

Ainārs Dimants

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PRET  
PAŠKONTROLI  
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Mediju pētījuma atklājumi

Kopsavilkums angļu valodā

Vidzemes Augstskola  
Valmiera 2004

## Summary

The aim of this research was to study the way in which editorial decisions are developed and approved at various Latvian newspapers when it comes to fundamentally important economic and political processes in the country. Of particular interest here is the relationship between editorial offices and the publisher or owner of the relevant media outlet. During the course of the research, I conducted 82 standardised and in-depth interviews with editors and journalists (38 from national newspapers and 44 from the regional or local press; a list is attached). Some of the interviews were recorded anonymously if the respondent so desired. All of the interviews were recorded on tape and have been stored in that medium. They have also all been transcribed onto paper.

As a researcher, I agree with the functionally structural system theory of Niklas Luhmann, which says that the basic function of media systems – self-observation of societies – is possible only if the mass media system is a **permanent** system with permanent logic about its functioning. This is particularly applicable to the positions which newspapers take in terms of reflecting events in news and commentary. This is a position which is flexible in accordance with ideological or normative factors, but it is inevitable, because even if a paper strictly aims at neutrality, certain conflicts of values cannot be avoided.<sup>35</sup> An important selection criterion here is the editorial line – how is it determined? Is it determined by the publisher or the editorial staff, particularly the editor-in chief? Is it instead informally determined by all staff members?<sup>36</sup> An absence of internal press freedom or editorial autonomy is a manifestation of a media system which has not yet been fully separated from the existing political system. In other words, the issue here focuses on that which sets the agenda of the media and on how this happens.

Research in the past<sup>37</sup> has shown that there is good reason to be concerned about internal censorship and self-censorship in the Latvian news media. This situation is put to malicious use by political and economic forces which, while remaining anonymous, interfere with editorial independence and autonomy in terms of setting out the agenda for the mass media. This is a key issue. It represents an area of research which is of public importance – discovering and evaluating the way in which decisions are taken at national and regional newspapers in Latvia, covering newspapers which are owned by various owners and are published in Latvian or in Russian. There must also be a study of how this situation affects freedom of speech. It is in the public interest to strengthen editorial autonomy and to weaken any purely political or commercial effects on media content. At the same time, limitations on the freedom of the press cannot be seen as an interference of the internal quality mechanisms of newspapers, provided that such mechanisms are aimed at improving the quality of the media product that is offered to the public. In this case, quite on the contrary, self-supervision must be seen as a co-operative and voluntary step toward carrying out the public responsibilities of the mass media.

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<sup>35</sup> See Luhmann, N. *Die Realität der Massenmedien*, 2. Aufl., Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag (1996), p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> See Ruß-Mohl, S. *Journalismus: Das Hand- und Lehrbuch*. Frankfurt a. Main: F.A.Z-Institut für Management-, Markt- und Medieninformationen, 2003 (Frankfurter Allgemeine Buch), p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> See „Aptauja: Iekšējā preses brīvība”, *Eiropas Zona*, 5 May 1999, pp. 10 - 11; see also Kalniņa, N., Liepiņa, M. and Slišāne, L. „Kā strādā žurnālisti Latvijā?”, *Academia + Media*, 4 April 2001, p. 8.

Working with two assistants, the researcher conducted in-depth and standardised interviews between June and December 2003 with editors and journalists (editors in chief, editors of newspaper sections, commentators and reporters) from a variety of newspapers. The process involved Latvia's five leading daily newspapers – *Diena*, *Latvijas Avīze* (known as *Lauku Avīze* until December 2003), *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, *Vesti segodnja* and *Chas* (the latter two are published in Russian). Circulation data with respect to these newspapers were found at <http://www.bdh.lv/default.asp?lang=v&id=1088>. Interviews were also conducted with people from a selection of regional and local newspapers, taking into account their ownership, particularly in terms of major media concerns. These included *Million* (in Russian) in Daugavpils, *Kurzemes Vārds* in Liepāja, *Novaja gazeta* (Russian) in Jelgava, *Zemgales Ziņas* in Jelgava, *Druva* in Cēsis and *Liesma* in Valmiera. These are Latvia's largest regional newspapers. Also included were *Jelgavas Rīta Avīze* (now known as *Jelgavas Avīze*) in Jelgava and *Ventas Balss* in Ventspils. A questionnaire was designed (see appendix), and at each newspaper, the plan was to interview the editor in chief, at least two section editors who deal with political issues, two commentators (provided that the newspapers had commentators), and three reporters – eight people in all from each newspaper. A total of 104 interviews were planned, and 82 were conducted (in the remaining cases, individuals declined to be interviewed, and at some newspapers, including *Jelgavas Avīze* and *Novaja gazeta*, there were fewer than eight editorial employees). This is unquestionably a sufficiently representative cohort to obtain a sense of the situation.

First it must be said that the newspaper *Diena* is published by the stock company “Diena”, in which 63% of shares are owned by the Swedish stock company “Bonnier”. The stock company also holds 100% control over SIA “Zemgales Ziņas”, which publishes an eponymous newspaper, and over *Novaja gazeta*.

*Latvijas Avīze* is published by the stock company “Lauku Avīze” which, according to information in the news media,<sup>38</sup> actually belongs to the stock company “Ventbunkers”. It is one of the companies in the so-called “Ventspils group”, which is believed to be largely controlled by the chairman of the Ventspils City Council, Aivars Lembergs. In the Latvian Company Register, however, the only owner of the stock company “Lauku Avīze” is shown to be its board chairman, Viesturs Serdāns.

Another company from the “Ventspils group” – the stock company “Ventspils nafta” – holds 100% control over SIA “Mediju nams”, which publishes *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* and *Jelgavas Avīze*. *Vesti segodnja* is published by SIA “Fenster”, *Chas* – by SIA “Izdevniecības nams Petits”, *Million* and *Ventas Balss* – by a single individual, although formally the two papers are also published by a limited liability company, and *Kurzemes Vārds*, *Druva* and *Liesma* – by limited liability companies which are co-owned by employees of the relevant newspapers.

