

Old & New Media, Old & New Politics?

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Introduction

These are uneasy times for Eastern European societies, most of which are in an ambiguous transition from totalitarianism to democracy. Although after the overthrow of the non-democratic regimes they proclaimed a course towards the latter, their political future is still rather unclear as many of their political, economic and social practices contradict with the notion and basic principles of democracy. The role of the media, notably press freedom and the many ways in which this is violated, is at the heart of the controversy. On the one hand, most Eastern European countries have adopted progressive media legislation and seem to have welcomed the appearance of independent and private media outlets. On the other, researchers and international observers report examples of media bias, political pressure over media, and journalists' self-censorship.

While focusing on Russia and Ukraine, this paper will look at the logic which drives post-Soviet media developments. The two largest republics of the former Soviet Union seem to be caught in between a logic which is defined by the liberal ideology of the free market place of ideas and one which is driven by the traditions of the state/party being the dominant actor in deciding the political and the public's agenda. In the old days, communist media were an integrated part of the socialization, education and cultural integration of the socialist citizen. The post-Soviet situation gives a new importance to the media: for the citizens as a reliable source of political education, for the political authorities as a new aid to their informational activities and a means of maintaining power.

In such a situation of uncertainty and ambivalence, the role of the Internet, as a new and difficult to control means of providing information and a platform for dialogue, could be paramount. The arrival of the Internet coincided with the transformation to democracy in Eastern Europe, it thus being branded as a medium of and for democracy. Combining both the characteristics of advanced technology and an extended mass medium, the Internet from the start was expected - may be in these countries even more so than in Western Europe and North America - to enhance democratic practices in society. By comparing on and off line media in Russia and Ukraine, we will analyze whether the application of the Internet lives up to this expectation and whether it overcomes the problematic informational situation the 'old' media of mass communication and their relation to the state have created.

Media logic and democracy

It is an open door in liberal democratic theory to say that media play an important role in making democracy tick. Independent from state and economic powers, they are to provide the plurality of information and opinions necessary for people to make sense of society's goings on so they can perform their participatory rights of citizens; to probe and enlighten the transparency of the decision making sphere; to give a platform for the expression of both society's wants and grievances and decision makers answers to these, and thus provide a means of dialogue necessary for the cohesion of society; and finally, to watch over the exercise and possible misuse of power and, next to the chosen representatives of the people, hold the holders of that to account.

The US-inspired discussion on a growing cynicism in the relationship between politics, media and publics, senses a 'mediatization' of political communication in which the 'laws' of television more and more 'dictate' the content and effects of the interactions (Capella &

Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1993). Traditionally most mass media in Western Europe used to inform on the political process from a *partisan logic* (see table 1). The media in the 19th and most of the 20th century used to have close links with political parties, performing more as a mouthpiece of the political elite than from an independent observer point of view. The metaphor best describing the journalists' role is that of the lap dog. In the 1960s and 1970s in most continental countries the partisan logic was replaced by a *party logic* in which the media still very much respected the political parties and the decision makers as the actors setting the political agenda, but from a more critical distance and without closely identifying with them. Instead, in a party logic the media perform in the public interest and from a sense of responsibility for the well being of the political system and the democratic process (Mazzoleni 1987). The well known metaphor is that of the watchdog.

Table 1. Logics in political communication

	<i>partisan logic</i>	<i>party logic</i>	<i>media logic</i>
Role of journalists	Mouthpiece	Critical with respect	Critical/cynical
Media identify with	Party	Public interest	Public's wishes
Agenda set by	Political elite	Political elite	Media
Period	< 1970	1970-1990	> 1990

As a consequence of the growing competition between TV channels in a dual broadcasting system and the market orientation of the tabloid press, we are now confronted by a *media logic* (Altheide & Snow 1979; see for a critical analysis of this claim Brants & Van Praag 2000). According to this logic the media content is decided by the frame of reference in which the media make sense of and socially construct what happens and by whom. The media now identify with the public, that is to say with what they assume the public deems important and enjoyable; politics becomes dependent on the functioning, the production routines and the news values of the media. In practice that not only means a distanced journalistic attitude, but even a cynical one, in search of the scandalous and the entertaining. The pitbull springs to mind as a metaphor, may be cross bred with a poodle.

The question is whether any of these US-European models fit, and thus help to explain, the media developments in Russia and Ukraine. If we look more to the outside of media changes in these countries we see the appearance of independent and often commercially driven media outlets. There is more genre diversity and commercial as well as political advertising unknown in the previous period. At the same time, we notice the establishment of partisan media supporting political forces different than the former communist parties. However, these visible changes could be misleading, as media transformations do not take place unchallenged. The long period of state control and censorship cannot be expected to disappear without a trace and over night. It has left its marks on the development of media policy and practice, and often determines the recent picture of the field.

So how can the current logic of the ex-Soviet media be explained in the two countries under study and what are the major patterns of the state-media-society relations? The evolution of the media in the former USSR republics cannot be understood without the exploration of media performance during the Soviet times.

A very short history of political communication in Russia

Before perestroika

The importance of the mass media has never been underestimated in the Soviet Union. Citizens were able to receive at least one national TV channel, two republican channels and very often one local (provincial) TV channel. Radio sets were available in any Soviet household including the most remote parts of the country. Newspapers, newsletter, bulletins and magazines were published in almost unlimited quantities and editions.

Television particularly was prominent and important, both as a provider of information/propaganda and as a tool in creating cohesion/order. It was relevant for the public as a disseminator of the Communist party propaganda, but also because it helped to preserve a connection of the regions with the centre and to give a sense of belonging of the Russian provinces to the high quality life and public affairs. However, 'dependency' of the Soviet authorities on TV was even greater than that of the population. As Ellen Mickiewicz (1997: 13) observes: "Belief in the overwhelming power of television never changed across the years of Soviet power.... Perhaps they exaggerated the effects of the medium, but from the time it began reaching the mass public, they had always done so". And she concludes further: "TV is important to people in power everywhere, but in the Soviet Union it was virtually an obsession" (Ibid.).

This attitude defined the policy of the party and the state towards TV in particular and all media in general. A very high level of party censorship together with the conscious self-censorship marked the parameters of the editorial policy of the Soviet media. Oppositional thinking as expressed by the official media was unknown. Open minded journalists did not have a chance to independently and pluralistically inform the people, because of the well trained and vigilant apparatus of the party and security service members who were the major mediators between the journalists and the public. The so called *Samizdat* literature was the main way of counteracting censored and controlled information flows: politically active citizens reprinted and translated forbidden publications. Thus multiplied copies of such publications were read all over the country under the permanent threat of arrest and physical punishment.

