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## RUSSIA AND THE NEWS MEDIA IN UKRAINE: A CASE OF 'SOFT POWER'?

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**ABSTRACT:** The mass media are closely associated with the concept of 'soft power'. In Russia, as in the West, politicians believe that favorable foreign media coverage can facilitate their foreign policy success. This article considers news coverage of Russia in Ukraine, a geopolitically important state where Russian 'news exporters' have been a prominent feature of the media landscape in recent years. Using content analysis and original interviews with editorial staff, the article reveals factors which shaped reporting about Russia in Ukraine in 2010–2011. It demonstrates that news providers in Ukraine which had a Russian shareholder or partner tended to be more restrained in their criticism of Russia than comparable news providers without such Moscow connections. Yet it also reveals diversity among Russia's news exporters: some clearly served Kremlin interests, while others were commercially driven and balanced demands from Moscow against the demands of their audience. The findings are relevant to assessments of Russian regional influence, as they highlight opportunities and challenges facing the Kremlin in its aspiration to secure an advantage from 'Russian' media operating in the post-Soviet republics. More broadly, this article questions whether the conceptual framework of 'soft power' is adequate to capture the complexities of Russian involvement in Ukraine's media environment.

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The mass media are closely associated with the concept of 'soft power' in international relations. Joseph Nye states that 'information is power' and that success in the information age depends not only on whose army wins, but on 'whose story wins'.<sup>1</sup> As the idea of soft power has caught on in policy-making circles around the world, so governments have come to believe in the media's potential to affect their nations' success in the international arena. It is thought that the media shape foreign public sentiments, which in turn affect the acquiescence or resistance of foreign elites to particular foreign policy goals. The validity of this assumption is very hard to test. Nevertheless, states are devoting considerable resources to reaching foreign publics via the media, hoping thereby to improve their chances of obtaining positive results in international affairs.

Russia has joined the soft power bandwagon. In 2011 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared that it was 'impossible' to effectively defend national interests 'without proper use of solid soft power resources'.<sup>2</sup> The Russian Foreign Policy Concepts of 2008 and 2013 included pledges to 'develop effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad'.<sup>3</sup> TV channels and publications with Russian shareholders or partners are available and often popular in many post-Soviet countries. However, researchers have so far paid little attention to the dynamics of Russian involvement in other states' media landscapes across the post-Soviet region. Most existing studies of post-Soviet journalism are written from a single-country perspective and focus on domestic issues, such as state control of the media;<sup>4</sup> concentration of ownership;<sup>5</sup> or the power/impotence of media during elections.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the literature on Russian foreign policy has tended to attach the soft power label to the Russian mass media indiscriminately without scrutinizing their transnational operations in any depth.<sup>7</sup>

This article explores Russian influence on news content in Ukraine through a comparative study of 14 leading Russian-language news providers, some of which had Russian shareholders or partners while others did not. Content samples are analyzed to expose how Russia was portrayed by the 14 news providers over a four-month period in 2010. The content findings are

then explained by 28 original interviews with journalists, editors and media professionals. The interviews shed light on factors which shaped reporting about Russia in Ukraine during the period under study, including the impact on content of Russian capital or commercial links. The empirical evidence presented here indicates that news providers in Ukraine which have a Russian shareholder or partner do tend to be more restrained in their criticism of Russia than comparable news providers without such Moscow connections. Some of the media studied generated tendentious coverage of Russia which flattered the Russian authorities.

At the same time, however, this article questions whether the conceptual framework of 'soft power' is adequate to capture the complexities of Russian involvement in Ukraine's media environment. The study reveals diversity among the 'Russian' news providers operating in Ukraine: some clearly served Kremlin interests, but others were motivated by commercial considerations so their journalists were balancing demands from Moscow alongside the demands of their audience. Indiscriminate application of the 'soft power' label risks obscuring this diversity and vulnerability to local constraints. A further problem brought out in the concluding discussion is that Russia's most pro-Kremlin news exporters have demonstrated a considerable capacity to provoke, which may be equally significant for Moscow-Kyiv relations as their capacity to 'softly' attract and persuade a mass audience, if not more so.

### CONCEPTUALIZING 'SOFT POWER'

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In one recent book Nye defines soft power as 'the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes.'<sup>8</sup> A state's soft power, according to Nye, comes principally from its culture, political values and foreign policy. These three resources (and others) can be turned into soft power by 'skilful conversion strategies' which may involve public diplomacy and various other tools.

Scholarly reaction to the idea of soft power has been mixed. There is now a sizeable academic literature addressing the soft power of China, the USA, Japan and Venezuela, *inter alia* (substantive studies of soft power in the post-Soviet region are not numerous, but are beginning to emerge).<sup>9</sup> Yet Nye's concept has been criticized for several major weaknesses. Besides the practical difficulty of drawing a clear line between power that is 'hard' and power that is 'soft' (e.g. material wealth can coerce and coopt simultaneously), there is a problematic conflation of distinct understandings of power through attraction in Nye's work.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, he implies that attractive power occurs as a natural by-product of a country's culture, values and policies which hold inherent appeal for particular subjects. Edward Lock calls this 'structural' power because the power is not strictly possessed by an agent; rather, it resides in social structures such as shared norms or values.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Nye implies that soft power can be 'produced' by a country investing in broadcasting and public diplomacy. He describes *Al Jazeera* as a 'soft power resource',<sup>12</sup> not because the TV channel holds attraction for others but because it can transmit messages and frame issues. This understanding of soft power is very agent-centric. Desired outcomes are achieved through communication – wielders of soft power persuade subjects to change their values and priorities, rather than exploiting values and priorities which are already shared. Lock calls this 'relational' power, as the power exists within the context of a relationship between actors.

Because he does not differentiate systematically between these two mechanisms of attraction, Nye's exposition of soft power has been described as 'maddeningly inconsistent'.<sup>13</sup> We still lack a coherent theory of soft power to clarify its causal mechanisms and the part played by the media (Nye himself says that soft power is 'an analytical concept, not a theory').<sup>14</sup> Further problems lie in the formidable challenge of establishing soft power's effectiveness empirically. On the whole, scholars have limited themselves to describing what countries do under the banner of soft power; they have not assessed the impact of such activity on the outcomes of foreign policy. As things stand, it might be most accurate to define soft power as a label

signifying actions undertaken by states *in the hope* of influencing opinions abroad, *in the hope* that by doing so their chances of foreign policy success will improve.

Despite these conceptual, theoretical and empirical concerns, soft power is a topic which cannot be ignored, not least because of the traction it has gained among governments. The term soft power (*myagkaya sila*) has been incorporated into Russian foreign policy: the Foreign Policy Concept adopted by President Putin in February 2013 describes it as ‘an indispensable component of modern international relations’.<sup>15</sup> Russia favors the agent-centric view of soft power. The Foreign Policy Concept stresses a state-led approach rather than letting Russian culture, values and policies elicit attraction by themselves. Explicit goals in the Concept which fall broadly under the soft power umbrella include promoting use of the Russian language, boosting the international role of Russian NGOs and strengthening the position of the Russian mass media on the global stage. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the focus of particular attention – the ‘common cultural and civilizational heritage’ of the CIS states is to be ‘preserved and augmented’, while Ukraine is to be involved in ‘extended integration processes’, such as Putin’s project for a Eurasian Union.<sup>16</sup> This reflects the rise of Russian ‘Civilizational’ discourse in recent years.<sup>17</sup> ‘Civilizationalists’ emphasize the distinctiveness of Russia’s culture and values and its responsibility to protect and unify those with whom it has historical ties. Russian-speakers in neighboring states are considered ‘compatriots’ (*sootchestvenniki*), whose ‘educational, linguistic, social, labor, humanitarian, and other rights’ Russia must protect.<sup>18</sup> In Ukraine, where attitudes toward Russia vary substantially along a much studied East-West divide,<sup>19</sup> Russia’s ‘Civilizational’ ambitions and ‘soft power’ policies are perceived by many as a threat to sovereignty and national identity.

