

Article

# **‘All the Necessary Information is Provided by Russia’s Channels’. Russian-language Radio and TV in Latvia: Audiences and Content**



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## ABSTRACT

**After the Maidan events in Kiev and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, discussions in Latvia expanded regarding the extent to which the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, whose daily information is obtained mainly from Russia's TV channels, can get well-balanced and objective information. Opinion polls showed that a large proportion (41%) of the non-Latvians supported the annexation of Crimea and Russia's President Vladimir Putin's policy (SKDS 2014a). The aim of this article is to analyse the structure of the audiovisual media in the Russian language and media usage habits of the Russian-speaking audience using secondary and primary data. And thereby assess whether diversified information is available in the Russian language to this societal group. The research results show that the Russian-speaking population in Latvia does not feel a need for additional information channels, because they believe that the variety of information obtained from Russia's TV and radio channels is sufficient.**

## INTRODUCTION

Russian-language media is a natural part of the media system in Latvia. After the restoration of independence, it experienced a boom and many new newspapers, TV and radio stations were established. Historically, all non-Latvians speak Russian in their families and everyday life, and the Russian-language media in Latvia offers comprehensive and relevant content in their native language (Zagorovska, Šudņevs 2005). Russian-language media in Latvia also forms public opinion and has the ability to influence the political processes in Latvia.

In the early 21st century, the structure of the audiovisual media in Latvia changed due to an increase in the number of media channels. Technological developments allowed the operators that offer TV pro-

gramming from other countries to enter the media market. The first to be registered was Baltic Channel Ltd in 2002. This is a trans-frontier television company that rebroadcasts several Russian TV channels. As of 2007, the company is owned by the Baltic Media Alliance (BMA), which is one of the most influential media companies in the Baltic states (Springe et al. 2012).

The public broadcasters – Latvian Television and Latvian Radio – develop content for targeting the ethnic minorities; however, they only reach a small part of non-Latvian audience. The media usage trends among ethnic minorities show that the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia prefer Russian TV and radio channels to the content created by the Latvian media.

Reactions to the geopolitical events in neighbouring countries and concerns

about possible Russian aggression toward the Baltic states have made the Russian-speaking audience and the information directed at them a hot topic in Latvian media and political circles. According to the politicians, media consumption is linked to the society's internal and external security questions. In order to reach out to the Russian-speaking people in Latvia, several media policies and projects have been created. The responsibility for involving the Russian-speaking audience was handed to the public broadcasters, which received additional funding in order to create content for the Russian-speaking audience.

Primary and secondary data are used as a basis for the study reflected in this article. The share of the ethnic minority audience in Latvia is measured using statistical and audiovisual media audience data. To analyse the media content and interpret the secondary data, semi-structured qualitative interviews with the managers of the audiovisual media in Latvia were conducted, and the content analysis of news and current affair programmes of the public media channel LR4 was examined.

The study asks,

- 1) What kind of audiovisual media content does the Russian-speaking population in Latvia consume and how do they evaluate it?
- 2) What characterises the content of the news and current affairs on the public radio station LR4 in the Russian language?

Being aware of the fact that a large part of the ethnic minorities in Latvia (Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Jews etc.) receive their daily information from Russian TV channels, the aim of the article is to analyse the habits of media usage and media perception of the Russian-speaking population, and the role of the public broadcasters in the context of the media policy decisions related to the minority audiences.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: DISCUSSING THE MINORITY MEDIA AND ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA (PSM)**

The normative view associates minority media (McQuail 2005, Cola et al. 2015) with the content diversity that is essential for a media system. Specifically, the existence of ethnic minority media in a democratic society has always been based on at least two important aspects: the availability of media content in minority languages and the preservation of the culture of the minorities. Considering ethnic minorities, researchers emphasise the following aspects: changes in a society resulting from migration, the coverage of ethnic minorities in the mainstream media, opportunities to create media for ethnic minorities and media usage habits (Cola et al. 2015, Jõesaar et al. 2013). Minority media usually try to fulfil two objectives: firstly, to promote the sense of belonging of other nationalities, and secondly, to unite the representatives of one particular minority. The development of discussions and studies focused on minority media and audiences is one of the reasons why, instead of a united public sphere (Habermas 1989), separate public sphericules can be seen in a democratic society (Gitlin 1998).

