plays a leading role in Dnipropetrovsk's Jewish community, financed dubious combat units and has orchestrated countless political intrigues. President Poroshenko appointed him as governor of Dnipropetrovsk for a time after the Euromaidan protests, but Poroshenko began pursuing his own competing interests long ago and therefore removed Kolomoysky from office in March 2015.

The furnishings at the editing offices and the technology at Kolomoysky's TV station are on par with those of other European television stations. «But this is a propagandist channel,» many journalists in Kiev say pointing to the content broadcast by the channel, which is considered the wealthiest television station in Ukraine. Its editorial department sees *Inter* as its main competitor for viewers on the TV market.

«The situation is what it is,» replies the channel's news director, Serhiy Popov, when asked about its owners. He draws a different picture from the internal perspective of the editors. «It is not the oligarchs that matter but whether they behave in a civilised manner,» he says, and talks of the «demonization» of Kolomoysky. «Our owner supports us,» he stresses. Popov admits that conflicts regularly flare up between

the editors and the owner, but says that they are in dialogue about this and can meet and argue with Kolomoysky in person. The advantage, he explains, is that the general director Alexander Tkachenko is also a journalist and knows how to present the editors' concerns to the owner. «I find it good that our owner listens to our arguments,» Popov says. For two years he has pursued a strategy of bringing together the television news and the website on a multimedia platform. According to Popov *1+1*'s website receives 500,000 visits per day. He says it targets an audience aged between 18 and 54 with a generally pro-Western stance.

Thanks to its good financial position *1+1* is an attractive employer for journalists. It pays well and produces a modern broadcasting programme. Unlike other media companies in Ukraine *1+1* can afford its own TV correspondents in Warsaw, Berlin and Washington. The post in Moscow had to be closed at the start of 2013 because it became too dangerous, Popov says, also pointing to the expense of maintaining foreign correspondents abroad.

The close interplay of politics and media ownership is also evident at the regional level. The Mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovy has earned a reputation throughout the nation as the successful mayor of the new generation and a talented PR expert. People outside Lviv, however, are less aware that the local TV station *24* and the website *zaxid.net* are registered in his wife's name, meaning that Sadovy controls one of the two companies that dominate the region's media market. His main rival in the battle to control the local media is oligarch Petro Dyminsky with his TV station *Zik* and its respective website.

«These two TV stations dominate the local market in Lviv,» comments Roman Rak, a freelance journalist and the local representative of the National Union of Journalists. But he doesn't see this as a major problem. «At least the competition between the two media groups ensures a little balance and pluralism,» he concludes. Lviv-based journalist Yuri Durkot doesn't see the situation in his city as problematic either: «Lviv has always been an oasis when it comes to media freedom,» he says. Naturally, you won't find any criticism of the mayor's style of governance on *24* or *zaxid.net*, he adds. «Lviv has done well in recent years and according to the mayor this is mainly thanks to him.»



→  
Viktor Pinchuk is the owner of TV channels *ICTV*, *STB* and *Nowyj Kanal*. He made his fortune, among other things, in the steel business.

# 3

## PUBLIC SERVICE

## BROADCASTING

In 2015, after decades of debate, the prerequisites were created for the establishment in Ukraine of a public service broadcaster based on the West European model. On 10 April 2015 the amending law on the establishment of the Natsionalna Suspilna Teleradiokompanija Ukraini (NSTU) came into force after being signed by president Petro Poroshenko three days earlier. Poroshenko said the new law on public broadcasting was a law Ukraine had been waiting for 23 years. The law was finally approved by a large majority in the Ukrainian parliament on 19 March 2015.

The new broadcaster is to be a public joint stock company, owned one hundred percent by the Ukrainian state. For this, the state-owned television and radio stations must first be merged. The new government in Kiev had been reluctant to dissolve the current state broadcaster, arguing among other things that its more than 8000 employees were all public servants and therefore couldn't be made redundant.

However, since the conversion of the state enterprise into a public joint stock company is already turning out to be a difficult legal process owing to the unclear ownership structure and other structural problems, this important reform is still stuck in its initial phase in spring 2016. «This is a huge bureaucratic process, particularly as the legal framework keeps changing at the same time,» says Zurab Alasania, who as the director general of the new company has the thankless task of implementing the difficult reform. One of the many contentious issues is whether the new company can become owner of the state broadcaster's extensive property holdings, a measure which according to foreign advisers would be one of the main guarantees for the broadcaster's independence.

In the meantime Alasania must steer the huge broadcaster through a difficult transitional period during which its television channel *First National (Pershyi Natsionalny)* has coverage of more than 90 percent of Ukraine's territory but only tiny viewing figures. *Pershyi* has a reputation as a «grandmothers' channel». «Only old people in the villages watch it,» Oxana Romanyuk of the Institute of Mass Information comments, adding: «The grandmothers in the villages will be wondering about the slight changes in its programmes». Romanyuk says she can already observe an improvement in the quality of the channel's programme content but that it still comes across as an antiquated state channel in transition to an unclear future. Other critics are harsher and say that the channel's whole look is more 1970s than modern television. «While the private channels are gleaming *Pershyi* still looks old and dusty,» a foreign adviser says commenting on the channel and its development potential. Aware of this criticism, the channel has launched an image-building campaign and begun reforming its programmes in a bid to convince viewers that it really is changing.



With Alasania as the company's director general, the reform is spearheaded by a man who is not just a successful media manager but also one of the most respected and charismatic figures in the Ukrainian media landscape. A prominent journalist, he was born in Abkhazia but has lived in Ukraine since 1982. Alasania is well-travelled and cosmopolitan and has observed how public broadcasters work in many other countries.

It is not clear how much power Alasania really has to change the situation. «It's all very, very slow,» he comments, predicting that the reform will take several more years to complete. He says that at the moment the legal and bureaucratic issues are in the foreground. «The journalism comes later - the same old programmes and the low viewing figures are still the problem,» Alasania says. «The government and the president are not interested in a public service broadcaster,» he adds, criticising the lack of support from the power elite. All the governments gladly used the state-run broadcaster for their own purposes in the past, the director general explains, and now Poroshenko of all people mistrusts the public broadcaster. After all, he still operates his own *Channel 5*, Alasania points out. «The government and the president are not providing support or help,» he observes with regret.

Alasania explains that under the new law the broadcaster is entitled to 1.1 billion hryvnia (around 34 million euros) a year, but in 2015 it received only half that amount (654 million hryvnia). The finance minister had pointed out that the broadcaster was not yet a public enterprise.

The problem is that the broadcaster only receives money from the national budget and has no other income. Under the new law the broadcaster could set up a subscriber system, but all that is still a long way off. «I want a few years to show people what they would be spending their money on first,» says Alasania.

The support the broadcaster has received so far has come mainly from abroad. The European Broadcasting Union sends advisers, and the US government and many European supporters are involved. Support also comes from Germany. «The Deutsche Welle Academy helps a lot,» says Alasania. «They offer training and good advice.» However, he points out that under the current system it is difficult to implement good ideas.

The broadcaster hopes to secure five million euros in support from the EU in 2016, which it could spend on reforming the regionally-based newsrooms and developing them into a nationwide network. Alasania is also hoping that Japan will help out with the modernisation of the broadcaster's antiquated studios.

«It is a slow and painful process,» Kyrylo Lukerenko of *Hromadske Radio* also says commenting on the public service broadcasting reform. «Ukraine's radio broadcasting sector is under stress and mass redundancies are expected.» Lukerenko sees major difficulties with the reform process and a high level of distrust among the key players.

The acclaimed media project *Hromadske Radio* already cast itself as the true «public service broadcaster» for the people years ago. Critics of the reform of the state broadcaster both in Ukraine and abroad believe that the better approach would have been to close down the state-run colossus and make a fresh start with a streamlined network managed by the activists from *Hromadske TV* and *Hromadske Radio*.

Alasania is open to cooperation with these two prominent media projects. Parts of *Hromadske Radio*'s programming have already been integrated into his own broadcaster's radio schedule. And a while ago *Hromadske Radio* moved into offices on the ground floor of the large broadcasting building in Kiev's city centre for a low rent. Katya Gorchinskaya, CEO at *Hromadske TV*, also sees stronger collaboration with the future public-service broadcaster as an option.

Although Alasania is in close contact with the Hromadske people and is open to the idea of acquiring high-quality programme content from them, he also sees limits to cooperation with the internet activists. «It's a difficult thing to combine,» he says: «The *First Channel* is a huge format, and at Hromadske they don't like traditional television.» He points out that the video formats on the Internet are, after all, a little different to the television business. For this reason the director general is also open to the idea of collaborating with the professional television producers at the private TV stations.

«The oligarch stations don't see us as competition,» says Alasania. So he tries to stay in dialogue with all the TV bosses and ask them for help. «They compete with each other but not with us.» He talks of entertainment programmes such as nationwide singing contests for which the *First Channel* could provide the money and the



commercial channels the technology, as is already common practice in Sweden. «I try to make the point that it's an honour to support us,» he says. He also points out that there are no theatre, concert or children's channels in Ukraine so far, and says he could easily imagine joint projects in these areas.