This article does not assess the overall effectiveness of Russia’s ‘soft power strategy’ in Ukraine, nor even the effectiveness of its media component. To do so, one would need to establish the impact of Russian public diplomacy efforts and media messages on Ukrainian public opinion, before tracing the impact of public opinion on foreign policy outcomes – both resource-

intensive tasks replete with methodological difficulties. The primary aim here is rather to scrutinize the behavior of various 'Russian' news media in Ukraine, i.e. news media with Russian shareholders or partners, and explore whether – on the basis of their content and editorial policies – they deserve to be labelled so widely and indiscriminately as soft power resources for the Kremlin. The findings relate not only to Russian state TV channels available in Ukraine (whose pro-Kremlin loyalties are not disputed) but also to popular newspapers. Some of the latter are subject to complex and conflicting influences (domestic vs. international), for which the soft power framework fails to account. At times, Russian TV channels have generated political scandals in Ukraine which fit uneasily with the soft power idea of eliciting positive attraction. Thus, this article does not set out to test the association between Russian media and soft power so much as to unpack and challenge assumptions and generalizations on which the association rests.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, Russian involvement in the Ukrainian market for news is described and contextualized. Next, the methods and data used in the study are explained, before presentation of the results in separate sections on TV news bulletins and newspapers. Finally, the article reflects briefly on the potential of Russian news exports to provoke as well as attract, highlighting the need for a more nuanced view of the role played by Russian transnational news media in regional political dynamics.

## UKRAINE'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND RUSSIAN NEWS EXPORTS

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For the past two decades the Ukrainian media environment has been pluralistic and far from transparent, reflecting the nature of Ukrainian politics. As things stood in 2013, all the most popular TV channels and mass-circulation publications belonged to rival privately-owned financial groups, ultimately controlled by Ukrainian 'oligarchs'. The big five media holdings were Inter Media ([uaimg.com](http://uaimg.com)), 1+1 Media ([media.1plus1.ua](http://media.1plus1.ua)), Media Group Ukraine ([mgukraine.com](http://mgukraine.com)), StarLightMedia ([www.starlightmedia.ua](http://www.starlightmedia.ua)) and Ukrainian Media Holding

([www.umh.com.ua](http://www.umh.com.ua)). Inter Media belonged to gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash and head of the Ukrainian Presidential Administration Serhiy Lyovochkin; 1+1 Media was owned by multibillionaire businessman Ihor Kolomoyskyy; Media Group Ukraine belonged to multibillionaire businessman Rinat Akhmetov; StarLightMedia was owned by multibillionaire businessman Viktor Pinchuk; while Ukrainian Media Holding was the property of young multimillionaire Serhiy Kurchenko.<sup>20</sup>

Several major media assets changed hands in 2013, prompting observers to speculate that the so-called 'Family' of President Viktor Yanukovych was establishing a propaganda arsenal in preparation for the 2015 presidential election.<sup>21</sup> Yet Yanukovych never managed to secure monopolistic control over the Ukrainian media. The balance of power between Ukrainian media moguls and the Ukrainian president has generally been less one-sided than the balance of power between Russian media moguls and Russian President Vladimir Putin; their allegiance has not been quite so reliable. It is not unknown for Ukrainian tycoons to switch political sides (e.g. Kolomoyskyy's vacillating support for Yuliya Tymoshenko in 2008–09) or encourage their media to adopt a balanced stance (as *Inter's* former owner Valeriy Khoroshkovskyy did in late 2012).<sup>22</sup> Ukraine has also had numerous media organizations with somewhat smaller audiences which pursue an independent or critical line (e.g. newspapers *Zerkalo Nedeli / Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, *Den*, and *Kommentarii*; the magazine *Ukrainskiy Tyzhden*; the website *Ukrainska Pravda* and cable TV channel *TVi*).<sup>23</sup>

When it comes to following the news, Ukraine is a nation of TV viewers. A survey conducted in November 2011 found that 94 per cent of Ukrainians used TV as a source of news every day or most days. This compares to 31 per cent who used radio; 30 per cent who used newspapers; 22 per cent who used the internet and 6 per cent who used magazines.<sup>24</sup> In fall 2013 Ukraine's most-watched news programs were *Podrobnosti* on *Inter* (part of Inter Media) and *TSN* on *1+1* (part of 1+1 Media). Each had a daily rating around 7–8 per cent, which equates to roughly three million viewers.<sup>25</sup> The other news bulletins with over a million daily viewers were *Vikna-Novini*

on *STB* (part of StarLightMedia); *Fakty* on *ICTV* (also part of StarLightMedia) and *Sobytiya* on *Ukraina* (part of Media Group Ukraine). Few newspapers had readerships to compete with the audiences of the TV news bulletins. The exceptions were the mass-circulation dailies *Segodnya* (Media Group Ukraine); *Fakty* (StarLightMedia) and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* (Ukrainian Media Holding), along with the weekly paper *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine* (Ukrainian Media Holding). In 2012 *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine* reported a per-issue readership of 1.6 million,<sup>26</sup> while the three dailies reported per-issue readerships of 1.3 million, 1.1 million and 0.8 million respectively (it should be borne in mind that there is no independent monitoring of Ukrainian newspaper circulations, so these data may be somewhat inflated for marketing reasons).<sup>27</sup> The press has been losing ground to the internet for years,<sup>28</sup> but most of Ukraine's leading off-line news providers have become major online players too.

In recent years Russian news exporters and Russian capital have occupied a very visible position within this Ukrainian media environment. Two of the mass-circulation publications mentioned above – *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* and *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine* – are Ukrainian editions of Moscow-based publications. They are run as franchises; some of their content is written by staff in Russia and some is produced locally in Ukraine. The broadsheet *Izvestiya v Ukraine* (1+1 Media) followed a similar model until its closure in 2013.<sup>29</sup> Another well-known Russian newspaper with a prominent Ukrainian presence was the business daily *Kommersant*, which launched *Kommersant-Ukraina* in 2005. Like its parent publication, *Kommersant-Ukraina* was owned by Russian tycoon Alisher Usmanov until it ceased operation in 2014.<sup>30</sup> *Kommersant-Ukraina* took relatively little content from Moscow. Over 80 per cent of the paper was produced by staff in Kyiv.<sup>31</sup>

TV news bulletins from Russia's main federal broadcasters are available in Ukraine via satellite and cable. During the period under study their *potential* reach was substantial, particularly in urban areas where cable is the most widespread means of television reception. One 2011 survey found that the international streams of the three biggest Russian state-controlled TV

channels, *Pervyy Kanal*, *RTR Planeta* and *NTV Mir*, were viewed weekly by 32.8 per cent, 24.9 per cent and 19.8 per cent of the Ukrainian population, respectively.<sup>32</sup> Yet entertainment programs on the Russian channels seem to attract more viewers than news and current affairs. In 2010, 8 per cent of survey respondents said they watched news and current affairs on *Pervyy Kanal*, while the figures for *RTR Planeta* and *NTV Mir* were 6 and 5 per cent respectively.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, *Inter's* news and current affairs output was watched by almost two thirds of survey participants. Another survey from 2011 found that 12 per cent of Ukrainians named Russia's *Pervyy Kanal* among their top three sources of information, while fewer than 1 per cent of respondents named *RTR-Planeta* and *NTV Mir*.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Ukrainian channels *1+1* and *Inter* were named by 60 per cent and 58 per cent of respondents respectively.

This overview of Russian involvement in Ukraine's media environment is not comprehensive; it is primarily intended to provide background information about the news providers analyzed below. The focus in this article is on high-profile TV news bulletins and newspapers available nationwide in Ukraine, so radio, the internet and non-news entertainment media are not discussed here, nor is Russian media involvement at the sub-national level.

