

Media system and journalistic cultures in Latvia: impact on integration processes

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The main point of my presentation:

the possibly disintegrating role of the media is rooted less in the activities of the media themselves, but more in the representation of the existing situation and the consequences of factors which lie outside of the media themselves

- **1. Interaction between the media and the fields of politics and economics**
- **2. Media system and media accessibility.**
- **3. The role of the media in establishing values and 2 information spaces**
- **4. Journalistic cultures, media content and integration processes**
- **5. Recommendations**

1.

The development of media system, the structure of the media, and the content of publications

- are influenced by existing political cultures,
- by the ethnic division of political parties,
- the historical and contemporary socio-political situation,
- the economic situation,
- legal regulations,
- close links of media to economic groups in terms of the distribution of the advertising market.

We should also take into account:

- A culture/a history of collaboration
- Dual attitudes to right-wing and left-wing forces and ideologies
- Assymmetric bilinguism
- Impact of Russia and its information space

Latvia's media system

- **Characteristic elements from**
 - **the liberal media model,**
 - **the democratic corporatist model,**
 - **and the Mediterranean or polarised pluralistic model.**

- **No government regulations** and a lack of support for the media
- **high level of political parallelism** in which the media are closely linked to political parties, and
- **a weak system of self-regulation,** responsibility and accountability to publics.

- **Consequences – no nationally declared values such as an integration programme can oblige the private media to observe the programme's positions or to demonstrate concern for any group in society if this is not of financial or political advantage.**

- This can mean the disappearance of media outlets which are meant for smaller groups in society (in the absence of financial aid that is specified in normative regulations).
- The content of a publication or programme can become trivialised in an attempt to find as broad an audience as possible and to survive under market-based competition.

Commercialisation

- promotes the creation of simpler and cheaper content, it reduces diversity in genre and format, it encourages the selection of stories and subjects which are easier to discuss, and it **facilitates confrontation, schematisation and dramatisation of events.**
- Rational analysis (as opposed to the expression of emotions) and the use of high-quality and diverse sources of information require major financial and time resources which may be beyond the reach of market-oriented journalism.

- Competition in our small media market also often forces the media **to use cheaper content from big countries**, because original broadcasts are expensive, and it is hard for them to compete with content that has been created and tested elsewhere in the world.
- This can cause **concerns about the preservation of national / ethnic cultures**.
- It can also increase **the influence of the information space of another country**.

- The restoration of Latvia's independence affected the media system
 - not only by opening up the path toward its democratisation,
 - but also gradually established two subsystems – the Latvian language media and the Russian language media.
- **Both subsystems are self-sufficient.**

- Russian language press has become more stable, it can also be read by representatives of other ethnic minorities (Belarusians, Ukrainians)
- It has not served the interests of other ethnic groups in terms of developing their own media.
- This is advantageous to the Russian language press, because it expands the audience, but reduces the use of other minority languages, diminishing the presence of cultural diversity in the public arena in various languages.

- Latvians and Russians have an equal availability of media in their native languages,
- but the opportunities for Russian speakers are more diverse, because they have access to vast media resources from Russia – the electronic media, the Internet, the press, as well as books and movies.

- The products created by Russian journalists and political technologies and the stories which local Russian journalists prepare for Russian channels are seen by viewers in Latvia because they are both accessible and popular.
- the foreign information space has a potential effect on integration processes.
- **Lack of complex research to measure the true influence, to identify the media effects,** or to seek out correlations among media choice, usage intensity and the level of information, values and attitudes toward the country.

- The democratic demand for diversity, the elimination of regulatory norms in private TV channels, and the more widespread use of the Russian language may **attract this linguistic group to the Latvia's media.**
- But it can also create tensions and insecurity among members of the other part of society who see it as **a threat against a diverse offer and the availability of media that are presented in Latvian.**

- The development of two equal sub-systems does not promote the learning of the Latvian language or its more widespread use; instead it creates a gap between the two linguistic groups, each of them having its own media space.