The director general is hoping that in the run-up to the next elections more viewers will switch to the *First Channel* because they get fed up with the style of the oligarch channels. Alasania believes that journalists, too, may soon come to see a switch to the public broadcaster as an attractive option because it allows them to escape the billionaires' interference at the private TV stations. He is working hard to ensure that the *First Channel* becomes an independent channel for the people.

But how far he still has to go here only becomes clear when we visit one of the countless regional stations that form part of the state-run network. Such stations can be found in every big city in Ukraine. At the broadcasting building in Odessa, for example, it is hard to imagine the former splendour of the Soviet television era. Back then films and other major productions were produced in these television studios. Broadcasting first began in this imposing building in 1956, but today most of the complex lies empty and looks completely run-down. Walking through the corridors you get the sensation that time has stood still here. It looks more like a television museum than a modern broadcasting facility.

The building still houses the city's largest television studio, but the equipment is completely outdated. «We've reached a dead end here, both financially and technically,» Nelya Shevchenko, the station's committed news director says. «We hope that something will change.» Shevchenko is hoping the conversion to public broadcasting will increase the channel's autonomy and that the calls from politicians and government officials that were a frequent occurrence in the station's time as a state broadcaster will finally become a thing of the past. There is no newsroom here. Shevchenko leads us through dark corridors to distant offices full of outdated technical equipment. Young people sit at their desks wearing coats because despite the wintery temperatures outside the heating isn't working properly. Paint peels off the walls and light bulbs hang from the ceilings providing dim lighting. 250 people are still employed at the Odessa TV station; 50 have already left.

No one at the station knows how many viewers watch its regional programmes, Shevchenko says. «The viewing figures haven't been measured for 15 years because there was no money for it.» She also says that the broadcasting signal is so weak that around a third of the Odessa region can't receive the channel at all, and that on the border with Moldova the signals from across the border are stronger than the signal from the Ukrainian broadcaster. Only in the city of Odessa is the channel transmitted via the cable network, she adds.

Shevchenko employs five young journalists in her news team, all of whom are likewise pinning their hopes on the broadcaster's reform. A few weeks ago, Shevchenko tells us, the director general Zurab Alasania came to Odessa and disappointed everyone with the news that the reform would unfortunately be further delayed. «In Kiev they are facing many problems and that means that everything is delayed for the whole broadcasting network,» Shevchenko explains. After the visit from Kiev, she says, everyone realised that they would just have to continue «muddling through».

At the end of 2015 advisers from the *Deutsch Welle Academy* came to visit and support the editorial staff. «But we can't implement everything they propose,» says Shevchenko. «It creates many aspirations but our everyday workload doesn't permit us to put them into practice.»

Yet with 30 registered private TV channels the competition in Odessa is fierce. While other channels are already showing footage of protests outside the mayor's offices in their morning programmes *Pershyi* doesn't air the material until the evening because the same camera team that filmed it also has to cover the city council meeting that follows before returning to the TV station. The news editing team hasn't yet been equipped with mobile phones or laptops that would enable digital transfer of the footage.

At around 58 euros per month, the average salary is even lower than on the free market and well below the average wage for Ukraine, which is roughly 150 euros in spring 2016. Consequently, other media outlets in Odessa have an easy time luring talented colleagues away from the channel. «Investigative journalism doesn't exist here,» says Shevchenko. «No journalist is willing to take risks for 58 euros.» This means that she can expect very little from her team in terms of ambition or performance, she says.

The news programme from Odessa continues to display its allegiance to the state: Shevchenko admits that the selection of topics is largely geared towards the wishes of the local government. The lead story, for example, is a report on a meeting between a group of new police officers and citizens of Odessa that shows governor Mikheil Saakashvili's new law enforcement officers in a very positive light. It is more like a marketing film than a journalistic report. The news programme's aesthetics – the choice of colours and the style – also look old-fashioned and dated.





# 4

## PRINT MEDIA

## IN CRISIS

Newspapers have for the most part disappeared from the Kiev cityscape and there are hardly any newspaper kiosks left in the centre of the city. According to a survey carried out in March 2016 by the Gorshenin Institute only 12.5 percent of Ukraine's citizens still read newspapers to keep up with current affairs. «The press is in freefall,» says Oxana Romanyuk of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI). Ukraine lacks a functioning advertising market and because of the ongoing economic crisis people have no money to buy newspapers, she tells us. The online media are the main beneficiaries of the newspaper crisis. Some regional papers are having more success with their online versions than with their print editions nowadays.

«Vesti is the only successful newspaper,» says the director general of the *First Channel* Zurab Alasania. «People take anything they can get for free.» This tabloid newspaper first appeared during the Euromaidan protests in Kiev and has been distributed free of charge in metro stations ever since. How *Vesti* was financed remained unclear for a long time, but its opposition to the post-Maidan government was conspicuous. The tabloid is put together in a professional way but according to local journalists its defining characteristic is a tendency to use anonymous sources and spread blatantly populist half-truths.

Whereas a leading tabloid like *Fakty i komentarii* once had a circulation of over a million, media experts calculate that that figure has shrunk to just 150,000 copies. However, there is no reliable data on circulation and advertising trends. All the figures provided by the newspapers are considered inflated and are provided by the publishers themselves. There is no regulation or self-monitoring of circulation figures, and this hinders the development of a proper advertising market. The media companies have little interest in the real circulation figures or in monitoring the figures themselves.

Since 2014 newspapers and magazines like the business papers *Kommersant* and *Kapital* have either disappeared from the market entirely or, as with *Ukrainska Pravda*, have discontinued their print editions and now only appear online. On top of that many papers saw whole sections of their readership disappear after the loss of Crimea and the areas that belong to the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk and People's Republic of Luhansk. The Russian-language tabloid *Segodnya*, which used to be one of the country's most popular papers, has seen its circulation, once estimated at several hundred thousand copies, drop to less than 100,000 copies, according to Lviv-based journalist and media expert Yuri Durkot.

Yet in the opinion of the director of the Academy of Ukrainian Press, Valeri Ivanov, there are still too many papers in Ukraine. He talks of between 6,000 and 8,000 titles across the country, some of which have a circulation of just 600 copies.

It is conspicuous that despite its 45 million inhabitants Ukraine no longer has a national newspaper that steers the public discourse and shapes political opinion. According to Ivanov, the weekly paper *Zerkalo Nedeli* is the only independent quality newspaper left in the country and is regarded by many Ukrainians as the one «bright spot» in the print media landscape. Yuri Durkot also praises the paper as critical and well informed, complaining that all the other newspapers are dependent on their owners and their owners' interests.

Newspapers like *Den* and magazines like *Fokus* and *Novoye Vremya* also play an important role in the country's intellectual discourse, but with their low circulations their impact is very limited. It is the online media that are attracting more and more readers in Ukraine nowadays.

The forecasts for the newspaper market are far from optimistic. Media groups are responding to the crisis by reducing the content of their papers, cutting investments and skimping on quality. «Our situation follows the trend all over the world,» says publisher Stefan Kurpil about his Lviv-based regional paper *Vysoky Zamok*. With a circulation of around 100,000 copies the paper sees itself as a supraregional, reputable daily in Western Ukraine, but in the last few years it has had to lower its publishing frequency from five times to just three times a week. The paper's content has also shrunk from 32 pages to 24. «Surveys show that 30 percent of all readers of newspapers and magazines would like to continue reading them but no longer have the money to do so,» Kurpil says commenting on the difficult situation.

Another problem is the state-run distribution of papers through the postal service, which is too slow to keep up with the pressure for news hot off the press. «If the paper appears in Kiev on Saturday the readers in Lviv don't get it until Tuesday,» Durkot says describing the practical problems of distributing the Kiev-based weekly *Zerkalo Nedeli* to other parts of the country. This is another reason why online media

© PICTURE ALLIANCE / DPA





© PICTURE ALLIANCE/NURPHOTO

↑ Protest in Kiev against Vesti newspaper, which is accused by critics of opaque financing and of disseminating pro-Russian propaganda.

are gaining ground. Stefan Kurpil also complains about the slow delivery, which has a negative impact on regional papers too. But at least his publishing company still has the advantage of a functioning kiosk network with 60 kiosks spread throughout the city.

The devaluation of the Ukrainian currency and the proportional increase in the dollar exchange rate has also had dramatic consequences for newspaper publishers. Because there isn't a single paper factory in Ukraine that produces the high-grade paper needed for newspapers, all the publishers have to import their paper and printing ink from Russia or Poland at a high cost. At the request of the media companies paper imports were omitted from the list of sanctions to avoid destroying the newspaper market entirely.