Mickiewicz (1997: 18) characterizes the Soviet media as caught by a 'zero-sum' approach: "all or nothing: no compromises, no middle ground". Another remarkable feature of the Soviet media was their elitist character (Splichal 1994; Mickiewicz 1997). Elitism revealed itself at least in three ways, which in themselves do not sound unfamiliar to the present Western observer: a) in the personalization of politics and news; b) in the selective nature of the journalists' caste, and; c) in the direction of media performance. In terms of personalization, the leaders of the Soviet Union and especially the General Secretary dominated media coverage with his presence, references and quotations. In terms of the selective nature, the journalists represented a highly educated and well paid group of the Soviet intelligentsia. And finally, any media coverage was directed towards the state and party officials who were considered the major audience of any media outlet. Thus, any media event was organized with the state officials and not population in the back of one's mind.

In terms of a defining logic, the Soviet period has reminiscences of both partisan and party characteristics, but it could probably best be described as a state logic, symbolized by "the undemocratic traditions in which the state apparatus or the [general secretary] hold control over the media and define what is and particularly what is not said. ... Under a state logic,

truth and truth finding are – potentially at least, practically most often – violated, suppressed and censored. Content is one sided and often propagandistic” (Brants & Krasnoboka 2001: 301).

Gorbachev's perestroika

Perestroika became a golden age of public journalism. It can be characterised as a mixture of elements of media logic - journalists performing as independent, critical watchdogs - and party logic - their performance was driven more by a sense of what was in the public interest than in what the public was interested in. Neither before nor even after perestroika were journalists so independent and respected in their job. Television programs such as *Vzglyad* (View/Look), *Prozhektor Perestrojki* (Spotlight of Perestroika), *Do i Posle Polunochi* (Before and After the Midnight) became the forerunners and guardians of democratization. Public discussions of these programs and the content of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Comsomol Truth), *Trud* (Labor), *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Literature Paper), *Argumenty i Fauty* (Arguments and Facts) became a matter of fact.

Media and public united in their struggle against the System and the leading figures of the communist party. The former contributed to the public's opinion, as it combined a sense of obligation towards society with a sensitivity for the mood and interests of their audiences. The state bureaucracy was almost afraid to intervene in that 'relationship'. As agenda setters, the journalists were the real opinion makers and political leaders of the Soviet people. Their role has moved from a propaganda function towards information dissemination, political education of citizens and particularly to analytical opinionating. Not surprisingly, leading journalists were elected to the Soviet Parliament during the first independent elections in the USSR in 1989 and later to the national parliaments.

In all their seeming independence, the media has no legal autonomy as they were still state owned and measures could be taken if they crossed boundaries. These boundaries themselves, however, were uncertain. Also their criticism was mainly directed at certain periods in the Soviet history and certain personalities. Moreover, media policy and practice was not yet regulated by a progressive media law. The existing one was limited by the general and formal statements and was rather outdated and remote from the current media practice. Finally, the orientation of the media towards the audience and society remained rather selective. It was still very elitist – directed toward 'oppositional intellectuals' (Splichal 1994); to a large extent intellectuals defined both the media and the political agenda during perestroika. Leading Soviet journalists either came from this group or were closely associated with it. Many of those who started their journalistic career in the late 1980s worked elsewhere before or came from the elite group of the journalists-international correspondents.

Thus, the logic of the media during perestroika would be better defined as a (fuzzy) civic logic with progressive intellectuals transforming political and media systems as well as setting the basis of civil society.

First years of independence

The next period of the Russian media history continued the situation achieved by Gorbachev's perestroika but under different political conditions. The collapse of the Soviet Union stimulated the appearance of independent media in several ways. Firstly, by adopting a new and progressive media law. Secondly, Russia witnessed the explosion of private media outlets; many of them ephemerons, others managed to survive for some time, but few became

established media. Thirdly, shortly after its independence Russia experienced the first democratic elections with the participation of different political parties.

Analyzing media performance during the 1993 Duma elections, Ellen Mickiewicz and Andrei Richter (1996) stress two significant changes of that time: "First, a significant amount of time was allotted to other points of view, even if substantially less time than was accorded to the favored party. Second, there was a near-total change in the incidence of opinionated or biased reporting. This time, scrupulous neutrality was maintained by most of the news correspondents and anchors" (121). On the other hand, however, ownership regulations of the leading national outlets were still not very clear. Television as the major medium of politics remained practically state owned, bringing uncertainty, contradictions and biases into media coverage.

Another feature of that time is further change in the journalist's role in distancing themselves from the traditional propaganda approach. At the same time, as Wei Wu with colleagues (1996: 544) have noticed, Russian journalist started to "believe more in such active roles as setting the political agenda and developing the interests of the public, but not in investigating government claims". In all, the different elements show a hesitant and embryonic birth of a media logic in Russia during the first years of independence.

Media wars

The presidential elections 1996 became a watershed in the history of independent media in Russia as well as a test of media devotion to objectivity. Most of the media did not pass that test. The behavior of the Russian media during the presidential campaign provoked a reverse turn in the process of democratization and became "the point from which the power of the media tycoons and journalistic "stardom" took off" (<http://www.ft.com>, April 23, 2001). Facing and fearing the Communists in the second round of the elections, independent and private media decided to support Yeltsin's re-election as the lesser of two evils. Many journalists naively thought that they could so maintain the freedom of speech and media independence, re-electing a democrat instead of a communist. Under these conditions the media campaign for Yeltsin became highly biased.

Yeltsin's victory revealed several issues. Firstly, lacking other sources, the Russian population relied heavily on the media and primarily the televised campaign. Secondly, thus sensing the importance of the media, the country's authorities also realized that it was not completely impossible to make successful negotiations with journalists. During the first years of independence there were primarily power holders who believed in the watchdog function of the media and who were horrified by the new situation. Finally, the media victory of Yeltsin became a signal for capitalist entrepreneurs how to use the media for their business purposes and political affairs. After 1996 the struggle for ownership and re-distribution of the Russian information flow started; the country fell foul to a period of so called information or media wars.

In the mid of 1990s hundreds of television and radio stations, and thousands of newspapers in Russia found themselves on the brink of bankruptcy, unable to pay their debts of paper costs, office rent and printing and video facilities. Editors in chief had to search for new and rich owners. "Russian journalists did not expect or seek to become dependent on bankers and industrialists. The 1991 law on the mass media contains no mention of media ownership or the rights and obligations of media owners. However, the Russian economy cannot support the vast majority of the country's media outlets. Surviving on advertising is not realistic

option, except for a few extremely popular publications” (<http://www.rferl>, Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media). Until the 1996 presidential elections, media content was little affected by private ownership. Once Yeltsin was back in Kremlin thanks to media support, the owners demanded political privileges from the authorities in return for media partisanship.