The study showed that the structure of ownership has a serious influence on editorial autonomy. Western investors are positive participants in this process, because they support editorial autonomy. Latvian investors have been active in shaping policy

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<sup>38</sup> See Rulle, B. “Lētas VN akcijas izdevīgas īpašniekiem: Valstij esot pasīva mazā akcionāra loma, privātpašnieku vadītā Ventspils nafta audzējusi biznesa muskuļus” (Cheap VN shares advantageous to owners: State said to have passive role of small shareholder, private owners of Ventspils nafta have strengthened their business muscles), *Diena*, 11 July 2002; see also Arāja, D. “Ventspilnieki atklājas kā Lauku Avīzes iespējamie īstie īpašnieki” (Ventspils representatives revealed to be possible true owners of *Lauku Avīze*), *Diena*, 19 June 2003; see also Rulle, B. and D. Arāja. “Sakritības liek domāt par Ventbunkeru kā patieso Latvijas Avīzes īpašnieku” (Coincidences suggest Ventbunkers is true owner of *Latvijas Avīze*), *Diena*, 10 September 2004.

(with a few exceptions in the regional and local media, and that is particularly true at those newspapers which are owned by their own journalists). The most vivid example in this case is *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*. Interviews made it clear that its publishers see the paper as a political instrument, not as a long-term project in the media business.

This was also seen in the content analysis of news reports, commentaries and statements of views in the most influential Latvian daily newspapers – a process which involved the counting up of positive, negative and neutral assessments of the government in May 2004. That was the time when the government was deciding on privatisation of the Latvijas Krājbanka bank – a process which significantly affected the interests of the so-called “Ventspils Group”, including Ventspils-based shareholders in the bank (compare answers in *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* to the question of support for the interests of narrow political and economic groupings). It was precisely in the articles of *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* that researchers found distinctively and comparatively larger numbers of negative evaluations – 93, as opposed to 35 neutral and 15 positive assessments. In *Diena* and *Latvijas Avīze* what was then *Lauku Avīze*, by contrast, there were only six and two negative assessments respectively. Assessments of the government in *Diena* were dominated by neutral evaluations – 13, in all, with just four negative assessments. In *Lauku Avīze*, there was one positive and one neutral judgment. This points to something that is typical in what is now *Latvijas Avīze* – a reticence in taking a specific position on matters such as major privatisation processes and other conflicts of an economic nature.

When it comes to Russian publishers, journalists and readers, most of the process is dominated by an ethnic and/or non-Western culture. Their interests and activities in publishing and reading newspapers are generally speaking influenced by their comparatively lower level of integration into Latvia’s society. Newspapers that are financed by Western investors (*Novaja gazeta*) are more likely to support the integration of society, emphasising primarily those things which bring people together. The problem for regional and local newspapers, for their part, is often their excessively close link to local governments.

The study also demonstrated, however, that there are two other decisive factors in determining editorial autonomy. First of all, there is the matter of the financial independence of the newspaper. Does the newspaper make a profit? Is it a long-term project for the publisher in the media business, or is it just an instrument in pursuit of narrowly defined political and economic goals in areas such as the privatisation of state-owned properties? The first step here is a ban against hidden advertising at the level of individual journalists, as well as the entire newspaper and publishing company. In the long term, hidden advertising provides no advantages to publishers or newspapers, because it affects the believability and trustworthiness that is the most important capital of a newspaper. By extension, it also affects the finances of the paper.

Second, there is the position which senior editors, and particularly the editor in chief, take with respect to editorial autonomy, editorial line and the criteria which govern the quality of journalism. Do they understand that these are absolute prerequisites if a newspaper is to be successful from the perspective of society, not just business? High professional standards in journalism are better upheld at those newspapers where there is professional and regular quality management within editorial structures. Elsewhere, one finds weak understanding of such basic concepts as censorship, self-censorship and self-control. It has to be said that there have been structural problems within editorial structures and in relations with the management or publishers in some of those media outlets which belong to Western investors, too.

Let us now turn to the answers which were given to two of the questions on the questionnaire. The most important answers are emphasised in bold print.

### **The editorial line of newspapers**

“What is your newspaper’s ideological position? Do other newspapers in Latvia have such a position? Was your position dictated by your publisher? Are the newspaper’s ideological principles formulated in a document, have they been announced publicly? How do they manifest themselves in your newspaper’s operations, how do they influence your work?”

- *Diena*

**Sarmīte Ēlerte, editor in chief:** “We identify ourselves with a liberal and democratic system of values. That has certainly appeared in the political suggestions that we make in terms of stating those parties which people should or should not vote for. That has appeared directly in pre-election articles. **Our position has never been influenced by the publisher.** When it comes to the **vision and mission** of the newspaper *Diena*, these are developed by the newspaper’s board, as well as by the board of the stock company, which represents the publishers. The strategic documents were drafted in 2000. In 1997 and 1998, the newspaper formulated nine elements that are known as the goals and responsibilities of *Diena*. The owners and founders of *Diena* have never attempts to influence the paper or insist on specific coordinates of values. The traditions of Scandinavian publishers have historically provided for enormous editorial independence. That is one of the cornerstones in the principle that is freedom of speech. Any attempt to influence the positions of the newspaper on important issues could not be a part of this culture of operations among our publishers. Latvia is an example of this. The Bonnier family owns two newspapers – *Dienas Bizness* and *Diena*. There have often been diametrically opposing views in *Dienas Bizness* and *Diena* with respect to how Latvia should develop.”

**Deputy editor in chief Māra Miķelsone** had this to say: “We certainly do not defend the principles of an authoritarian state. Competition among various entities promotes development more rapidly than a situation in which there are authoritarian instructions, in which the state regulates economic development and determines what is to be developed and what is not to be developed. Our newspaper upholds this principle, and if you read our newspaper regularly, then it should be evident to you. We fight against corruption in all of its manifestations, particularly in terms of political corruption. A free market can survive only in a country where the rule of law prevails. Latvia needs a civil society which is able to organise itself. To be sure, this idea about the civil society lead to the next issue – NGOs. That is a segment which we really defend. We want the sector to develop more intensively in Latvia.”

**Pauls Raudseps, editor of the commentary section,** was wise in noting that “this is also a way that readers can check the extent to which the things that we say are in line with these principles. No one – no individual, no organisation – can ever be objective. We can, however, try to be as varied as possible, and that is what we do.”

**Commentator Askolds Rodins** was not sure about this: “I think that the position is defined somewhere, I believe that it is so.”