We are dependent on imports but prices have gone through the roof,» complains Kurpil, adding that the rising costs can't be passed on to newspaper buyers. «When the dollar went up we panicked and had to dismiss 40 employees.» What has helped his media company to survive so far is the fact that it has its own printing plant, which also prints other newspapers, including some from Kiev. Then there is additional business from women's magazines and health magazines. But the difficult economic situation means the company has no money to invest in developing the paper's website, which is currently run by just three employees. The publisher doesn't believe there is any money to be made from the website anyway at this stage. «In Ukraine there is no such thing as paid online content; it's all free.»

Even in a relatively prosperous city like Lviv, the advertising market is so small compared to nearby Poland that it offers no chance of escaping the crisis, says Kurpil. This is despite the fact that there is only one serious rival, the tabloid *Express*, and two websites to cater to the city's 750,000 inhabitants. «The advertising market




is already very weak and is growing even weaker in the economic crisis,» says the publisher. On top of everything else many small and medium-sized companies are reluctant to advertise in the media because they don't want to attract the attention of the tax authorities, he notes. «A company that has money to spend on advertising is doing too well, the taxman says to himself, and starts investigating,» Kurpil explains from experience, adding that naturally companies want to avoid this at all costs.

But Ukraine still has a few successful publishers who have found a niche for themselves on the print media market. Gennady Chabanov is the founder and owner of holding company Center Media in Odessa, which publishes the two newspapers *Pensioner* and *Odesskaya Zhizn* as well as running two websites. He belongs to a small group of independent publishers in Ukraine. Ten years ago he came up with the idea of launching a newspaper for pensioners. «I thought to myself: the people who read newspapers are 40 plus nowadays.» He also noticed that the wave of redundancies back then was affecting many people who had retired early and had trouble understanding the complex rules and regulations of Ukraine's pension system.

In the beginning Chabanov ran a one-man-operation in which he both wrote the articles and delivered the newspapers personally in the Odessa area. Today the newspaper is popular and has a circulation of 50,000 copies. «It's a successful niche product,» says Chabanov. He went around visiting all the pension experts in the country to persuade them to help him explain the intricacies of the pension system to his readers. «We needed their information and they were happy to provide their advice,» Chabanov recounts. Another key to his success is that journalists translate the complex language of the experts and legal facts into simple content that readers can understand. «There are few journalists specialised in such topics in Ukraine.» The paper now has 17,000 subscribers and more copies are sold at kiosks or delivered by post. Fifty percent of its financing comes from advertising and the other fifty percent from sales, and according to the publisher it even manages to turn an annual profit. *Odesskaya Zhizn*, a local paper, is also holding its own on the market.

Chabanov and other private publishers are very critical of the fact that up to now the newspaper market has been distorted by local papers subsidized by local governments. These papers are used mainly to make official announcements and print local PR content, but other local papers see them as bothersome rivals. «This is another reason why Ukraine doesn't have a properly functioning newspaper industry,» says publisher Chabanov. «They get their money given to them while we have to earn it.» He points to the local paper *Odessky Vestnik*, which gets its funding directly from the municipal authority's budget while his own local paper has to generate its own income independently.

This is soon to change. On 1 January 2016 president Poroshenko signed a law under which all local newspapers are to pass into private ownership and be reformed over the next two years.



# 5

## ONLINE MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ASCENDANT

«I'm going to the Maidan. Who's coming with me?» the Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayyem wrote on Facebook in November 2013. This is how the local protest in Kiev against the decision of then president Viktor Yanukovich not to sign the association agreement with the European Union is supposed to have started. It turned into a huge protest movement organised via the social media, and established the online and social media as even more important information sources in Ukraine than in other countries.

According to the international media consulting agency Gemius, in 2015 more than 20 million Ukrainians used the Internet to communicate with friends, keep informed or for entertainment. Media experts report that online media outlets have long since overtaken radio and print media as the main sources of information. The Gorshenin Institute reported in March 2016 that 29.9 percent of the population mainly uses Ukrainian news websites to stay informed. Compared to other countries Internet access in Ukraine is cheap and the online products of the mass media are free.

Since the downfall of the Yanukovich regime and the new government's accession to power the limits on Internet freedom have virtually disappeared. All citizens have free access to online media. In this context a key role is played by a few opinion-makers who cleverly exploit the social media to their own advantage and have achieved a level of popularity attained only by rock stars or actors elsewhere. These individuals are political activists, journalists or politicians, whereby the dividing lines between these professions have become blurred. Their publications, be they in the form of a blog or posts on Facebook, are often more influential and reach a larger audience than any Ukrainian newspaper.

Political activist and former investigative journalist Mustafa Nayyem, for example, has switched to politics and is now a member of parliament, but his «blog» in the online paper *Ukrainska Pravda* is still very popular and his Facebook account even more so. His fellow campaigner Serhiy Leshchenko has also retained his Facebook star status even after switching to politics. And interior minister Arsen Avakov is jokingly referred to as the «Facebook minister» and uses his posts for political purposes. Around 360,000 Facebook friends follow his entries.

Since Avakov took office in 2014 everyone has been able to follow his ongoing assessment of the political situation in the country on Facebook. He announced the dissolution of the Berkut special police force on Facebook. Everyone could observe how difficult the minister found the task of reforming the police force when he first assumed his post. At the start of his term of office Avakov saw the social network as the easiest way to compensate for the lack of a professional press office. He continues to use it intensively and has also used this direct link to the citizens to

trigger political scandals. In December 2015 Avakov published a spectacular video of himself and the governor of Odessa, Mikheil Saakashvili, yelling at each other for several minutes during a council meeting on the fight against corruption. A number of media outlets also published the video afterwards. The confrontation ended with Avakov throwing a glass of water at Saakashvili after president Poroshenko broke up the meeting. The video of this incident was then posted on Avakov's Facebook page for everyone to see. But the former president of Georgia, Saakashvili, is also a Facebook star in Ukraine's media landscape.

Certain bloggers are highly influential. «Some of them set an ideological agenda in a very «unjournalistic» manner,» observes journalist Andrey Dikhtyarenko, who works for *Radio Liberty* in Kiev.

The importance of online media has grown dramatically in recent years. The main advantages for users are that they are always available, they focus on being up to date and they provide information for free. The websites of many newspapers have also long since become more successful than the original product. Some online





Former investigative journalist and blogger Mustafa Nayyem (right) is a Facebook star in Ukraine, as is his fellow campaigner Serhiy Leshchenko. Both were elected to Ukraine's parliament in late 2014.

media outlets like *Ukrainska Pravda* get hundreds of thousands of clicks a day. The «Ukrainian Media Landscape 2015» analysis by the Kiev office of Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation showed that a selection of seven new news sites had a combined total of more than 20 million visitors per month. These websites are *Espresso TV* (6.4 million), *Novoye Vremya* (5 million), *Inforesist.org* (3.5 million), *Hromadske TV* (3 million), *Apostrophe* (2 million), *4 Vlada* (0.8 million) and *Insider* (0.5 million).

Oxana Romanyuk of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) points out that despite this trend, under Ukrainian law a person who works for online media is still not recognised as a journalist. In her view this needs to change.

The trend towards mobile use of the Internet has grown stronger since 2015. According to media consulting agency Gemius more than five million users in Ukraine access the Internet via mobile or smartphones. «This kind of data expands the possibilities for advertisers to plan their online campaigns more efficiently and for website operators to sell their spaces more effectively,» says Lesya Prus, head of the Gemius office in Kiev.

Interestingly, the US companies Facebook and Google have more users in Ukraine than the Russian search engine Yandex or the social media platforms Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki. However, media experts also point to regional variations. In Kiev and western Ukraine Facebook has more users while in the east and south of Ukraine Vkontakte remains more popular than Facebook.

Twitter on the other hand is used mainly by journalists and politicians, says Natalya Steblyna, a media expert from Odessa. «Everyone has an opinion and they want to express it,» Steblyna says and explains her theory on why Ukrainians don't use Twitter so much: «Twitter is very brief and news-oriented. It offers too little space to express your opinion in detail.»

The importance of Facebook in Ukraine was also underlined in the summer of 2015 when Poroshenko asked Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to open a Facebook office in Kiev. The president's move came after a debate broke out about whether Facebook was pursuing a pro-Russian line and erasing anti-Russian posts on Ukrainian web pages.

# 6

## IDENTITY CRISIS

## AT HROMADSKJE TV

One of the shooting stars of Ukraine's media landscape was *Hromadske TV*. This «public television channel» was founded by journalists shortly before the Euromaidan protests because they grew tired of following the orders of the oligarchs at the private media outlets and wanted to work independently. The website had its finest hour during the Euromaidan protests because its journalists filmed the unfolding events live with their smartphones and then put them unedited on the web. The station saw itself as the revolution's mouthpiece and also as the pluralist and independent media platform of the new Ukraine.

This special role garnered international attention and won *Hromadske TV* the support of many foreign donors who began backing the up-and-coming website with a unique approach.