Between 1996 and 2000 Russia was permanently faced with media wars, resulting in the journalists losing their credibility and respect in society. As Emma Gray, analyst of the Center for Journalists’ Protection (CPJ) concludes, “media bias reached fever pitch during the December parliamentary election campaign [1999], when facts and balance lost out to slander and mud-slinging designed to destroy candidates’ reputations. Commentators such as Sergei Dorenko, who anchors ORT’s flagship political program, blatantly supported the pro-government party and mercilessly attacked its rivals. Though Dorenko used perhaps the greatest array of dirty tricks, almost all media put out openly biased material, to the open dismay of a few major quality newspapers such as Segodnya and Izvestiya” (<http://www.cpj.org>, March 2000).

Putin’s new state logic

The uneasy relationship between ownership and independence got a final blow with Putin’s presidency. The first signs of such developments could be noticed shortly after the December 1999 parliamentary election campaign. By the time of the 2000 presidential elections “the Kremlin forces ha(d) consolidated power, undermined the party system and nullified opposition to a degree that even strong independent stations such as NTV may have trouble in continuing to air opposing viewpoints” (Oates & Roselle 2000: 48).

The media reporting about the ‘Kursk’ submarine catastrophe became the last swallow of media freedom. As if sensing their future predicament, the majority of the media outlets united in their tough criticism of the Kremlin authorities. Inexperienced citizens could even believe that at that moment Russian media were able to overthrow the ex-KGB officer. Using primarily legal mechanisms and business tensions among media owners, the state managed to shut down or completely renew the leading independent media which previously belonged to the media empires of Berezovsky and Gusinsky. Law and criminal suits against Babitsky and Dorenko warned other Russian journalists what might happen to them and many returned to the old days self-censorship. The exile of Berezovsky and Gusinsky had the same effect on media owners who quickly restricted their demands. Collisions around *NTV/TV-6/Echo Moskvy* journalists who still continued to fight for a free press raised doubts about the Russian media being able to beat the state.

Nationalism, which had exploded in many Eastern European media shortly after democratic revolutions (Splichal 1994), had been rather unknown in Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia found itself in a sort of identity crisis, also *vis a vis* the other former Soviet-bloc countries. Putin managed to restore Russian pride and patriotic feelings with the introduction of a new type of state nationalism. Now media were not only demanded to be patriotic and to respect their own country, but a remark critical of government activities could be easily regarded as anti-patriotic.

Putting developments in perspective (see table 2), the result of ten years of Russian media independence is that the state dominance is again everywhere. It is a body which both defines and defies the written and unwritten rules of media performance in that it manipulates media ownership through the creation of media financial crises or by ‘simply’ putting media owners

and journalists in jail. Neither media law nor money determines media practice in Russia. Media viability is again defined and determined by the state.

Table 2. Logics of media performance in Russia

Parameters	State logic	(Fuzzy) civic logic	(Embryonic) media logic	Media wars' logic	New state logic
Journalistic role	Propaganda	Criticism	Criticism	Compromat	Loyalty/ nationalism
Identification	Party/ State	Public elite	Media/ public elite	Media owners	State
Agenda setting	Party	Media	Media	Media	State
State interference	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
Censorship	Party, self-censorship	Moderate party	Moderate self-censorship	Self-censorsh. towards the owners	State censorship, self-censorship
Ownership	State	State	State/ independent	Private/ state	State/ private
Media law	Formal	Formal	New law	Lawsuits	Dominance of other laws over media law
Period in Russia	Before 1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	1996-2000	Since 2000

An even shorter history of political communication in Ukraine

The performance of Ukrainian media during the Soviet period, perestroika and the first years of independence resembles very much the practices of Russian media. The major difference was the provincial character of Ukrainian media. Even national TV channels and newspapers were considered to be of lower quality and importance than those concentrated in Moscow. Moreover, state control and censorship over Ukrainian media were often even stricter than in other parts of the Soviet Union, which can be explained by the geopolitical and economic importance of Ukraine, the second largest republic, as well as strong national feelings among Ukrainian cultural elites.

Similar to many other Eastern European countries nationalism became the distinguishing feature of the independent Ukrainian media, aimed at the creation of the national identity and in defense of national sovereignty. The nationalism of the Ukrainian media neglected however, the establishment of domestic oligarchs and a conversion of the former local Communist leaders into national political figures. Blaming the communists and Russia for all evil in the historical development of the country, Ukrainian media consciously or unconsciously closed their eyes on the emergence of domestic 'oppressors'. In spite of this, the presidential campaign of 1994 was an example of nearly fair competition between the incumbent and his major rival. The victory of the 'new man' Kuchma over the acting president Kravchuk, the acceptance of the results by everyone, open competition, transparency and criticism during the campaign confirms that the presidential race and the political reporting of it was fair. After Yeltsin's victory in 1996 no doubt existed that Ukraine would shortly follow the same pattern.

The emergence of a new class of media owners has taken a slightly different path in Ukraine. Starting their media activities two, three years later than in the neighboring country, Ukrainian oligarchs had a clear vision of their media projects: these were used to obtain political power and a position either in the legislative or in the executive bodies. In contrast to Russia, establishment of Ukrainian media empires went side by side with establishment of the oligarchs' political parties – a process that was rather unknown in Russia where at the beginning oligarchs mainly competed for personal power. Additionally, loyalty to president Kuchma has always been a distinguished feature of Ukrainian private and state owned journalism.

In contrast to Russia, where till recently business-political groups were fighting for power and placement of 'their man' in the Kremlin simply allowed them to be critical towards Yeltsin, leading Ukrainian oligarchs, their parties and media have always been competing for the favour of the president. In this sense citizens of Russia were right in saying that they could obtain complete information and establish their own opinion and judgment of the situation by watching/reading/listening to several different outlets. In Ukraine, people always receive more or less the same national and international news with local news and news on different political groups and parties being slightly different. Ukrainian media wars have never been so 'bloody' and never involved the president.