Public media represents both an imagined unity (Stankiewicz 2014) of the population living in a single nation-state and the pluralism of the audience. The special attention and additional funding for the media directed at minorities are usually associated with the responsibility for the public service media reaching all parts of the society. The unique duties of PSM are broadly discussed based on the public value theory (Benington, Moore 2011; Beitika 2015; Dimants 2016).

Taking into account the fact that the market-based media system cannot reflect all the existing economic and cultural interest groups of a society (Curran 1997, Cola et al. 2015) and that economic conditions limit the media's non-economic functions (Hallin 2008), the European Union-wide media policy defines the duties of the public media to

reach all parts of the society and to ensure content in the languages of ethnic minorities (Council of Europe 2007). Since 2000, the strategy that supports cultural diversity has dominated EU public media policy. This approach replaced earlier strategies that ensured the integration of ethnic minorities (1960s–1970s), and programmes related to the idea of multiculturalism (1980s–1990s) (Cola et al. 2015).

According to the data from a number of EU countries, the large investments made in creating public media products addressed to ethnic minorities to cover different varieties of diversity ‘nevertheless show only low levels of success’ (Cola et al. 2015: 87). In other EU countries, ethnic minorities prefer international channels for everyday information retrieval, because the information in the public media does not reflect their interests; moreover – representatives of ethnic minorities are stereotyped in media, there is a lack of the presentation of minority cultures in different genres (Cola et al. 2015).

In Latvia and Estonia, ethnic minorities comprise more than 30% of the population. The ethnic structure and language of the minorities have helped a diverse media group targeted at the Russian-speaking audience to develop. Russian-language media is a part of the media system in Latvia, which was formed based on the neoliberal principles expressed by Nordic corporate press and social responsibility (Balčytienė 2008).

Therefore, the variety of Russian-language media does not belong to the parallel media sphere, which exists alongside the mainstream media (Balčytienė, Vinciūnienė 2012). But there are still reasons for discussing the shared culture of a single country’s population. That is, even when a common history exists, various groups of the society interpret it differently (Jõesaar et al. 2013). The specific character of the small media market in Estonia described by Andres Jõesaar et al. is comparable to the situation in Latvia, where two linguistically separated media markets can be identified.

After the restoration of Latvia’s independence, the issues related to the largest ethno-linguistic groups were not resolved successfully (Nikišins et al. 2014). Knowing that 38% of the population in Latvia are non-Latvians (Central Statistical Bureau 2015), and that Russian TV channels saturated with the Kremlin’s propaganda are very popular in Latvia, the political debate related to Latvian media increasingly deals with the partitioning of the information space (Ozoliņa, Rostoks 2014) and the term ‘two information spaces’ has been used. This represents a situation where the audiences, which are split by language, receive their daily information from different sources, thereby not only receiving asymmetric content, but also perceiving the events in the world and Latvia differently. The hybrid war implemented by Russia and the aggressive information campaigns on the TV channels caused a reassessment of the impact of the neighbour’s information on the polarised Latvian society (NEPLP 2015a).

The content devoted to ethnic minorities and minority languages in small countries and small media markets create a small niche (Jõesaar et al. 2013), but the smaller size of an audience always means smaller investment in content and lower value (Riggins 1992, Napoli 2003). Commercial media are not interested in serving the minority audiences for business reasons (Cola et al. 2015), but the underfunded PSM cannot attract a sufficient share of the minority audience. At the same time, there have been several attempts to increase political influence on the operations and regulatory body of the PSM in Latvia (Dimants 2016), and the rejection of PSM projects for minority audiences demonstrates the lack of political will to support the development of Latvian Television and Latvian Radio (Beitika 2015, Dimants 2016); therefore the limits of media content diversity are determined mostly by the opportunities in the Latvian media market.