Today a sense of disappointment prevails at *Hromadske TV* because the website's major triumphs seem to lie in the past. *Hromadske TV* is still seen as an important media project but it has lost a lot of users and in Kiev's media community there are many who are now critical of the station. Some of the channel's staff are also gradually realising that even in Ukraine *Hromadske TV* is perhaps little more than a niche channel. Thanks to a franchise system a few *Hromadske* offshoots have been launched in regional areas, but they tend to cultivate their own separate identity. Opinions are divided about how much appeal the media project has outside Kiev: «It's more of a Kiev phenomenon,» says Lviv-based journalist Yuri Durkot. «Here in Lviv it doesn't really count for much.»

During the revolution the station was very successful, but critics say the editorial team has failed to move forwards and offer new formats. Commentators from Kiev point out that nowadays people want background and solid analysis rather than the fast-paced news reports and studio interviews on «streaming TV».

«All media must be able to adapt to the new situation,» agrees Ekateryna Sergatskova, who works as an editor for *Hromadske TV*. «During the Euromaidan there were no other media outlets that conveyed the mood like we did. Now we face the question: what do we become next?» The situation in the media reflects the situation in society, Sergatskova explains. «We want to turn a new page in history now,» she says.

On top of this a scandal erupted at the turn of the year that has taken on such proportions that it not only damaged *Hromadske TV's* image but also threatened to discredit crowdfunding as an instrument of growing importance for independent journalism.



One of the station's co-founders, Roman Skrypin, is accused of embezzling a large sum of money. The talk is of between 150,000 and 200,000 euros that were donated by viewers and are allegedly deposited in a private account of Skrypin's in the Czech Republic. Skrypin denies the allegations. He defended himself on Facebook explaining that his PayPal account was set up in the Czech Republic in 2010 while Yanukovich was still in office because it wasn't possible to set up the PayPal online payment system legally in Ukraine at the time, making a solution outside the country necessary. The journalist left *Hromadske TV's* management a while ago but allegedly failed to organize a proper transfer with his successor, editor-in-chief Natalya Gumenyuk, and this is what supposedly triggered the internal conflict.

31

In January 2016 the website's prominent members of the supervisory board made the donation scandal public. It said that the editorial team had had no knowledge of the money in the Czech Republic because Skrypin organized the PayPal payment system on his own. Since it learned about the money *Hromadske TV* has been demanding the return of the money and also of the rights to the domain name (Hromadske.tv). «For a whole year nothing was given back, and this testifies to a weak leadership,» members of staff at the station say. Editor-in-chief Gumenyuk says she is convinced it will come to a legal battle with Skrypin. *Hromadske TV* has no legal access to the money in the Czech Republic. Former colleagues of Skrypin suspect he wanted to use the money for a new project of his named *Hromadske Kiev*. But this, too, is causing conflict because it is unclear whether the journalist is allowed to use the Hromadske brand for his own purposes in this way. Gumenyuk has stressed that *Hromadske TV* is trying to display as much transparency as possible and to keep the public and international donors informed about the developments.

Many people were shocked by the scandal when it first broke and feared a loss of credibility for the respected media brand. The Ukrainian capital's media community is small and everyone knows each other. Although the *Hromadske TV* management is trying to play down the magnitude of the scandal it has faced harsh criticism from fellow journalists. «Skrypin was like a tsar,» they say. «The station should have set up a structure to ensure more effective self-monitoring at a much earlier stage.» Another reason why the events are causing such a stir is that up to now *Hromadske TV* had been perceived as a shining example of quality journalism. «Skrypin is something of a rock star in Ukrainian journalism,» comments Zurab Alasania, director general of the *First Channel*. He explains that Skrypin has an authoritarian leadership style and that this lost him support in the editing department. «Fortunately this is not about money from foreign sponsors,» Alasania observes.

The chief editor at *Hromadske Radio* is also concerned: «I worry that the scandal will hurt our reputation too,» says Kyrylo Lukerenko, even though the two projects are completely independent of each other. «We work in a totally different way and we do our own crowdfunding, but this is an unpleasant situation.»

Others point out that it is difficult to tell who is right from the outside. «They are good people,» says Serhiy Popov, news director at *1+1*. «This is a very dangerous conflict.»

But the director of the Academy of Ukrainian Press, Valeri Ivanov, defends Skrypin against the allegations. Ivanov is convinced that his former student Skrypin didn't embezzle the money but wanted to use it for his new project *Hromadske Kiev*. «The scandal shouldn't be exaggerated; everyone has their own truth here,» Ivanov says.

There were periods during which the website received a lot of money from abroad, which could have led to a sloppy approach to the finances. Hanno Gundert, executive director of the Berlin-based journalist network *n-ost*, remembers his irritation when he inquired in May 2014 at *Hromadske TV* about whether the station had received a donation from Germany and met with surprisingly indifferent reactions. During the Euromaidan protests *n-ost* gathered several thousand euros in donations in Germany for the website.

In the long term the TV station must become independent of its international donors, because too many engaged media projects in Ukraine are surviving mainly thanks to support from abroad. The support is frequently tied to individual projects, and this makes things very difficult for the NGOs and their employees.

«That is the big question: whether media in Ukraine can survive without donors,» says Sergatskova of *Hromadske TV* remaining sceptical. «We see ourselves as an experiment and want to gather experience. Others can benefit from this.» She says that people must be encouraged to use media and to pay for it, but despite positive experiences with crowdfunding Ukraine still has a long way to go in this respect.

Many journalists are pinning their hopes on Katya Gorchinskaya, who took over as *Hromadske TV's* CEO on 1 February 2016 and has an excellent reputation as a journalist and media manager. She talks of an «identity crisis» at *Hromadske TV* and admits that the revolution platform needs to change. So far the platform has operated as a collective with horizontal management structures. This will probably change now.

Not everything with «Hromadske» in its name belongs together. *Hromadske Radio* attaches great importance to emphasizing the independence of the radio project, which was launched back in 2003. The project was closed down for several years because it lacked financing after the tragic death of its founder in a car accident. Then it was re-launched. The new team was able to take over some of the old technical equipment and now broadcasts from two rooms in the city centre that used to belong to the old state broadcaster and that the station was able to rent cheaply.

«We want Ukrainian radio audiences to be provided with good information,» says Kyrylo Lukerenko, chief editor at *Hromadske Radio*. Thanks to crowdfunding the radio station developed its own website in the summer of 2013. After the Euromaidan the radio project also began to receive funding from foreign donors. In February 2014 *Hromadske* began airing its programme every night at 9 p.m. via the state broadcaster. This cooperation was expanded last year. *Hromadske* was given its own frequency and since November 2015 has been broadcasting 24 hours a day like a regular radio station, but mainly in Kiev (70,4 Mhz). There is an hour of news followed by six hours of live broadcasting and the cycle is repeated every seven



hours. «We hope to continue developing as a radio station,» says Lukerenko. «The older generation listens more to radio while younger people read us more online,» says the journalist. «Exiled Ukrainians listen to us and read the website from abroad.» *Hromadske Radio stands out in Ukraine's radio landscape for its high quality and balanced reporting, but is mainly to be heard through streaming on the web.*

In the regions too, not all NGOs automatically identify with *Hromadske TV* in Kiev but instead tend to focus on local peculiarities in this franchise system. In Odessa support for Skrypin remains as strong as ever. «We prefer to stay out of the current dispute,» says the chief editor in Odessa, Elena Gladkova, refusing to take sides. «Skrypin was our boss and always maintained good relations with us here in the regions.» She is concerned by the fact that the management in Kiev is now thinking about changes to the entire structure. «We want them to listen to our opinion on this,» she says. Her six-member editing team doesn't want to become a correspondents' office for *Hromadske TV* in Kiev, she explains. «We are an independent organisation,» Gladkova stresses. Yes, they have benefited from the Hromadske brand, but they see themselves as an independent project that now fears for its autonomy, she says. «When we were having problems we had to deal with them on our own.»

The project started off in an improvised way, with sleepless nights spent in kitchens around the city. After the dramatic events of 2 May 2014, when more than 40 people died under unexplained circumstances during riots outside the trade union building in Odessa, a group of journalists began to stream live television reports and post them on Youtube. Through a contact with Skrypin, who was editor-in-chief of *Hromadske TV* at the time, the group signed a partner agreement giving it the right to use the brand in Odessa and also to share experiences and material. Gladkova wants this loose partnership to continue. Centralisation of *Hromadske* is rejected not just in Odessa but in other cities too, she says. «It is important that we maintain our autonomy in the regions.»

She, too, is concerned about the damage the donation scandal has caused to *Hromadske's* image. She points out that it used to be the colleagues in Kiev who worried that one of *Hromadske TV's* regional stations might hurt its reputation, but now it's the other way round.

«Anyone can become Hromadske» was the experimental media project's motto for a long time, but now that the goal is to create a uniform structure it is paying dearly for this approach. «In the city of Kherson there is a Hromadske offshoot that we here in Kiev don't know anything about,» says Sergatskova. During the revolution no one thought about structures, they just concentrated on the programming, she explains. «Now a long-term strategy needs to be developed.»