## INVESTIGATING RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ON NEWS: METHODS AND DATA

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In order to assess Russian influence on news content in Ukraine, 14 news providers were studied and compared:

- three nightly news bulletins: *Podrobnosti* on *Inter*; *Sobytiya* on *TRK Ukraina*; *Vremya* on Russia's *Pervyy Kanal*;
- three daily tabloids: *Segodnya*; *Fakty i Kommentarii*; *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*;
- three daily broadsheets: *Den*; *Kommersant-Ukraina*; *Izvestiya v Ukraine*;
- five weekly newspapers: mass circulation *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine*; broadsheets *Zerkalo Nedeli* and *2000*; Berliner-format *Stolichnyye Novosti* and *Kommentarii*

During the period under study all these news providers were available nationwide in Ukraine; published or broadcast in Russian;<sup>35</sup> and were well-known (the newspapers reported weekly print-runs over 50,000 and the TV bulletins came from channels that fell within the national top 10 at the start of the study). Six of the 14 news providers had a shareholder or partner in Russia: *Pervyy Kanal* belonged to the Russian state; *Inter* had a minority Russian shareholder (a 29 per cent stake in *Inter* is owned by *Pervyy Kanal*);<sup>36</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*, *Izvestiya v Ukraine* and *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine* all had Russian franchisors; while *Kommersant-Ukraina* was fully owned by Russian tycoon Alisher Usmanov. The other eight news providers did not have any visible organizational links to Moscow. This case selection made it possible to investigate the hypothesis that *a news provider with a shareholder or partner in Russia is likely to generate (a) more extensive and (b) more favorable coverage of Russia than market rivals because of its Russian connections*. The research strategy is small-*n* comparison, following principles laid down by Mahoney (2000) and Brady and Collier (2010).<sup>37</sup> Causal inference is based on a combination of nominal comparison (analyzing content from news providers that are broadly similar, but differ on the key independent variable of having a Russian shareholder or partner) and within-case analysis (interviewing editors and journalists from each news provider who explain the decision-making behind their news coverage of Russia).<sup>38</sup>

The content analysis uses a five-week sample of news from 2010.<sup>39</sup> Simple quantitative content analysis was used to explore variation in the *scale* of coverage which each news provider devoted to Russia: stories containing three or more Russia-related keywords were coded as 'featuring Russia', then for each news provider the proportion of total stories 'featuring Russia' was calculated. Qualitative content analysis was then used to identify variation in the *tone* of news 'featuring Russia'. Tone of coverage was assessed through comparison of the news providers' story selection and their reporting of the biggest Russia-related event of the sample period – a visit to Ukraine by Patriarch Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus. In this article the content analysis findings are summarized only briefly due to space limitations.

The interviews with editors and journalists were conducted by the author in Moscow (12) and Kyiv (16) during 2011. The choice of interviewees was guided first and foremost by the aim of speaking to at least one representative from each newspaper and TV news bulletin. Editors-in-chief or editors/journalists responsible for international and political news reporting were preferred.<sup>40</sup> In the case of news providers with Russian partners and shareholders, representatives from Moscow-based head offices were also approached. In general, there was a high level of willingness to participate in the research. The only news provider for which no interview could be obtained was *Vremya*.

### NEWS COVERAGE OF RUSSIA IN RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE TV BULLETINS

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The scale of coverage devoted to Russia by *Vremya*, *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* was found to vary in line with the hypothesis. On average, 85 per cent of *Vremya* stories (on Russian state-owned *Pervyy Kanal*) were coded as 'featuring Russia', against 11 per cent of *Podrobnosti* stories (on *Inter*, which has a minority Russian shareholder) and just 5 per cent of *Sobytiya* stories (on *Ukraina*, which has no Russian shareholder).

The tone of *Vremya's* coverage of Russia was also in line with expectations. *Vremya* bulletins were dominated by uncritical reporting of the daily activity of (then) President Dmitry Medvedev and (then) Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. In contrast, *Sobytiya* and *Podrobnosti* showed only a handful of reports in which Medvedev and Putin figured; they did not broadcast any reports in which the Russian leaders dominated proceedings.

The stories selected by *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* presented Russia in a mixed light. It is notable that both these bulletins, unlike *Vremya*, ran news about a Strategy 31 demonstration in Moscow staged by the anti-Kremlin opposition. *Podrobnosti* reported from the scene of the protest and interviewed demonstrators, thus highlighting problems with human rights in Russia. *Sobytiya* showed footage of a 'sympathy' protest held outside the Russian embassy in Kyiv.

On the other hand, *Podrobnosti* regularly broadcast reports which looked back nostalgically to the Soviet era and beyond. For example, it ran lengthy features to mark the anniversaries of the Tu-104 passenger jet's first flight ('the pride of the Soviet Union'), the first joint US-Soviet space mission and the death of Soviet bard Vladimir Vysotskiy. One might argue that such reports are favorable from Russia's point of view because they emphasize the positive side of its historical relationship with Ukraine. There were no such historical or nostalgic stories on *Sobytiya*. *Sobytiya* was more inclined to run quirky or slightly absurd stories from Russia, such as news about a Canadian model on Chechen TV and an anti-ageing pill invented in Russia.

*Podrobnosti* paid considerably more attention to Russian-Ukrainian relations than either *Sobytiya* or *Vremya*. It was the only bulletin to report any news about bilateral economic ties during the sample period and its reports stressed the importance of the Russian market to Ukrainian businesses. Yet Russia was not always portrayed as a benign economic partner. A Russian ban on Ukrainian dairy produce was described by *Podrobnosti's* correspondent as a 'milk war' and the 'political character' of Russia's actions was made quite clear.

*Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* differed most noticeably in their reporting about Patriarch Kirill's visit to Ukraine. Like *Vremya*, *Podrobnosti* completely ignored the tensions surrounding Kirill's presence in Kyiv. It made no mention of the noisy anti-Kirill protests or the police deployed to keep order. *Sobytiya* did report these details; it was also the only bulletin to inform viewers that thousands of Orthodox believers had joined a procession led by Patriarch Filaret of the rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) instead of that led by Patriarch Kirill. Like *Vremya*, *Podrobnosti* did not broadcast footage of anyone expressing opposition to Kirill's visit. *Sobytiya*, on the other hand, showed clips of interviews with Patriarch Filaret of the Kyiv Patriarchate, as well as both pro-Kirill and anti-Kirill members of the public.

To explore the reasons for these findings, interviews were conducted with editorial staff from *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* (interview requests sent to *Vremya* went unanswered).

The difference in scale of reporting about Russia on *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* appeared to stem, first and foremost, from the level of resources which each program had at its disposal, rather than *Podrobnosti's* Russian minority shareholder. At *Ukraina's* news studio in Kyiv, a senior editorial figure complained:

'They [*Inter*] have huge resources. In Kyiv alone they have 40 correspondents... We have 12 people here. They have a news bureau in Moscow, so it's easy for them to send culture over from Moscow. If there is some Russian-Ukrainian exhibition there, they will surely run a story on it. But we cannot.'

Another reason for *Sobytiya's* relatively limited Russia coverage was the length of the bulletin; it was only 20 minutes long against *Podrobnosti's* 30 minutes.

The prevalence of 'nostalgic' stories featuring Russia in *Podrobnosti* bulletins was linked to the interests of *Inter's* viewers. When asked to describe the kind of stories which attracted his attention, a *Podrobnosti* journalist said:

'The first thing that interests us is everything connected to Ukraine... The second point is anything which may simply be interesting to Ukrainian viewers... For example, there was a festival of Soviet advertising in Moscow... Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, it's only been independent for 20 years, so many people there still remember those times and the Soviet Union, it will be interesting for them to get nostalgic and remember. Familiar people and actors, familiar Aeroflot, familiar Soviet sparkling wine being advertised. Adverts for familiar Zhiguli or Zaporozhets [cars]. Maybe they never saw the ads [originally], but it will be interesting for them to watch because it's their youth.'

At *Ukraina*, on the hand, more weight was given to infotainment-type criteria. An *Ukraina* journalist said:

'In journalism there is a thing known as the six Ss and one D. Have you heard of it? They are the hooks which hold a viewer and rivet attention to the news. What is news? News is information which contains something from the six Ss and one D. What are the six Ss? Fear [strakh], death [smert], sex [seks], scandal [skandal]. What else was there? Laughter [smekh] and something else... D is for money [dengi]. Anything that doesn't fall into those categories isn't news. Because it's a minus, it misses the cash till. It's propaganda.'

The same interviewee suggested that some content differences between *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* could be explained by their different target audiences:

'[At *Inter*] it's about old ladies over 50. They are deliberately working for [an audience of] grannies. That's their contingent... In general, we [at *Ukraina*] are working for a commercial audience – 18 to 45 year olds.'