These features define the behavior of the media during election campaigns. "Recent elections of the parliament (1998) and the President (1999) showed a biased media performance in which personalities and their families, scandal and gossip, horse race and conflict dominated over content. The different party programs and policy views, which were characterized by a strong similarity, hardly gave rise to a pluralist portrayal. There were also no TV debates, as fear more than democratic accountability reigned these campaigns" (Brants & Krasnoboka 2001:?). The presidential campaign 1999 became an ode which private and state owned media sang to the incumbent President. The facts of media biased behavior have been noticed and declared by all missions of observers. The most common conclusion on media performance during last election campaign was made by the OSCE: "Both the publicly funded electronic and print media, and private broadcasters comprehensively failed to meet their obligations. ... Editors and journalists concluded that critical comments on the incumbent President's campaign would invite unwarranted impediments to the publication of their paper or broadcasting of their programs" (OSCE/ODIHR 1999).

Alongside issues of oligarchs' partisanship and president's loyalty, Ukrainian media experience new methods of state pressure which kills (sometimes literally) the remains of critical and unbiased reporting. Media organizations undergo regular and special fire, health, anti-epidemic and tax inspections any time they try to be independent. Moreover, the existence of many media outlets and particularly of TV channels depends on the issue of licensing as well as on the function of still state-owned printing facilities. Additionally, media and journalists are practically unprotected against lawsuits of powerful authorities and local bureaucrats.

According to the information collected by the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe, "(i)n 1999 Ukrainian media were sued over 2000 times for the total of almost three times as much as the country's whole budget!" (AS/Cult (2000) 43, January 2001). At the same time, "officials who were often at the origin of leaking false information to the media for their own interests were unpunished" (ibid.). Finally, Ukrainian state

authorities return to the old practice of censorship, expanding it with the new form of ‘censorship by killing’ (OSCE 2001).

The issues and facts mentioned above do not allow to conclude that the logic used by Ukrainian media have something in common with the notion of media logic. On the contrary, as well as in the case of Russia, Ukraine presents an example of a newly emerged state logic diluted by oligarchs’ partisan logic (see table 3).

Table 3. Logics of media performance in Ukraine

Parameters	State logic	(Fuzzy) public logic	(Embryonic) media logic	New state & partisan logic
Journalistic role	Propaganda	Criticism of the Center	Nationalism	Compromat/ loyalty
Identification	Party/ State	Nation	Nation	Party/ financial group/ state
Agenda setting	Party	National elite	National elite	Party/ State
State interference	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong
Censorship	Party	Moderate party	Moderate self-censorship	Strong state censorship, strong self-censorship
Ownership	State	State	Independent	Private/ State
Media law	Formal	Formal	New law	Lawsuits, licensing, tax penalty
Period in Ukraine	Before 1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	Since 1996

As the two tables show, Russian and Ukrainian media have not made use of the chance they got with perestroika and independence. Obtaining practically unlimited popularity and trust, being leaders of public opinion formation and political agenda setting, media have lost almost everything within the ten years of independence. Having been the major megaphones of state and communist party propaganda, national media managed to establish the skills of objective information reporting and high quality analysis. However, these skills were disintegrated by the overuse of compromat materials and style of reporting during Russian media wars. In Ukraine similar tendencies have only started to accumulate. Many media outlets often return to the ‘zero-sum’ reporting which is in many cases connected with deep national/nationalistic feelings.

Moreover, the sphere of legal existence of post-Soviet media is full of paradoxes. Although both countries on paper established very progressive media legislation (with Ukraine having almost the ideal media legislation among European countries), its implementation is connected with all sorts of violations and collisions between different laws. Criminal court cases against Russian journalists are good examples of the dominance of the law on State Secrets over the journalists’ right to obtain and disseminate information. Steven White rightly observes: “Formally, there may be a system of justice; but how real can it be so long as the law is regarded (in the words of a Bulgarian proverb) as a ‘door in an empty field: you can go through it, but what’s the point?’” (2000: 323-4).

Media bias is not new or unknown to Western societies. But as Oates and Roselle stress: “Certainly, there are openly biased newspapers in many countries, particularly among the

tabloids in Britain, but this is within well-established democracies in which citizens have ample access to relatively unbiased information through many other sources, including their state television. When the main sources of information become conduits for a single political faction in a post-authoritarian state, citizens lose their ability to hear a range of viewpoints and political positions” (2000: 47).

The evolution of online media in Russia and Ukraine

The Internet has become one of the most (and in some cases, the only) independent source of information and a meeting point of different political opinions. Many people believe that with arrival of the Internet and other new technologies, a return to the totalitarian regime is impossible: “talk of a return to the Soviet past is exaggerated. The Internet, the mobile phone, the ability to travel, the desire of most Russians, especially the young, to be part of a wider world, mean that attempts to squelch the press can only stiffer the purveyors of news and debate a bit. Gone are the days when a leader of the Soviet Union – Mikhail Gorbachev, no less – could take 18 days to let a disaster like Chernobyl be publicly mentioned” (The Economist 2001: 16).

One could even say that the Internet has rarely been labelled with negative connotations in Eastern Europe, except for the authorities may be. Though later than Mac Donald’s, the Internet arrived in the countries of the former Socialist block practically at the same time as their independence and became one more sign of a long waited freedom. Moreover, the educational and technical skills of the population allowed people to adjust to the Internet quickly and easily. Even today, despite all difficulties of the economic and political development, more than 97 percent of Ukrainian and Russian population are fully and sufficiently literate¹. And because of investments of the Soviet state into free higher education, a large percentage in both countries has a university degree. Thus, the moment the Internet arrived, may were well prepared.

Two media-political events in Ukraine and Russia have become a sign that the Internet can compete with traditional media in the coverage of political affairs and in affecting the political and media agenda. In September 2000 independent online journalist Georgy Gongadze disappeared in Kyiv. According to the unwritten rules of the post totalitarian society his name would simply appear on the long list of the journalists and politicians who were murdered or committed suicides since the times of independence. But the course of events was different this time, thanks to the Internet, making the case public and provoking the biggest political crisis in the country. The Internet became the only source and tool in the hands of political opposition, concerned citizens and independent journalists. The Gongadze case stimulated the evolution of online journalism in Ukraine. If in April 2000 there was only his *Ukrainska Pravda*, in late Autumn of 2000 online media became serious competitors for the traditional media. Their number increased significantly (over 40 original online media by mid 2001).

Russian journalists too refer to the Internet as the only uncensored medium left for their professional activities. The NTV collision in April 2001 became the first test case when the Internet turned out to be practically the only source presenting the opposite side of the conflict. The first online newspapers appeared in the second half of the 1990s and originally had a rather limited circle of readers. The user group grew with the Internet as a news and information source in the Summer of 2000, during the catastrophe of the Russian submarine Kursk and fire in Ostankino TV-tower which paralysed broadcasting of the leading national

channels. Many Russians went online to get additional information and analyses in the case of the submarine catastrophe and to receive news in the case of TV-tower fire. The popularity of on line papers originally grew out of necessity, but their independent reporting (in the face of the growing state-TV complex) soon gave them credibility as well.