# 7

## JEANSA – SURVIVING THANKS

## TO PAID-FOR CONTENT

The so-called «jeansa» problem is widespread among all media in Ukraine. «Jeansa» is media coverage that is paid for but is not labelled as commissioned PR content. With surprising candidness journalists and editors admit that their publications only survive thanks to this paid-for content.

Paid-for coverage takes various forms in Ukraine. For instance press releases are simply reprinted in newspapers, articles are ordered, or radio and television broadcasters air paid-for quotes or even entire reports.

The key period for generating this type of income is the run-up to elections, because the «jeansa» phenomenon isn't limited to advertising content but often includes political articles ordered by interest groups and used for smear campaigns against political opponents. «Most media outlets live from one election to the next,» says media expert Natalya Steblyna from Odessa. Particularly during election campaigns a lot of money is earned this way and then everyone lives off the income generated by the paid-for content, she explains. Studies carried out at regional media outlets show that once elections are over they publish far less paid-for content.

The term «Jeansa» dates back to Soviet times. The story told among journalists in Kiev is that it was coined because a Western jeans company wasn't allowed to place advertisements in the media so it paid bribes for articles that gave its products positive coverage. Some of the bribes were even paid in the form of jeans, the story goes. This «white corruption» is still a key component of Ukraine's media reality today. So far too little has been done to put an end to this questionable practice in the general context of the fight against corruption.

The Ukrainian website *Telekritika*, a forum for debate on media issues, developed certain criteria for identifying paid-for coverage long ago. The experts there say that articles should be treated with suspicion particularly if they exaggerate the positive achievements of a political party or candidate and almost identical versions of them appear in different media outlets.

The «monitorings» of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) are one of the few initiatives aimed at making the problem at least more visible. Thanks to foreign donors' support the institute's co-workers analyse newspapers, magazines and online media on a regular basis in search of camouflaged PR. The most recent project of this kind was commissioned ahead of the local elections in autumn 2015. According to the findings, the increase in the use of paid-for coverage varied by region. In online media between five and fifteen percent of the content was «jeansa». The highest

proportion of «jeansa» (21 percent) was registered in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, where the rival candidates fought out a veritable «battle» in the local media.

The Lviv-based journalist Maryna Dovzhenko has conducted several analyses of the use of «jeansa». «Jeansa are a big problem in Lviv» she says, explaining that the city has no functioning advertising market and the «tit for tat» principle holds sway. Personal contacts for instance with the people who work at the local bank, a clinic or a local business play a major role, she says. A paper will publish an article in the health section about the excellent treatment results at a certain clinic, or repeated articles about a bank that offers its customers loans on particularly generous terms. «Jeansa are often very easy to identify,» says Dovzhenko, adding that sometimes the texts are even put in a box or written in a different typeface from the rest of the text to simulate the labelling of advertising content.

The publisher of the local newspaper *Vysoky Zamok*, Stefan Kurpil, denies that his paper uses «jeansa» content. «Political parties in particular want this but we don't do it. We label PR and advertising,» he says. He does admit, however, that every now and then the paper receives an inquiry, for example from a bank, asking not for direct advertising but perhaps for an interview with a bank adviser. «That we go along with,» says Kurpil. «They pay for it and we publish the interview in a box.» The publisher criticises the fact that nowadays every positive report is suspected of being hidden advertising, pointing out that a newspaper can't just cover negative developments.

In online media, too, this business is booming. «In the run-up to elections a news article costs around 300 euros,» Oxana Romanyuk says. Given the low salaries of journalists, that can amount to far more than a month's income: «It's a huge business.» The money goes to the director, the chief editor or directly to the journalists. Because of the small monthly salaries paid to journalists, which can be as low as 80 to 100 euros in the regions, many of them need to earn a little on the side. At between 250 and 300 euros salaries are somewhat higher in Kiev, but living in the capital is more expensive too. Top salaries of 10,000 euros are extremely rare among journalists, but according to Romanyuk a few of the more prominent ones in the TV business actually do earn that much.

Many see «jeansa» as an attractive source of extra income: a chief editor tells us that he gets seven times as much for putting «jeansa» on his website as he does for normal online advertising. «Instead of 1000 hryvnia you get 7000,» he points out. That makes this «dark source of income», as it is often called, worthwhile. He says that in his experience «advertising clients also see hidden advertising as far more effective, particularly when it comes to politics.» «That's the reality of Ukraine,» he says. «Unfortunately the corruption is systematic in character and this also has a major influence on the media.»

For this reason hardly any of the media outlets have an editing policy that prohibits «jeansa». On the contrary, because the amount of normal advertising has dropped in the economic crisis many media managers and editors have no qualms whatsoever about earning extra money by publishing paid-for stories. «How else are we supposed to survive?» is a common argument. Then there's the fact that in Western media companies «native advertising» – online advertising disguised as journalistic content – is now seen as an important marketing tool and is increasingly blurring the lines that enable readers to distinguish between journalistic content and camouflaged PR in the West, too.

Many people in Ukraine's media industry lack the awareness that such practices are hardly compatible with journalistic ethics and professionalism and have a negative impact on media credibility. Yet in Ukraine too, the publishing of camouflaged paid-for articles contravenes the ethics of the profession. Article 7 of the Commission for Journalistic Ethics' Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists stipulates that «news articles and analysis pieces must be made clearly distinguishable from advertising through the use of headings.» And according to Article 17 of the Code journalists are not allowed to accept «material compensation or services in return for finished or unfinished journalistic material.» The code of ethics of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine contains similar rules, but few are willing to adhere to them.





# 8

## THE WAR

## AND THE MEDIA

Russia's «hybrid war» in the east of the country and the accompanying mass propaganda against Ukraine provoked the desire in Kiev's government circles to adopt countermeasures that still influence the country's media policy today. The measures also highlighted how willing certain sections of the political elite in Kiev are to rashly place restrictions on media freedom in Ukraine. In August 2014 the Ukrainian government banned 15 Russian TV channels from broadcasting in Ukraine. Interior minister Arsen Avakov signed a decree that blocked them from Ukraine's cable network on the grounds that the Russian channels were broadcasting «war propaganda and violence». By 2 April 2015 president Poroshenko had already signed a law that prohibited the broadcasting of numerous Russian TV series and films.

These decisions were highly controversial in Ukraine. Media expert Valeri Ivanov, director of the Academy of Ukrainian Press, harshly criticises the blockade against Russian channels: «What makes the government think it has the right to decide what its citizens may or may not watch?» he objects, denouncing this «undemocratic decision». He points out that even Russian films made decades ago have been banned. Ivanov sees this crackdown as more the product of Soviet reflexive reactions than of a clever strategy. Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis the governmental film agency has put more than 400 Russian films on a list of forbidden films.

At the start of August 2015 Ukraine's security service, the SBU, published a list of 38 books banned from import into Ukraine. The list was compiled by an expert committee at the Ministry of Culture. It was announced that the books were being banned to protect the citizens of Ukraine from «information war methods and disinformation, from the spread of misanthropic, fascist, racist and separatist ideologies and to avert attacks on the country's territorial integrity and constitution of the Ukrainian state.» An odd aspect of the measures was that they involved various different authorities but there was little evidence of coordinated action here.

In autumn 2015 Ukraine banned a large number of foreign journalists and bloggers from entering the country. A decree posted on the presidential administration's website on 16 September 2015 named around 40 representatives of the media who were to be banned from entering Ukraine for a year. Only after large-scale international protests were several journalists removed from the blacklist.

The popular talk show presenter Savik Shuster, who left Moscow and fled to Kiev more than ten years ago to escape the growing pressure on journalists in Russia, has also fallen victim to these measures born of a false concept of patriotism and hysteria. Shuster is the presenter of «Shuster Live», the most influential political talk show on Ukrainian television, but according to reports his work permit was to be temporarily revoked due to allegations of tax evasion. Shuster defended himself

against this politically motivated harassment and threatened to go on a hunger strike. Numerous media organizations and Ukrainian colleagues came out in his support, forcing the employment agency to revise its controversial proceedings. Shuster has accused president Poroshenko of being behind this «complot».

The head of state has repeatedly made negative headlines with measures that testify to a flawed understanding of press freedom. On 2 December 2014 the Ministry of Information Policy was established in Kiev, provoking fierce reactions both within the country and abroad. International journalist organisations feared that the ministry would be used as an institution for censorship and propaganda and endanger media freedom in Ukraine.

Journalist and politician Yuri Stets, a close confidante of president Poroshenko, was appointed as its minister. The new authority was charged with suppressing Russian propaganda in the country and spreading counterpropaganda both in Crimea and in the areas controlled by pro-Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine.