**One of two reporters who asked to be anonymous** said something similar: “Yes, the fact is that we are a centrist newspaper. Is there a legal document to that effect? I do not know, I cannot tell you whether it is so or not. As is the case in any company, it is important to set out a goal. Only in pursuit of that goal can you achieve results.”

**The other anonymous reporter** was also secretive: “That’s a question that you should pose to the management of the newspaper. I do not know whether the ideological position of *Diena* is set out in legal documents. I do not wish to speak about areas with which I am not completely familiar.”

- *Latvijas Avīze*

**Voldemārs Krustiņš, chairman of the newspaper’s editorial council:** “We have not set out any ironclad political programme which in one way or another coincides with the programme of a party or a political force. We do not want to say that we have a principle that can never be changed. My personal position is that we must not denounce a political force, we must denounce specific things which it does. If the political force is wise, then I don’t care whether it’s in government or opposition. Our newspaper’s internal position, one which employees must know, is that we are a nationalist and conservative newspaper. I really do not want us to stick entirely to the nationalist line, however. I think that the future of the newspaper lies in the kind of newspaper that it already is. Within the European Union, I think that there will be greater confrontations over the European constitution, about things like that. All of the contradictions are becoming more detailed, **the issue of sovereignty** will be one such matter. Latvia does not need to accept things that it does not need. In this context, I think that *Latvijas Avīze* will differ from the others.”

**Editor in chief Linda Rasa:** “We are a nationalist and conservative newspaper which defends basic national values and identities. We make that clear in the subscriptions catalogue for the press, we make it clear in our advertising. This idea was developed by Voldemārs Krustiņš, and over the last few years it has become more stable, more expansive. My work is influenced by this fact in the sense that it helps me to organise and plan my work. If you know the overarching and basic goal of the newspaper, then you know which areas of events should be the focus of your attention. That helps in setting out priorities.”

**Journalist Ilze Kuzmina** both agreed and disagreed with the firm professional backbone of the newspaper: “*Lauku Avīze* [*Latvijas Avīze*] has a very distinct nationalist line. We oppose pro-Russian parties, we oppose any liberalisation of laws on education and citizenship. We do not believe that the process of naturalisation should be made any easier, that the exams should be made easier. We also take a position against whingeing and wailing. We do not support whingeing pensioners, for instance. We also write about farmers who have achieved a lot with their work, determination and ambition, not with whingeing about the idea that nothing is any good. There is no piece of paper which says that we support nationalist values, but if you work here, you get the sense of the position. Those who work here largely agree with it. Sometimes my position may be a bit more moderate, and then I have to make my way between that which my bosses want and that which I want. Krustiņš, for instance, has a very strict position. Any letters or statements from pro-Russian MPs are lies, as far as he is concerned, but I would call it tendentious information. If I put that into the paper, then I have to listen to him saying ‘Again with the tendentious information! Lies, lies, lies!’ But I try to write as I see fit.”

**Dace Terzena, editor of the newspaper’s supplement “Mājas Viesis” (Guest at Home):** “Our focus is on national pride, national identity and national values, now, of course, in the context of European Union values. In this process of globalisation, *Lauku Avīze* [*Latvijas Avīze*] distinctly stresses national values, those things that are of importance to the Latvians. I think that the direction, the trend has been specified by the publisher. This position, this overall impression of our newspaper, is promoted

by the everyday work of the editorial structure. We have meetings, we discuss the positions that are taken in important articles, we discuss the direction which interviews should take.”

**Māris Antonēvičs, the paper’s political editor**, agreed and had specific knowledge: “We are a nationalist and conservative newspaper. That is evident in the newspaper’s contents and in our staff meetings. I think that our readers understand it, we don’t have to set out that position in any concrete form. We have no concrete model in splitting off the editorial structure from the publisher, although the situation is changing gradually. The publisher is more interested in financial issues, although he also attends our staff meetings, of course (and here I am speaking of Viesturs Serdāns). Editorial and content issues are left largely up to the editorial council, but I would not say that these areas are strictly kept separate from one another.”

**Commentator Ivars Andiņš** clearly separated out **populism**: “As far as I am concerned, the word ‘ideological’ applies specifically to ideology. I work mostly in the area of economic and social issues, and there is not much ideology there. Sometimes perhaps I conclude that something should happen in this way or that way, but in most of my work, that is not the case. To be sure, we do have an overarching line with respect to the subjects that we cover. That is clearly where the ideological position influences articles, that has been specified by the publisher. I cannot tell you whether the publisher has formulated the ideological position in documents of some kind.”

**A section editor who chose to be anonymous**: “Perhaps it changes from time to time, but it is always there. I think that our newspaper’s guidelines have not been publicly declared. I think that they are very evident in articles, in our major commentaries. To a certain extent, our ideological position has been determined by the publisher. We hold regular meetings. We are not forced to do specific things, however, it is all discussed at the meetings.”

**Journalist Māra Libeka** to a certain extent admitted that an ideological direction is replaced with politics: “You know, I have seen nothing in writing. *Lauku Avīze* [*Latvijas Avīze*] has made it absolutely clear that we will help this government, this New Era-led government, to work. The newspaper might just as well take the opposite ideological position – we must get rid of this government and then accept, let us say, a government that is led by the People’s Party – and then work in that direction.”

**Journalist Iveta Tomšone** admitted that “it is, of course, determined by our management, and we strictly observe and implement those policies. The management is our board chairman, basically it is also the chairman of the [editorial] council.”

- *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*

**Editor in chief Aldis Bērziņš**, about whom it must be noted that he served in that position only until the government of Prime Minister Indulis Emsis (Green and Farmers Alliance) took office: “We do not take the side of those who are in power, we try to influence those who are in power in serving the public interest. We criticise all governments so as to force them to act. To be sure, the position of the newspaper has been agreed with the publisher, but the position as such, of course, comes from the editorial structure. It has emerged through discussion, through the need to offer this product in the market. The principles are available, if you are interested in them, but they do not contain specific sections. The situation has never been formulated in a completely separate document, it emerges in the context of our development plan and our business plan.”

**Commentator Dainis Lemešonoks** did not really agree: “We do not have a conscious and institutionalised moral position, no set of such principles, but we do have traditions that have existed for years now. Pluralism is the main thing, we allow different kinds of people to express themselves on the basis of the same rules. We do not apply any clichés, any ideological insistence. We are an open stage to a certain extent. We want to uphold the atmosphere of independence to an even greater degree, and that is because of our shareholders, the reputation that we get because of those shareholders. Shareholders always influence political positions, of course, and there are contradictions here. It would be very hard to spit in their direction, however, because if you look at it realistically, then the desire of “Ventspils nafta” to buy the “Preses nams” publishing house rescued our newspaper from financial disaster.”