During the interviews, questions were asked about the influence of media owners on reporting about Russia. Of course, owner influence is a topic which editorial staff may be reluctant to discuss openly. However, the interviewees' responses suggested that *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* journalists could report Russian domestic affairs without much pressure from above, provided there was no Ukrainian angle to the story. Witness the following exchange between two senior members of the editorial staff at *Ukraina*:

First interviewee: 'The only limit on editorial policy is not to harm the company's interests.'

Interviewer: 'Since his [Akhmetov's] interests are concentrated in Ukraine, does it concern international issues? Can you talk about other countries without worrying?'

Second interviewee: 'We can even make a bit of a nuisance of ourselves [nemnozhko pokhuliganit].'

First interviewee: 'And that's what we do.'

Interviewer: 'Last year you reported about Strategy 31. Is that interesting for Ukrainians?'

Second interviewee: 'If there is a commotion, if lots of people come out and someone gets punched in the face, then it's interesting. For the most part, anything can be written there: Strategy 66, gays against Slavs.'

For his part, the *Podrobnosti* correspondent said he felt free to report 'a full range of opinion' about Russian political matters. He drew a contrast with the situation at Russian state TV channels:

'We show the full range of opinion. The full range is missing from the Russian federal channels, but we maintain a balance of opinion. Of course, [we report on ruling party] United Russia, those who are currently in parliament... But at the same time we talk about the political parties which are small... Let's say [opposition activist Boris] Nemtsov, perhaps... [opposition-minded satirist Viktor] Shenderovich. [The people] who take an active citizens' position, people who protest against the current regime and believe that these [December 2011 parliamentary] elections are simply a farce, in principle...'

Thus, the interview data corroborated the content analysis finding that *Podrobnosti* and *Sobytiya* reported anti-Kremlin opposition unlike *Vremya*, which tended to ignore it.

The *Podrobnosti* correspondent completely rejected the notion that *Pervyy Kanal's* shareholding in *Inter* had any effect on content. He pointed out that there was no day-to-day cooperation between *Vremya* and *Podrobnosti*. He also made quite clear that *Podrobnosti* enjoyed no special relationship with the Russian authorities by virtue of its link to *Pervyy Kanal*. When asked about his interaction with the Russian authorities, he said:

‘They [the Russian authorities] invite [*Podrobnosti* journalists to media events]. But here you have to understand that if you are invited by an official state structure... they’ll show you the very best and not how it really is: they’ll paint the fence, change the doorknobs, wash the children in school, make the teacher look nice – not how it is in reality. What reason do we have for filming that sugar-coated reality? We can easily go ourselves and film on another day.’

The interviewee insisted that not once during his time at *Inter* had he been instructed to leave out certain information or refrain from asking certain questions. He said that all ‘generally accepted standards’ – including ‘balance of opinion, objectivity, not expressing one’s own opinion’ – were observed at *Podrobnosti*. The content analysis findings support his claims where coverage of Russian domestic politics is concerned. Yet *Podrobnosti*’s coverage of Patriarch Kirill’s visit to Ukraine was clearly one-sided. Interviewees at *Ukraina* suggested that *Inter*’s close relationship with the Ukrainian authorities was to blame. They said:

‘With all respect to colleagues at *Inter*, *Inter* has practically turned into a state channel... There [in the Ukrainian authorities] they really don’t like additional agitation of the situation.’

Thus, the interviews, together with certain patterns which emerged from the content analysis (i.e. *Podrobnosti*’s willingness to report anti-Kremlin protests), indicate that the ‘pro-Russian’ slant of which *Inter* had occasionally been accused was more likely due to domestic Ukrainian political forces than direct Russian shareholder influence at the channel.

## NEWS COVERAGE OF RUSSIA IN UKRAINE’S RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PRESS

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Contrary to the hypothesis, news ‘featuring Russia’ in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* was found to be no more extensive than coverage in *Fakty* and *Segodnya*. In fact, the mean proportion of stories per issue coded as ‘featuring Russia’ was a little lower for *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* (14.2 per cent) than *Segodnya* (15.5 per cent) and *Fakty* (16 per cent).

Comparison of these papers' selection of stories featuring Russia revealed further similarities and offered no clear support for the hypothesis. *Segodnya*, *Fakty* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* all took great interest in accidents, criminal activity, ordinary people doing unusual things and spy stories. None of the three tabloids displayed much interest in domestic Russian politics. *Segodnya* was the most attentive. It reported a run-in between Putin and the opposition-minded Russian rock musician Yuriy Shevchuk; the Strategy 31 protest; a story about Russian oligarchs seeking election; and a report about Putin's cousin getting a top job in a bank. Both *Segodnya* and *Fakty* picked up on the troubles of (soon to be dismissed) Moscow mayor Yuriy Luzhkov. It is hard to identify a single story in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* that dealt with Russian domestic politics. Thus, its story selection in this area might be described as uncritical of the Russian state, but not particularly favorable.

*Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* did, however, regularly run stories about Russian-Ukrainian economic ties, as did *Segodnya*. In almost all the economic stories across all three papers Russia had the role of a partner rather than a rival or predator.

None of the papers took a clear-cut editorial stance on matters relating to Russia. Only *Segodnya* had regular opinion columns that mentioned Russia, all of which were written by Oles Buzina. Buzina is known for supporting the 'tri-unity of the Russian people', i.e. the idea that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are one nation.

It is difficult to argue on the basis of story selection that coverage of Russia in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* was more favorable than coverage of Russia in *Segodnya* and *Fakty*. The three papers actually demonstrated a similar approach: none of them showed much interest in the Russian political situation and Russia tended to feature in their news content as a banal adjacent space where Ukrainians have relatives or do business rather than as a malign or benevolent geopolitical force.

Yet the tone of coverage devoted to the patriarch's visit in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* did have a more pro-Kirill (and by extension, pro-Russian) slant than coverage in *Segodnya* and

*Fakty*. All three daily tabloids gave reasonably detailed accounts of where Kirill went, whom he met and what he did. None of them failed entirely to mention the protests and tensions his presence prompted. However, *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* was alone in mentioning the rose petals scattered at Kirill's feet by his Ukrainian supporters, the 'glad shouts' which welcomed Kirill and the cries of 'our patriarch' to which he departed. It quoted Kirill more extensively than either *Segodnya* or *Fakty* and endorsed the detention of Ukrainian nationalist protesters. Both *Segodnya* and *Fakty* reported the procession of thousands of believers led by Patriarch Filaret of the Kyiv Patriarchate, whereas *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine v Ukraine* ignored it.

The interviewees were asked to explain their lack of editorializing on Russia-related matters. At both *Segodnya* and *Fakty*, editorial staff pointed out that an editorially dispassionate position was necessary to retain a mass audience in a politically divided country like Ukraine. At *Fakty*, a columnist said:

'We consider ourselves a mass [circulation] newspaper. Therefore, we understand that we are read by people with different political and religious views. Why should we impose our opinion on them? We don't have that right!'

Similarly, at *Segodnya* an editor said:

'Our reader... believes we should not complete the thought at the end of the article. We should give him the opportunity to draw a conclusion himself on the basis of the facts which we lay out in the article... I consider it a great skill: to be able to lay out all the facts so that the conclusion is clear, but you haven't prescribed it; the reader himself draws a conclusion and is proud to be so clever.'

However, unlike *Fakty*, *Segodnya* did have the regular columnist Oles Buzina who was very forthright in his views. When asked how such opinionated material went down with readers, the editor said:

'If they buy the paper, that means they're OK with it. Obviously, our society is split in two halves due to all these political [changes tack]. So we are read by the half which is closer [to the views expressed in Buzina's columns]. But in general, we try to be objective.'

At *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* interviews revealed a need to balance mass audience preferences with the expectations of the paper's Russian franchisor. When asked how the paper covered Russian-Ukrainian relations, a correspondent said:

'That's probably the most complicated moment. There are a lot of underwater currents here. Here, one has to be extremely careful [akkuratnyy] in one's conclusions and assessments... When you write about this, you have to take into account that *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* represents the point of view of the majority of people living in Ukraine, after all. The federal Russian paper exactly represents the point of view of the majority of Russians.'