It is important to stress that the major role in these events was played not so much by the Internet itself as by online newspapers. The phenomenon of online newspapers in the former USSR republics is different from established democracies. When in the latter case it refers to the extended online versions of traditional media, the former presents an original online outlet. Online newspapers should be differentiated from online versions of traditional media such as newspapers, television, radio, journals, etc. Thus, we will define online newspapers as the information outlets which mainly or entirely exist on the Internet. Regularly updated and originally presented news, analyses and discussions of current affairs are the major focus of their activities.

Investigation of the structural characteristics of online newspapers, their political and financial affiliations as well as their popularity among the Internet users (Krasnoboka 2002) allows us to distinguish them from traditional media in these countries (either in offline or online version). Original online media are flexible, mobile and consist of small groups of professional journalists and sufficiently educated enthusiasts. Most of these media are not affiliated with a political or business group and maintain their activities with personal money or grants from international NGOs. Analysis of online ratings of popularity confirms that not only separate online outlets but also original online media occupy leading positions. Monthly ratings of many original online outlets compete with subscription ratings of many (particularly local) newspapers and journals. The age of online journalists can be also considered as an important indicator – most of them have started their professional activities already after the independence or at least during the perestroika.

It can thus be assumed that online media constitute a unique means of communication in societies in transition. But do they indeed function as a new, independent, platform for gaining knowledge, creating dialogue and enhancing democracy in these societies?

Research results

For the analysis in Ukraine and Russia, we have selected two on and two off line newspapers and one national TV station. We focused on political news (national political issues and politicians, internal political news only when it referred to the national situation), raising the question how much in type and focus of article/news item and in the references to different political actors on and off line media differed, assuming that the first would present a more balanced picture of politics than the latter.

On and off line in Ukraine

For Ukraine we selected two national daily newspapers, *Facty* and *Den*, which have the largest circulation, the two most popular online newspapers – *Ukrainska Pravda* and *Korrespondent*, and the first national (state owned) TV channel – *UT-1*ⁱⁱ. We analyzed one regular week in October 2001 (15.10.01- 21.10.01), as part of a larger research which includes the election campaign coverage in the two countries and two case studies.

In total 175 articles have been selected for analysis: Ukrainska Pravda – 22; Korrespondent – 64; UT-1 – 38; Facy – 17; Den – 34.

Type of article

The emphasis in all media is on current affairs and general political stories (see table 4). Only UT-1 and Den show examples in all categories, but the TV channel generally prefers political stories while the newspaper combines political analysis with current affairs news. The online newspapers have no local news, while full interviews is particularly favored by Ukrainska Pravda.

Table 4. Type of article in on and off line media in Ukraine

Type of article	Ukr.Pravda	Korrespondent	UT-1	Facy	Den
Current political affairs	10	39	13	11	9
General political story	4	20	21	4	6
Local news	0	0	1	2	2
International news	0	5	1	0	3
Interview	7	0	3	0	4
Political analysis	8	0	1	0	10

N.B. Some articles were coded in two categories (e.g. current affair + analysis; current affair + interview)

Focus of article

While the emphasis is on issues and events, most of the articles in both online newspapers and in Den have a clear link to a certain politician, party or official representative. However, personal features of politicians or private information about them is absent. UT-1 and Facy differ considerably in their focus from the others: within their focus on events, both outlets have chosen the President as their major focus of attention. UT-1 regularly reports on political meetings, visits and telephone calls of the President, whereas Facy relies on the president's opinion on most of the issues and events discussed in the newspaper. Meetings of the parliamentary speaker and prime minister, although less often than meetings of the President, are also in the center of attention of the national TV channel.

Table 5. Focus of on and off line media in Ukraine

Focus of an article	Ukr.Pravda	Korrespondent	UT-1	Facy	Den
Issue	22	49	13	15	20
Event	5	13	22	10	13
Politician	2	5	2	1	4
Party	5	7	3	0	2
Officials	4	4	20	15	4
Media	1	0	0	0	1
Public	1	1	0	0	2

NB. Some articles were coded in two categories (e.g. issue/event + politician). Some issues, events and people have been coded several times as the focus of an article.

If we take a closer look at the facts highlighted by the different media (table 6), we see that with the exception of the Russian airplane catastrophe, all other topics have a different

importance for different media. There are some telling differences too. First of all we see that online newspapers are much more critical than their off line counterparts: they focused much more on accusations against the country's authorities and seem to be less interested in the official staged and pseudo events of official visits and the day-to-day workings of the Parliament. The offline media seem to ignore accusations and focus intensively on president Kuchma's meetings and visits, and his contacts with international leaders. Also, when we can locate in the table some diversity in the facts presented by the national TV channel, most of it is presented from the President's point of view, or from other pro-presidential sources or journalists. Other Members of Parliament and even the Parliament as such are often treated in a negative or one sided way by UT-1. The very popular ex-prime minister Yushchenko, however, was rather much reported in the offline newspapers, though not in the TV news.

Secondly, though the elections were still more than half a year away, on average the online media were very much interested in the politics of it. But more importantly, they presented a much more varied picture of the parties and politicians involved. Opposition leader (Tymoshenko) and parties (Communist Party and National Democratic Party) get virtually no attention in the offline media, while the online media pay attention to (almost) all relevant parties and politicians, though not necessarily in a fully balanced way. Interviews with politicians dominate online newspapers' articles and TV news. However, it is difficult to say whether this fact confirms opinion diversity in the media. While Ukrainska Pravda mainly provides interview with the oppositional politicians, UT-1 mainly interviews pro-presidential forces. Korrespondent is the only outlet which tries to preserve certain balance. Two national newspapers differ between each other as well. Whereas Facyt almost avoids interviews as such, newspaper Den almost equally distributes opportunities between different groups – politicians, officials, think tanks and media. At the same time, as in the case of Ukrainska Pravda and UT-1, selection of people interviewed by the Den is far from being objective.