**Commentator Viktors Avotiņš** stresses other aspects of the issue: “Our ideological programme says that we must reflect things that are happening and the possible consequences of those things in an all-encompassing, objective, hopefully competent and convincing way, one that is accessible to people, one that attracts their interest. I think that this might be the ideological programme for *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*. I’m not saying that our editorial structure is completely free of the publisher, but no one, thank God, has ever tried to regulate me. The editor in chief and I hold similar views, but sometimes his judgments are quite different from mine.”

**Economics editor Rolands Pētersons** made the statement that was closest to the boss’ thinking: “We harshly criticise, we look at what people are doing. This position is a part of our newspaper’s concept, it was designed by the owners, managers and employees of the paper.”

**News editor Māra Matisone** did not know: “I am not aware of whether any ideological positions have been formulated.”

**Journalist Aija Lulle** emphasised something else: “We have declared in our editorials that we stand for the protection of everyone, particularly of those segments of our society which are weakly protected. We are a socially oriented newspaper.”

The answer that was given by **journalist Gunta Skrebele** included a **contradiction**: “We mostly try to defend the common man, the interests of businesspeople.”

- *Vesti segodnja*

**Editor in chief Aleksandr Blinov** stressed: “We focus mostly on the interests of the Russian society, and that is true for political reasons. Most of our readers are Russians. At the same time, however, we also write about Latvians, because they have more problems than the Russians do. We pay more attention to the government.”

**News editor Aleksandr Shunin** was more specific: “I have felt no guidelines in our publication. We focus on that which is in demand in the marketplace, the things that are of interest to our readers, that are of use to them. The publisher [Andrej Kozlov] tells us what he wants to see as our owner, and that is where we must put our emphasis. That doesn’t happen very often, however, and it is offered as a wish, not an order. The only section with which he works more closely is the business section.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous**: “I don’t know whether the position is set out in any documents. I have never seen any such documents.”

**Reporter Jekaterina Pevneva** on her newspaper’s position: “It is meant for the Russian speaking audience.”

**Reporter Igor Mejden** was also semi-open in his response: “Without ideological principles, no newspaper can operate. Our newspaper’s position is determined by the publisher.”

- *Chas*

**News editor Elena Titova** had this to say: “I think that we try to take a specific and balanced position. Our newspaper has its own position on European Union issues, for instance, on education reforms. Readers must receive full information about a situation, readers must come up with their individual conclusions, however. I think that the position of any newspaper is specified by the publisher, that is the publisher’s right. The editorial structure, however, can operate quite freely. Before elections, for instance, the newspaper decides how neutral its position is going to be.”

**Journalist Roman Koksharov** added: “Of great importance is also the fact that we are the Russian press. I think that this direction has been determined by the publisher.”

**Political editor Darja Zhdanova**: “In terms of politics, it means offering deeper and more extensive explanations, explanations from all aspects, the aim is not just to inform. **Our course, our direction? It is clear that we are Russians who live in Latvia.** Less in the way of ideas, more in the way of practical approaches.”

**Commentator Leonid Fedosejev**: “We are concretely oriented toward the middle class and the upper class, and that is why we have more advertising than *Vesti segodnja* does, even though theirs is the higher circulation. I have a fairly draconic contract with the employer, I have lost absolute freedom. We have agreed that in the worst case, if the publisher hates something, then he has the right to eliminate some of my text. He does not, however, have the right to dictate terms to me, to issue orders.”

**Journalist Andrej Mamykin** explained: “In selecting and reporting the news, we always keep in mind the reader, the things that are of importance to him. This includes citizenship issues, education reforms, relations with Russia. We Russians speak the same language here as do Russians in Russia, we are very close to them in terms of culture. I am a citizen of Latvia, but the Russian culture is closer to me. No child selects his parents, and I could not choose my native language and culture. Relations with Russia, and that includes political relations, are very important to me as a journalist, and I see an echo of this in my readers. Our publisher is very close to Western standards, luckily enough he does not interfere, he does not tell us what to publish and what not to publish. Approximately three years ago, a booklet was published which set out what we are, who our readers are.”

- *Druva*

**Editor in chief Dina Kļaviņa**: “Our ideological position is most evident in advance of elections, and we try to define that position in advance, stressing our neutrality. If an article is bought by others, then we always print it with the notation “paid publication”. In that case, the information is provided not by the newspaper, but by someone else. As is the case with many regional newspapers, several of the newspaper’s journalists came together to establish a limited liability company. A total of 11 or 12 people came together to come up with the overall tone. The publisher is not an independent person. The situation is peculiar – more than 50% are journalists and also publishers.”

**SIA “Druva” board chairman Verners Rudzītis** confirmed this: “Each correspondent has his or her individual viewpoint. We do not express the views of the editorial structure, of the publisher.”

Similarly, **commentator Andris Vanadzīņš**: “*Druva* does not have an ideological position, no such position has been defined. Before elections or major campaigns, however, we discuss and reach agreement on what we will do so as to ensure that all

parties have equal rules of the game, how we will ensure self-censorship in relation to **hidden advertising. *Druva* has no hidden advertising at all.**”

**Journalist Laura Pablaka** focused on something else: “I think that *Druva* tries to be politically neutral, and sometimes it is **toothless when it comes to the local government**, toward failures on the part of the City Council, because that is **not of financial advantage**. There are only limitations during election campaigns, when you are not allowed to speak up on behalf of a party. That is seen as the position of the entire newspaper.”

**Journalist Sarmīte Feldmane** added: “The second page of the newspaper is called “Viewpoints, Commentaries”, and that is where all of this appears. The “Journalist’s Column” appears there. **The journalist does not represent the views of the newspaper, although that is how the readers perceive it. Our statutes say that *Druva* is an independent publication.**”

- *Liesma*

**Editor in chief Antra Lāce**: “This position has not been declared in any document. We have set out priorities, and we stick to them, but we do not declare them, we do not discuss them all that often. We have written up our **priorities**, and we reached agreement on this a few years ago. In everyday circumstances, the priorities are manifested in the way that we choose those are as that seem to be of the greatest importance to us. We determine that on the basis of these priorities, and that determines whether an article will be published sooner or later, where it will be placed on the page, etc.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous**, however, had this to say: “Undeniably the editor looks at these things. Whether or not he considers an event to be more important than another event – that is his subjective criterion.”