She went on to say:

'A journalist who tries to analyze the situation linked to Ukraine's political relations, certain economic conflicts, he risks falling towards one side... Staying on the line and balancing is the hardest thing... Sometimes one has to step on the throat of one's own political impressions of what's correct and what's incorrect... In my view, Ukraine is being violated here, but I have to find certain arguments so that the other side's point of view is also represented.'

The presence of a Russian franchisor clearly affected coverage of Russian-Ukrainian relations in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*, but editorial stance did not appear to be explicitly dictated from Moscow. Rather, the correspondent's comments suggested that the paper generally ended up acknowledging any obvious tensions, but playing down their significance:

'It would be very strange if the Ukrainian editorial office, knowing the mood of people in Ukraine, started to pursue the line which is close to the federal Moscow editorial office. We have to reflect the situation we live in. We have to take into account the opinion of our readers and the majority of citizens... When there are two opinions on one page, the compromise solution in that situation is [to include] some comments by pundits, who say that this is all normal, in fact. There are two points of view and there is no solution other than to look for some points of common ground.'

The problem of balancing between reader and franchisor expectations was also raised by an editor interviewed at *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine*. Content analysis indicated that latter publication took a muted editorial stance on Russia. For instance, its coverage of Patriarch Kirill's visit consisted of just one small article based on a letter from a reader. The reader observed that 'many arguments' surrounded the patriarch's visit, and asked whether it was 'really another lever of Moscow's pressure on Kyiv'. *AiF v Ukraine* reassured her that 'despite protests by right-wing forces', Kirill's visit had not been 'marred by unpleasantness'. The senior editorial figure at *AiF v Ukraine* explained her paper's approach to this story as follows:

'When he [Kirill] arrived for the very first time, there was very great public and reader interest towards him and we ran reports about it several times... Later we reduced the share of this news, because it became clear that there is not just religion here, there is politics here too. And in order not to provoke any kind of irritation in the reader once again [we reduced coverage]... The same with Putin. Yes, the event happens, but we don't stress it... If we were not the main publication in Moscow we could allow ourselves more.'

The interviewee said that *AiF v Ukraine* tried not to 'irritate' its readers or trigger reproaches for being 'pro-Russian'. These prerogatives were borne in mind when republishing material from the Russian federal edition.

A couple of missing issues made it impossible to compare accurately the scale of coverage devoted to Russia by the weeklies. However, contrary to the hypothesis, the tone of Russia coverage in *AiF v Ukraine* was not visibly more favorable than the tone of coverage in *2000*, *Zerkalo Nedeli*, *Stolichnyye Novosti* and *Kommentarii*. In fact, *AiF v Ukraine* was often gently skeptical about the system of authority in Russia. A regular column on its second page took quotes from prominent public figures – Russian ministers and MPs – and followed each one with a mocking editorial response. One example from 22 September ran:

‘S. Markov, State Duma deputy: “Back then (in the 1990s – ed.) it was not so much liberals who were governing as traitors or absolutely unqualified thieves.” – Clear progress is apparent in the Russian state! In terms of their level of qualification, the thieves of those days were not a patch on today’s lot.’

One cannot qualify this mild derision as criticism, but it does subvert the official version of Russian politics promoted by the likes of *Vremya*.

The most unambiguously ‘pro-Russian’ weekly was *2000* (another publication which recently shut down).<sup>41</sup> Its proprietor and editor-in-chief Sergey Kichigin is on record as saying: ‘In every way we [at *2000*] have advocated and are advocating friendship with Russia’.<sup>42</sup> This was very much reflected in its story selection. For example, it ran a lengthy interview with Konstantin Zatulin in which the Russian MP expounded views for which is well known: he called for the closest possible ties between Russia and Ukraine; reiterated that Ukrainians were ‘Russians who live on the periphery [s krayu]’; and argued that not enough was being done to preserve the ‘single Russian-Ukrainian cultural and spiritual space’.

Story selection in *Zerkalo Nedeli*, *Kommentarii* and *Stolichnyye Novosti* was less indicative of a particular editorial viewpoint on Russia. In *Stolichnyye Novosti*, opinion-based articles were often set up to contrast opposing points of view about Russia on the same page. For its part, *Kommentarii* focused heavily on the economic aspect of bilateral relations and frequently mentioned Russia without making any value judgments. On occasion it highlighted advantages

to Ukraine of doing business with Russia, but the message that Russian and Ukrainian economic interests are essentially at odds was often visible. For instance, *Kommentarii* columnist Andrey Starostin wrote on 4 June:

‘The Ukrainian authorities, and above all big business, are hinting that they won’t surrender anything else without a fight. The Russians are inquiring after the price and waiting until the Ukrainians run to them by virtue of the most varied reasons.’

*Zerkalo Nedeli* was somewhat similar to *Kommentarii* in that there was no outright editorial hostility towards Russia evident in its story selection, but several suggestions that Russia’s influence was something of which Ukraine should be wary.

The flattering coverage of Russia in *2000* can be traced back to views expressed by the editor-proprietor. Precisely why he holds those views is less clear (it may be relevant to note that Kichigin is reportedly a former KGB counter-propaganda officer). Yet the editorial policy established at *2000* attracted a readership whose views corresponded to those of the owner, so journalists wrote to please both their readers and their editor simultaneously. A journalist from the paper explained:

‘I am free to develop any topics from any angle. But perhaps I always write with reference to the fact that I understand the kind of audience which reads us: *2000* readers, it seems to me and I’m certain I’m right, are people of strongly pro-Russian views, perhaps even strongly nostalgic for the Soviet past. And probably when I write, I understand that in the back of my mind and therefore I try not to write too sharply about certain obvious things.’

The interviewee herself did not particularly identify with the position she attributes to her readers. At one point she observed: ‘Journalists look at their work with sarcasm. It’s just work.’

A situation of mutually reinforcing influences, albeit with a very different content outcome, was found to exist at the analytical weeklies *Zerkalo Nedeli*, *Kommentarii* and *Stolichnyye Novosti*.

Journalists from these papers all stressed that they were trying to help decision-makers make good decisions. When they wrote about Russia as a threat, they did so because they perceived it to be so themselves, because their editors agreed with them, and because they believed reports discussing the Russian threat were in the interest of their readers. Thus, one journalist from *Zerkalo Nedeli* explained:

‘There are things which need to be spoken about, for example, issues of security... Ukraine has declared itself an independent state. How should Ukraine ensure its security in this situation?... It’s a very practical question to which the Ukrainian authorities are paying no attention. An example in fact: the Black Sea Fleet. Does it present a risk to Ukraine’s security? In my view, yes.’

Interviewees from all three papers indicated that the perception of Russia as a threat was quite widespread among their colleagues and that these personal views affected the tone of reporting. There was no evidence of regular or inherent conflict between what the journalists wanted to write about Russia and the principles or boundaries imposed by owners and managers. At *Zerkalo Nedeli* journalists sometimes negotiated over stories with the editor-in-chief; the interviewee explained:

‘In our case, the editor-in-chief – the person who supervises the creative process – is also the owner, the co-owner. Therefore everything depends on whether you can convince [him]. Sometimes you don’t convince [him]. Sometimes you go away and you are wrong, but this is decided each time in an individual way.’

The *Kommentarii* interviewee indicated that the owner’s influence was fairly light and tended to concern reporting of certain domestic topics more than international affairs. The *Stolichnyye Novosti* journalist stated that he, too, had experienced only localized owner pressure. He observed that the paper’s proprietor (Ihor Kolomoysky) had other more significant media to worry about, such as the TV channel *1+1*.

As for the daily broadsheets, the content analysis results conformed partially to the hypothesis. *Izvestiya v Ukraine* was found to have extremely extensive Russia coverage, with 47 per cent of its stories coded as 'featuring Russia'. However, *Den* (26 per cent) had more extensive Russia coverage than Russian-owned *Kommersant-Ukraina* (18 per cent).