Table 6. Facts highlighted in the different Ukrainian media

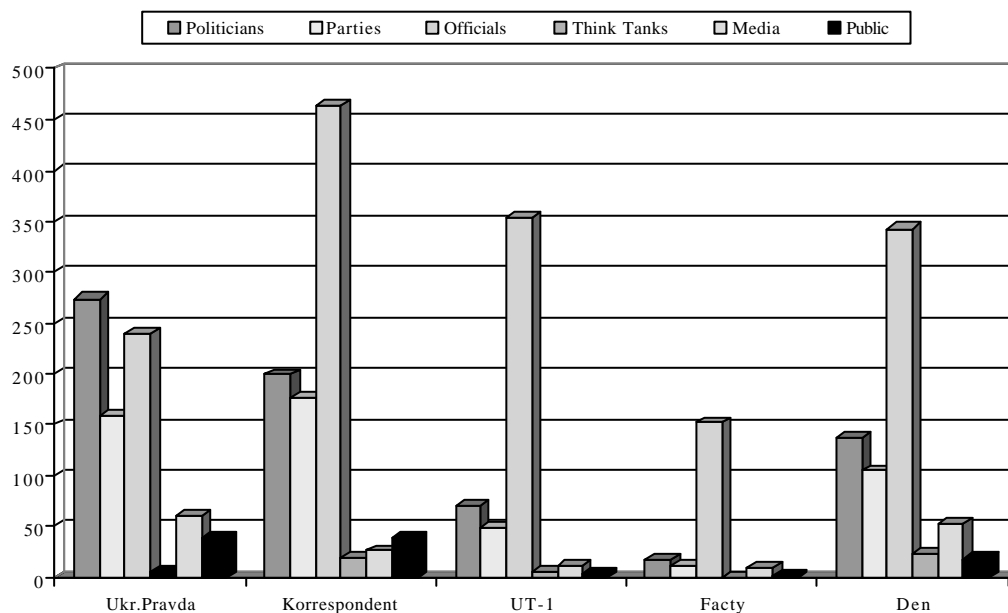
	Ukr.Pravda	Korrespon Dent	UT-1	Facyt	Den
Catastrophe of the Russian passenger airplane shut by the Ukrainian missile	3	28	3	16	20
New election law	8	16	10	3	10
Accusations against country's authorities	10	22	0	0	1
Elections:	25	32	12	5	15
- block of Yushchenko	12	7	0	4	10
- election campaign	5	4	0	1	0
- block of Tymoshenko	3	3	4	0	0
- Communist Party	3	5	2	0	0
- Socialist Party & Moroz	1	5	4	0	5
- Brodsky & Yabluko	0	5	2	0	0
- National Democratic Party	1	3	0	0	0
Meetings & visits of officials	0	1	20	3	0
International image of Ukraine	0	2	19	4	26
Social and political problems of Crimean Tatars	6	0	0	0	10

President's complaints about certain political forces in the country	0	1	8	3	2
Working day of the Parliament	1	4	11	0	0

Representation of different actors

Finally, we have looked at the regularity of different actors and groups of actors appearing in the media. As we can see from table 7, the category 'officials' is most represented in all outlets, except the Ukrainska Pravda where the number of politicians is slightly higher. However, representation of officials shows serious difference between the outlets. In the case of the national TV channel and the newspaper Factly officials are out of reach by any other category. Korrespondent and Den, paying big attention to the officials, nevertheless, try to present other categories as well. Ukrainska Pravda shows almost equal distribution of attention between politicians, officials and parties. A category 'politicians' is the second most representative. Political parties are rather equally represented in the online media but underrepresented in the traditional outlets. With few exceptions the categories 'media', 'think tanks' and 'public' are underrepresented. They are better visible in both online newspapers and the national newspaper Den. However, the gap between representation of these categories and the first three categories is substantial.

Table 7. Actors in the news



If we look at the personalities most often covered by the media we will see that the President of the country is the most popular personality in the national media. He is followed by some other representatives of the power including the head of the National Security Council

Marchyuk, representative of the President in the national parliament Bezsmertnyj and the speaker of the parliament Plyushch. Among the politicians ex prime minister Victor Yushchenko is the most prominent figure to most of the outlets excluding the national TV. Leaders of Ukrainian opposition Moroz and Tymoshenko and their parties are very prominent in the online newspapers. They are mentioned from time to time by the national newspaper Den and the television channel and completely absent in the national newspaper Facyt.

On and off line in Russia

We have selected for the analysis in Russia two national daily newspapers *Izvestiya* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*; two most popular online newspapers – *Lenta.RU* and *NTVRU.COM*ⁱⁱⁱ and the national (state owned) TV channel – *RTR*. We have analysed one regular week in February 2002 (4.02.02 – 10.02.02).

A first analysis shows that both online newspapers have the largest total number of publications as well as the largest number of political articles. National TV channel RTR has the lowest general number of articles (items) and also the lowest number of political items. At first sight this is not surprising, as TV news has usually less space than the front page of a newspapers, but the number of RTR political items is substantially lower than that of Ukrainian UT-1. In total 133 articles/items have been analyzed: *Lenta.RU* – 37; *NTVRU.COM* – 39; *RTR* – 5; *Izvestiya* – 31; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* – 21.

Type of article

The emphasis in Russian media is clearly on current political affairs (table 8), but different from Ukraine, we see a larger attention to local news. However, local news here means news from the federal republics of Russia. Political news from other than Moscow and Petersburg cities or villages of Russia is absent. Contrary to Ukraine, online newspapers do not provide any political analysis and do not make interviews. These functions are performed by the national newspapers.

Table 8. Type of article in on and off line media in Russia

Type of article	Lenta.RU	NTVRU.COM	RTR	Izvestiya	Nezavisimaya Gazeta
Current political (media-political) affairs	24	25	2	12	11
General political story	8	4	1	4	0
Local news	6	6	1	5	0
International news	0	3	0	1	0
Interview	0	0	1	4	3
Political analysis	0	0	0	6	7

Focus of article

As with Ukraine, issues dominate media coverage, though stronger so with the online newspapers (table 9). Most of the issues in Russian media coverage are closely related to certain political players. There seems to be a kind of ‘issue ownership’: if the issue concerns problems in the media sphere it necessarily refers to Press Minister Lesin and Russian

oligarchs; if the issue relates to the work of the Russian Duma or parties' activities than the new powerful party organization Edinaya Rossiya is the center of attention; when the focus is on Chechnya than representatives of the government and the President such as Shoygu and/or Yastrzhembsky, are at the center; finally, when the division of powers, international affairs and problems of the common people are being discussed, the presence of President Putin is evident.