**Reporter Jūlijs Cukurs**: “The ideological position has not been defined in documents or in our contractual relations.”

**Reporter Andris Briedis** spoke to the **monopoly situation of a local newspaper, which does not demand any clearer ideological profile**: “It would be a sad thing if *Liesma* had a definite and declared ideological line. Of course, the director of SIA “Imanta” [the *Liesma* publisher] can tell you that perhaps you should not have done that, the editor can say that you have not written the story quite properly, but that is OK, it’s just a matter of differing views.”

**Reporter Valentīna Brūniņa**: “I certainly think that one of the most important missions here is objective information.”

- *Zemgales Ziņas*

**Editor in chief Ligita Timma**: “We try to select the middle ground, one that is more or less centrist. That doesn’t mean that we defend the views of one party or another, that we follow along with. We try to take a healthy and objective view at matters, **making use of the prism of what is important to our readers**. We are absolutely neutral in politics. No one from above dictates our views. **Our publisher has influenced our position only in the sense that he has demanded this political neutrality**. We have a column called “ZZ Commentary”, and sometimes when one of our employees has a radically different views from the majority of his or her colleagues, then he or she writes a column called “Viewpoint”. That is not our commentary. Each individual has the right to hold his or her own views, and at our newspaper, no one is forced to accept anyone else’s views.”

**News editor Inga Bērziņa** confirmed this: “Our main position is that we write about those things that are necessary for our readers, the things in which they are interested. We write about important aspects of our city’s development, as well as about our region’s development.”

**Economics editor Aija Rone**, however, sees a problem: “Sadly, *Zemgales Ziņas* does not have a such position, and I think that this is a bit of a problem in our work. We are not really consistent, everyday work is quite chaotic. It all depends on the wishes of the journalist who has collected the facts – the journalist writes as the journalist wishes to write.”

**Commentator Edgars Sauka** confirmed this: “**I myself put in place** the main criteria. If I look at an issue, I look to see whether I have reflected all of the possible viewpoints.”

**Reporter Anna Afanasjeva** knew something else: “Sometimes a permanent and major advertiser visits the publisher, the advertiser asks for help, he says that he needs advertising or something. It happens, and it is idiotic, let us say. Sometimes it happens if you look at the advertising policy. Sometimes the Advertising Department dictates terms, although the reader has to know that the priority is that he must know about the latest information, about local products and such. There is a grey area in our newspaper, and the reader cannot differentiate between news and advertising articles. During election campaigns, anything can happen. The publisher has declared the principle that we must primarily write about those companies which pay, not about other ones.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous** did not explain **what kind** of ideological position there is: “The principles on the basis of which decisions are made are that our commentary section is the most important one. If you read the commentary, you can usually see what is most important not only here, but in all of Latvia. The ideological position is publicly declared in the newspaper, on the commentary page. Our boys are active, the different views are heard and received, and I think that it is fairly heterogeneous, at least they try to make it so. There has been response from the readership, too. The specification of an ideological position is a matter of the publisher’s policies, yes. There have been times when we have been told yes or no, you can do that, you can’t do that, you should look at this thing but not at that thing.”

**Reporter Egita Veinberga**: “We have talked about the idea that our newspaper may be the one which **lacks** such a position. No, the position has not been publicly declared, sadly it has not been declared. I think that is the thing that we lack, although the editor, of course, takes decisions in this area. The newspaper does not have its concrete position, we present the position of our commentators, of course. My view, my position has to be expressed in relation to concrete and specific events or occurrences. It is absolutely clear that it is my view, although I know that my colleagues agree with me.”

- ***Jelgavas Rīta Avīze***

**Editor in chief Maija Laizāne** admitted that “*Jelgavas Rīta Avīze* is a supplement to *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, and so our ideological position is similar. Of course, we defend democratic values. I have never seen a document in which *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* has declared its position.”

**Reporter Kristīne Langenfelde** had a more concrete position: “The idea is that we come together with *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, and it is a parallel position.”

**Reporter Zane Auziņa** noticed that “*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, just like “Preses nams”, does not think much of the People’s Party, while *Diena* likes the People’s Party. Supposedly *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* doesn’t like the People’s Party, doesn’t like the First Party, it doesn’t like these political groupings.”

- *Kurzemes Vārds*

**Deputy editor in chief Edgars Lūsēns** was not concrete in his statement: “Our newspaper’s ideological position has not been formulated or documented anywhere. Ours is an independent newspaper, so we can feel free in expressing any view at all.”

**Journalist Ints Grasis:** “The newspaper has some 25 owners, mostly existing and former journalists. Sadly, no principles have been put on paper. Agreements and plans of action in relation to controversial or problematic issues usually emerge through discussions. Usually this happens during our morning planning meeting, when journalists meet with the editor. I think that if we made our position clear, that might help us to avoid fruitless discussions from time to time.”

**Journalist Sarmīte Pujēna** added that “during election campaigns we do declare that we are politically neutral.”

- *Ventas Balss*

**Executive director Ilze Meiere:** “Our owner clearly wants us to reflect the lives, achievements and activities of the people of Ventspils.”

**Journalist Pēteris Neimanis:** “In a comparatively small town, it is hard to take the side of someone specific.”

**Journalist Līga Gabrāne** was more expansive in her statement: “I don’t think that we lead public thought in any way. I’m more inclined to believe that the ideology of *Ventas Balss* was more influenced by our former editor. She was editor during Soviet times, she was still editor after the restoration of independence. **The only thing is that we try to avoid any conflicts with the local government**, because otherwise either a new newspaper would be set up, or there would be attempts to torpedo us. That doesn’t mean that we never write anything negative or positive. We just don’t try to create a fuss on purpose.”

**Journalist Ilona Kursīte** had this to say in this context: “It is very important to learn to think positively and to ensure that you are in good form.”

- *Million*

The understanding of **executive secretary Zoja Abrazevich:** “Our goal and our mission is to set a sample, to offer advice.”

**A journalist who wished to be anonymous** disagreed: “I work on the basis of the principle that a newspaper is a source of information and fact, not a weapon.”