«It is not the task of the government to control information,» said Christian Mihr, executive director of Reporters Without Borders Germany, criticising the decision at the time. «You do not fight propaganda with propaganda. Independent media and critical journalists should instead be encouraged. It is not a good start for the newly elected government when the first thing it does is to set up a kind of ministry of propaganda.» The ministry also drew criticism from journalists and media organisations in Ukraine who feared that the new minister Yuri Stets would be established as a censor in the government led by former prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

A year on, the mood has calmed down as the fears that the Ministry of Information Policy would tighten controls on the media have proven unfounded. «We were afraid that it would become a propaganda ministry,» says Oxana Romanyuk of the Institute of Mass Information, who was among the harshest critics of the ministry. «In the meantime it has become clear that it has no influence and no one takes its employees seriously.» After all, it's just a small ministry with only 30 officials, she points out. Romanyuk still doesn't understand exactly what the authority was needed for. «It has mainly functioned as a PR agency for Poroshenko,» she says. Nowadays most people in the media industry have simply grown used to it. There was a bit of a stir when Stets formally resigned from his post as information minister on 3 December 2015. With this step he was keeping the promise he made when he took office twelve months before that he would only hold the office for a year. But since his resignation hasn't yet been accepted Stets continues to occupy the post, even under the new prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman.

When the minister met with RSF's representative he tried to generate more support and understanding for his work. «A country becomes different from other countries when it is at war,» Stets explained. «In times of peace I, too, would be more critical of a ministry of information like this.» Stets sees his own work after a year in office as a complete success and is clearly proud of his achievements, which he displays using a brochure. The minister is surprisingly sensitive and uncomprehending on the subject of the widespread criticism of his office. «It is certainly not a ministry for censorship,» Stets stresses, and nor is he a «minister for censorship». The minister of information takes a critical view of his own government's measures to ban Russian books and media products. «Everyone has the right to choose for himself what he wants to see or read,» he says, thus distancing himself from the measures of other ministries.



↑ International journalists at the demarcation line between areas controlled by the Ukrainian army and those controlled by pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

The tasks of the Ministry of Information Policy are of an entirely different nature, Stets points out. It has pushed through a reform of the government's strategic communication, he says, and expands on this explaining that in the past the whole press department was replaced every time a minister left office, but now the ministry now tries to ensure greater continuity and make sure that the government speaks with one voice.

The minister goes on to explain that in the fight against Russian propaganda the Ministry of Information Policy uses transmitters to broadcast Ukrainian information programmes in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. For this mission it receives technical support from Poland, Latvia and the US, Stets says. The ministry also publishes a newspaper, *Ukraina Jedyna*, (Ukraine is United) that targets the citizens of the Donbass region, soldiers and civilians alike. «It is constantly being criticised by the Russian government, which shows that we are doing everything right,» Stets' deputy Tetiana Popova points out. The articles are written by Donetsk journalists, and this is why the separatists are definitely worried about this Ukrainian publication, she says. The ministry also supports journalists in annexed Crimea. Journalists who fled there can broadcast their programmes on the state radio network, and there is also a Crimean-Tatar version of the ministry's website.

In March 2015 the authority also launched a campaign on the social media and on posters put up in Ukraine and abroad aimed at spreading the message «Crimea is Ukraine» and preventing people from forgetting Russia's forcible annexation of the peninsula.



In May 2015 the ministry began offering Ukrainian and foreign journalists the chance to travel to the war zone for a week «embedded» in Ukrainian fighting units so they can report directly from these areas. More than 50 journalists have taken advantage of this opportunity so far, deputy minister Tetiana Popova adds. «Fortunately none of them have died doing this,» says the politician, who by her own admission is referred to by the Russian media as the «Ukrainian Goebbels». This service for journalists was developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence. Many journalists welcome the fact that the Ukrainian Ministry of Information Policy offers such trips to the fighting zone. Some, however, like the news director at *1+1* Serhiy Popov, are critical of the fact that journalists aren't allowed to travel to the front independently: «We want to see for ourselves what is going on there and whether our soldiers are barefoot and hungry.»

Since 1 October 2015 the government has its own website, *Ukrinform*, which broadcasts to the rest of the world in several languages. «We want to tell the world that Ukraine is not just a country of depressed regions, corruption and poverty but a European country that wants reforms,» the information brochure tells readers. This service provided by the Ministry of Information Policy is also controversial in Kiev: «No one outside the country is interested in this. It's just a waste of money,» many journalists say.

Besides, with *Ukraine Today* there is already another project aimed at enhancing Ukraine's image abroad and countering the Russian propaganda. It is produced at the studios of Kolomoysky's private channel *1+1* and first went on air in the summer of 2014. «I wouldn't see it as the answer to RT,» says the channel's producer, Tetiana Pushnova, stressing what she believes makes the channel different from the Russian propaganda channel: «We don't do propaganda.»

The channel's main target groups are experts, politicians and journalists in Europe who speak English. *Ukraine Today* uses the tools of television to report on Ukraine, Pushnova explains. The aim is to start a dialogue with the community on the Internet, she continues, stressing that «Ukraine Today» isn't a money maker. «We work out of enthusiasm, although naturally we get paid for it.» Around 45 people are employed in the editing department, including six English-speaking editors and five authors. The new editor-in-chief is Julia Sotska, a Ukrainian from Canada who worked for many years as a news editor.

Commenting on her channel's special role Pushnova says that it is hard not to emotionalize issues in times of war, describing this as a difficult balancing act. «We convey a lot of information about Ukraine and show the face of Ukraine, but we make a deliberate effort not to be manipulative in our work. Above all we want people to understand our country,» says Pushnova. She explains that even among Slavists, for too long the expertise on Ukraine was too Russia-oriented and dependent on Moscow's views. «I see myself as a nationalist,» says Pushnova, but she doesn't want to be misunderstood. She says that the tragic events of the last three years have taught her: «If someone is a patriot it doesn't necessarily mean they are a bad journalist.» After all, she points out, to be a good journalist it is important to have a firm stance and to fight for your beliefs.

Pushnova is far from being alone in her views because since the outbreak of the war in the east of the country many journalists in Ukraine have come to see themselves first and foremost as «Ukrainian patriots» rather than neutral reporters. Even at the universities' journalism schools foreign lecturers face strong opposition when they say that journalism does not primarily carry out «nationalistic tasks». «Many journalists misunderstand their role and have become

propagandists,» complains the director of the Academy of Ukrainian Press Valeri Ivanov commenting on this trend. Ivanov criticises the concomitant phenomenon of a «patriotic journalism» which feels allegiance to the government and is willing to remain silent on awkward issues. He notes that some journalists even say openly that the president should not be criticised as long as the war continues, and simply copy out the Defence Ministry's press releases.

Ivanov accuses a number of journalists of withholding the truth about the large number of deaths on the front. «Because of the war the freedom of words is worth less today,» he says, criticising this stance. Sometimes people who sympathise with the separatists in the social media are even arrested, he claims. «This is normal for authoritarian Russia and for an authoritarian Ukraine, but it doesn't fit in with a Ukraine that wants to move closer to Europe.» In the view of the media scientist this patriotic fervour is another factor that is contributing to the people's lack of trust in the Ukrainian media.

«People who insist on objective journalism quickly become pariahs here,» Zurab Alasania, the director general of the *First Channel* also complains, bemoaning a decline in the country's journalistic culture. In January 2016 there was even a scandal at Lviv University that reverberated through the entire industry when a journalist insisted on talking of the «Ukrainian troops» rather than saying «our troops», triggering a fierce debate.

Oleg Konstantinov, chief editor of the popular online newspaper *Dumskaya* in Odessa, takes a different view: «We see emotionally coloured language as appropriate,» he says explaining the way his editorial team writes about the separatists in the east of the country. «We write 'terrorist' and we don't try to make things sound nicer than they are.» The BBC may be able to afford neutral language, «but we are at war», the journalist says. That doesn't mean the paper engages in propaganda, he stresses, pointing out that he and his colleagues also criticise the conditions in which the soldiers live, as well as the government's conduct of war.

Ekateryna Sergatskova of *Hromadske TV*, who spent a lot of time in the war zone and reported from Donbass, points to international policy debates in the media industry on how to handle certain key terms: «We try to observe the standards and say 'fighters' rather than 'terrorists,» she says about her editorial team.

In a moving commentary piece for the Berlin-based online magazine *Ostpol*, Sergatskova dealt with the taboos in Ukraine's coverage of the war and in December 2015 appealed for a return to more objectivity in Ukrainian journalism:

«Over the past year and a half some unspoken taboos have emerged. You cannot criticize the words or the actions of those who identify themselves as patriots (a patriot is always right). You cannot mention problems with the military (it plays into the enemy's hand). You cannot speak about human rights abuses (it is not the right time, we must first solve the most important problem – the war). Many similar prohibitions emerged, killing the possibility to speak about problems, and therefore, the possibility to work on solving them.

One year and a half after a part of Ukraine's territory was annexed, with unprecedented media support, it has become evident that the virus of Putin's propaganda has stuck around. More than that – the infection has begun to spread not only in breadth, but also in depth. Now, preserving objectivity in one's own, free territory is becoming harder and harder, and being blamed for collaborating with the Kremlin – easier and easier.

After a year and a half of war, which has exhausted and traumatized millions of people, and which has still not quite finished, after a series of not very transparent and not very successful elections, one of the most important challenges for Ukraine lies in whether or not we will be able to restore journalistic objectivity. This may well cause pain, but will at least provide the opportunity to move forwards, and not backwards into the Middle Ages, where we are being propelled, in one way or another, by propaganda. After all – it is wrong and completely crazy to be afraid when you are in your own home.»