- **TV broadcasts with subtitles** can be an effective means for learning a language, but we should get some more research data in order to know in what direction this phenomenon works – to improve either Latvian, Russian or English language.

Sensitive question of language use

- In Latvia, choices or changes related to **language**, particularly in the public arena and in the media, **are not just a matter of communications**.
- For the most part, they relate to the **manifestations of power**, and demonstration of opposing, challenging identities.

- issues related to language use appear regularly in the media of both languages, with expressed concerns
 - about a decline in the quality of both languages,
 - about the demonstrative refusal to speak one or the other language in contacts with clients,
 - about imprecision in the translation of people's surnames,
 - about language use of public officials in media.

Attitudes towards the role of media

- When asked about those factors which split up society to the greatest degree, in second place behind social and material stratification was the **language barrier**.
- Next came radical political announcements by right wing and left wing parties, the factor of historical memories, the **mass media**, and then **propaganda from abroad**.
- Politicians use to blame media

Media use

- The main trend there is that people usually choose those press editions and those broadcasting channels
 - which are in their native language,
 - which are trusted and
 - which affirm their beliefs.

Media policy

- There are no national policies in the area of the electronic media that might have an effect on the representation of integration processes on electronic channels, except for the indirect effect of awarding or refusing frequencies.
- The word “integration” does not appear anywhere in the 2009 conceptual document on the development of public television

- Not easy to develop policy in this area.
- An increase in the proportion of programmes on LTV that are meant for non-Latvians and a broader offer in Russian might attract greater numbers of Russian speakers to Latvian programming.
- From the perspective of competition among languages, it narrows the use of the Latvian language even further, and it also reduces resources for original programming and films in Latvia.

- The logic of the advertising market may also focus on support for channels and programmes that are meant not for specific target audiences or endangered groups in society, but instead for as large a segment of the audiences as possible.

The role of journalistic cultures and media content on integration processes

- Role perceptions
- Professional values
- Conflict of interest
- Role of media owner – impact on editorial content

Media texts

- An analysis of the media situation in Latvia shows that the **media system features external diversity and pluralism,**
- But the **lack of internal diversity.**

- There are many different press publications, television and radio channels, and the Internet, all of which ensure the appearance in the public arena of **opposing ideas, viewpoints and ideologies.**
- Radical ideas of both sides

- People can state publicly that the restoration of Latvia's independence was a misunderstanding and that “the Latvian state is as evil as the Nazi state (..) The fact that our generation permitted that to happen is an unforgivable mistake”

- Differences in the presentation and interpretation of various events are seen
 - in relation to **domestic politics (elections)**.
 - **foreign policy issues** (attitudes toward the United States, participation in the war in Iraq, events in Kosovo, evaluation of Russian-Georgian war)

- The presentation of issues related to **history, collective memory, collective myths and dates of commemoration** has, for a long time, been used by the media of both languages as an effective means for upsetting people and splitting up society into two camps.

- discourses of **liberation and occupation**
- Politicians use these differing experiences, collective memories, and views about history to engage in public **political bargaining** – the status of the Russian language as an official minority language, the ability of children to pursue their education in Russian, and the awarding of citizenship are all offered in “trade” for a recognition of the fact of the occupation.

- **Internet portals** and especially **comments** on articles and blogs is the environment where controversial viewpoints, ethnic stereotypes and diverse opinions meet;
- Both languages used.
- Does **culture** in media unite people?

- A study conducted by the BISS showed that the Latvian language and Russian language press **shape different collective identities**, and the conclusion here is that this split in the media arena promotes a situation in which the two ethno-linguistic groups stay apart.

- Content analysis has shown that in the traditional media and the press, statements which foment ethnic hatred and biases are uncommon, but they are very common, indeed, in comments left by readers of Internet portals.
- Stereotypes most often relate to political evaluations and identification.

- Intolerant or stereotypical statements about Latvians or Russians usually appear in the context of specific political forces or groups with specific views.
- As such statements accumulate, hatred toward an entire nation can be established, even though the public criticisms may well apply to Latvian politicians, for instance, not the Latvian nation and people.