**Journalist Svetlana Kozhanova** had a different thought: “We defend pensioners, because many of them subscribe to *Million*. Our work is based on their needs and desires. We want the government to index pensions differently, because right now the situation is wrong. People with small pensions receive small increases in the pensions, the larger the pension, the larger the increase. Our newspaper is published and edited by Grigorij Nemcov, he specifies our direction, our ideology.”

- *Novaja gazeta*

**Editor in chief Andrej Muravjov:** “One of our jobs is to preserve the “Russianness”. We want our newspaper to associate with something Russian in the good sense of the word – nothing chauvinistic, but in this specific way. It has been

declared that ours is a newspaper that is published in Russian, which helps people to preserve their Russian nature. I hope that the time will come when differences exist only in the area of culture, in nothing else. There will be different songs and dances, for instance, but nothing more.”

**Reporter Albina Zenevich:** “I know that Latvian and Russian newspapers have different audiences, and that means that we deal with specific issues. As far as I know, this ideological position has not been expressed in documents, in public. At least I have never seen any such document.”

**Reporter Jelena Shaladajeva:** “We have a special column that is called ‘Thoughts’, and there we can express our position on one matter or another. The thing is, though, that this column represents our personal positions. All kinds of things happen each day, they’re organised by one political party or another. We try to watch from the sidelines. Let the events speak for themselves, we just reflect them.”

### **Support for the interests of narrow political and economic groupings**

“Do you think that your newspaper supports the interests of narrow political or economic groupings, as opposed to the overall public interest in Latvia? Please explain your views.”

- ***Diena***

**Editor in chief Sarmīte Ēlerte:** “**I don’t think that liberal and democratic principles can be unified with the interests of any narrow group.** Irrespective of the needs of the moment, we say that 2% of GDP must be given to the army, because Latvia must join NATO. Latvia must join the European Union. Parliamentary democracy is the best system for Latvia’s development. We have always opposed the idea that the Latvian president should be popularly elected. The Latvian language is the state language. An integrated society. Tolerance in any issue. We support liberal politics – the less authority the state has, the less right it has to influence public matters, and particularly the national economy, the better it is for society.”

**Deputy editor in chief Māra Miķelsone:** “Journalists must not represent any interests other than the right of the public to learn the truth about events that seem to be of importance and interest to them. The way in which people interpret things – that is a different matter.”

**Commentary editor Pauls Raudseps** explained: “You will not find a single political party in Latvia which we have not criticised. There are issues with respect to which we support those who move them forward, but that emanates from our principles, not from the idea that we support that specific party or that specific individual. **There is no party that we have never criticised** over stepping back from these principles.”

**Commentator Askolds Rodins** admitted: “If I have to say something bad about someone who I personally like for one reason or another, then I will do so, of course, but my comment will not be as harsh as would be the case if I didn’t care about the individual or did not like him.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous:** “That is one of the main reasons why I can work here – I don’t have to write about narrowly drawn interests.”

Not without reason, **reporter Jara Sizova** told the researchers that “someone from outside of our newspaper could probably offer you a more certain statement about this.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous:** “No, our newspaper certainly does not support any narrow political or economic grouping. I can say that. I believe that the floor at our newspaper is open to absolutely everyone.”

- *Latvijas Avīze*

**Voldemārs Krustiņš, chairman of the editorial board**, was thoughtful about separating out advertising and about the occasional accusations of hidden advertising: “You know, *Latvijas Avīze* can be called Ventspils newspaper, a Bonnier newspaper, an Abramovich newspaper, whatever, depending on how this other person expresses her views. I could suspect that *Diena*, for instance, serves the Swedes, the Bonnier family or some other entity. I do not do so, you know. I am interested in what they support and what they oppose. It may be, after all, that the interests are good and honest, or perhaps they are the interests of Bonnier or [Aivars] Lembergs. An oligarch? A fraud? I think that he is a person with a great mind. Let anyone point to anything which will prove that [*Latvijas Avīze*] represents the views of Ventspils. The newspaper represents the views of the public, because readers easily can tell whether you are writing on behalf of [Andris] Šķēle or Lembergs. Our audience is not stupid, people immediately see the interests that are served.

Right now there are disputes over who owns the newspaper. I’m not interested in that, of interest to me is the content, the differences between one newspaper and another. We have focused little on privatisation, because our audience consists of people who privatise small things, they don’t care who privatised the *Latvijas Krājbanka* bank. The Ventspils group has largely been identified with Aivars Lembergs for all of these years. I am convinced that changes are taking place there, that the group is not a homogeneous structure. To claim that the group, that all of its participants have interests that are absolutely equal, that always coincide – no, that is not the case. I cannot deny that Šķēle was involved with *Lauku Avīze* as a political figure. There were no financial links at all. I can tell you that *Lauku Avīze* has never been financially dependent on anyone. If there is advertising, then it is honestly bought. No one has any privileges. I think that this is why we have survived for all of these years, because **we have demonstrated to people that we have no unpleasant background interests at our newspaper**. I think that this is the key to our success that we have not done anything of that sort. **We are read by various kinds of people, and that is the best guarantee.**

The only possible change is that the newspaper is turning into **a more extensive stock company**. Presently, in the form of Viesturs [Serdāns], **it is very narrow**, the stock company needs to expand. But I don’t want to tell you about this, I don’t know. When I sold my own shares, I announced that I would have nothing more to do with the financing of the newspaper. When I left my job, the treasury of *Lauku Avīze* had one million lats. It is published six times [per week], and at the expense of *Lauku Avīze* itself. Profits decline, of course, but no one finances us, there are no subsidies. We have no loans.

There was only one instance with [Aivars] Lembergs got a gold pin from us. When we didn’t have any money, then Lembergs – and thanks to him – gave us 10 million roubles. We repaid that money honestly, with interest, in three months’ time, it was not charity. Lembergs did it, **he demanded no political benefits in return**, and I respect him for that. If someone wants to buy *Latvijas Avīze*, then he will have to buy it as it is.”

**Editor in chief Linda Rasa** was open in saying that “no one could have any doubt that before the last parliamentary election, we clearly supported New Era. We do not try to criticise them, our position is supportive in various articles – commentary and news alike.”