Table 9. Focus of on and off line media in Russia

Focus of an article	Lenta.RU	NTVRU.COM	RTR	Izvestiya	Nezavisimaya Gazeta
Issue	31	17	2	17	15
Event	0	5	1	5	1
Politician	1	2	0	0	1
Party	6	8	3	3	4
Officials	6	1	0	6	1
Media	1	9	0	2	0
Businessman	0	3	0	0	1
Public	0	0	0	0	0

Taking a closer look at the facts highlighted in the different media, we see that the media themselves are very much at the center of attention (table 10). Among the media related questions discussed is the competition for the TV-6 frequencies and the problem of the state-media relationship. Another issue which receives serious media attention is the establishment and functioning of the new powerful propresidential party – Edinaya Rossiya. Parliamentary activities of their members as well as organizational questions and interviews with or quotes of its leading politicians are among the major political news in the country. Another important topic is the relation between the Russian central power and regional authorities. Only the articles related to this topic contain sometimes criticism of the ruling authorities. However, such criticism spreads over the local authorities and as a rule does not touch the Kremlin. At the same time, only these articles present views, ideas and position of the local governors. Most of the articles – both in the on and the off line media - related to the media and to the problems in Chechnya are one-sided and focused primarily on the official position of the state. The two online newspapers differ in their strong attention to the problems of the Russian media and the national newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta does in its focus on the center-regions relationship.

Table 10. Facts highlighted by the different media in Russia

Focus of an article	Lenta.RU	NTVRU.COM	RTR	Izvestiya	Nezavisimaya Gazeta
Media questions:	24	48	4	34	10
- Competition for the TV-6 channel's frequencies	14	21	1	5	1
- Affairs around the NTV	2	3	0	2	1
- Echo Moskvyy problems	4	7	0	4	4

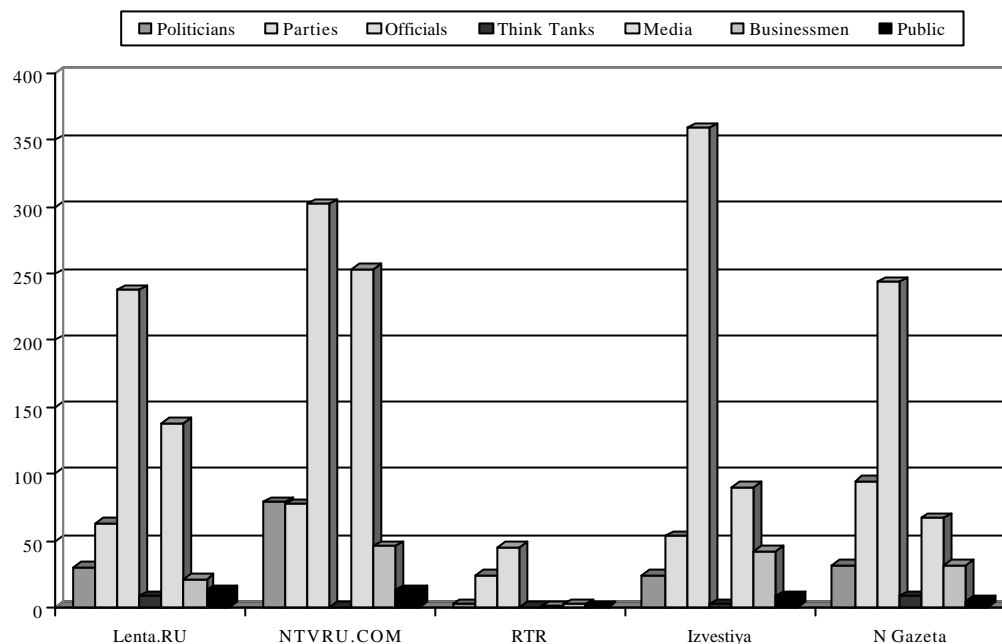
- State vr media relations	4	7	3	23	4
Centre vr regions relations:	8	10	1	31	21
- Discussions in Duma	5	4	0	2	11
- Regional elections/appointments	0	0	0	7	0
- Establishment of the powerful vertical	2	1	0		0
- President's address to the nation	1	5	1	17	10
- President's address to the nation	0	0	0	5	0
Situation in and around Chechnya	9	2	0	8	0
Political activities of Edinaya Rossiya	6	7	5	7	5
Outcomes of Putin's direct media conversation with the people of Russia	1	2	2	7	0
Negotiations between Russia and Japan over the islands	0	5	0	8	0
Berezovsky	1	3	0	1	13

Contrary to Ukraine, where the online newspapers turned to be the most critical towards the ruling elite, the national newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* is the most critical in the Russian case. This criticism, however, is balanced by the biased position towards Berezovsky who is closely associated with this paper. On the whole the media in Russia, at least during the one week analyzed, are less divided in their political preferences than in the case of the Ukrainian media. They show a much more professional and structured picture and seem to be more balanced in their coverage although their reporting reveals existence of certain taboos.

Representation of different actors

As in the case of Ukraine, Russian officials are the most represented category in political news. In contrast to Ukraine, politicians are not the second largest group. Very often Russian outlets refer to the media and journalists, and not politicians. Another difference is the rather poor visibility of both the political parties and politicians. Russia also presents an entirely new group of media attention – Russian oligarchs. Online newspapers seem to be a bit more balanced in spreading attention between different groups. Such rather balanced coverage is reached, however, not by reducing the presence of officials but by increasing presence of, first of all, media and parties towards the level of officials.

Table 11. Actors in the Russian news



In general, there are not many interviews with different political figures in the analyzed outlets, much less than in Ukraine. If we look at the personalities most often covered by the media, the President of Russia, stands out. And the presentation is virtually without criticism, with exception of the Nezavisimaya Gazeta which is closely related to Berezovsky. Mr. Putin seems to be omni-present in the Russian news – visible or invisibly – as the major point of reference. There is however, as a well known feature of modern Russia, a collective condemnation of the bureaucrats. Criticism of any of Putin’s subordinates and particularly those from the regions is a very popular topic. Such criticism makes the president shine even more as the good tsar.

Among another personalities often mentioned by the media are the minister of press Lesin, the minister of emergency and the co-leader of the propresidential political party Edinaya Rossiya, Shojgu. Another group of the prominent ‘personalities’ in the Russian media are certain media outlets and their leading journalists such as TV-6, NTV, media company Gazprom-media and radio station Echo Moskv together with its director Venediktov. The strong prominence of the several media outlets in the analyzed articles seems to show this group as a competitor of the country officials’ prominence in the media. Reminding of a media logic, such an approach is clearly different from Ukraine where oppositional politicians and officials constitute the two largest groups.