*Den* and *Izvestiya v Ukraine* behaved fully in line with the hypothesis in the tone of their reporting about Russia. The former ran many reports in which the Russian state was depicted as a threat or malefactor. The latter carried a copious amount of uncritical news about the Russian authorities. *Kommersant-Ukraina* took a much more ambiguous editorial stance. References to Russia were frequently found in the context of news about trade or energy, but such news tended to be reported from an economic perspective, with the geopolitical dimension downplayed. Column space was divided fairly evenly between the positive and negative sides of the Russian-Ukrainian economic relationship. In stark contrast to *Den* and *Izvestiya v Ukraine*, *Kommersant-Ukraina* carried almost no editorial comment. Thus, when reporting Patriarch Kirill's visit, *Kommersant-Ukraina* journalists drew no conclusions of their own. Instead, they conveyed the views of a wide range of interviewees encompassing politicians (from opposing camps), political scientists (from opposing schools of thought) and both patriarchates of the Ukrainian Orthodox church. Meanwhile, *Izvestiya v Ukraine's* coverage of the visit read like an official itinerary. It reported that a handful of believers had sailed the length of the Dnipro River to symbolize the 'unity of holy Rus', yet the fact that several thousands of believers had joined the Kyiv Patriarchate's procession instead of following Kirill was omitted. In *Izvestiya v Ukraine*, most statements of opinion came from Kirill himself. The only opposing opinions it quoted were a couple of nationalist slogans, which were clearly labelled by the reporter as 'insulting' and belonging to a 'miserly' small group of extremists. *Den*, for its part, described Kirill as the 'main church hierarch of the empire' and its reporter complained: 'The attack on democratic and independent Ukraine is clearly not weakening.'

When asked why *Kommersant-Ukraina* did not take an editorial stand of its own, one journalist interviewed described the policy as a marketing strategy:

‘There is a rule: analysis is not encouraged at our paper. There is a fear that it won’t be objective. In other words, we are supposed to lay out the facts... When *Kommersant* moved over here, there was too much subjective opinion everywhere. *Kommersant* decided that we should differ in some way, there had to be a unique selling point [fishka]. [Our unique selling point is that] we don’t write opinion, we write news.’

In fact, this rule that journalists should not explicitly express their own views in print was one of the main constraints imposed by the Moscow editorial office on their Kyiv colleagues. A senior *Kommersant* manager in Moscow explained: ‘They don’t have the opportunity to put in something that we have not checked’; editorial staff in Moscow exercised rigorous control over the tone and quality of material published by *Kommersant-Ukraina*. However, in matters of substance the Moscow editorial team allowed their counterparts in Kyiv leeway. One *Kommersant-Ukraina* journalist said:

‘If they have written that it is *so*, but we understand that it is *not quite so*, we have the right to write it differently. They [*Kommersant* in Moscow] do not control us in that respect.’

This interviewee acknowledged that *Kommersant-Ukraina* was ‘accustomed’ to being viewed as Russian and sometimes accused of writing with a pro-Russian slant. ‘It’s impossible to avoid – we are a Russian publication,’ he said. Yet he pointed out that ‘unpleasant’ things were printed about Russia in *Kommersant-Ukraina*, things ‘which Russia would not like to see’. He attributed this to the paper’s business audience, noting the need for businesspeople to be aware of opposition to the Kremlin. He gave no indication of having to balance the interests of Ukrainian readers against those of Russian colleagues or owners. As for Alisher Usmanov, the interviewee said:

'He doesn't decide anything at our paper. He's a long way away. And it's too small an asset for him to decide anything... He simply has a mega-empire, a global one, so *Kommersant* is just a small project. So for him to call here and decide something – it's just not his level.'

The relationship between *Izvestiya v Ukraine* and its Moscow head office was quite different. Editors in Kyiv did not have to get Moscow's prior approval for the content of each *Izvestiya v Ukraine* issue, but a senior *Izvestiya* representative in Moscow made clear that certain editorial principles had to be observed. He said:

'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. This is natural, at the end of the day... If we have a certain editorial policy, then the editorial policy of the edition in Ukraine, should match this.'

He added that 'things which directly violate or distort Russia's policy towards Ukraine' could not appear in the main body of the newspaper without provoking objections.

The negative portrayal of Russia observed in *Den* was first and foremost attributable to personal views held by the editorial team, including the journalist interviewed, who was responsible for much of the paper's reporting on Russia. The journalist said he enjoyed a large amount of freedom in his selection of stories. He made very clear that he viewed Russia as a source of risk, saying:

'Even when we write about Russia's domestic affairs, we have Ukraine in mind. First, for obvious reasons, many processes that happen in Russia also happen in Ukraine in another form, or similar. Or a danger arises – I call it a virus infection – a danger of that infection being carried in from there. For example, we are very

interested in the ethnic tension in Russia, because we have had direct attempts to instil it here. We have had anti-Semitic occurrences. But it is all the work of Russian agents...'

The interviewee made clear that journalistic neutrality was deliberately rejected at *Den* in favor of promoting what was best for Ukraine in the eyes of the editorial team. He explained:

'We are anti-communist, what's more, a militantly anti-communist newspaper. We also take the positions of liberalism and Ukraine's independence from Russia. In other words, we want [Ukraine] to be constructed according to a European pattern. We want to be a European country not only geographically... We do indeed adhere to a pro-Western course, but exclusively to Ukraine's advantage.'

Quite why *Den* took this forthright approach is unclear; the interviewee said the owner's political views did not make themselves felt at the paper. However, he did note that 'a lot depends on the editor-in-chief'.

#### DISCUSSION: RUSSIAN NEWS EXPORTS AND 'SOFT POWER'

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The research presented above shows that Russian capital and franchisors affected the view of Russia in news consumed by millions of Ukrainians during the period under study, but it also shows that their impact on content varied from one news provider to another. Via *Vremya* and *Izvestiya v Ukraine* Russia was exporting news which portrayed the Russian authorities and their policies in a very positive light.<sup>43</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* and *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine* did not generate such regular and extensive flattery for the Russian state; the latter even gently mocked Russia's political establishment. Yet both tabloids were inclined to play down bilateral tensions as editors balanced the expectations of Russian colleagues against the need to appeal to a mass Ukrainian audience. *Kommersant-Ukraina* wrote about Russia's democratic deficit, but it did so in a very matter-of-fact way, without obvious editorializing, because such was the policy imposed by its parent publication in Moscow. Only at *Podrobnosti*

was the presence of a Russian shareholder found to have little discernible effect on Russia coverage. *Pervyy Kanal*'s minority stake in *Inter* apparently had negligible impact on the latter's editorial policy, which owed more to Ukrainian state influence on the channel during the period under study.

This diversity and vulnerability to local influences among the 'Russian' media in Ukraine is obscured when such media are viewed exclusively through the lens of soft power. The soft power framework fosters an overly simplistic interpretation of Russian transnational media activity, where state interests are overemphasized and other explanatory factors risk being overlooked.

There are grounds to be cautious about applying the 'soft power' label even in the case of unambiguously pro-Kremlin news exporters. From time to time, Russian TV channels generate political scandals in Ukraine which fit uneasily with the idea of eliciting positive attraction. A notable documentary shown on *Rossiya/RTR-Planeta* in March 2006 claimed that a CIA prison existed outside Kyiv.<sup>44</sup> Another on *Pervyy Kanal*, titled *Oranzhevyi deti tretyego reykh* (Orange children of the Third Reich) suggested in February 2010 that the Orange revolution had been staged by second-generation Nazis with assistance from the USA.<sup>45</sup> In 2008 *Vremya* seized on a report (which originated in the Ukrainian press) about the sale of Hitler dolls in Kyiv, embellishing the story with untrue claims that the doll had become a 'hit' among customers.<sup>46</sup> More recently, the reluctance of President Yanukovich to sign Ukraine up as a full Customs Union member prompted a Russian media offensive against him and his policies.<sup>47</sup> Such Russian 'information attacks' sparked outrage in Kyiv, even though relatively few Ukrainians actually saw the offending content when it was first broadcast. As explained above, Russian TV channels have not had a particularly large audience share in Ukraine in recent years. Yet 'information attacks' by Russia have become news stories in their own right as they have been reported by domestic news providers, posted on YouTube and vocally criticized by politicians, journalists and other public figures.