**Journalist Ilze Kuzmina** spoke about her experience: “Probably we do support such interests. We don’t know anything specific about Ventspils, but there are things to suggest that it might be the case. When I speak to colleagues at *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, I see that support for economic groupings is very specific there. Perhaps that’s because everyone knows it, so there is no reason to hide anything. I don’t feel that in my own work, I’ve never been ordered to write a story differently. Sometimes, when I remember that we supposedly belong to Ventspils, I wonder whether I will be sacked for writing something good about the First Party of Latvia, for instance. Nothing of the sort has happened.”

**Dace Terzena, editor of the “Mājas Viesis” supplement**, spoke about a kind of **professional populism**: “There are moments when there are radical shifts in the life of the state, the government, the national economy, and then the newspaper must express its positions. We ask our readers questions every day. What do you think? What would you do? What is your attitude? We publish all of these things. Certainly our sympathies are evident. I think that it cannot be denied that we try to support New Era, its efforts, its desire to do something on behalf of the public – not blindly, but we do give such support.”

**Political editor Māris Antonēvičs** was laconic, but meaningful: “We represent our readers.”

**Commentator Ivars Andiņš**: “Absolutely not, definitely not. That can be done by **newspapers which have not decided to recoup their own investment.**”

**A section editor who wished to remain anonymous**: “No, we do not support the interests of narrow political groups, this doesn’t affect my job specifically. I cannot deny that our newspaper paved the way for the People’s Party in the elections, but that time has passed, it is no longer the case. Support shifts, but stable values remain – patriotism, national feelings. I think that this is evident in all issues of *Lauku Avīze* [*Latvijas Avīze*].”

**Journalist Māra Libeka** offered a more precise statement: “Absolutely not. I don’t care whether this newspaper belongs to Lembergs or anyone else, just as long as I am freely allowed to express my views, views which correspond to the views of management. I have no reason to claim the contrary.”

**Reporter Iveta Tomsone**: “No, absolutely not.”

- *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*

**Editor in chief Aldis Bērziņš** apparently was not speaking of his publishers – the stock company “Ventspils nafta”, which represents an economic grouping (keyword – “Ventbunkers”), and, by extension, about Aivars Lembergs. Lembergs has never been criticised in the newspaper, and this means that he is a **taboo subject**: “We have never taken a position on behalf of the interests of a political force or economic group, we have never written that they are positive, that they are doing good work. We look for mistakes, we want to force them to do good work. If they’re already doing good work, we want them to do better work. That is why we take a critical position.”

His successor as editor in chief, **Armands Puče**, is more cynical and less professional: “Lots of people still have not come to understand that just as there is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as a free or independent press. [...] There can never be an independent press, because everything is based on economic, business or political interests. [...] someone pays for the process [...], the publisher counts on his political or economic goals. [...] It used to be that the most important owner was “Glavlit” [the Soviet-era institution which ensured that state secrets were not published in the press]. Relations with that institution were based on

so many different scenes that they could easily compete with contemporary scenes which deal with ‘the publisher’.”<sup>39</sup> In response to the more direct question “How would you react if some morning you found that a clever journalist has published true information but has submitted that which is advantageous to the publisher for your acceptance?”, Puče had this response: “I cannot avoid the situation, my job involves controls of that kind, that is why I am paid a salary.”<sup>40</sup>

**Commentator Dainis Lemešonoks** also pointed to the political and economic interests of the publishers, not to the profits of the newspaper: “The press market to a certain extent is upheld by the fear among the political elite that we might end up with just one daily newspaper. When our newspaper was independent, it did not do very well economically, and then along came some shareholders who were prepared to subsidise, to invest. Logically they want to receive something in return, and they want to receive it immediately.”

**Commentator Viktors Avotiņš** spoke of the responsibility of a professionally responsible journalist as an individual on the one hand, and the ideological and political position of the newspaper which he had previously denied and that has not been openly declared on the other hand: “I think that *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* is not completely neutral. Each newspaper in Latvia has an owner, and Latvia is a fairly party-based country. It is in vain to hope that media that are owned by someone will be holy and faultless. To be sure, **their interpretation of politics is in one way or another dependent on the owner**. At *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, I have never been told what to write. I know that I am employed by a specific employer, and I will not degrade the company for which I work. If I do not like something, if I find myself facing **excessive censorship**, then I shall have to leave. As long as that does not happen, I can only blame myself for **self-censorship**. I pay too much attention to the newspaper’s conjuncture. I have to remember that the owners of the newspaper are who they are, but I don’t have to service them, I have felt no such pressure.

*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* plays the role of the socialised press. We represent the little guy, we try to represent him to a certain extent. Positioning is a normal phenomenon, it makes sympathies clear. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* leans more toward New Era and the Farmers Union, even though *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* is also not antagonistic toward the Social Democrats in Riga.”

**Journalist Baiba Lulle** expressed an even more differentiated idea: “I think that we represent the interests of the public, of our readers, but **something is always hushed up, or in any event information touches upon the positions and interests of the owner in one way or another**. That applies only to specific subjects, however, the interests of the owner do not affect other articles. Open the newspaper, and yes, throughout the newspaper you will see a defence of specific interests. There are **subjects, however, such as Laksa** [Arnolds Laksa, then an MP and a former president of Latvijas Krājbanka, which the Ventspils group tried but failed to privatise], **which we monitor, because to a certain extent this has to do with the interests of economic groupings or our owners.**”

- *Vesti segodnja*

**Editor in chief Aleksandr Blinov** continued the subject of **the goals of the publisher**: “No, I don’t think that we do. We have an **owner who allows us to follow the policy of independence, because he knows very well that otherwise he**

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<sup>39</sup> Puče, A. and A. Terzens: “Sporta žurnālists un viņa karjera” (A sports journalist and his career), *Kabinets*, No. 12, 2004, pp. 16 and 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

**will not be able to sell copies of the newspaper. He looks at this issue purely from the economic perspective.** It would be a different situation if we stopped dealing with him entirely, if we started publishing pictures of naked ladies on the cover. Then he would tell us that we are not working properly.”

**News editor Aleksandr Shunin** was less convinced: “No. It’s hard for me to explain this. Let’s stop there – it’s very hard to explain it. I really don’t know.”

**Executive editor Aleksandr Kazakov:** “No, we are a fairly independent newspaper. No one pays us for anything, no party does, Moscow does not, as people sometimes claim. We have an **owner who consults with us quite frequently.** The point here is not a political set of marching orders, the discussion focuses on how we can improve the quality of the newspaper, that’s all.”

