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### ***International news production in post-Soviet Ukraine: Where is the 'center'?***

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the geography of news sources and news flows, which are involved in international news production in Ukraine. It seeks answers to the following questions: which sources – Western-based media and global news agencies or their competitors from other parts of the world (first of all from Russia) – are preferred in the making of international news in Ukraine? What are the possible reasons of this preference? How does information on foreign affairs created by abroad news producers reach Ukrainian newsrooms? The analysis is based on interviews with 35 media experts and news producers at major Ukrainian broadcasting organizations, as well as from print and online media. The interviewees – editors-in-chief, heads of international news' departments, foreign correspondents – were asked about the process of international news production in their editorial offices, the human and technical resources allocated for foreign news coverage, the professional standards of international journalism, as well as the main sources of foreign news and criteria of their selection involved in the news making process. An important finding of the presented research is the conclusion about *indirect, or circuitous movement of foreign news* from international news agencies to the Ukrainian media. Because of the peculiarities of Ukrainian news production described in the paper, news from Reuters or Associated Press regularly reaches Ukrainian editorial offices after it has been processed by Russian newsmakers.

**Keywords:** international communication, foreign news production, post-Soviet media, Ukraine, Russia, news flows

#### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The issue of international news geography became the subject of profound

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<sup>1</sup> The paper does not concentrate on political determinants of international news making in Ukraine. According to the experts and media professionals interviewed during the study (late 2010-early 2011), political pressure on international reporting in Ukraine was insignificant at that moment, different from rather extensive political impact on coverage of national affairs. After the research was finished, the situation regarding political pressure on international reporting in Ukraine has changed. Starting from 2011, after President Viktor Yanukovich faced growing international criticism of his government, international news in Ukraine became the subject of significant political influence.

scientific research in the 1970 when representatives of peripheral<sup>2</sup> nations raised in UNESCO the question on disproportions between the news on the North (mainly, the countries of Western Europe and Northern America) and South (the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America). The main approaches within which international news were investigated at that time included: media (and cultural) imperialism, dependency theory and one-way news flow.

Important component of the discussions around asymmetry of news flows between the North and South was the analysis of the role in international communication supplied by major international news agencies. The Western-based agencies such as AP (USA), Reuters (United Kingdom) or AFP (France) were reported to dominate international dissemination of news to the point that the world received up to 80 per cent of news from London, Paris and New York (MacBride, 1980: 145). The domination of major news agencies in international communication had not only a quantitative, but also a qualitative dimension: they exhibited a general “Western” bias not only in the selection of regions to inform about, but also in the concern for issues and angles of primary interest for the developed world (Boyd-Barrett, 1982).

Since the 1990s, their dominance has been challenged, at least at regional levels, by transnationally operating non-Western-based news services, of which a textbook example is Al Jazeera (based in Qatar) (Tunstall, 2008). The picture of international communication has become more complicated. According to Volkmer (2007), today’s world communication space is an increasingly diverse globalised ‘news sphere’ where besides powerful multi-national corporations, such as CNN or BBC World there exist some transnationally operating news channels which address not a ‘global’ or ‘mass’ audience, but highly specific globally dispersed news communities. For example, ZEE-TV targets the expatriate Indian community worldwide, Al Jazeera addresses audiences in the Arab world (Arabic language service) and beyond (English-language service), and TV Globo International, the major Brazilian television company, operates in Latin America and some other world regions (Volkmer, 2007). Some of them, such as, for example, the Chinese English-language channel CCTV-9, pursue the aim of providing their national perspective of the news to audiences worldwide. In 2005 an attempt to create such a broadcaster was taken also by Russia, which launched a 24-hour English-language channel “Russia Today – From Russia to the World” offering audiences in Europe, Africa, Asia, the US and in the former Soviet Union international news “from a Russian perspective” (Rantanen, 2007).

In this context it is appropriate to mention such notions as ‘geo-linguistic regions’ (Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham, 1996) or ‘geo-cultural markets’ (Straubhaar 1997) that were introduced to international communication and globalization

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<sup>2</sup> Following McPhail (2006) we use here the following categorisation of countries in the world: core nations- the industrialized nations, which according to the World Bank are: Australia, the UK, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States (most of them are situated in the global North); and peripheral nations – non-industrialised nations located mainly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – placed geographically on the South.

studies to represent a growing complexity of global communication that could not be reduced to a one-way information flow model anymore. Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham (1996) paid attention to the rise of regional and language based markets that have been established on the basis of the world languages propagated by historical relationships of colonization, as has been in the case with English, Spanish, or French. According to Sinclair (2004), geographical proximity still matters, though geo-linguistic regions include not only geographically close countries, but also diaspora populations distributed around the world. In his turn, Straubhaar (2008) points out that cultural proximity is equally important, which explains, according to him, the preference of Al-Jazeera to CNN in the Arab world, because its news is framed within a specific set of values and traditions commonly held in the region.

As for the former Soviet Union, a lack of studies on international communication in this region makes it problematic to estimate which news agencies – Western-based “majors” or any of their rivals, including the ones of regional level – are the main sources of foreign information for news organizations in the post-Soviet states. Rather scarce mentions in international communication studies (Boyd-Barrett, 2008, Clausen, 2010) let us assume that the former Soviet (now Russian) state news agency ITAR-TASS is traditionally popular, and also the commercial Russian agency Interfax established in 1989. Equally rare Ukrainian studies (Bryndza & Bezverkha, 2008) give evidence of the popularity of another Russian state news agency RIA Novosti among Ukrainian journalists. However, the lack of detailed research does not allow us to access the scope and character of the influence of these agencies on news making in post-Soviet countries. For example, Clausen (2010) considers that ITAR-TASS is influential only for information it provides about Russia, but not as a source of news about other countries. At the same time, according to the claims of some Ukrainian media experts,<sup>3</sup> Ukrainian journalists use Russian media not only for getting the news about Russia and other post-Soviet states, but also for finding information about other regions of the world. The issue seems even more complicated due to the fact that the situation with the popularity of one or another international news source may be different in countries with so dissimilar post-communist trajectories as Central Asian republics, the Baltic States, or Ukraine.

This paper is an attempt to shed light on the issue of the sources of foreign news in the media of Ukraine, a post-Soviet country which geographically is situated between Russia, the regional center of news production in the former Soviet Union, and the European Union where the headquarters of several global news providers (Reuters, APTN, The BBC World) are situated and where there are also several significant European news capitals: Paris (AFP), Geneva (Euronews), Madrid (EFE), and Hamburg (dpa). Which sources – Western-based media and

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria Syumar, the Director of the Institute of Mass Information and Otar Dovzhenko, former Vice-Editor of Telekrytyka group online resources and lecturer at MA Program in Journalism at Ukrainian Catholic University, quoted in: (Bryndza, Bezverkha, 2008)

global news agencies or their competitors from other parts of the world (first of all from Russia) – are preferred in the making of international news in Ukraine? What are the possible reasons of this preference? How does information on foreign affairs created by abroad news producers reach Ukrainian newsrooms?

### **Study of the production of international news in Ukraine**

This analysis draws on the investigation of the production of international news in Ukrainian media conducted in 2010-2011. It was based on interviews with Ukrainian newsmakers and media experts and was focused not only on sources of foreign news but also on other aspects of the process of international news production in Ukraine. Though a traditional way of studying the sources of foreign news in international communication research is the use of quantitative content analysis (the classic examples here are: Sreberny-Mohammadi et. al, 1985; Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974), the use of qualitative methodology (in particular, in-depth interviews with newsmakers) has several advantages, in particular if the Ukrainian case is concerned. First, as Ukrainian media experts who monitor the content of news in Ukraine admit, journalists in Ukraine quite often happen to ignore the demand to specify the source of information they use.<sup>4</sup> Second, the method of content analysis is not fully adequate to the today's realities of information dissemination which have become more complicated since the first international news flow study in late 1970s. A pure content analysis registering the media and news agencies referred to in foreign news assumes a linear model of information flows between countries, according to which the news produced in one country gets directly to the media in other country. As Lisbeth Clausen rightly argues in her recent overview of international news flows studies (Clausen, 2010), the linear model was adequate to a situation of one-way information flow from the global 'core' (North and West) to the 'periphery' in the 1970s and 1980s, but provides little insight into the dynamics of globalization processes today.

Besides, interviews with journalists and editors help to address the qualitative aspects of international news production. As the investigations of Gurevitch's team (Gurevitch et al., 1991) in the early 1990s and Lisbeth Clausen (Clausen, 2004) a decade later have demonstrated, information about abroad events from international news producers is not transmitted to national audiences unchanged but is 'domesticated'. 'Domestication', as Clausen (2010) puts it, is "a process of framing: recognizing, defining, selecting and organizing news in a way judged to be appropriate for the intended audiences". The mentioned studies showed that the characteristics of a country's news production contexts – economic capability of news organizations, their human resources, organizational norms of news production, journalistic news values and so on – play a significant role in the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for examples, the monthly results of the Monitoring of the press compliance with journalistic standards conducted by the Institute of Mass Information at: <http://imi.org.ua/category/моніторинг/моніторинг-стандартів>

selection of international news and their sources. Access to this qualitative side of the problem was essential for the reported study.

The study was based on interviews with journalists and editors making foreign news in Ukrainian media, who were asked about the process of international news production in their editorial offices, the human and technical resources allocated for foreign news coverage, the professional standards of international journalism, as well as the main sources of foreign news and criteria of their selection involved in the news making process. Several interviews were accomplished also with experts from the leading Ukrainian media supporting organizations, such as Institute of Mass Information or Telekrytyka, and one representative of the Institute of World Policy think-tank. The total number of interviews was 35.

The interviews were conducted in late 2010 and early 2011 in major Ukrainian broadcasting organizations, as well as in print and online media. The interviewees engaged in international news making included: editors-in-chief, news programs' editors, heads of international news departments as well as foreign correspondents. To get acquainted with the situation not only in nationwide, but also in regional media, part of the interviews (14) was conducted in Lviv, and the rest of them (21) were conducted in Kyiv. In Kyiv, interviews were conducted with representatives of seven top-ranking national TV channels and state TV channel UT-1, three leading newspapers, one weekly magazine and one Internet site. In Lviv, among the respondents there were the newsmakers from major regional news organizations: two newspapers, one TV channel, one radio station, and two Internet sites. As the most popular nationwide media in Ukraine are privately owned, the majority of the persons selected for interviewing represented the employees of private media companies (with the exception of one interview conducted with the Head of the International Department at a state TV channel).<sup>5</sup> The respondents were interviewed by the author in Ukrainian or Russian depending on the language choice of the respondents. The data collected was analyzed in the wider context of economic, political, technological and information-supply conditions the Ukrainian media operate within.

### **Ukrainian media: general information**

Ukrainian media landscape includes 4 thousands of regularly published periodicals (of which only 1 per cent are daily newspapers)<sup>6</sup>, 524 radio stations; 647 television stations (most local) (IREX, 2011, 202). The majority of Ukrainian media is privately owned although around 22 per cent of printed media and 4 per cent of broadcast media are still not privatized and belong to the state or local

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<sup>5</sup> Ukraine has not implemented the model of public service broadcasting yet. At the same time there still exist the state and municipally-owned media.

<sup>6</sup> The Report of the Association of Independent Regional Press Publishers of Ukraine, 2008.

communities.<sup>7</sup> Ukraine remains one of the three European countries (Ukraine, Russia and Belarus) which have not introduced public service broadcasting since 1989. This is despite the fact that the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law on public service broadcasting already in 1997. The newspaper circulation in Ukraine (74 readers per 1,000 inhabitants) is comparatively low among the post-communist countries.<sup>8</sup> The most popular newspapers are tabloids. The sector of quality press is underdeveloped. There is only one nationwide daily, *Den'*, which can be categorized as a quality newspaper, but its circulation is only 65,400.<sup>9</sup> Television is the most popular mass media in Ukraine. According to the survey by Gorshenin Institute (2011), 76.7 per cent of Ukrainians get the news from TV, 40.2 per cent from the press, 21.1 per cent from radio and 16.8 per cent from the Internet. Central national television channels are the main information source for world and national events.<sup>10</sup> Internet audience is dynamically growing in Ukraine. Internet penetration has reached 40.2 per cent at the end of 2011, whereas in February-March 2011 it was only 32.4 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The advertising budget in Ukraine is low in comparison with the ad budgets of countries with a population of comparable size: for example, in 2008 total TV advertising budgets in Ukraine amounted to about \$500 million, which was twice as small as the total advertising budgets in neighboring Poland, and 40 times less than in Germany.<sup>12</sup> Per capita advertising spending in Ukraine is among the lowest in Europe. In 2006 it amounted to \$15.90, whereas in Poland, The Czech Republic and Hungary it was \$100, \$173 and \$296 and in Russia – \$44.20 as well as in Bulgaria – \$57 accordingly.<sup>13</sup> Different from post-communist countries of Central-Eastern Europe which boosted the development of their media markets after the fall of communist governments by attracting foreign investments (mainly from West European and Scandinavian media corporations), Ukraine did not manage to draw much-needed investment from Western media owners. They are scared away from the Ukrainian media market by a lack of stable and transparent rules for

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7 Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Ukrainian Media Landscape—2010, 2011, available at [www.kas.de/ukraine/ukr/publications/23004/](http://www.kas.de/ukraine/ukr/publications/23004/), accessed September 21, 2011; Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, KAS Democracy Report 2008: Ukraine, available at [www.kas.de/wf/en/33.14855](http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.14855), accessed September 21, 2011. There is no local community media in the Western sense of the word in Ukraine. The local community media are very much like the state-owned media in the sense of their dependence on government entities. For example, under Ukrainian law, municipal media can only be set up by local governments subordinated to the central government.

8 Compare, for example, to newspaper circulation in Hungary (194 per 1,000 people) or Czech Republic (89 per 1,000). See [www.pressreference.com](http://www.pressreference.com), accessed September 21, 2011.

9 This is the circulation declared by the publisher. According to Ukrainian media experts, real circulations of Ukrainian print outlets may be significantly lower than the official data (see: KAS Democracy Report, 2010, p. 18/40)

10 The media audience research by Kiev International Institute of Sociology in 2008, reported in: U-Media Project (2008)

11 The results of the survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in November, 2011 can be found at the Institute web-page: <http://kiis.com.ua/ua/news/view-123.html>

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

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

business making, widespread corruption and uneasy relationships between the media and political powers.

At the same time Russian business does invest in the Ukrainian media market. In particular, the most popular Ukrainian TV channel *Inter* has the Russian *Channel One*<sup>14</sup> among its shareholders (29 per cent shares). The main investor of the oppositional *TVi* TV channel is a disgraced Russian oligarch, Konstantin Kagalovskii. Besides, Russians have a share in influential print publications, in particular, the daily newspaper *Izvestiya v Ukraine* or the weekly newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukrainie* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*. Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov owns the daily newspaper *Kommersant-Ukraina*.

Besides low advertising budgets, lack of foreign investment and deficiency of other financial sources in media organizations (such as, for example, low sales and subscription rates of news press or small state subsidies), an important economic component of international news making in Ukraine is harsh competition in the media market. The Ukrainian media market, especially its broadcasting segment is overcrowded because media enterprises are set up in Ukraine not exclusively for gaining profits but for achieving political influence. For example, the number of nationwide terrestrial TV channels in Ukraine is 15 (of which one – *UT-1* – is state-owned),<sup>15</sup> which is two and a half times more than in neighboring Poland, where the amount of national terrestrial TV broadcasters is only six (two of them are public service broadcasters) (Filas & Planeta, 2009).

**Table 1: The top-seven Ukrainian TV channels**

Ukrainian nationwide TV channels	Position in the Gfk broadcasting ranking	Type of ownership	Audience share, per cent
Inter	1	private	15.4
1+1	2	private	11.4
“Ukraine”	3	private	9.9
STB	4	private	9.9
ICTV	5	private	8.0
Novy	6	private	6.5
UT-1	7	state-owned	3.4

Source: GfK Ukraine (June 2011).

Too big an amount of media in the media market gives rise to at least two phenomena influencing foreign news production: cost-cutting and tabloidization. To outrun their competitors (or, in case of lower-rated and regional media, to

<sup>14</sup> The main shareholder of Russian *Channel One* is the Russian state (Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Onufriyenko, A., Mironova, I. (December 22, 2008). “Televizionnyi rynek. Komu prinadlezhit Ukraina” (Television market. Whom Ukraine belongs to). *Kommersant*. Retrieved September 21, 2011 from <http://www.kommersant.ua/doc.html?docId=1098087>.

merely survive in the media market), media owners drive for cutting costs and increasing productivity. A widespread practice is to save on specialists in international reporting.<sup>16</sup> As Table 2 shows, only four news organizations in Ukraine have staff reporters in other countries. Among them are two TV channels, two news agencies and no newspaper or magazine.

**Table 2: Ukrainian media organizations with foreign bureaus**

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

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

### **A “human factor” or who makes international news in the Ukrainian media**

The choice of sources of information about abroad events and the ability to make use of them for the production of international news depends upon professional skills of newsmakers, including proficiency in foreign languages. Average journalists in Ukraine are not expected to know foreign languages, and it is only in media organizations which have international news departments that fairly good command of a foreign language (most often English) is a necessary condition for getting a job in these departments. Based on the interviews with news makers and experts we can conclude that only a few editorial offices in Ukraine have international news departments. They are mostly top-ranking TV channels and a couple of nationwide newspapers. The number of employees in these departments is low, with the exception of three national TV channels (see Table 3). One of them is the state TV channel *UT-1*, but because of the low popularity of this channel it has little impact on public opinion. What is disturbing is that the news outlets which should provide for competent coverage and in-depth analysis of events around the world – the national quality newspapers – have very limited resources for the production of international news. In both Ukrainian quality newspapers – the daily *Den'* and the weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* – international news are covered by two people only. Compared for example, with the Polish quality daily

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Victoria Syumar, December 2010; Interview with Ihor Slisarenko, December 2010.



*Rzeczpospolita*, where the international news department has ten employees,<sup>17</sup> this is a very small amount.

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

Name of media organization	Type of media organization	Number of journalists in the international news department
Inter	TV channel	16
1+1	TV channel	7
UT-1	TV channel (state-owned)	7
ICTV	TV channel	5
“Ukraine”	TV channel	3
STB	TV channel	3
Den’	Daily newspaper	2
Dzerkalo Tyzhnia <sup>a)</sup>	Weekly newspaper	2

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

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

It is necessary to admit that whereas journalists at international news departments have to know foreign languages at a level at least “good enough for translating Reuters”,<sup>18</sup> this is not the case for editors, including the editors of news programs. The editors at such media organizations like the top-ranking nationwide TV channels very often do not know foreign languages except Russian.<sup>19</sup> This may pose a problem since these people are directly engaged in making decisions about the choice and content of foreign news.

The experts interviewed in this study explained the fact of poor command of foreign languages among TV editors by the general logic of media business in Ukraine, according to which the media exist mainly to bring political influence to their owners.<sup>20</sup> Editors of news programs are expected to have good awareness of events inside the country because it is the coverage of domestic politics and internal affairs that can be efficiently used to incline public opinion in favor or against these or that politicians and, consequently, be an instrument of political influence. As coverage of international affairs is much less beneficial from this point of view, media owners care little about international news and language proficiency of their editors.<sup>21</sup> For example, the editor-in-chief of the News and

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Jerzy Chaszczynski, The Head of International Department at *Rzeczpospolita* daily, conducted by the author, November 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Natalka Gumenyk, chief of international news department at Inter TV channel in 2007–2009, December 2010.

<sup>19</sup> We exclude Russian from the group of foreign languages here because Russian is widely used in Ukraine. Moreover, inhabitants of Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine commonly consider Russian their native language. For more see: <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua>.

<sup>20</sup> In more details the specific logic of media business in Ukraine is presented in: Dyczok (2009), Dutsyk (2010), Ryabinska (2011)

<sup>21</sup> This thesis was put forward in particular by Tetiana Neimash (December 2010), Victoria Syumar (December 2010), Andrii Pavlyshyn from Western Analytical Group (November 2010), and other

Analytical Service of Ukraine's top-ranking TV channel *Inter* confessed overtly in the mid-2000s that he understood nothing of foreign affairs but felt comfortable about it.<sup>22</sup> This is not surprising, insofar as the main demand for news desks editors and managers in main Ukrainian TV channels is loyalty to their bosses (media owners) and readiness to pursue their political interests.

In the media which cannot afford international news departments, international news are produced by non-specialized journalists. Though statistics of the command of foreign languages among Ukrainian journalists are lacking, it would be reasonable to assume that it is in general rather poor. For example, media editors and managers interviewed in this study admitted that good knowledge of foreign languages together with general journalism skills give a person in Ukraine the chances for getting a much better paid job than in journalism, therefore they are washed out from the profession.<sup>23</sup> This especially concerns regional media where average monthly salaries in journalism are around 300-400\$.<sup>24</sup> Besides, when asked who makes international news in their editorial offices, the media managers of regional news outlets and the nationwide print and online media (except the quality ones) confessed that though they do have a person in their team with a knowledge of English 'ascribed' to covering international events, most commonly news from abroad is a regular task of other journalists as well. Based on this, we may assume that very often foreign news is made in Ukraine by people with little or no foreign language proficiency.

What is worth mentioning in the discussion of the sources of foreign news in Ukraine are the issues of journalism standards and journalistic professionalism. The news monitoring conducted by Ukrainian media supporting organizations (the Academy of Ukrainian Press, *Telekrytyka* and others) register a permanent tendency to violation of basic journalism standards – objectivity, balance, accuracy and comprehensiveness.<sup>25</sup> Neglect for the accuracy standard makes journalists unscrupulous about sources of information. In particular, journalists often happen to ignore the demand to check information found by them in the Internet. In the realm of foreign news production this results in uncritical use of materials about world events published on Russian online news sites. Namely, the coverage of international news in the Russian Internet, which frequently is consulted by Ukrainian journalists for learning about abroad events,<sup>26</sup> is rather not checked or confronted with information from other sources. Interestingly, the

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interviewees.

<sup>22</sup> The interviewee who provided us with this information asked not to be identified by name. Interview with the author, December 2010.

<sup>23</sup> This was admitted by Oleksii Koval (interviewed in December 2010) and Ganna Gorozhenko (interviewed in December 2010).

<sup>24</sup> These data were mentioned by Ukrainian media expert Otar Dovzhenko during his online conference at: <http://zik.ua/ua/chat/110> accessed 22 February 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, AUP (2011); Ivanov, V., Syumar, V., Ligachova, N., & Kostenko, N. (October 8, 2011). *Kurs na steril'nist'* (In the direction of [news] sterilization). *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, Retrieved October 10, 2011 from: <http://www.telekritika.ua/daidzhest/2011-10-08/66309>.

<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon will be debated in more details in the following part of the paper.

international news in Russian online media is quite frequently an interpretation of the information from Western news services (supplied with corresponding links). The problem is that Ukrainian journalists often uncritically “buy” this interpretation and do rarely bother themselves with checking what was reported by a primary source, or as Natalka Gumenyuk, chief of the international news department at *Inter* TV channel in 2007–2009 nicely puts it, they would “rather not click on the link of a primary source”.<sup>27</sup>

The violation of the journalistic standard of accuracy, which takes the form of an unscrupulous approach to information sources in international news-making in Ukraine can be partly explained by the fact that international journalists here are mostly young people lacking professionalism and experience (Ryabinska, 2012). The age of Ukrainian international journalists rarely exceeds 30–35 years, and there is rather high fluctuation of journalists in the sphere of international news making. As far as their journalistic professionalism is concerned, Yevhen Fedchenko, the Director of Mohyla School of Journalism at National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, who himself is a qualified international journalist, comments on it as follows: “If a young person comes to an editorial office [in Ukraine], the first tasks she is entrusted with are international news – this is supposed to be ‘safe’, devoid of the risks of bringing troubles [to ‘friendly’ politicians]; and [only] after she gets some experience [by fulfilling these tasks], is she allowed to write about the President” (Dorosh, 2012). In other words, international news is normally *not* treated in Ukraine as a responsible and significant sphere which demands high journalistic skills and professionalism and deserves a particular concern about quality and credibility of information supplied to audiences as well as careful and critical approaches to information sources.

The journalists who are engaged in making international news most often lack not only experience, but also an adequate professional education. The panelists of International Research & Exchanges Board participating in annual discussions of the issues of media sustainability in Ukraine regularly mention low level of journalism education in the country (see, e.g., MSI-Ukraine, 2006–2007, 2008, 2011). Journalism departments’ curricula and handbooks are outdated and do not correspond to modern reality and the industry demands. As a result, graduates are not acquainted with practical skills and international standards. Just a few academic programs in Ukraine implement the model of modern, practice-oriented journalism education, but their amount is insufficient.

Paradoxically, even if an international journalist has good professional knowledge and skills, she is not guaranteed a worthy career. On the contrary, quality specialists are washed out of the profession. Comparatively low salaries and lack of professional perspectives throw good specialists out of international journalism. The journalists who were interviewed in this study expressed a conviction that an international reporter cannot become a “star” in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Natalka Gumenyuk, December 2010.

opinion is based on fact.<sup>28</sup>

The additional factor that strongly affects the choice of information sources in foreign news making in Ukraine is a high workload experienced by journalists (Ryabinska, 2012). It does not allow them to spend much time on information gathering. Hence, the staff uses the most time- and effort-consuming ways of creating content. Therefore, international news making in most editorial offices is reduced to translation of information from wire services (in broadcast media) or to finding ready-made material on the Internet and placing it in one's paper (or Internet site) with minimal reworking.<sup>29</sup>

### Sources of foreign news in Ukraine

As it was already mentioned, own correspondents rarely become the sources of information on international affairs in Ukrainian newsrooms. As for information from world news agencies, the situation looks as follows: Subscription to big news agencies like Reuters, Associated Press or Agence France Press is affordable only to big nationwide TV channels. Half of them are subscribed to one agency only, which is Reuters (see Table 4). In general, Reuters is the major source of abroad information for these news organizations. To a great extent reports of international affairs on Ukrainian TV are essentially the translation of Reuters materials.

**Table 4: Subscription to international news agencies among Ukrainian TV channels**

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

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

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

As for printed and Internet-based media, at the time of study they did not subscribe to big Western international news agencies, though some editors (*Den'*,

<sup>28</sup> For example, the makers of probably the most successful and professionally made program of international news in Ukrainian television, *Vikna v svit* (1997–2003) at *STB channel* founded by Internews network, are all out of international journalism today. They have become media managers, TV anchors, university lecturers, or even professional film translators.

<sup>29</sup> This is an observation of media experts engaged in monitoring or/and analysis of Ukrainian media content, in particular, Ihor Balynskyi (interviewed in November 2010), Ihor Slisarenko (interviewed in December 2010), and Victoria Syumar (interviewed in December 2010).

*Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, Segodnia*) noted that before the 2008–2009 financial crisis they had a subscription to Reuters. For these media the main source of information about overseas events was the Internet.<sup>30</sup>

Foreign Internet sources used for international news making in Ukraine may be divided into several groups (see Table 5). The first group is foreign-language (mostly English-language) webpages of international news agencies and renowned Western print media such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and others. This group of sources is accessible only for journalists with a good command of English which can be met chiefly in editorial offices of big news-making TV channels (*Inter*, *1 + 1*, *ICTV*, *STB*, *Canal 5*). These sources are also used by quality press journalists.

**Table 5: Foreign Internet sources of international news in the Ukrainian media**

	News-providing TV channels, quality press	Other nationwide media	Regional media
Global news agencies, renowned Western press	•	-	-
Ukrainian (Russian) services of the Western media: -BBC, -Radio Free Europe, -Voice of America, -Deutsche Welle, -Euronews, - Reuters	•	•	•
Russian wire services and news media	•	●	●

Source: the author's own study. (bigger dots indicate more significant use of these sources)

In other media, since their journalists' knowledge of foreign languages is rather poor, Internet pages of Western sources can be used for news production only in case they have Ukrainian or Russian-language versions. The sources of this type are few and include Ukrainian and Russian services of international broadcasters – BBC, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle – as well as the Russian-language version of Reuters and Euronews. In comparison with this rather limited choice of Western sources accessible for an average Ukrainian journalist, the array of Russian media and news services, which also contain

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

information about world events, is much wider.

An evident advantage of Russian news sources for Ukrainian journalists is overcoming the language barrier. This is the main reason for their popularity among the editorial staff engaged in the production of foreign news but lacking proficiency in other foreign languages. In case of print and Internet-based media, an additional reason to prefer Russian Internet sources is that their materials can be unproblematically used unaltered (or slightly altered) for making a media's own news content. This is because a lot of Ukrainian online news platforms and newspapers operate in Russian (or have Ukrainian and Russian versions). A significant advantage of Russian media and news services over the Ukrainian ones is that they commonly bring the news faster because of a much bigger network of own correspondents abroad. In addition, Russian media, different from Ukrainian, have enough resources to quickly translate and process information from foreign news agencies.

The problem is that Russian media do not simply translate the news reported by global news agencies, but also present them via the prism of Russian "national interests". Consequently, a journalist for whom the Russian media are a major source of foreign news has little chance of seeing any other perspective of world events except the Russian one.

The results of this study show that Russian wire services and news media (especially the online media outlets) are one of the most significant sources of international news in editorial offices of nationwide media outlets lacking special departments of international news and in regional media (this is illustrated by bigger dots in the Table 5). They are also extensively used by the teams of international journalists at nationwide TV channels. To be precise, different employees of TV channels interviewed by us reported about different scope of use of the Russian sources. Some of them claimed that Russian Internet is used only as a source of interpretation and opinion of abroad events (not only at Russia and CIS, but also in other parts of the world),<sup>31</sup> and others confessed that their journalists often go to Russian sites for getting more detailed information about the news obtained from Reuters (or APTN).<sup>32</sup> The strong argument in favor of the assumption on the popularity of Russian news sources in Ukrainian newsrooms is the unanimous expert opinion regarding the issue. It can be precisely expressed by the words of Victoria Syumar, director of Kyiv's Mass Media Institute: "Russian-language materials are the major traditional source for Ukrainian journalists, who use them enthusiastically and consistently. This is the famous disease of Ukrainian journalism."<sup>33</sup>

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31 Interview with Natalka Gumenyuk, December 2010.

32 Interviews with Serhii Popov (December 2010), Mykhailo Shamanov (December 2010), and Yurii Sugak (December 2010).

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

What is important, for many TV journalists Russian media are not only a source of information on world affairs, but also a trusted source of their analysis. As Natalka Gumenyuk comments on the situation in the Ukrainian top-ranking *Inter TV* channel, if a TV journalist is proficient in English language she prefers Western news agencies to *learn* about world events, but for their *analysis* she refers nevertheless to Russian sources.<sup>34</sup>

This phenomenon the experts interviewed in the study explain by cultural factors. In particular, Ihor Balynskyi from the Journalism Department at Ukrainian Catholic University claims that Russian cultural context is closer to a Ukrainian journalist even not because of a common Soviet past (which is of little importance for today's Ukrainian journalists who are mostly young people with little or no experience of Soviet times) but because of its overwhelming presence in Ukrainian information space.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Russian TV and press are available in Ukraine to a much greater extent than the Western media. In particular, Russian TV is accessible on Ukrainian territory by cable and satellite, and Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine can also access them via terrestrial television. Besides, the schedules of Ukrainian channels are heavily padded with Russian serials, reality shows and gala concerts. Russian soap operas and comedy shows constantly appear among the most popular programs in Ukrainian TV ratings<sup>36</sup>. In comparison with somewhat parochial domestic media production, the Russian TV industry offers programs of higher quality and diversity. In addition, they are produced in incredible amounts when compared to the Ukrainian media business.

Our conclusion on the significant place of Russian sources in Ukrainian international news making is consistent with the findings of the study of Ukrainian media coverage of the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008, conducted by the consulting company ProMova.<sup>37</sup> According to the study, during the war Ukrainian media used mostly Russian sources to provide coverage of the conflict. Especially during the first days of the conflict, Russian media reports accounted for up to 66 per cent of the war coverage in Ukrainian outlets. At the same time, Western sources were used in barely 10 per cent of the coverage (only starting from the fourth day of the war did this amount grow somewhat) (Bryndza & Bezverkha, 2008). The study results showed that Ukrainian media borrowed from Russian reports not only facts about the war but also interpretations. For example at the beginning of the war Ukrainian media uncritically used the phrase "Georgian-Ossetian conflict" introduced by the Russian side to avoid any mention of Russia itself in its branding of the events. Besides, Russian troops were referred to as "Russian peacemakers" and the Georgians as "the aggressor." It was only after several days that these names were put aside, for example the conflict was finally defined by Ukrainian media as "the Russian-Georgian war".

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34 Interview with Natalka Gumenyuk, December 2010.

35 Interview with Ihor Balynskyi, November 2010.

36 Weekly Ukrainian TV ratings can be found at: <http://www.telekritika.ua/page/ratings/>

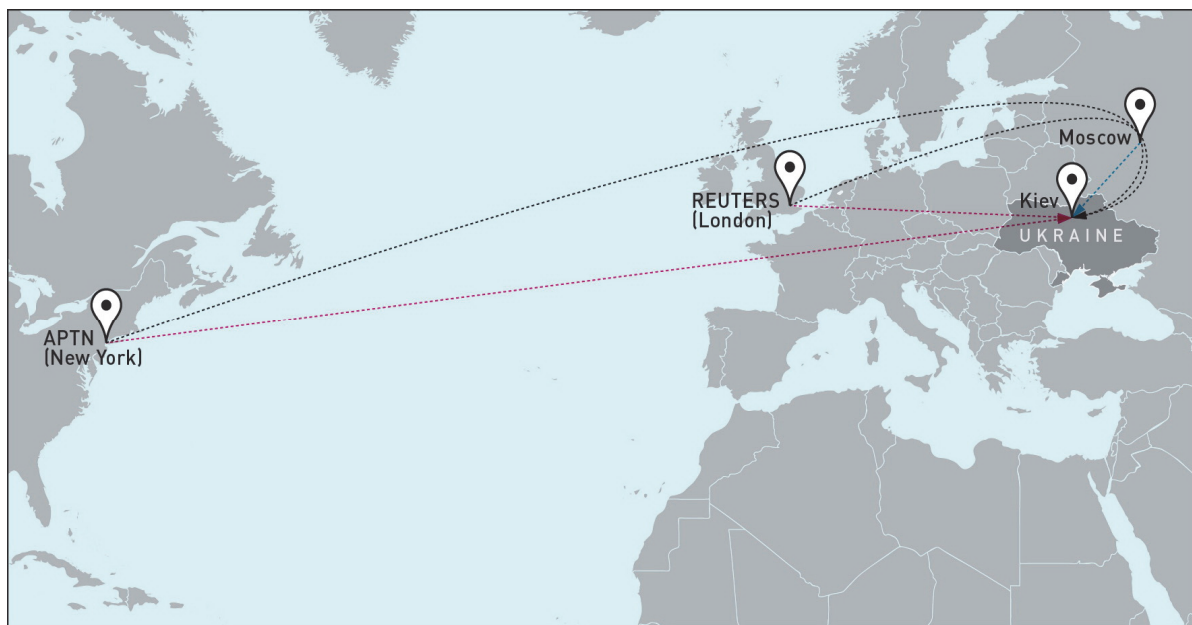
37 See the study report in Bryndza & Bezverkha (2008); and the study analysis in Business Ukraine magazine: Bondarchuk, O. (September 8, 2008). Virtual Empire. Business Ukraine. Retrieved May 5, 2009 from <http://www.businessukraine.com.ua/virtual-empire>

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the geography of the sources of international news in Ukraine. The main task was to learn what sources of foreign news – the Western-based news services and international media or the news producers from other parts of the world - are most often used in Ukrainian editorial offices. An additional question focused on the way in which information produced abroad reaches Ukrainian newsrooms. The results of the study presented in this paper let us assume that there are several types of most frequently used sources of international news in Ukraine. Information travels from them to the desks of Ukrainian news makers along different trajectories.

Information from Western-based news agencies is available in full extent to news organizations which can afford the subscription. This is the case mainly for top-ranking Ukrainian TV channels which make news casts and consequently need footage to report on international news. They also have in their disposal international news boards formed of journalists with a good command of foreign languages. Ukrainian TV channels subscribe mainly to Reuters, some of them have also subscriptions to APTN. Materials produced by these news agencies are a significant source of international news at the Ukrainian TV (see the news flow denoted by red arrows at Fig 1).

**Figure 1: Three flows of international news to Ukrainian editorial offices**



- the first flow: directly from Western-based news agencies and media;
- the second flow: directly from Russian media and information agencies;
- the third flow: from Western news sources via Russian media

To understand the events reported by Reuters and weigh up their significance, the journalists of top-ranking TV channels often consult the Russian media, primarily



those available through the Internet. Because of low professionalism and lack of experience which are not unusual among employees of international news departments in Ukraine, the Russian policy perspective on international affairs happen to impact the choice and slant of the reports on international news on Ukrainian TV (see the news flows denoted by blue and black arrows in Figure 1). What additionally contributes to this phenomenon is the lack of English language proficiency among editors of news programs, which is rather the rule than an exception in the newsrooms of the main TV channels.

Direct use of Western sources of abroad information (see red arrows in Figure 1) is characteristic to Ukrainian quality press. Similar to top-ranking TV channels these news organizations have international news desks and employ journalists with a good command of foreign languages. These media which are not very numerous (one daily, one weekly and several weekly journals) provide in-depth analysis for some of the most important world events. Unfortunately, the reach of these media in Ukraine is very limited because of their low circulation.

In the majority of Ukrainian editorial offices, both on the national and on the regional level, the lack of foreign language skills prevents journalists to use foreign-language sources of information (except the Russian ones). Therefore very often the preferred source of foreign news for them (which concerns not only the news from CIS countries, but also from the rest of the world) are the Russian media, in particular their online versions, which frequently excel Ukrainian news services in the amount of foreign news and the speed of their delivery. The abroad news in Russian news outlets partly originates from Russian correspondent offices abroad, but commonly it is the Russian-media interpretation of the news made by Western-based world news suppliers. In this second case the information from Western news sources reaches Ukrainian editorial offices in a circuitous way, after it was selected and processed by Russian newsmakers (see the news flow denoted by black arrows in Figure 1).

Because of high workload and neglect of journalistic standards, Ukrainian journalists rarely look for alternative sources of information and commentary or address original sources referred to on Russian web pages. Information and interpretations from Russian sources are thus not verified or questioned. As a result, international news in Ukraine is commonly produced with an excessive use of Russian sources or the information from Western news suppliers previously selected and interpreted in Russian newsrooms.

Possible reasons for this, besides the already mentioned language issue, low professionalism and high journalists' workload, are, first, of economic nature. There is a deficiency of specialists well versed in foreign languages and international affairs (not to say about foreign correspondents) in Ukrainian commercial media because of a harsh competition in the Ukrainian media market and the attempts of media owners to save money on international reporting.

Journalists' salaries in these media are on average rather low and therefore specialists with the above-mentioned knowledge and skills are washed out from the profession.

Of equal importance is the issue of a lack of media independence in Ukraine and a particular logic of its commercial media, according to which the owners of most popular Ukrainian media outlets – the local industrial-financial magnates – set up or maintain media businesses not in quest of financial success but to exercise political influence. It is via the coverage of domestic, not foreign affairs that the media can influence political attitudes of their audiences and correspondingly make an impact on politics. Therefore, international news is on the margin of owners' and editors' interest and gets minimum financing, its professional level is not cared about in most media organizations.

One should also not neglect an issue of cultural proximity, which is especially evident in case of the journalists from international news departments at major nationwide TV channels, who do not have problems with language proficiency but usually make choice in favor of Russian sources when seeking *understanding* of international events. Their preference of Russian sources to the Western ones is explained by the experts interviewed in the present study by the fact that the Russian cultural context is closer to the average Ukrainian than the North American or Western European ones. What is important, cultural proximity to Russia is constantly reinforced in Ukraine because of extensive presence of Russian cultural and media products in the Ukrainian information space.

Insufficient attention to international news coverage and analysis in privately owned media could be counterbalanced in Ukraine (like in other countries) by strong international reporting in public service media. This is not the case however, as long as Ukrainian government refrains from introduction of public service broadcasting in the country. At the moment of writing this paper in 2012 Ukraine was still lacking public service broadcasting in spite of several attempts already undertaken in this direction since 1991.

## **List of interviews: 2010 – 2011**

### **Journalists and editors**

Natalka Gumenyuk - chief of international department at *Inter* TV channel in 2007–2009

Oleksii Koval – independent journalist specialising in international reporting, freelancing for *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, *Den'* and other news outlets, the founder (the first editor-in-chief) of international department at *Inter* TV channel

Tetiana Silina – leading journalist of *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* specialising in international reporting

Mykhailo Prudnyk – head of international department of *UT-1* TV channel

Ganna Gorozhenko – journalist of international department at *Inter* TV channel

Ihor Slisarenko – former editor of international programs at *STB*, *Channel 5*, currently freelancing

for various news outlets, teaches at Kyiv State University  
 Serhii Popov – editor-in-chief of information programs at 1+1 TV channel  
 Natalka Katerynychuk – vice-editor-in-chief of TVi TV channel  
 Andrii Het'man – head of international department at ICTV TV channel  
 Mykhailo Shamanov – chief editor of *Novy* TV channel  
 Diana Dutsyk – chief editor of group of websites Glavred.info, teaches at National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy  
 Irina Kovalchuk – international journalist at *Segodnia* newspaper  
 Oleksii Mustafin – chief editor at STB TV channel  
 Yurii Sugak – head of International Department at *Ukraine* TV channel  
 Mykola Siruk – head of international section at *Den'* newspaper  
 Iryna Kovalchuk – international journalist at *Segodnia* newspaper  
 Dmytro Gubenko, editor of international news at *Ukrainskyi Tyzhden'* magazine  
 Olexandr Voitko – journalist of International Department at *Channel 5*  
 Yaroslav Dovgopol – journalist at National News Agency of Ukraine *Ukrinform*  
 Natalia Baluk – chief editor of *Vysoky Zamok* daily (Lviv)  
 Askold Yeriomin – leading journalist at *Vysoky Zamok* daily (Lviv)  
 Paraska Dvorianyn – chief editor on regional news program (Lviv) at *Channel 24*  
 Svitlana Zhabjuk – chief editor at *Zaxid.net* Internet site (Lviv)  
 Volodymyr Luchyshyn – executive director at *Nova Hvylya* radio (Lviv)  
 Taras Smakula – chief editor of *ZIK* Internet site (Lviv)  
 Andrii Pavlyshyn – international journalist at *ZIK* Internet site (Lviv)  
 Andrii Ganus- head on the department of politics at Express regional daily (Lviv)

#### **Scholars/Analysts, NGO actors:**

Victoria Syumar (Institute of Mass Information)  
 Otar Dovzhenko (Telekrytyka, Ukrainian Catholic University)  
 Victoria Bryndza (ProMova)  
 Volodymyr Pavliv (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv)  
 Ihor Balynskiy (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv)  
 Andrii Pavlyshyn (Western Analytical Group, Lviv)  
 Dmytro Borysov (Western Analytical Group, Lviv)  
 Serhii Solodkyi (Institute of World Policy)  
 Tetiana Neimash (Telekrytyka)

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