In fact, Russian news does not even need to be deliberately exported by Russian broadcasters in order to resonate across the border. In March 2013 a local TV station in Russia's Orenburg ran a report about Taras Shevchenko, in which the revered Ukrainian poet was described as a Russophobe and linked to Nazi propaganda. The report was only broadcast in the Orenburg region. Yet it was spotted by Ukrainians living in Russia and subsequently received widespread coverage in the Ukrainian media.<sup>48</sup>

It remains an open question whether benefits accrued by the Kremlin from Russian media 'attracting' foreign audiences outweigh the problems caused by Russian media's power to provoke. This is an issue which future research should investigate. In the meantime, the soft power framework should be applied with caution. Indiscriminate generalizations about the 'Russian' media in Ukraine and assumptions that they facilitate Russian foreign policy success are problematic. Rather than soft power, we might use the metaphor of a Soviet-era communal apartment with very thin walls. When Russia talks about its neighbors it tends to be overheard and the neighbors inevitably react. Yet the thin walls are not necessarily an advantage for Russia. To date there is little firm evidence to suggest that Russia's audibility has made its life in the apartment easier – and some episodes indicate that quite the reverse is true.

#### POSTSCRIPT

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This article was completed in October 2013, before the mass protests of 'EuroMaidan', the ousting of President Yanukovich and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The crisis has put the Russian presence in Ukraine's news media landscape into a state of flux: cable transmissions of Russia's main federal broadcasters have been banned by the new Ukrainian government in the interests of 'information security';<sup>49</sup> *Kommersant-Ukraina* has ceased publication. Meanwhile, the issue of Russian TV 'propaganda' has hit center-stage.<sup>50</sup> The recent turbulent period arguably underlines the inadequacy of the 'soft power' framework to capture the nature of Russia's transnational media activity and its significance for relations between Moscow and

Kyiv. Softly ‘eliciting attraction’ has been a far lower priority in the Kremlin’s information strategy than discrediting the new Ukrainian authorities.

During the crisis, some journalists have written about Russian channels being ‘widely watched’ in Ukraine and playing a ‘crucial’ role.<sup>51</sup> Such statements need to be treated cautiously. The Russian propaganda campaign has undoubtedly made political waves, but this may be due to its highly aggressive nature and apparent effectiveness in Russia more than a high proportion of Ukrainians tuning in and taking its claims at face value. As this article has pointed out, the best available data suggest that Russian TV news has been less widely *watched* in Ukraine in recent years than widely *available*. Most Ukrainians prefer to get their information about current affairs from domestic channels – which have been reporting the Russian propaganda campaign critically, as a news story in its own right, and exposing elements of disinformation.<sup>52</sup> Across Ukraine, the persuasive power of Russian TV news may have been restricted by other, more popular sources contradicting its messages. The ‘power’ of Russian TV news during recent Ukrainian events would in that case be *polarizing* more than persuasive, stemming from its capacity to deepen divisions between a smaller section of the population who are convinced and a larger section who are offended. Further research into the matter is undoubtedly needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Nye, *Soft power: the means to success in world politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 105; J.S. Nye, ‘The future of soft power in U.S. foreign policy’, in *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, edited by I. Parmar and M. Cox (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 12 December 2011, [www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/newslines/88EDE46B7ED6659044257964005D6EB9](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newslines/88EDE46B7ED6659044257964005D6EB9).

<sup>3</sup> President of Russia, 15 July 2008, [kremlin.ru/acts/785](http://kremlin.ru/acts/785); Russian Foreign Ministry, 12 February 2013, [www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, S. Eke, 'With the state or against the state: The media in Belarus', in *The EU and Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels*, edited by A. Lewis (London: Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2002); M. Lipman and M. McFaul, 'Putin and the Media', in *Putin's Russia: past imperfect, future uncertain*, edited by D. R. Herspring (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); L. Belin, 'Politics and the Mass Media under Putin', in *Russian politics under Putin*, edited by C. Ross (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); F. Fossato, 'Vladimir Putin and the Russian Television "Family"', in *The Russia Papers / Les Cahiers Russie* (Paris: CERI Sciences Po, 2006); B. Beumers, S. Hutchings and N. Rulyova, *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2008); O. Nikolayenko, 'Press freedom during the 1994 and 1999 presidential elections in Ukraine: a reverse wave?' *Europe-Asia Studies* 56-5 (2004): 661-686.

<sup>5</sup> For example, N. Ryabinska, 'The Media Market and Media Ownership in Post-Communist Ukraine,' *Problems of post-communism* 58-6 (2011): 3-20.

<sup>6</sup> For example, S. Oates, *Television, democracy, and elections in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2006); M. Dyczok, 'Do the media matter? Focus on Ukraine', in *Media, democracy and freedom: The post-communist experience*, edited by M. Dyczok and O. Gaman-Golutvina (Bern; Berlin; Bruxelles; Frankfurt am Main; New York, NY; Oxford; Wien: Lang, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> For example, A. P. Tsygankov, 'If not by tanks, then by banks? The role of soft power in Putin's foreign policy', *Europe-Asia Studies* 58-7 (2006): 1079-1099; J. Sherr, *Hard diplomacy and soft coercion: Russia's influence abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> J. S. Nye, *The future of power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> For example, H. Lai & Y. Lu (eds.), *China's soft power and international relations* (New York: Routledge, 2012); M. Li, *Soft power: China's emerging strategy in international politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); J. Kurlantzick, *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); D. L. McConnell & Y. Watanabe *Soft power superpowers: cultural and national assets of Japan and the United States* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008); C. Hayden, *The rhetoric of soft power: public diplomacy in global contexts* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012). Studies relating to the post-Soviet region include V. Hudson, 'A Study of the Civilisational Aspect of Russian Soft Power in Contemporary Ukraine' (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2013); A. P. Tsygankov, 'If not by tanks, then by banks? The role of soft power in Putin's foreign policy', *Europe-Asia Studies* 58-7 (2006):

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1079-1099; J. Sherr, *Hard diplomacy and soft coercion: Russia's influence abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> E. Lock, 'Soft power and strategy: Developing a 'strategic' concept of soft power', in *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, edited by I. Parmar & M. Cox (London; New York: Routledge, 2010); J. B. Mattern, 'Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 33 (2005): 583–612.

<sup>11</sup> E. Lock, 'Soft power and strategy: Developing a 'strategic' concept of soft power', in *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, edited by I. Parmar & M. Cox (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> J. S. Nye, *Soft power: the means to success in world politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 28.

<sup>13</sup> C. Layne, 'The unbearable lightness of soft power' in *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, edited by I. Parmar & M. Cox (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 54.

<sup>14</sup> J. S. Nye, 'Responding to my critics and concluding thoughts' in *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, edited by I. Parmar & M. Cox (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 219.

<sup>15</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, 12 February 2013, [www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D).

<sup>16</sup> *Izvestiya*, 3 October 2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

<sup>17</sup> A. P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 206.

<sup>18</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, 12 February 2013, [www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D).

<sup>19</sup> For example, A. Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: a Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); D. Arel and V. Khmelko, 'The Russian Factor and Territorial Polarization in Ukraine', *The Harriman Review* 9-1/2 (1996): 81–91; L. Barrington and R. Faranda, 'Reexamining Region, Ethnicity and Language in Ukraine', *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25-3 (2009): 232–256; I. Katchanovski 'Regional

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Political Divisions in Ukraine in 1991–2006', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 34-5 (2006): 507–532.

<sup>20</sup> The Ukrainian Week International Edition, 8 July 2013, [ukrainianweek.com/Politics/83970](http://ukrainianweek.com/Politics/83970).

<sup>21</sup> Telekritika, 19 June 2013, [www.telekritika.ua/rinok/2013-06-19/82619](http://www.telekritika.ua/rinok/2013-06-19/82619).

<sup>22</sup> Institute of Mass Information, 16 November 2012, [imi.org.ua/analytics/39470-chesnist-napokaz-scho-stojit-za-polipshennyam-rivnya-ukrajinskih-televizijnih-novin-.html](http://imi.org.ua/analytics/39470-chesnist-napokaz-scho-stojit-za-polipshennyam-rivnya-ukrajinskih-televizijnih-novin-.html).