## THE CONTEXT: DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS ON MEDIA CONTENT FOR THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING AUDIENCE IN LATVIA

While trying to answer the question of how current events can affect a Latvian society that is split by ethnicity and media usage, the focus of policymakers turned to the media – its content, audience's media usage patterns and the possible effects. In order to answer questions about the media usage of the Russian-speaking population, several studies were conducted and projects addressed to Russian-speaking audience were created.

In this discussion, the main reasons why addressing the Russian-speaking population only with professional and diverse content in Latvian is insufficient were clearly noted. One of the conclusions was related to the expectation that all the inhabitants of Latvia will gradually start consuming media in Latvian. This has not happened because the Russian-speakers prefer information in their own language. It is easier to perceive and understand and it better suits their identity (SKDS 2014b).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the liberal media system in Latvia has enabled businesses related to Russia's commercial and state media to offer a wide range of TV and radio channels and to attract advertising addressed to this audience in Latvia. Thirdly, the under-funding of public media has led to a situation where public media cannot sufficiently address the Russian-speaking audience.

Specific projects, which could reduce the informational isolation of various audience groups, were developed in Latvia. One of the major projects was a public Russian-language media channel (NEPLP 2015a). In 2014, a grant of € 682,399 was made to support Russian-language public media programming, as well as expand public media content on the internet (Vikmanis 2014). However, unlike in Estonia, where the Russian-language TV channel was designed purposefully, the formation of a similar

channel in Latvia was rejected (TVNET 2015), although Latvian Television had already created a project for it.

In the current political situation in Latvia, this was a politically driven decision. It reflects the concerns of the nationalist politicians that increasing the amount of information in the Russian language would not motivate the Russian speakers to learn Latvian and would legitimise Latvia as a bi-communal state. Describing the situation related to the opportunities for speaking to the Russian-speaking audience at the end of 2015, Olga Proskurova, the chief editor of Russian-language content at Latvian Television, admitted that under the current very competitive conditions, when ПБК (Первый Балтийский Канал) has introduced parallel news broadcasts to LTV7, a public TV channel in Russian is necessary (Krūtaine 2015).

In order to evaluate people's attitude regarding the creation of a new Russian-language TV channel, the respondents to a survey carried out by SKDS in November 2014<sup>2</sup> were asked if they support the creation of such a channel, and would they would watch it (SKDS 2014c).

Fifty-three percent of the respondents support the establishment of a new Russian-language TV channel, including 22% who 'fully support' the idea. The creation of such a channel is not supported by 32%, including 17% who fully reject the idea. Greater than average support for the Russian-language TV channel was expressed by respondents aged 35 to 44 years, those with higher education, residents who speak Russian in their families, respondents without Latvian citizenship, survey participants with low or medium incomes, and those living in Latgale.

By contrast, a negative attitude was more often expressed by those aged 18 to 24 with primary education, respondents who speak Latvian in their families, and those with lower than average incomes.

Assessing the probability that they would watch the TV channel, 39% of the respondents said the probability is gener-

1 Public opinion survey data has been provided to the author of this article by National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP).

2 The survey data provided by NEPLP.

ally high ('very likely' and 'rather great probability'), but almost a half (49%) said that the probability is low. It should be noted that about 1/3 said it was 'very unlikely' that they would watch the newly created channel.

Of the respondents, 59% believed that the probability that they would watch such a TV channel is generally high, including 28% respondents who said that the probability is very high. 63% of the people living in Latgale said there was a high probability that they would watch a newly Russian-language TV channel. In other regions, fewer respondents evaluated this probability as high (28–40%).

During the study, nine focus groups were organised in the largest Latvian cities about an establishment of a Russian-language TV channel (SKDS 2014b). The respondents (people who mostly watch Russian TV channels and rarely watch LTV7 broadcasts) admitted that they are motivated to watch television programmes because they can receive information in their native language, are interested in non-moralising, neutral content, and the values expressed in the programming matched their perception of life.

The respondents' attitudes towards a new Russian-language TV channel were different from the quantitative survey, as many focus group participants stressed that the existing TV channels offer sufficiently diversified content and a new TV channel is not needed. Respondents admitted that watching the Russian TV channels is a strong habit. They are aware that it is important to keep track of various information channels in order to assess and compare the information provided, but believe that this diverse range of information sources is already available. Focus group participants suggested that the current LTV channel offerings could be improved by Russian-language broadcasts that attracted professional, charismatic leaders, with a greater emphasis on positive information. LTV7's content should be supplemented by the arts, culture, gardening, youth and children's programming, which are

fields of interest for the Russian-speaking audience.

Some of the participants also expressed suspicions about the goals of the new channel and thought it might be an attempt to distract from Russian TV channels and 'implant biased information'. The participants also thought that the channel could represent the interests of the leading politicians and attempt to express subjective information and divide the society. The respondents did not believe that a high-quality and successful information channel, which can compete with the Russia's channels, could be launched with such a small budget.

I believe that the creation of Russian-language content on LTV7 is a waste of taxpayers' money. What's the sense of putting some broadcasts in Russian onto a Latvian channel, if there are dozens of channels in Russian? The money for public service broadcasting in Russian should have been given to those which already have an audience and the channels where these broadcasts can be shown. Since the law in Latvia provides a small portion of public funds to be invested in the content of commercial media, we have submitted original projects to competitions. Unfortunately, unsuccessfully. Seeing that the audience is interested in broadcasts generated in Latvia, we have decided to look for sponsors and make our own original projects. (Ginta Krivma, Head of pan-Baltic Development, BMA.)

The media policy documents in Latvia do not focus on content addressed to the audiences comprised of ethnic minorities. In the *National Strategy of Electronic Media Development 2012–2017* (NEPLP 2012), the requirement for retaining the Latvian language is highlighted in order to promote Latvian cultural identity. The strategy pro-

vides for increasing the role of public service media to strengthen the Latvian language and the Latgalian dialect (one of the dialects of Latvian language). The document mentions the need for ensuring an 'information space in Latvian' throughout Latvia. Thus, the current situation in the electronic media field has created a contradictory picture: on the one hand, the documents of the national strategy stress the need to strengthen the status of Latvian; on the other, in the name of long-term integration, high-quality Russian-language content should be created, in order to compete with the influential and well-financed Russian TV channels (NEPLP 2015a, NEPLP 2015b).

In the strategy, the following directions for further development are emphasised: increasing content in Latgalian; the accessibility of public service media in Latvia's border areas; broadcasting authorisation for those media organisations that offer programming mostly produced in Latvia; allocating broadcasting permits based on the reputation of the owner of the media organisation; ensuring national defence and security interests. Such specific objectives can be understood as reactions to the perceived high proportion of Russian TV and radio channels in the Latvian audiovisual media system, and the impact of Russian-language media content on the non-Latvian audience living in Latvia.

### **AUDIENCE FOR RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE TV CHANNELS IN LATVIA**

The TV market in Latvia is very concentrated. It is dominated by three companies: MTG with six channels (TV3, TV3+, TV6, LNT, TV5, Kanāls2), BMA (represents Russian TV channels PBK, NTV Mir Baltic, REN Baltija, 1st Baltic Music Channel [1BM]) and Latvian public television (LTV1 and LTV7). Russian TV channels are also represented by Baltic Media Union Ltd. that provides the RTR Rossiya, RTR Planeta channels, CTC Baltic, the KHL sports channel, the TDK entertainment channel.

The TNS Latvia study on the TV audience included 22 channels available in

Latvia. Eight of these offer information and entertainment in Latvian (public media channels LTV1 and LTV7, TV3, TV6, LNT, Channel 2, Re:TV, RigaTV24), eight channels are in Russian (NTV Mir Baltic, PBK REN TV Baltic, 1BM, CTC Baltic States, RTR Planeta Baltija, TV3 +, TV5), and others are cross-border international film, music or documentary channels (such as FOX, National Geographic, Sony Entertainment etc.). Only two of the aforementioned Russian-language channels are located in Latvia – TV5 and TV3+. News, discussions and current affairs programming in Russian is also offered by the public broadcaster LTV7. The rest of the content on Russian-language channels is created in Russia, but the PBK news service is used by several programmes, including the news programme *Latvian Time*.

The survey carried out by the marketing and public opinion research centre SKDS indicates that 79% of the Latvian population get their news and current events from television (SKDS 2014c)<sup>3</sup>. Television is the main source of information for most women, respondents older than 35, those who speak Russian in their families and those without Latvian citizenship.

As far as the trustworthiness of the information provided by TV channels, the Latvian population generally relies on the Latvian streaming channels TV3 (64%) and LTV1 (60%), while 51% trust LTV7 and 43% trust PBK, fewer people trust RTR Rossiya (35%), NTV Mir Baltic (31%) and Ren TV Baltic (28%).

The Russian-speaking respondents most often said that they trust the information provided by PBK (77%), RTR Rossiya (66%) and TV5 (61%). NTV Mir Baltic is trusted by 55% of respondents and Ren TV Baltic by 46% of respondents.

PBK is the most popular Russian-language channel. It has a stable audience and influence – its share of viewing time ranges from 8.7% to 11.3%. A comparison of the share of viewing time of the other Russian language TV channels in Latvia (see **Table 1**)

3 Research data provided by NEPLP.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
PBK	10.1	10.4	10.7	11.2	10.1	11.3	10.3	9.8	9.6	8.7
TV5 Riga	2.8	2.2	3.3	4.4	3.9	4.3	4.6	3.5	4.3	4.2
TV3+	4	4.9	4	3.3	3.6	4.3	3.9	3.7	4.1	3.5
Ren TB Baltija	1.7	2	2.5	2.5	2.4	3.2	4.2	4.7	4.3	3.3
PBMK;1BM		0.3	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.3
LTV7	5.3	3.9	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.1	3.9	3.2	3.8	2.7
RTR Planeta Baltija				3.4	4.8	4.5	2.8	5.7	5	6.7
NTV Mir Latvija						5.1	6.2	6.8	7.7	7.6
CTC Baltija							0.3	0.4	0.6	0.7

**TABLE 1. Time spent watching Russian-language TV channels (share %) 2006–2015 (TNS Latvia).**



shows that their shares of viewing time are similar – an average of 3–4%. Within a few years, the share of viewing time has increased for two Russian TV channels – NTV Mir Latvia (7.6%) and RTR Planeta Baltiya (6.7%).

The share of viewing time for the Russian-language channels created in Latvia (TV3+ and TV5, the latter has been closed since 31 March 2016 for business-related reasons) is similar to the TV channels broadcasting from Russia. It means that Russian-speaking TV audience uses a number of channels with similar content.

The audience reached by the Russian-language channels differs (see **Table 2**). Although PBK's share of viewing time is twice as high as the other Russian-language channels, its audience is only 5–7% higher than the other streaming channels in Russian. PBK reaches from 24% to 27% of all viewers in Latvia each day, while the other channels broadcasted in Russian reach 11% to 22% of the TV viewers in Latvia.

There is a stable audience that watches a number of Russian-language TV channels daily. This is confirmed by the analysis of the audience structure of the BMA. In 2015, PBK's audience consisted mostly of viewers between the ages of 50 and 59 (32%), and older than 60 years (30%). And more women watch this channel (61%; men 39%). Most PBK viewers live in Latvian cities (45%) or in Riga (41%). Significantly, 23% of PBK's audience are Latvians, and 77% belong to other nationalities. The audience structure of REN TV Baltic and NTV Mir Baltic is almost identical, with a tendency to rise in the group aged between 60 and 69 years. Young people have little interest in the most popular Russian TV channels – only 2–4% of people aged 10 to 30 years watch them.

The news programmes on PBK attract the largest share of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia. The local news programme *Latvian Time* is watched

more than the evening news programme *Vremya* from Russia. Latvian news also 'warms up' the audience for the popular evening shows on Russian TV and helps us to maintain a stable share of viewing time. We have estimated that the LTV7 broadcasts in Russian 'take' about 3–4% of the existing audience away from our programmes. (Sergej Klimakov, the head of BMA Research pan-Baltics.)

The data on the audience for news and current affairs in Russian shows the interest of non-Latvians in Latvian events (see the **Table 3**). The most popular programmes are the PBK news broadcasts. The news programme *Latvian Time* was watched by more than 100,000 viewers every weekday in January 2016 and is the most popular show on this channel. The PBK *Evening Interview* show was watched by an average of 80,000 viewers and the commentary programme *Behind the Scene* reached an average of 78,000 viewers. The most popular news programme on the other channels is *Evening@22* on TV5 (35,000 spectators). The audience of the public media channel LTV7 Russian broadcasts is relatively small, ranging from 25,000 for the news programme *Evening Today* to 14,000 for the interviews and discussion programmes.

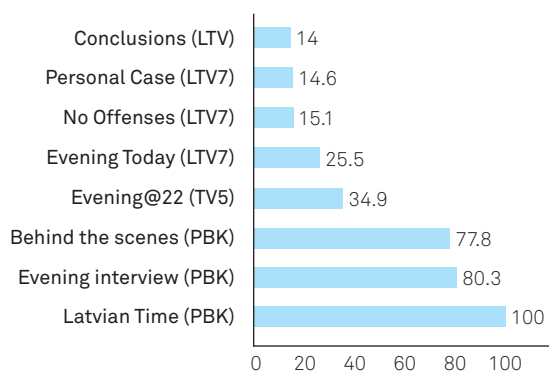
The television market in Latvia is dominated by MTG Latvia with six channels (29.3% of viewing time) and BMA with five channels (19% of viewing time). Public television channels (LTV1 and LTV7) attract relatively fewer viewers and their common timeshare is 12.9% (TNS Latvia 2016b).

### **THE AUDIENCE FOR THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES ON CHANNEL LTV 7**

In order to increase the offering of Latvian-generated content for the Russian-speaking population, the funding for the public TV channel LTV7 was increased in 2014. Several new programmes were created –

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
PBK	15	18	19	20	20	21	21	23	25	22	24	22	20
TV5 Riga	1	5	7	6	6	6	4	7	9	9	9	10	9
TV3+				5	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	7
Ren TB Baltija						4	4	5	6	5	7	6	9
PBMK;1BM							1	1	1	1	1	1	1
LTV7	7	8	10	10	10	11	10	10	10	10	8	9	6
RTR Planeta Baltija										7	10	9	6
NTV Mir Latvija											11	13	13
CTC Baltija												1	1

**TABLE 2. The average audience reached per day (daily reach %) 2001–2013 (TNS Latvia/TAM).**



**TABLE 3. The audience for news, current affairs and discussion programmes in Russian ([000], January 2016; BMA).**

an informational morning show called *This Morning*, analytical programme called *Personal Thing*, *Without Insults* with an interview format, and *Conclusions*, which is a discussion programme. An informative and entertaining afternoon programme called *Life Today* was created in 2015.

These investments forced LTV7 to fulfil a very difficult assignment. The content of this channel consists mostly of translated popular sports events; and it offers educational documentaries, series and programmes for young people in the Latvian language. In this line-up, the programmes in Russian had to attract the target audience to such a degree that viewers would watch LTV7, particularly in the time targeting them.

The data collected about the Russian audience of LTV7 (**Table 4**) indicates that the new content in Russian has gradually increased the number of viewers, as well as the percentage of the Russian-speaking viewers of LTV7. In 2014, there were 205 broadcasts in Russian on LTV; in 2015 there were 575 programmes. The broadcasting volumes in Russian have increased from 196.5 hours in 2014 to 486.4 hours in 2015.

In 2014 LTV7 broadcasts reached 39% of the Russian-speaking audience or 315,800 viewers; in 2015 this increased to 50%, or 405,500 Russian-speaking viewers. The news programme *This Evening* and discussion programme *Conclusions* attracted the most viewers.

Non-Latvians only watch the Russian-language programming on LTV7. If the entire channel is not focused on one audience, the attraction for the Russian-speaking audience is very problematic. We are gradually increasing the number of Russian-speaking viewers but a powerful media brand is needed. It cannot be created if there is no separate channel and online platform in the Russian language. This is the result of the work that has been left undone in the integration

process by Latvian society during the last twenty years. One public media channel cannot integrate the whole society in such a short period of time. (Sergey Nesterov, LTV Board Member for Content.)

The special purpose grant for Russian-language content for LTV7 was maintained in 2016. During 2015, the audience of the Russian language section in the online media platform of Latvia's PSM lsm.lv increased from 11,000 to 25,000 visitors.

### THE STRUCTURE AND THE AUDIENCE OF THE RADIO STATIONS IN LATVIA

Eighty-three percent of Latvians and 73% of non-Latvians (TNS Latvia 2014) listen to the radio in Latvia. The radio market in Latvia is small, saturated and highly fragmented: 44 radio stations offer 69 programmes (BICEPS 2015). Five of these channels broadcast nationally, 11 broadcast regionally and 53 locally. The largest time shares for the each programme on the aforementioned public broadcasters are LR1 (news, discussions and education programmes), LR2 (popular music), LR4 (Russian programme), as well as four commercial radio stations, whose content consists mostly of popular music, news and a few shows (Radio SWH, Radio Skonto, European Hit Radio, Star FM).

The largest players in the radio market are Latvian Radio, the Super FM media group, Radio SWH, Radio Skonto, Star FM, and the MIX FM media group. The total radio audience is stable. According to TNS Latvia survey, in the winter of 2016, an average of 79% of the Latvian population aged 12 to 74 years listened to the radio every week, but 61% of the population listened at least once a day (TNS Latvia 2016a).

The data on 26 radio programmes are available in the TNS study on the radio audience in Latvia. Only ten exceeded 3% of listening time (**Table 5**). The share of listening time of the sixteen of the top 26 radio stations surveyed by TNS Latvia is between 0.1% and 2.9%.

Radio availability for the speakers of

	Non-Latvians (reach %)	Entire audience (reach %)	Non-Latvians (reach 000)	Entire audience (reach 000)
<b>2014 (Total)</b>	<b>39.2</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>315.8</b>	<b>935.6</b>
No Offence	10.3	12.5	83.3	248.4
This Morning	14.6	17.0	117.9	337.4
This Evening	29.2	36.5	235.0	725.7
Personal Case	13.7	17.8	110.7	353.4
Conclusions	13.8	18.5	111.1	368.4
<b>2015 (Total)</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>60.9</b>	<b>405.5</b>	<b>1203.4</b>
No Offence	18.6	23.4	151.1	461.8
This Morning	17.0	21.3	136.8	423.3
This Evening	41.1	51.1	333.2	1010.8
Life Today	23.3	33.3	184.3	654.3
Personal Case	17.2	25.3	139.8	500.7
Conclusions	23.5	29.7	190.6	587.2

**TABLE 4. The audience for LTV7 Russian-language programming in 2014–2015; audience aged 4+ (LTV).**

No	Radio programme	Autumn 2015 AQH share, %	Winter 2016 Winter 2016 AQH share, %	Winter 2016 Weekly audience (Reach, 000);	Weekly audience (Reach, %);
1	LR2 (public radio station, popular music)	18.4	20.3	358	21.2
2	Radio Skonto (commercial channel, popular music)	10.5	11.7	297	17.5
3	LR1 (public radio station)	10.0	9.9	224	13.2
4	Radio SWH (commercial channel, popular music)	6.4	6.4	199	11.8
5	LR4 (public radio, Russian-language)	4.7	5.7	130	7.7
6	TOP Radio (commercial, Russian)	4.3	4.7	127	7.5
7	EHR (European Hit Radio, commercial)	4.6	4.3	182	10.7
8	Star FM (commercial channel, popular music)	4.4	3.8	178	10.5
9	Hiti Rossii/Russkoe Radio (commercial Russian)	3.3	3.3	150	8.9
10	SWH+ (commercial Russian)	2.8	3.1	133	7.8