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous:** “Well, given that I told you that we focus mostly on the Russian audience, then I suppose that this means that the answer to your question is yes. **We try to defend the interests of the Russian speaking audience.**”

- *Chas*

**Journalist Roman Koksharov** made a deep statement: “Publishing a newspaper is a business, and that means that there are certain economic and political priorities in the process.”

**Commentator Leonid Fedosejev** was more concrete: “In this sense perhaps we are one of the few newspapers to earn money with the information that we sell and the advertising that we receive. We live on the basis of that which we sell.”

**Journalist Andrej Mamykin** spoke about the **professionalism of the publisher, which is based on his experience in journalism:** “Perhaps it appears that someone is defended more than someone else, but that represents the sympathies of the individual journalist. The publisher [Aleksej Shejnin] is the most professional journalist. He entered this business from journalism circles, so I can put the arguments of a journalist on the table, and he will understand me. Perhaps he will not accept my arguments, but he will understand them. I can produce counter-arguments for the publisher every day, and I do.”

- *Druva*

**Commentator Andris Vanadziņš** spoke about the **importance of the structure of ownership:** “Economic and political interests are manifested through the fact that the owners of the newspaper have interests in economics or politics, and they dictate those interests, they implement them through the media. **Journalists themselves are most of the owners of Druva.** There are probably temptations – big money for hidden advertising, that kind of thing. I have been offered money for articles, but there is a good mechanism here. **The Advertising Department watches closely to make sure that we don’t take bread out of their mouths.** If they suspect something, then there is a discussion.”

**Journalist Laura Pablaka** spoke about **the identification of the newspaper with the local government:** “We seem to try to support local businesses. If a new store is opened, if a new company is launched, then we print a photo report at no cost at all. Businesspeople are aware of this, they count on their first advertisement being that kind of thing.

**We have close cooperation with the [Cēsis] City Council, the District Council,** so less often do we say anything bad about them. **It’s almost as if we have joined hands in pursuit of a single goal.**”

- *Liesma*

**Editor in chief Antra Lāce:** “Absolutely not, because we are **financially independent, and our newspaper earns a profit**. Approximately one-half of our profits come from advertising, the rest comes from circulation. That is our specific situation, we are basically independent.”

**A reporter who asked to speak anonymously:** “We try not to represent any such interests. **We try to support the interests of the public, but we suffer from the fact that we receive very little information in return.**”

**Reporter Jūlijs Cukurs** continued with the thought of **the importance of the structure of the ownership:** “We ourselves decide on what to report, what not to report, we consult amongst ourselves. That is because **the journalists themselves are the publishers.**”

With good reason, **reporter Andris Briedis** was self-critical: “To be perfectly honest then there have probably been occasions when we have supported a company or an individual. Sometimes afterward I feel ashamed, I am sorry that this has occurred.”

- *Zemgales Ziņas*

**A reporter who wished to remain anonymous** was equivocal: “Such support is manifested through articles. If you’re in the sphere, in the area of economics with one and the same businesspeople, then you want to lean in their direction to a certain extent. Perhaps that is not the best thing for the reader, but there is such support, yes.”

- *Jelgavas Rīta Avīze*

**Editor in chief Maija Laizāne** innocently responded: “Definitely not. If media represent such interests at all, then they are, of course, financially dependent on these groupings, then they represent the interests of such groupings.”

- *Kurzemes Vārds*

**Deputy editor in chief Edgars Lūsēns:** “We are a newspaper for Liepāja.”

**Journalist Ints Grasis:** “We feel for ordinary people, not government officials or businesspeople.”

**Journalist Sarmīte Pelcmane:** “We are published in two languages, because ever since Soviet times, there has been a significant proportion of Russian speakers in Liepāja. Demand dictates lots of what we do.”

**Journalist Sarmīte Pujēna:** “Near our port, there was some terrible stench in the air which had an unfavourable influence. An economic group was standing behind that process, but we started to speak up, and eventually the issue even ended up in court.”

- *Ventas Balss*

**Executive director Ilze Meiere** would reveal just this much: “**The situation would be different if more than one political party were in power in Ventspils.** The [Ventspils City Council] election was won only by people from one party, and it is hard for me to tell you what would happen if Ventspils were a multi-party town.”

**Editor in chief Gundega Mertena** about her thinking: “This is a regional newspaper, and our functions differ from those of the national press. We can **afford [!] to be less official, less critical.**”

**Journalist Pēteris Neimanis:** We are told that we only write good things about the City Council and about [Aivars] Lembergs, but **readers don't know how to find the fact** that we write about all kinds of things. If **they** [not he] have failed to do something, then we do not close our eyes. We write the truth."

**Journalist Līga Gabrāne,** however did admit that "because **we are very loyal vis-à-vis the local government,** and the government is closely linked to the leading taxpayers, "Ventspils nafta", the port, etc., then automatically **there is one grouping, decisions are taken in a harmonised way.** I think that the fact is that **if we criticised them properly, then we would not survive.**"

**Journalist Laimdota Sēle:** "If you are asking about the people of Ventspils, then they also do not oppose or fight against [those interests]. We are all in one town, many of us know one another, and that could affect our relatives, our family members. **We can't afford to do the things that they do in Riga.**"

**Journalist Ilona Kursīte:** "Sometimes we have heard readers saying that we are a **Lembergs newspaper, but that is not really the case.** The life of our town is simply very closely linked to the work of the City Council, and that work is positive. Why should we write anything else? We write about what is happening, and "sadly", it is positive."

**Journalist Marlena Briede:** "The public interest, the interests of the people of the city of Ventspils and the Ventspils District."

- *Million*

**Executive secretary Zoja Abrazevich** again spoke about **the decisive thing – the goals of the publisher:** "No. Our publisher is also our editor, and our only interest is to make sure that the newspaper can exist."

**Journalist Boris Lavrenov:** "Basically the position for *Million* is that we don't need to support the interests of any political or economic grouping – **unlike other newspapers, where you can really feel someone behind the throne, someone who is interested in, for instance, the privatisation process.**"

**A journalist who wished to remain anonymous** spoke about **financial independence as a prerequisite for editorial autonomy:** "No, because we are independent. The publisher is also the editor, and I don't think that anyone else finances us. We can afford to do that, therefore."

**Journalist Svetlana Kozhanova:** "We allow everyone to have a say."