<sup>23</sup> *TVi* has been involved in various controversies since 2010. First it was stripped of broadcasting frequencies following the election of Yanukovich as president, then cable operators began to remove the channel from their basic subscription packages causing its audience to shrink. In 2012 *TVi* faced charges of tax evasion and was forced to repay the government a considerable sum. In 2013 it was the subject of a battle for ownership and a change of management at the channel prompted many of its journalists to quit in protest (see Telekritika, 28 May 2013, [www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2013-05-28/82028](http://www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2013-05-28/82028)).

<sup>24</sup> Broadcasting Board of Governors and InterMedia, *International Broadcasting in Ukraine* (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2011). Questionnaire survey carried out for the BBG by Intermedia in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS);  $n = 2,019$  (general population).

<sup>25</sup> Weekly TV ratings in 2013 were compiled by GfK and made available on the Telekritika website; see [www.telekritika.ua/type/8](http://www.telekritika.ua/type/8).

<sup>26</sup> *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine*, 28 May 2012, [www.aif.ua/money/article/32684](http://www.aif.ua/money/article/32684).

<sup>27</sup> *Segodnya*, n.d., [www.segodnya.ua/advertising/pechatnye/auditoria/450689.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/advertising/pechatnye/auditoria/450689.html) (accessed 26 November 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Telekritika, 27 November 2012, [www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2012-11-27/77040](http://www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2012-11-27/77040).

<sup>29</sup> *Izvestiya v Ukraine* closed in February 2013, reportedly for financial reasons; see Newsru.ua, 12 February 2013, [http://rus.newsru.ua/ukraine/12feb2013/zakrili\\_izvestiya.html](http://rus.newsru.ua/ukraine/12feb2013/zakrili_izvestiya.html) (accessed 2 May 2014).

<sup>30</sup> *Kommersant-Ukraina* closed in March 2014 because of the 'political situation' in Ukraine and financial problems; see Newsru.com, 13 March 2014, [www.newsru.com/russia/13mar2014/kommersant.html](http://www.newsru.com/russia/13mar2014/kommersant.html) (accessed 2 May 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Research interview with Pavel Filenkov, commercial director of the Kommersant publishing house, Moscow, 12 April 2010.

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<sup>32</sup> Broadcasting Board of Governors and InterMedia, *International Broadcasting in Ukraine* (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2011). Questionnaire survey carried out for the BBG by Intermedia in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS);  $n = 2,019$  (general population).

<sup>33</sup> Research & Branding Group, 23 December 2010, [rb.com.ua/rus/projects/omnibus/6999](http://rb.com.ua/rus/projects/omnibus/6999).

Questionnaire survey conducted 29 November – 6 December 2010;  $n = 2,076$  (adult population).

<sup>34</sup> Broadcasting Board of Governors and InterMedia, *International Broadcasting in Ukraine* (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2011), 17. Questionnaire survey carried out for the BBG by Intermedia in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS);  $n = 2,019$  (general population).

<sup>35</sup> *Zerkalo Nedeli* and *Den* also have Ukrainian-language editions.

<sup>36</sup> The Russian state broadcaster has held a stake in *Inter* since the latter was founded in 1996 as a joint venture between *ORT* (as *Pervyy Kanal* was then known) and Ukrainian MP Oleksandr Zinchenko. Originally *Inter* filled much of its airtime with content from the Russian channel; *ORT* had been forced to cease direct terrestrial broadcasts in Ukraine due to Ukrainian legislative changes. See *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1 September 1999, [www.ng.ru/cis/1999-09-01/lyubye\\_vybory.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/1999-09-01/lyubye_vybory.html).

<sup>37</sup> H. E. Brady and D. Collier, eds, *Rethinking social enquiry: diverse tools, shared standards*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010); J. Mahoney, 'Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis', *Sociological Methods & Research* 28-4 (2000): 387-424.

<sup>38</sup> In the case of the weekly newspapers it was not possible to compare 'like with like', as *AiF v Ukraine* is the only mass-circulation weekly on the Ukrainian market. The selected weeklies clearly target different audiences. Therefore, in the case of the weekly newspapers all causal inference is made on the basis of the interviews rather than nominal comparison.

<sup>39</sup> The sample comprises weeks beginning 31 May, 14 June, 12 July, 26 July and 20 September 2010; not including weekends. This period was determined by the timeframe in which the study had to be completed. The sample of news was gathered (recorded to disk in the case of TV bulletins; bought in the case of newspapers) specifically for this study. Several of the news providers under study are not available in public archives, so taking a sample from previous years was not an option.

<sup>40</sup> None of the interviewees requested anonymity. However, they are not identified here by name to prevent the (unlikely but not impossible) scenario of their participation in the study being met with

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disapproval and having negative career implications. Their comments should be considered personal opinions and do not necessarily reflect the official position of their respective media organizations.

<sup>41</sup> Newsru.com, 13 March 2014, [www.newsru.com/russia/13mar2014/kommersant.html](http://www.newsru.com/russia/13mar2014/kommersant.html) (accessed 2 May 2014).

<sup>42</sup> 2000 (website), 1 July 2010, [2000.net.ua/2000/forum/sosedi/67869](http://2000.net.ua/2000/forum/sosedi/67869).

<sup>43</sup> The same is true of news bulletins on Russia's other main federal channels with international streams in Ukraine, *NTV Mir* and *RTR Planeta*, as their editorial policy is coordinated with the Kremlin. They were not selected for analysis here because they were not among Ukraine's top 10 channels at the start of the study.

<sup>44</sup> BBC Monitoring, 12 March 2006, [my.monitor.bbc.co.uk/portal](http://my.monitor.bbc.co.uk/portal) (access for subscribers only).

<sup>45</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 February 2010, [www.ng.ru/week/2010-02-08/11\\_culture.html](http://www.ng.ru/week/2010-02-08/11_culture.html).

<sup>46</sup> *Deutsche Welle*, 15 May 2008, [www.dw.de/false-hitler-doll-reports-vex-ukraine/a-3337110](http://www.dw.de/false-hitler-doll-reports-vex-ukraine/a-3337110).

<sup>47</sup> Glavkom, 14 March 2013, [glavcom.ua/articles/10391.html](http://glavcom.ua/articles/10391.html).

<sup>48</sup> For example, *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*, 15 March 2013, [kp.ua/daily/150313/384436](http://kp.ua/daily/150313/384436);

Korrespondent, 13 March 2013, [korrespondent.net/video/ukraine/1521805-rossijskij-telekanal-nazval-tarasa-shevchenkovtorosortnym-poetom-i-prizval-ne-prazdnovat-ego-200-let](http://korrespondent.net/video/ukraine/1521805-rossijskij-telekanal-nazval-tarasa-shevchenkovtorosortnym-poetom-i-prizval-ne-prazdnovat-ego-200-let).

<sup>49</sup> UNIAN, 11 March 2014, [www.unian.net/politics/895188-segodnya-vecherom-v-ukraine-vyiklyuchat-neskolko-rossijskih-kanalov.html](http://www.unian.net/politics/895188-segodnya-vecherom-v-ukraine-vyiklyuchat-neskolko-rossijskih-kanalov.html).

<sup>50</sup> For example, BBC News, 2 March 2014, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26411396](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26411396); *The Economist*, 29 March 2014, [www.economist.com/news/europe/21599829-new-propaganda-war-underpins-kremlins-clash-west-1984-2014](http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21599829-new-propaganda-war-underpins-kremlins-clash-west-1984-2014); delo.ua, 3 March 2014, [delo.ua/ukraine/informacionnaja-vojna-kak-rabotaet-rossijskaja-propaganda-229022](http://delo.ua/ukraine/informacionnaja-vojna-kak-rabotaet-rossijskaja-propaganda-229022).

<sup>51</sup> BBC News, 12 March 2014, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26546083](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26546083).

<sup>52</sup> For example, *Sobytiya on Ukraina*, 3 March 2014, [sobytiya.tv/episode/30502](http://sobytiya.tv/episode/30502); *TSN on 1+1*, 7 March 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ta0xV1hAWtw&list=PL1neMztLSbMNxum4lBfHo2qVOKxScvMGr](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ta0xV1hAWtw&list=PL1neMztLSbMNxum4lBfHo2qVOKxScvMGr).