These are tricky debates which, notwithstanding the ongoing war, are still taking place among Ukrainian journalists and in the public sphere. Journalist Yuri Durkot from Lviv observes a widespread and deep-seated distrust of Russian media among his fellow citizens, according to the motto: «The Soviets always lie.» This concept was widespread in Lviv and the western Ukrainian region of Galicia in Soviet times. For this reason he believes the impact of Russian propaganda in today's Ukraine is very limited, especially in Western and Central Ukraine. The above-mentioned surveys carried out by the Gorshenin Institute in March 2016 confirm this unperturbed view of the situation.

It has become virtually impossible for Ukrainian media to report directly from the self-proclaimed People's Republics. The decrease in the large number of kidnappings and attacks against journalists in the east of the country since 2014 is for the most part due to the fact that fewer journalists can travel to the disputed areas these days. Those in command in these areas block access entirely for Ukrainian journalists, and almost all the independent journalists from Donbass have left their home city and in most cases now do their reporting from Kiev. «The Ukrainian colleagues take great risks to smuggle themselves into the occupied areas,» says Andrey Dikhtyarenko, who comes from Luhansk and now reports from Kiev on the situation in his home region on his website *Realnaya Gaseta*. According to the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, around 600 journalists were among those forced to flee their homeland, with roughly 100 of them coming from Crimea. Not only individual

↓  
«Don't shoot at journalists!» In January 2014, Ukrainian and international journalists protested in Kiev against violence directed at media workers.



journalists but entire editorial departments have been forced to flee and try to continue their work outside the «People's Republics».

Under the protection of anonymity Dikhtyarenko still works with colleagues in Luhansk in order to publish reports directly from the area and give his former colleagues a voice. He has found a new job at the Kiev office of *Radio Liberty*, and runs his website featuring reports from Luhansk on his own with voluntary commitment. He is driven by the desire to end the isolation of the «People's Republics». He spent months campaigning for his colleague Maria Varfolomeyeva, who was finally released from prison in March 2016 and came to Kiev for medical treatment. The separatists had arrested her on 9 January 2015 as she was taking photographs on the streets of Luhansk. The self-proclaimed People's Republics have become a journalistic «black box», says Serhiy Popov, news director at TV channel *1+1*, who himself comes from Donetsk: «We try to obtain information and work secretly with freelance journalists, but naturally this is particularly difficult for television.»

Ukrainian and foreign journalists became the targets of an unprecedented attempt at defamation launched by the operators of the Ukrainian website *Myrotvorets* (Peacemakers) in May 2016. This controversial nationalist website published the personal data of 4068 journalists who had received accreditation as journalists in the self-proclaimed «People's Republics» of Luhansk and Donetsk in the last two years. Ukrainian hackers had cracked the database of the «People's Republics» and published documents listing the mobile phone numbers and email addresses of these journalists. In an open letter to the website numerous Ukrainian journalists called on the operators of the site to immediately remove the list from the web, arguing that accreditation did not by any means constitute collaboration but offered journalists who travel to Eastern Ukraine a certain amount of protection.



# 9

## JOURNALISTIC TRAINING

## AS PART OF THE PROBLEM

In every Ukrainian media company one hears the same complaint about how hard it is to find good journalists and suitable young recruits. Above all the traditional academic approach to training journalists has come under fire and is a leftover from Soviet times that still poses an obstacle to high-quality journalistic training today, not just in Ukraine but also in other post-Soviet states.

Zurab Alasania, director general of the *First Channel*, finds it absurd that journalists in Ukraine have to go to university for five years to obtain a Master's degree in journalism. «Journalism is a craft,» he says. Alasania argues that it makes more sense to study a proper academic subject like law, medicine or history and then learn the trade in practically oriented courses. «A journalist needs a broad education,» Lviv publisher Stefan Kurpil concurs. «There is a lack of practitioners as teachers in journalism education,» Katya Gorchinskaya, CEO of *Hromadske TV*, also complains. Most university lecturers have no practical experience whatsoever of working in an editorial department. They often keep their students occupied with arcane topics. Rather than preparing students for their future careers the history of journalism is the main focus of many study programmes. Current developments in digital journalism and new fields like data journalism are often ignored.

«There are 71 universities that educate journalists in Ukraine,» says media expert Otar Dovzhenko, a lecturer with the journalism programme at the Catholic University in Lviv, adding that even polytechnical universities are involved in training journalists. «Almost everywhere the training is far too academic and no longer in keeping with the times.» Dovzhenko also complains about widespread corruption in the courses. Many of the PR people at the ministries happily pay for a «pseudo education» because they need a diploma to be able to work for a government authority. Dovzhenko explains that for the equivalent of 2,000 dollars they can complete a diploma examination in six months and then call themselves «qualified journalists». Most courses don't make a proper distinction between PR and journalism anyway, he says.

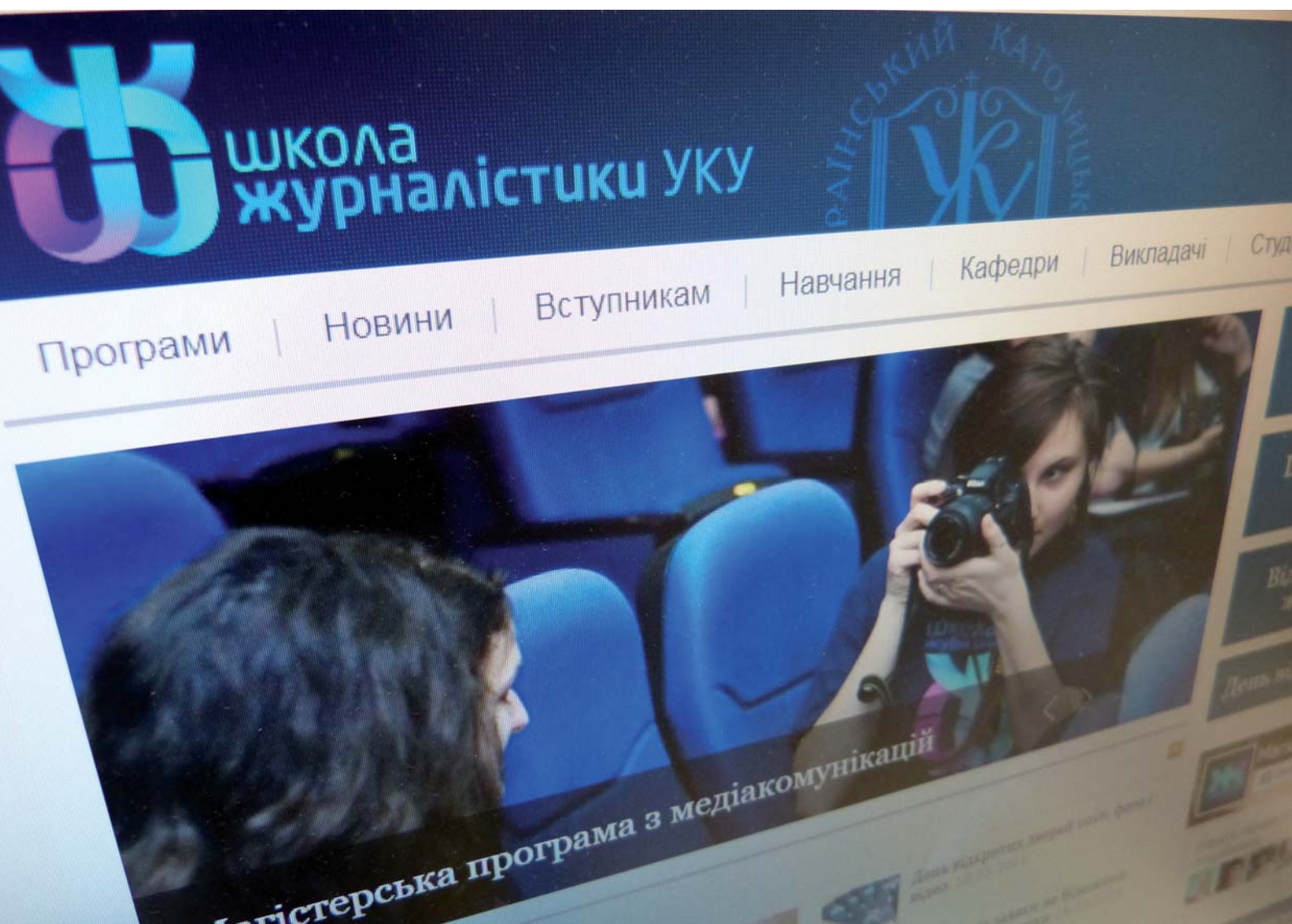
The Mohyla School of Journalism in Kiev and the journalism degree programme at the Catholic University in Lviv are regarded as the two flagships of journalistic training in Ukraine. A few other universities are trying to reform their journalism courses and adjust them to the requirements of the media industry.