A first comparison

Ukrainian and Russian online newspapers can be conditionally divided into two groups – oppositional papers and independent papers. Oppositional online newspapers, which in our analysis are represented by Ukrainska Pravda and to a certain extent NTVRU.COM, see their main goal in the criticism of political authorities and the investigation of the currently most

important political topics and issues. Their oppositional nature is not related to the support of a certain political force. It mainly derives from their critical approach to the news reporting. However, we have to admit that such tough criticism which political authorities face in the Ukrainian oppositional online newspapers is practically unknown in Russia (at least in the case of the most popular online outlets). Russian online newspapers are very moderate in their criticism and seldom choose the President of the country as a potential target. At the same time, attention which Russian online media pay to the situation in Chechnya contradicts the major demands of the current Russian authorities about positive and non-violent media coverage and can already be seen as an example of the serious political and media position^{iv}. Independent online newspapers, in our case represented by the Korrespondent and Lenta.RU, try to present the stream of political and media related facts and leave the evaluation and judgment of these facts to the readers. They cover relevant events in their development and progress. Media coverage provided by the independent online newspapers is a good example of objective reporting. However, in the political conditions of both countries such an approach to the news is considered rather or even highly oppositional.

Is it possible to conclude from this limited research where the analyzed online newspapers stand *vis a vis* the different logics of political communication? Although their media coverage cannot be seen as balanced, compared to the national newspapers (with the exception of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*) and especially to the national TV channels, online newspapers bring diversity in news reporting. They provide, first of all, oppositional parties and politicians (and in the case of Russia also oppositional oligarchs and media) the chance to be heard or at least mentioned. In the case of Ukraine online newspapers became the only media channel for oppositional politics to communicate the citizens. Quality of media reporting and almost hour-by-hour updatedness signify professionalism of online journalists. Lack of political analysis in three out of four online newspapers in our case study can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, absence of personal evaluations of the journalists brings additional objectivity in the reporting. On the other hand, it also refers to a certain self-limitation of online journalists in order to avoid the closure of the outlet. At the same time, tough criticism of *Ukrainska Pravda* towards the country's officials places it among oppositional media which positions is very often also biased although most of the accusations expressed by *Ukrainska Pravda* are supported by many documents and evidences.

Trying to take into consideration different aspects of the online newspapers' performance as well as political and media context of their activities we would suggest that online media in these countries have made a step towards (or some might say back) a party logic. However, such a label connotes so much with the influence of the party in the former Soviet times that a different name should be given: a professional logic seems to fit best. Such a conclusion is supported not only by structural, organizational and financial differences between online and traditional media but also by the more balanced media coverage of the political events in the case of online media. At the same time, such 'typical' problems of the post-Soviet media as elitism and personalization are characteristic for online media as well.

Discussion

Analysis of the logic of Ukrainian and Russian media indicates visible reverse processes in democratization of the media flow in these countries. The level of state involvement in media performance is so high that it allows to talk about rebirth of the new state logic. Media logic in its classical understanding had chances to appear in the post Soviet societies. However, a

short period of the (embryonic) media logic was replaced by the logic of media wars between powerful business (Russia) and business-political (Ukraine) groups and a new wave of the state intervention.

Current stage of the media performance in these countries becomes even clearer from the content analysis of the national television and national newspapers. Realizing importance of the television impact on the public and general political situation in the country, state authorities see de-privatization of the most popular and accessible TV channels as the major task. Coverage of the political events by the state owned national channels in both countries proves that national television is neither objective nor critical. Dominance of the Ukrainian President in the news, detailed descriptions of his working day, all visits and meetings in the prime-time program discloses big similarities between the national Ukrainian television and its Soviet prototype. National newspapers in both countries are, as a rule, also lacking critical approach towards the news presented. However, in the case of the print media objectivism and criticism are very much depending on the media sensitivity and closeness to the powerful center. Closer to the center a newspaper is, more sensitive it becomes to the demands and wishes of the ruling group. In such cases a newspaper tries to follow political discourse of the authorities: it pays more attention to the topics which are defined as the priorities by the authorities (both in Ukraine and Russia foreign policy and contacts of the President is one of the most prioritized topics); it avoids discussion of the issues or people which/who are unpleasant for the authorities; it portrays authorities in a way how they would like to see themselves, etc. At the same time, low level of readership of the print press and rather low popularity among the general population comparing to the TV channels makes newspapers less attractive media outlet for the state authorities. Such attitude allows newspapers particularly those rather remote and less sensitive to the state authorities to perform their journalistic duties more freely than television channels can do. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* is an example of such behavior. Very often this newspaper presents the topics and particularly analyses openly critical towards the ruling regime. However, since its readership is limited by the circulation and price and, on the other hand, its existence indicates devotion of the Russian government to the freedom of speech, it is allowed to exist.

In such situation online newspapers differ considerably from the traditional media outlets. While in the case of Ukraine online newspapers provide oppositional political forces with information support, Russian online newspapers bring more light into the questions of state-media relationship. Ukrainian online newspapers, which are similar to *Ukrainska Pravda*, have become the real and the only channel of oppositional politics. In their devotion to the opposition they become as biased and subjective as the state oriented and owned media. At the same time, there are many online newspapers devoted to objectivism and unbiased reporting. However, in the case of Ukraine such newspapers are perceived by the state authorities in the same way as oppositional media and are blamed for their objectivism which is seen as oppositional and protest behavior. In the case of Russia, such online newspapers have to be careful in the selection of the topics and people for their news reporting. To a certain extent Russian online media are already pushed to introduce certain measures of self-limitation to survive physically and financially.

The current political situation in both countries does not allow predicting fast and successful transformation of these countries into democratic societies. Moreover, many recent processes manifest further strangling of the opposition and deprivation its access to the mass channels of information and communication. In both cases the state has good chances to win the battle against the opposition and to de-privatize, obtain control over or shut down the most popular

media outlets. The policy of the state towards online media is also obtaining more certain and less democratic shapes. Russian and Ukrainian authorities have serious intentions to regulate the Internet and its content. If their attempts are successful those of online media which will be able to survive such procedure and to remain independent in the same time, will remind more the Soviet style underground samizdat literature.

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ⁱ Data are consulted on the websites of the World Bank and OSCE.

ⁱⁱ Text version of the UT-1 news has been taken from the website of the online newspaper UAtoday – <http://www.uatoday.net>

ⁱⁱⁱ NTVRU.COM is not an online version of the famous Russian TV channel. Predicting problems which the media outlets of Gusinsky started to have once Putin became the President, journalists of the online paper NTV registered it as an independent outlet which did not belong to the Media-Most group and which was created by a separate group of people. Such behaviour helped the NTVRU.COM survived the collapse of Gusinsky business.

^{iv} Most of the articles on the situation in Chechnya have not been coded in this analysis. Media articles on Chechnya, particularly in the case of online newspapers, are mainly focused on the problem of crime and violence and very seldom discuss the political side of the war.