

Russia in the news of its neighbours

Cross-border connections and foreign affairs coverage in the Russian-language media of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova

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Objectives

□ To identify and describe links between the Russian state and the Russian-language news media in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova e.g., newspapers owned by 'pro-Kremlin' businessmen have subsidiaries and franchises in the CIS; bulletins from Russian state TV are rebroadcast via satellite, cable and terrestrial networks; video material is exchanged in the region via a Russian-funded news 'pool'; news providers in Kiev, Minsk and Chisinau source stories from Russian state news agencies

□ To assess the impact of these links on the portrayals of Russia conveyed to mass audiences in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova via Russian-language TV bulletins and newspapers i.e. what do the leading Russian-language news providers in each country say about Russia? Do some consistently portray Russia more favourably than others? If so, is this due to Russian state influence or other factors?

□ To explain cross-country variation in Moscow's ability to shape Russian-language print and TV news to its own advantage in the region of study
Likely explanatory variables include media regulation and the size of the national economy (its ability to support strong domestic media that can compete with Russian rivals and produce content independently)

Methodology

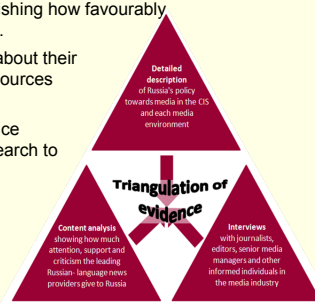
A four-step research strategy is employed.

Step 1 is to document Russia's interaction with Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova on variables that have been found to affect news content.

Step 2 is to analyse content samples from the leading Russian-language news providers in each country, thus establishing how favourably and extensively they report on Russia.

Step 3 is to interview media workers about their editorial policies towards Russia, the sources they use and the pressures they face.

Step 4 entails triangulating the evidence accumulated at each stage of the research to gauge the extent of Russia's leverage over news narratives in each country. With causal mechanisms thereby exposed, it should be possible to explain cross-country variation in Russia's leverage over news content.



Project Summary

My doctoral thesis investigates Moscow's ability to shape Russian-language print and TV news to its own advantage in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

It provides a detailed account of Russia's efforts to construct a 'single information space' in the CIS, and describes the legacy of cross-border media connections inherited from the USSR.

The thesis looks at how these efforts and cross-border connections affect portrayals of Russia conveyed to mass audiences in the three countries by Russian-language news bulletins and newspapers.

It 'triangulates' multiple forms of evidence, including quantitative content analysis and interviews with journalists, to shed light on where, how and to what extent Russia is able to influence news narratives in the strategically sensitive region of study.



Timetable for completion

Start date:
October 2009
Expected completion date:
September 2012



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Progress to date and initial findings

Step 1 of the thesis is now complete. This step entailed researching and documenting the various ways in which Russia interacts with Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in the area of Russian-language news media.

Particular attention was paid to interaction involving variables which the literature identifies as influential in the formation of news content, e.g. media ownership; sponsorship and funding; major news sources (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

This work has led to the following findings.

□ Russian policy-makers have launched and allocated funding to numerous initiatives targeting journalists and news audiences in CIS states. These include special TV channels (Mir, TRO); special news agencies (ANIA, Soyuz-Info); and regional platforms for cooperation and networking (Informsovet, the Forum of European and Asian Media). However, few have the potential to give Russia leverage over news narratives conveyed to mass audiences.

□ The news bulletins and newspapers that evolved from the Soviet central media continue to be popular in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. However, control over their content is often split between Moscow and Kiev, Minsk or Chisinau. For example, Russian state news bulletins *Vremya* and *Vesti* are still broadcast terrestrially in Belarus, but the Belarusian authorities can edit them if required. The editions of 'Russian' papers like *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Argumenty i Fakty* and *Izvestiya* sold in the countries under study may not belong to the eponymous Russian publishing houses. They produce much of their own content locally, although in some cases the editorial policy is set in Moscow.

"There were people in the leadership of the Ukrainian editorial team in whom we suddenly noticed a certain disdain for the interests of Russia. We did everything so that these people first found out about this, put things right, and if they didn't put things right, they left."

Vladimir Mamontov, President of *Izvestiya*

□ Russian involvement in the media of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova is not always driven by politics. Sometimes it is initiated by local partners; sometimes it is driven by the desire to make money.

"There are 50 million Russian-speakers [in Ukraine], we can't miss out on an audience like that."

Pavel Filenkov,
Commercial Director, *Kommersant*

"We do not object to newspapers being published under the Izvestiya brand in the countries of the CIS... But we don't do anything especially for this purpose. We don't spend any money."

Vladimir Mamontov, President of *Izvestiya*



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