- There have also been new stereotypes in both media worlds. One example includes the idea that newly naturalised citizens are a unified community.

- The mass press tends to report on extremes,
- there is an incommensurate presentation of the ideas and views of radicals on both sides of the coin.
- Sadly, **normalcy** is seldom presented.
- Rare are the voices of Latvia's Russian intellectuals in mass press

- The Latvian press, for instance, rarely reports on Russians who speak several languages, are satisfied with life, are not waiting for Russia to protect them, and do not support Russian policies.
- Similarly there are few articles which demonstrate an understanding of the subjective feelings of a Russian born in Latvia who has to prove knowledge about history or language.

- The Russian language press, for its part, has never reported on the fate of a member of the Latvian Legion, or any understanding of the limited ability of Latvians to speak their native language in Latvia's capital city.

- The more primitive the media narratives and the more black-and-white the heroes who are presented, the less such media messages will state the main thing –
- that people in Latvia have very diverse and shifting identities, that there is no single and simple truth, that problems should be discussed, not ignored,
- and that ideas can be criticised, but attacks against individuals or uncritical generalisation of someone's behaviour should not be acceptable.

Has economic crisis an impact on media and integration?

- **Yes:** losses in number of publications, their quality
- **Yes:** no plans or money for integrating programs in public TV, radio
- **Yes:** owner change in daily press is viewed with caution who are they and how will it change direction of the paper
- **Yes:** weakening of our PBS

- **No: if media texts and discourses are considered**
 - Powerholders – common people
 - The rich- the poor
- **ethnic tensions or hate speech – not more than usually**

Recommendations

What should/can be done?

- **To somehow make politics understand the importance of public service broadcasting**
- **Money and legislative frame for public media**
- My other recommendations maybe are of idealistic type or for more stable times:

Education

- Media literacy courses at school teaching young people to use the media.
 - This might reduce negative effects, as teachers can talk about how stereotypes emerge, how important the choice of information sources is, and how specific problems are framed.
- Courses for journalists and editors (lifelong education)

Media critique and professional discussions

- We are in need of publications, sections of Internet portals which engage in a critique of the media.
- There should also be a professional publication for media employees, more active journalist union
- public discussions on ethical dilemmas and questionable practices

PBS, culture, children, minorities

- Programmes and public media broadcasts which promote the civil society and integration in society should be planned, financed and produced, ensuring that the needs of specific groups in society are met and that these groups have access to the media.

PBS

- Media policy must define steps to be taken toward a greater sense of security and belief that a group's interests are being taken into account. This applies both to the majority and to minorities.

PBS

- An attractive **Latvian language teaching programme** is needed on TV,
- programmes for young people in which speakers of both languages interact-competitions on knowledge and skills, games, etc.

PBS

- broadcasts which have basic **information about Latvia**, its geography, culture, history and distinguished individuals of different ethnic backgrounds
- programs for recent immigrants and for people who are poorly integrated into the Latvian environment – non-citizens and older people.

- The public media should set aside broadcasting time on specific days and at specific times for **public discussions**, messages from local residents and NGOs, and programmes in minority languages (with subtitles on television).

- The public and other media should self-promote their production in the media outlets of the other language so that people can learn about what is on offer.
- This would bring together the fairly limited information and cultural spaces in Latvia.

- Only if all groups in Latvia will see that public broadcasting system works for all of them, changes in financing it will be possible (**subscription fee**)

Research

- The scientific potential and resources of the Latvian media and interdisciplinary sectors must be co-ordinated so as to engage in complex research into the issue of whether and how specific types of media consumption and other factors affect the views of people toward Latvia, different groups in society, and their identity, history and citizenship.

- Only if people in political circles are truly interested in public integration and consolidation – something that is of key importance in dealing with the economic crisis, political alienation, greater emigration, and a reduction in civic patriotism – only then will there be more intensive and targeted thoughts about how to attract large segments of the audience to a specific information space, as well as about the quality and effectiveness of this process.

Thank you!