«Our degree programme in Lviv tries to take a completely different approach,» says Dovzhenko. Although the university is a religious institution the programme is secular in design. This highly professional programme receives financial backing from numerous Western sponsors and, like the Mohyla School of Journalism, earns the highest praise in the form of the strong demand for its graduates at editing departments. Since 2011 each semester the university takes on 45 new students

who have already completed a course of studies and can speak a foreign language. In the Master's degree programme the students gain a good overview of the different fields of journalism over two years and can then specialise in one of them, for example television journalism.

All members of the programme's teaching staff have practical experience in the media industry and many visiting lecturers come from other parts of the country and abroad to teach here. Students have access to modern technical equipment and the university's own television and radio studio. In the so-called «master classes» prominent journalists come to public lectures that also deal with sensitive topics like «reporting on conflicts».


All the students publish texts throughout the course so that at the end of their studies graduates can produce plenty of samples of their work. In 2015 a generous Danish sponsor funded 16 scholarships for students from the east of the country and Crimea. The programme also encourages and helps students to take advantage of grants for visits abroad to expand their horizon. «Seventy-five percent of Ukrainians have never been abroad,» Dovzhenko points out. The course even pays for the five best students to travel to Rome, Warsaw, Turkey or Germany. Thanks to contacts in the Ukrainian diaspora selected students are also given the opportunity to do a month's practical training in Chicago.



«We want to create an alternative educational model,» says the head of the programme, Ihor Balynsky. Balynsky also launched the Lviv-based website *zaxid.net*, one of the leading online media platforms in the region. His vision is that in the future his department will not only train journalists but also offer courses for media managers, media researchers, data journalists and political communication. Balynsky attaches great importance to preparing his students for the challenges of the digital media world right from the outset. «The students should know how to use the social media but also be able to draw connections between local events and global developments,» he says, adding that visualisation and also «story-telling» are playing a growing role in the media. He stresses that students must be able to work with a multimedia approach: «No text is complete without good pictures nowadays.» He is glad that he has small classes that allow him to teach the new trends in journalism with a hands-on approach. The programme is so popular that there are around five applicants for each place.

Before taking his current post Balynsky taught journalism for 15 years at Lviv University, where around a thousand journalists have to complete a five-year degree programme without coming into proper contact with the practical aspects of the profession. «Each year 300 students earn their degree in journalism – but where are they all supposed to go?» he asks. He believes it is high time for a reform and above all a clean break with what he calls a «post-Soviet and post-philological understanding» of journalistic training. The graduates of his modern programme and those of the Mohyla School of Journalism in Kiev have a good reputation and are in high demand as junior employees at media outlets. Balynsky points out that as things stand now around 40 percent of the journalists working in Ukrainian media lack any journalistic qualifications.

Some media groups try to compensate for this deficit by training their journalists to suit their particular needs. The TV station **1+1** began offering its employees special training a few years ago. «There is a trainee programme,» says **1+1**'s news director Serhiy Popov. «We select the best people and put them in our recruiting programme.» Alasania also wants to set up a training centre for his new broadcaster to make its more than 8000 employees fit for the modern media world. He is looking for sponsors and support from abroad for the project.



## DEMANDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

**As this report shows, despite major challenges and deep-rooted problems Ukraine has made good progress towards developing a pluralistic media landscape. It has many dedicated journalists and media who are doing good work despite all the difficulties. From the perspective of Reporters Without Borders the reform efforts in Ukraine therefore deserve more international attention and sustained support from foreign governments, donor organisations and media. We issue the following demands and recommendations:**

### **To the Ukrainian leadership:**

RSF calls on the Ukrainian government to ensure that the reforms in the area of media legislation, including the law on greater transparency of ownership structures, are implemented.

RSF calls on president Petro Poroshenko to give up control of his private television news network «Channel 5». In the view of RSF, holding high political office is not compatible with media ownership.

RSF calls on the Ukrainian government to clearly distance itself from the controversial Ukrainian website *Myrotvorets* (Peacemaker) and from other attempts to publicly denounce journalists because they have been accredited in Eastern Ukraine and report from there.

RSF calls for stronger support for the conversion of the Ukrainian state broadcaster into a public-service broadcaster.

RSF calls for further investigations into the deaths of journalists under previous governments. Their fate must not be forgotten.

RSF recommends that the Ukrainian government revoke its bans on Russian books and films and that it remove all journalists from the list of people banned from entering Ukraine.



### To Ukrainian journalists:

RSF recommends that Ukraine's media companies launch a critical debate on the lax approach to paid-for coverage, commonly referred to in Ukraine as «jeansa», which is not clearly identifiable for readers/users as advertising content.

RSF recommends that Ukrainian journalists conduct an open debate about patriotism and journalism. Colleagues should not be shunned for adhering to journalistic standards.

### To the OSCE:

RSF calls on the OSCE presidency to oblige the conflicting parties in Eastern Ukraine to grant journalists free access to the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk and People's Republic of Donetsk so that they can report from these areas. This must also apply for the local elections planned to take place there.

### To the EU:

RSF calls to the EU that closer association between Ukraine and the EU should be made contingent on the Ukrainian government refraining from obstructing the development of a pluralistic media landscape and guaranteeing media freedom.

### To international donor organisations:

RSF recommends that international donor organisations provide more long-term support to Ukrainian media projects. Applications for projects should be approved to run for at least two years longer in order to make it possible for dedicated Ukrainian journalists to further develop innovative media projects.

RSF recommends that foreign donors provide more support to innovative training programmes for young Ukrainian journalists which satisfy the multimedia requirements of modern journalistic training. In this context partnerships between European journalism schools and Ukrainian training centres should also receive more support.

RSF recommends strengthening connections between Ukrainian journalists and media groups and the European colleagues, networks and media companies. Particularly since foreign investments by foreign media companies have been lacking in Ukraine so far, there is great need for international exchange especially as regards modern media management and the development of innovative business ideas.

RSF recommends that donor organisations support media projects that facilitate encounters between Russian and Ukrainian journalists. Precisely because of the war in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, this dialogue is vital.

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES QUOTED IN THIS REPORT

**Zurab Alasania**, general director of Natsionalna Suspilna Teleradiokompanija Ukraini (NSTU)

**Ihor Balynsky**, head of the journalism programme at the Catholic University in Lviv and founder of the *zaxid.net* website

**Gennady Chabanov**, founder and owner of Center Media holding company in Odessa

**Andrey Dikhtyarenko**, journalist from Luhansk, owner of the *Realnaya Gaseta* website, subeditor at *Radio Liberty* in Kiev

**Maryna Dovzhenko**, journalist in Lviv and freelance collaborator of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI)

**Otar Dovzhenko**, journalist and lecturer with the journalism programme at the Catholic University in Lviv

**Yuri Durkot**, journalist and media expert in Lviv

**Elena Gladkova**, editor-in-chief of *Hromadske TV* in Odessa

**Katya Gorchinskaya**, executive director of *Hromadske TV*

**Natalya Gumenyuk**, editor-in-chief of *Hromadske TV*

**Hanno Gundert**, executive director of Berlin-based Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe *n-ost*

**Valeri Ivanov**, president of the Academy of Ukrainian Press in Kiev

**Oleg Konstantinov**, editor-in-chief of the online newspaper *Dumskaya* in Odessa

**Stefan Kurpil**, editor at the Lviv-based regional paper *Vysoky Zamok*

**Kyrylo Lukerenko**, editor-in-chief of *Hromadske Radio* in Kiev

**Christian Mihr**, executive director of Reporters Without Borders Germany

**Tetiana Popova**, deputy information minister of Ukraine

**Serhiy Popov**, news director at Ukrainian TV station *1+1*

**Tetiana Pushnova**, producer of TV channel *Ukraine Today*

**Roman Rak**, journalist and local representative of the National Union of Journalists

**Oxana Romanyuk**, RSF correspondent and head of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) in Kiev

**Nelya Shevchenko**, news director at *First Channel TV* in Odessa

**Ekateryna Sergatskova**, subeditor at *Hromadske TV* in Kiev

**Natalya Steblyna**, journalist and media expert in Odessa

**Yuri Stets**, information minister of Ukraine

**Julia Sushenko**, journalist in Odessa and freelance collaborator of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI)

**Denis Trubetskoy**, journalist in Kiev



Commemorating the Euromaidan protests in Kiev two years later.

**REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS** promotes and defends the freedom to receive and impart information worldwide. Based in Paris, it has ten international bureaux (in Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, Madrid, New York, Stockholm, Tunis, Turin, Vienna and Washington DC) and has more than 150 correspondents in all five continents.

Secretary-general : **CHRISTOPHE DELOIRE**  
Head of Eastern Europe & Central Asia Desk : **JOHANN BIHR**

International Secretariat  
CS 90247  
75083 Paris Cedex 02  
Tel. +33 1 44 83 84 84  
Web : [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)

With generous support of

**Robert Bosch Stiftung**

**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION