First Eastern Partnership Media Conference

Role of Media in the Eastern Partnership

May 19 – 20, 2015, Riga

**Welcome and Opening Session.**

**Ināra Mūrniece** (Speaker of the Saeima (Parliament) of the Republic of Latvia) opened the Session and greeted the participants of the Conference launched by the Latvian Presidency. She stressed the importance of free media to sustain the values, goals and ideals of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Ms Mūrniece underlined the role of the freedom of the press and freedom of expression for a democratic society, as well as society’s need for professional and powerful media.

Ms Mūrniece noted that the threat to media caused by Russian propaganda undermines democracy and political accountability. In this hostile information environment, it is important to strengthen the resilience of the media community and general public to the pressure of disinformation as well as to improve critical thinking and media literacy.

Ms Mūrniece invited delegates to share ideas and experience with regard to current challenges to media freedom in the Eastern Partnership countries and expressed hope that the Conference would provide valuable input to the EaP Summit and its Declaration.



**Christian Danielsson** (Director-General of Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) at the European Commission) praised journalists for the work they do providing objective, good quality and independent information, which is vital for democratic society.

He noted that free, resilient media is an essential element of the EaP's state-building process.

Speaking about challenges that media face in the modern world, Mr Danielsson mentioned: 1) the difficult economic situation causing pressure on media both from the government and from private actors; 2) globalisation of the information space that, from the one side, offers incredible opportunities provided by different forms of online and social media. However, low reliability of some sources undermines the degree of public trust to media.

Taking into account these factors, Mr Danielsson suggested continuing support of professional journalism and training of journalists. Moreover, governments need to guarantee a safe environment where different opinions can be expressed. They should also ensure that all citizens have access to factual and objective information. And they need to ensure that rules on competition and transparency of media exist and are upheld. Meanwhile, civil society and media representatives have a responsibility to hold Governments to account.

Free and reliable media are crucial for implementing the goals of the EaP. European Union is working with our Eastern Partners, both at the political level and through technical and financial assistance. It promotes freedom of expression and independence of media, supports media pluralism and ethical journalism. The EU is also working with professional associations to improve media professionalism and journalist training, as well as providing support for journalists' human rights.



**Nils Muižnieks** (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights) touched upon the problematic issues within the media environment in EaP countries. He expressed his concern over safety of journalists in Ukraine, forced closure of the Tatar channel in Crimea, imprisonment of journalists in Azerbaijan, undermined media pluralism in Georgia and Armenia, lack of transparency of media ownership in the EaP region.

Mr Muižnieks stressed that answer to propaganda is not counterpropaganda, but media pluralism and ethical journalism. Primary responsibility lies with governments to foster media pluralism, to remove undue restrictions and to resist bad practices (anti-extremist law, anti-homosexual propaganda law).

Council of Europe is ready to assist all EaP countries: they recently launched an internet platform for the safety of journalists. He invited all the journalists to report all bad practises against freedom of media.

**Dunja Mijatović** (OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media) noted that situation with media freedom in the EaP countries is not promising. In Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia media are not free. Despite the dramatic circumstances in Ukraine, direct and ugly effect of propaganda, its government has no excuse to take wrong steps with regard to media freedom.

Ms Mijatović addressed number of violations of media freedom and rights of journalists in the EaP. Ms Mijatović noted that some EaP countries are seriously determined to join the EU; at the same time these countries deny that they have problems with media their environment. It is the right time for the EU to draw attention of these governments to the issue of media freedom.

**Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga** (President of the Club de Madrid (2014- ), President of the Republic of Latvia (1999-2007), Chair of the High-Level Group on Freedom and Pluralism of Media in the European Union (2011-2012)) stressed the crucial role of media in democratic society and for maintaining peace. She claimed that media should be free from political as well as from financial pressure and draw attention to problems arising because of business interference in media process. She identified alarming signs which are potential dangerous for media in Europe:

1. Media ownership concentration in one hand. In spite of editorial and journalists freedom, if the interests of the owner are threatened, the society can’t count that media would become truly objective, unbiased and neutral. Diversity in ownership of media as well as diversity of editorial policies has the role to play.
2. Serious impact on quality on the profession of journalists, their training, their experience. Short-term contracts rather than permanent job – production of content and professional qualification of journalists and job safety are threatened.
3. Entertainment media, which takes a large mass of media space, significant source of revenue of media concerns – an instrument of manipulations, serious tool of propaganda. Public should be taught how to read media, journalists should be trained, certain ethical standards. Fictions should be divided from serious publications.

**Session 1: Media Environment in the Eastern Partnership Countries – Trends and Challenges.**

**(Moderated by Viktors Makarovs, Adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia).**

The first session analysed media environment in the EaP countries, including the legal, regulatory and policy environment, and media integrity.

**Boris Navasardian** (President of Yerevan Press Club, Armenia) presented findings of the research “Media environment in the EaP countries” which was conducted surveying experts in all 6 EaP countries. Comparative chart shows different indicators in the countries according to four components (policy, practices, broadcasting and internet). These five components determine the dynamics of the situation. Greatest progress happened in Ukraine in 2014, and there is a decline in Azerbaijan. The research points out the main issues and how to solve them in each of the four components in each of the six EaP countries. Mr Navasardian also presented a report “Messages on Russian TV: Monitoring Report 2015” that monitored eight Russian TV channels to evaluate the level of political diversity in their news coverage of various international and local topics.

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**Oksana Romaniuk** (Executive Director of Institute of Mass Information, Ukraine) explained some ways the Institute of Mass Information in Ukraine (IMI) used to quickly respond to the situation when information became a weapon. In 2014, the quality of media in Ukraine was high, now standards are lower because the media belongs to oligarchs and politicians. In addition to Russian propaganda in Ukrainian language, the trust in media has decreased. Therefore Ms Romaniuk suggested some recommendations:

* Local media should be supported financially;
* “Stop fake” initiatives are supported, people trust them;
* Create public service broadcasting;
* Build transparency of media ownership, IMI has promoted self-regulation.

There is a rise in trust in individual journalists. (However, they need to abstain from emotions, use games, infographics and videos to make information more attractive).

There are about 1000 local journalists without a job; they have no access to official events because they do not have accreditations.

What we need to do:

Reforms implemented into practice; coordinate our efforts opposing information war from Kremlin in cooperation with EaP countries; better education for journalists and consumers, support for local media or digital non-journalism media.

**Tatiana Repkova** (Founder of Media Managers Club, Czech Republic) focused on the factors affecting the development of professional media in the EaP countries, distinguished 5 major groups of factors and categorized them in accordance with SWOT analysis. There is one group of internal factors that can be managed and made into strength or weakness: journalist skills and expertise, and professional media management. However, external factors - democratization and digital media revolution - can be either an opportunity or a threat. Propaganda, disinformation, information war and war in Donbass are threats. All these groups of factors have to deal with the Truth. The truth should be perceived rather as precision of facts. There is variety of truths but the audience can never perfectly understand which kind of truth we are talking about. Replying to the pro-Kremlin media narratives about the “truth” by more narratives about “the truth” from the other side means only to contribute to the growing confusion. If the information is factual, it is also truthful; if it is complete, it is also as objective as possible; therefore professional journalism does not need labels of “truth” or “objectivity”. Professional journalism may be the best counter-propaganda. The most difficult task for journalists, who are reporting objective information, is to avoid criticism and interference from the audience remaining neutral.

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**Ehtel Halliste** (Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership) drew attention to how media and journalists can be helped. How to achieve quality product? Ms Halliste informed about the study "EU-related communication in Eastern Partnership countries" made by the Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership. The first stage of the program lasted 16 months and covered more than ten events, including bilateral and multilateral seminars in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as well as multiple study-visits to Estonia. The methodology of the program used three main elements: a needs assessment survey; training events, seminars, study tours and fieldwork. The aim of the program was to bring together journalists, public communicators and civil society representatives, because united efforts will bring better results.

First findings: trust between journalists and public communicators are very important. There is mistrust from both sides. Let`s help journalists know subjects far better with the help of briefings.

All media should be treated equally. Public communicators should work with any media.

Regional journalists have peoples` trust. They should be involved in any kind of initiatives, trained in their mother tongue.

Knowledge of foreign languages is not sufficient among journalists in EaP countries. They can get information only from sources in their mother tongue. They can`t read EU official materials. EU can come and help with language trainings. Everything can be translated into human language (more simple sentences).

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Discussions: questions about the role of the public service broadcasters and challenges, about the need for alternative media sources, issue of financing, and about the issue of transparency.

**Oksana Romaniuk** answered that they are in process of creating a public broadcasting in Ukraine. There are organizational challenges, there is a need for new structures, there are working groups established. Media transparency is important at local level; they are going to propose investigations, because they are owned by officials. Introduce media transparency by laws and political wills to introduce a ban to ownership for state officials and enhance media plurality.

**Boris Navasardian** answered that there is no immunity against partisanship and editorial independence is not ensured, therefore legal and regulatory mechanisms should be made. Additional initiatives are important, maybe by a basket fund that would fill the gaps and support initiatives of creating alternative media. Transparency is an issue everywhere. It should be independent regulator to see how investments are made before giving licenses, and there is a need to find final beneficiary.

Discussions: questions about how many more studies we need to finally solve issues, about regional TV, standards for promotion of separatism.

**Boris Navasardian** answered that it is natural that different institutions try to tackle new challenges, but there is coordination between researchers. Using existing media is very much important, Mr Navasardian prefers *Dozhj TV* channel. There is a need to support its products. Promotion of separatism is not something to be restricted if it is not connected to war propaganda, xenophobia and discrimination.

Conclusions:

**Boris Navasardian**: Russian propaganda is a new challenge, must take it into account.

**Oksana Romaniuk**: we must join forces and coordinate our efforts and we should promote education and develop infrastructure (also mobile internet) to have possibility to read news, we should promote public broadcasting, citizen journalism, self-regulation as well as local media should focus on fact checking.

**Tatiana Repkova**: to close the gap between social and mass media.

**Ehtel Halliste**: bringing people together, to have a network after this conference.

**Session 2: Resilient Media – Ensuring the Right of Citizens to Balanced, Factual and Reliable Information.**

**(Moderated by Roland Freudenstein, Deputy Director - Head of Research at Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies).**

The second session considered the role that media play in ensuring the free flow of objective information in a challenging environment.

**Dace Melbārde** (Minister for Culture of the Republic of Latvia) identified ways to fight against informational aggression and to raise public trust in media:

1. Promote skills of the society to recognize propaganda. Media literacy should be taught not only in school, but, in cooperation with NGO and journalists, to be integrated in different initiatives, thus developing critical way of thinking.
2. Deconstruct the propaganda: promote analytical journalisms and support different social platforms that disclose manipulation with the reality, for instance, Ukrainian “stop fake” which involve the society in creation of reliable media.
3. Support pluralisms and media work creating journalism based on democratic values.
4. Ensure transparency of media ownership by establishing a mechanism disclosing a true beneficiary of an enterprise.
5. Avoiding media monopolies by creating an instrument preventing concentration of media in hands of one single owner
6. promote media self-regulation, inviting media representatives to discuss professional standards and ethical issues
7. Increase international cooperation which would aim at proposing interesting solutions for creating of democratic media environment, i.e. creating of the special fund within the EU to support journalism.



**Petru Macovei** (Executive Director of the Association of Independent Press, Moldova) overviewed features of media resilience in Moldova. He concluded that in situation when Russian propaganda broadly affects public opinion, there is a need for media literacy classes. Mr Macovei noted that Moldova needs a policy on development of its media space. In addition, he mentioned a demand for law regulating competition in the media market.

Mr Macovei called for the EU to exercise pressure on the government to decrease media concentration as well as to take measures to support local media.

**Zhanna Litvina** (Chairwoman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (1995-2015), Belarus) characterized situation in Belarus. She informed that major media is still state funded. However state regulation weakens the media, which is not able to formulate any position before receive official instructions. Belarus is most vulnerable to Russian propaganda - 2/3 of population trusts in Russian media. In order to cope with propaganda there is a need to develop informational space for independent media. Another factor which deteriorate situation is amendment to Press law aimed at strengthening of media control. Internet resources were equalled to media. Ministry of information got a right to block resources for publishing information which contradicts state interests. This regulation has been applied for international resources as well. In addition, accreditation of foreign journalists is delayed by the state. Rough fines were applied for journalists who do not comply with this regulation.

**Jerzy Pomianowski** (Executive Director of European Endowment for Democracy) gave the assessment of the EU activities in support for local media in EaP countries. Although the EU spends a lot for journalist training or consulting, in the difficult market situation the EU funding is not sufficient to help media representatives to run their business. Despite some good initiatives, the activities of the EU and its Member States are still very fragmented, lacking coordination and methodology. For Ukraine and Moldova the core problem is need for de-*oligarchisation*. Stressing the importance of editorial independence, he called the EU to encourage the national governments to adopt legislation eliminating owner’s influence on editors and journalists. Moreover, the EU needs to contain itself from editorial influence, caring for quality, not for content.

**Discussion**: participants identified the need to provide the EU financial support for local media, independent private media that produce quality journalisms and freelancers. They also call the EU to support journalists who ensure monitor and control over how the governments are spending the EU funds. Countries’ representatives warned that, in situation of major institutional mistrust, critical thinking may lead to cynical thinking which, in its turn, is a predisposition to attractiveness of propaganda. It was also suggested to promote journalists visits to the EU institutions, thus enabling them to provide objective information about the EU to the citizens of the EaP countries.

**Session 3: The Way Forward – Identifying Appropriate Responses to Challenges and Donor Support.**

**(Moderated by Gunnar Wiegand, Director of Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE Directorate of the EEAS).**

The third session outlined the way forward and discussed responses to the challenges for the media, took stock of the EU’s assistance to media in the EaP region, and looked at how to enhance possible contributions to improving the overall media environment in partner countries.

**Mogens Blicher Bjerregård** (President of the Steering Committee of European Federation of Journalists) determined key elements for sustainable media. And emphasized that all parties must come together and work in mutual understanding. Challenges:

* The owners of the media outlets must be able to make a business;
* Salaries and working conditions for journalists must be higher in order to make a decent living out of it;
* Ensuring of Press Freedom with acceptance of a system of self-regulation;
* High ranked educational environment for journalists;
* Midcareer training supported by both journalists and media;
* It is crucial that both the media owners and the journalists themselves understand the importance of cooperation and the importance of doing business together and by then be able to develop mutual understandings. This could actually be obtained through bargaining.

What can we do?

* Rebuild Journalist unions by reaching out to the new professionals.
* Building institutions to take care of focused further education/Midcareer training.
* Business training for media owners and leaders
* Media subsidize is essential especially in small countries

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**Arif Aliyev** (Chairman of “Yeni Nesil” (New Generation) Journalists’ Union, Azerbaijan) pointed out challenges in the EaP countries based on study about media landscape of EaP countries:

The freedom of speech, independence and professionalism - these challenges are interlinked. The situation in the EaP is different in each country. The same journalists are always mentioned by the foreign organizations, but journalists who are not less professional and did as much for the freedom of speech are often forgotten. Aliyev mentioned a journalist from Azerbaijan Mr Rauf Mirqadirov.

What can the EU do to improve media landscape in these countries? It is necessary to remember that ethical standards and management are important in countries with relatively stronger democracies, such as Georgia. The most effective activities are direct support for the survivors of independent media. We need to provide support in order to ensure high quality media. There is a need for consistent work on projects, not to create many ideas and leave them forgotten. The EU should not forget that there must me awareness of what is the EU, what can the EU bring to people in EaP countries, why they need the values of the EU. Half of the population in Azerbaijan does not understand the benefit from the EU.

**Maia Mikashavidze** (Professor at GIPA, Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Georgia) pointed out the existing and new challenges in the media across the EaP. New challenges: the persecution of journalists, Russian propaganda, Internet trolling, invasion of privacy, but the biggest challenge is massive, well-targeted flow of disinformation, pouring from Russian language broadcasts and internet sources. Recommendations:

Monitor media content and the public opinion, increase the volume of quality of fact-based information, boost media literacy and critical thinking skills among the public; providing reliable information in national and minority languages covering their interests and needs; monitor the media and the public opinion to identify false claims and beliefs; independence from political powers; support independent radio stations that have low ratings; more quality journalism programs; need for transparency of ownership and financial streams in the broadcast sector (each web site should have a section “about us”); manifold increase in financial support for the independent media.



**Tarmu Tammerk** (President of Organization of News Ombudsmen / Media Ethics Ombudsman of Estonian Public Broadcasting Company) explained that his work as an ombudsman is to handle feedback from listeners and readers about journalism ethics problems. He handles complaints. Mr Tammerk explained that he would like to promote the idea of self-regulation. Because there are economic problems everywhere, self-regulation is a good way of keeping politicians away from meddling in media. Some countries in the EaP have good self-regulation mechanisms, for example, there are press councils, but there are no ombudsmen institutions, even in Lithuania and Latvia. Mr Tammerk encouraged thinking of creating a post of media ombudsmen for public media institutions. A Media ombudsman is a judge who is not involved in media everyday editorial decisions. Russian propaganda has forced Estonia to create new Russian language TV channel in September this year. We need to counterbalance Russian propaganda after situation between Ukraine and Russia. We hope that journalists working in the new Russian language channel will not have to be too careful criticizing the government of Estonia, for example, not to make viewers think that he is working in the hands of Kremlin. Self-regulation takes time, so start it now.

**Aidan White** (Director of Ethical Journalism Network & Former Secretary-General of the International Federation of Journalists) emphasised that information challenge is everywhere, there are problems of political interference, conflicts of interest, lack of responsibility in journalism, and media and ownership exist everywhere. The Ethical Journalism Network is established to counter the drift towards a valueless system of media and journalism and to try to promote ethically good governance and self-regulation. Ethical journalism can be an inspiration for responsible communications across all public information landscape. We need to build public trust in journalism, much more transparency, ethical behaviour and good governance inside media as well as self-regulation. Issues like hate speech and propaganda are going to be defeated by promoting solidarity within the media sector and public at large. What the EU can do? The EU should be more funding and more focused in a way that the EU funds are used to support media and journalism as an important public institution in terms of building democracy. Mr White mentioned OSCE media program (cross border dialogue) to build bridges and promote the dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian journalists. The EU actions must be more practical to provide tools to combat manipulation and lies. These actions are very often heard in words, but we need to make them into actions through good training. The reality today is that journalism does not generate huge revenues and profits. Journalism is a non-profit activity. Therefore funding media and journalism is desirable for pluralism and democracy. We need to not to throw out the values, the standards of democracy that have been established over the years building media freedom that we enjoy today. We need to promote media solidarity; owners, editors, producers, directors, journalists, academics need to work together much more effectively, to set agenda and let it develop. If the EU can make such an effort, it will be very useful.

Discussions: questions about the role of the church in Georgia. Comments from the audience: the key thing is the editors, but we don`t have good communication with editors. We need experts who are travelling around the world, to catch them when they are near and invite to some events. Ukrainian media content should be translated in Europe. Idea of exchange of documentaries, videos might be useful. Revive Eastern European studies which are lost (scholar field). Ukrainian initiative “stop fake”, it is important to criticize discourse as well. Use “Twitter” to speak out.

**Mogens Blicher Bjerregård** emphasised two key words: patience and long term. The message to the donors and the EU: when you engage in these things, you have to be committed to a long term process.

**Tarmu Tammerk** answering the question on what role can professional networks play in improving overall media standards, he mentioned that Organisation of News Ombudsmen launched a week long courses for Ombudsmen. Professional networks should be encouraged by donors.

**Aidan White** answering the question about the religion, it is important to engage in dialogues between media, religious leaders and political leaders to try to eliminate the issue of hateful speech. Mr White mentioned that a new international, interreligious network of journalists from faith based media in the world was set up few weeks ago. Another suggestion is to contact the independent editors. On question about public service media, Mr White considered that TV will be the last tool of information source in the future.

**Mr Andris Kesteris, Principal Advisor for Civil Society and Media at the European Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement, presented financing and funding commitments. Till now 750 journalists have been trained in the Eastern neighbourhood, to communicate EU and its policies.**

Conclusions:

**Arif Aliyev:** efforts needed to keep independent media; if there is no consequence and consistence of excellent ideas, it will become an experimental field.

**Maia Mikashavidze**: journalism does not have enough funding to create conferences.

**Aidan White**: self-regulation is an important aspect. Independent media needs funding.

**Tarmu Tammerk**: state money should not be used in propaganda to counter propaganda. The new TV channel in Estonia is created to produce unique, local media content.

**Aidan White**: we have the principles and values; we have to create conditions to establish media freedom. We shouldn’t be intimidated by propaganda to counter propaganda, it is dangerous. Russia is investing a lot of money into propaganda, but the US is doing that as well. Money should come from public sources not with political attachment.

**Summary of the Conference and Concluding Speech.**

**Eduards Stiprais** (Undersecretary of State - Political Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia) summarised the findings of the conference.

It was acknowledged that free and reliable media is inevitable for implementing the goals of the Eastern Partnership. That is why the EU needs a closer engagement with partner countries on the issues of media freedom and development. It was highlighted that a weak domestic media is associated with number of risks: it can’t provide a real fight against corruption or real democratic oversight; moreover, it can’t resist misinformation aiming at confusing the audience and disseminate mistrust. On other hand, the Governments should take care of media resilience rather than attempt to control media.

A need for more ambitious media support in the EaP region was identified. As most immediate steps in that direction could be: monitoring of media situation, journalist training, creation of a journalist network, support to journalist professional organizations.

It was established that risks stemming from propaganda could be mitigated offering alternative sources of information to citizens who receive it in the Russian language.

Further events covering role of public service in broadcasting, the delayed digitization process of the terrestrial broadcasting in EaP countries, development of social media and other issues shall be discussed in this format.

**Johannes Hahn** (Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission) provided closing remarks of the Conference.

Free speech and a professional press are essential for democratic society. Without them dangerous prejudices and misperceptions take root, which undermine chances for peace and stability. That is why freedom of the media is one of the very foundations on which our Union is built. Moreover, a strong independent press is fundamental to successful societies everywhere.

However, media in EU and neighbourhood nowadays is facing major challenges. Threats to free journalism are complex. It is difficult for independent media to survive financially. Concentration of media ownership can undermine the diversity of opinions, limiting the possibility for independent journalism. Different forms of online and social media are a great contribution to democracy, however, not always reliable. That is why professional journalism and the training of journalists need more support.

Diversity of opinions is essential.Unfortunately, the freedom of the media is being undermined by disinformation which needs to be identified. On the other hand, governments have responsibilities with regard to the overall media environment, guaranteeing safety of expression of different opinions and ensuring that all citizens have access to factual and objective information. Civil society and media representatives have important roles to play in holding governments to account when it comes to media freedom.

There is the need for closer engagement of the EU with partner countries on the issues of media freedom which is crucial for implementing the goals of the Eastern Partnership. The countries that have chosen closer relations with the EU have to follow European standards in the media field.

The EU should ensure more ambitious media assistance in EaP region, in particular by supporting journalists' training, establishing a network of journalists already familiar with EU matters, supporting the journalists' professional organisations, to promote high standards and self-regulation.

In conclusion Mr Hahn emphasized that the media has a crucial role in communicating the goal of the Eastern Partnership to a broader public. This should be done not through propaganda, but through critical, determined reporting of a variety of views. He called media representatives to harness the power of free media and to combat the threat, assuring that the European Commission is and will remain committed to this issue.

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**Special Event: Russian Language Media in the Eastern Partnership Region and Beyond – A Sneak Preview of the Feasibility study by the European Endowment for Democracy**

**Jerzy Pomianowski** gave a brief summary on the controlled media in Russia, which might in future result in a generation of people who will believe that their enemy is the West, that the West wants to destroy them. However, if we will respond to propaganda with counterpropaganda, the trust in media will only decrease. Therefore, the aim of the Feasibility Study in Russian Language Media Initiatives (RLMI) in the Eastern Partnership and Beyond “Bringing Plurality and Balance to the Russian Language Media Space” is to foster plurality and high-quality journalism within the Russian language media space. The study is meant for political decision makers in Europe and beyond. One of the main challenges of the Study was finding ways to reach Russian language audiences through balanced and independent media. One of the recommendations of the study is invest into balanced, trustworthy, independent and diverse media for Russian-language audiences.



**John O’Loan** presented key findings and initial recommendations of the Study. J O`Loan informed that the focus of the Study is on Russian speaking communities in the EaP countries and beyond, including the Baltic and Central Asia regions, as well as Russia.

Key findings:

1. A breakdown of trust. TV remains the dominant source of news and information for Russian language audiences. However, this source is dominated by Kremlin-controlled channels, and local TV channels often fail to persuade audiences about the credibility of their content. Furthermore, the importance of the internet is growing, especially for audiences under 45 years; however they are unlikely to look for diverse sources of news online. There is a consistent lack of trust in news outlets.
2. The local gap. In several countries, there is a need for more content that engages audiences on a local level. Because Kremlin-produced news is concentrated around international stories with little attention to domestic issues. Therefore, more attention should be given to media outlets and initiatives that provide local content across all platforms.
3. Fragmented and forgotten audiences. Promoting access to alternative sources and growing media literacy are essential to ensure that the widest range of independent and trustworthy media reach the widest spectrum of audiences.
4. The survival challenge. Although independent media outlets exist throughout the region, many struggle on extremely limited resources. There is a need for better coordination and long-term approach in support for independent media across the region.
5. Skills and knowledge gaps. There are important gaps in media business as well as security training for independent media and insufficient coordination between various existing training providers. Therefore, there is a need for better media monitoring and research dedicated to tracking evolving media consumption and content in the Russian language media space. More efforts are needed to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges, allowing knowledge sharing and establishing business networks.

Five main recommendations:

1. News Hub to exchange high quality news content among leading Russian language media. It may act as a proto news agency.
2. A content factory - regional content production Centre with particular emphasis on content that reflects local issues and local lives.
3. A Centre for Media Excellence - for the coordination of audience research and training, focusing on market research and business planning - skills that are often lacking in the region.
4. Multi-donor basket fund, which would provide long-term demand-driven support to Russian language media initiatives and their partnerships.
5. Coordination mechanism for these four initiatives to avoid duplication of initiatives and to fill existing gaps as well as to resist pressure from outside forces.

In time, these recommendations could naturally evolve into pan-regional multimedia distribution platform.

**Peter Pomeransev** gave a summary of the main thematic chapters of the study. Mr Pomeransev analysed charts that depict Russian language usage in Former Soviet Union (2009-2012). With two exceptions, 40% or more of the population in each of these countries speaks Russian. The overall number of Russian speakers in these countries exceeds 93 million. TV is the dominant source of news and information for the older segment of the audiences (45+); they live in Kremlin dominated world. Younger audiences (12-44) could be reached through mobile internet. There is a need for strong media literacy programs and educational initiatives that help audiences to think critically about the media it consume, because some viewers claimed that Kremlin channels` were more objective because those journalists were more passionate about the subject. Kremlin controlled media focus more on foreign news, less on local and domestic issues. Moreover, Russian domination on entertainment has big effect. To reach the aim of gaining trust in high quality journalism, it is necessary to reflect local news, improve the quality of factual documentaries (ex. radio format, talking shows on daily lives) and enhance translation service that would translate international content into Russian.

**Natalia Lygachova** evaluated the results of the study from the perspective of a media practitioner. People often do not trust any media because Ukrainian media also lie; we need to consider it. Drawbacks/flaws: The study does not take into consideration differences within the region. In Baltic countries, Russian speakers identify themselves as Russians, however in Ukraine there is no separation between Russian and non-Russian speaking media. Ms Lygachova supports the idea to develop existing and already working initiatives, not to create new ones. Furthermore, we need to think about entertainment context. Ms Lygachova recommended that it is possible to cooperate with oligarchs to use them against Kremlin. Because there are oligarchs who are interested in providing information that is anti-Kremlin. We need to work with schools and teachers, to present information in the format of funny pictures that are far away from satire. It is more effective than serious researches. We need to understand that Russian speakers and countries are different; therefore, we need to coordinate efforts not to create new initiatives but work on the existing ones.

**John O’Loan** commented that this study is not looking at Russian language speakers as whole. In addition, one-fits-all approach will not work. Next steps and way ahead: establish a news exchange network; strengthen investigative journalism; building a portfolio of high quality non-news content and setting up a regional entertainment content fair; setting up specialist research and training team; promote media literacy and access to alternative sources; co-produce multimedia content by existing media outlets.

Discussion session: A participant of the conference suggested better creating a media channel in Georgian language than Russian, because too much Russian language media affects Georgian media platform.