**TABLE 5. The share of listening time for the most popular radio programmes in Latvia (AQH share, % [average quarter-hour share – the percentage of radio listeners]; TNS Latvia).**

different languages is characterised by the data on the languages of radio programmes. According to licenses issued by the EMMC (BICEPS 2015), seven radio programmes broadcast in Latvian; 90% of the broadcasting time for 25 programmes is broadcast in Latvian; for 10 programmes, the Latvian-language content varies between 55% and 80%; and for 10 programmes, the content is 50% / 50% (Latvian language / foreign language [usually Russian]). The broadcast language of nine radio programmes is predominantly Russian and eight radio programmes broadcast only in Russian. The earlier practices for issuing licenses have resulted in a situation where several radio stations produced programmes that did not conform to their broadcasting permit, i.e. programming in Latvian was not offered to the necessary extent and was only broadcasted formally, usually at night.

In the TNS Latvia survey, of the 26 top radio programmes, 11 broadcast in Russian: public radio station LR4, Radio SWH +, Hiti Rossii/Russkoe Radio, Top Radio, Retro FM, Autoradio, Radio Mix FM, Europa Plus / Mix FM Dance, Jumor FM, Radio Baltkom, Radio Pik and Capital FM.

Some of these radio stations retransmit programmes from broadcasters in Russia, i.e. their online sites are linked to Russian radio stations. For example, Hiti Rossii/Russkoe Radio, which is a part of the JSC Super FM, has no website in Latvian at all.

The transmissions of Russian radio programming include advertisements targeting the Latvian audience. This business model has created conflicts in the radio market since it creates unfair competition. From a business point of view, inserting commercials in programming from another country is much more profitable than producing original programmes. It also allows lower advertising prices to be offered (BICEPS 2015). Therefore, amendments to the laws were drafted in 2014. Now, 90% of the weekly content that is broadcast must be produced by the radio station, except for music and advertising. If the radio station has not received a retransmission license it

is prohibited from including the content of other radio programmes.

In 2015, NEPLP drafted amendments to the legislation that would restrict hidden retransmission and more clearly define the language of the radio station, by providing the choice of broadcasting in Latvian or a foreign language. If these amendments are adopted, nine radio stations will broadcast in Latvian, but 19 will remain wholly or mainly Russian-speaking. LR4 is transmitted throughout Latvia, eight radio stations in Russian are available in Riga and its vicinity (Radio SWH Plus, Baltkom Radio, Radio Mix FM, Radio PIK etc.); and ten programmes in Russian are available throughout Latvia. These amendments to the electronic media law have yet to be adopted because one of the players in the radio market challenged the decision in the Constitutional Court; the Latvian Parliament is expecting a decision in the case in 2016.

The attitude of non-Latvians towards listening to the radio is similar to the attitude towards watching TV. Radio is a background media, people mostly listen to the commercial radio stations to relax, have fun, improve their mood and keep informed (Factum Group 2012; SKDS 2014c). Some of the respondents confirm their loyalty to LR4 and the quality of its content. But others in the Russian-speaking population admit that they do not listen to LR4 because they do not like the political content, they are not in the habit of listening to this programme, or they do not like the music.

In 2016, the inhabitants of Latvia have access to different radio stations in Latvian and Russian. Most radio programmes in Russian provide news and music, but some also provide high-quality discussions and educational programming. In turn, the changes in the regulatory framework highlight a situation in which the impact of the Russian radio stations on the structure of the radio stations in Latvia is disproportionately large.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS CONTENT ON THE PUBLIC RADIO STATION LR4**

The public radio station LR4 in the Russian language attracts the largest share of the non-Latvian audience. A two-week programme analysis was conducted in order to determine the key trends of the content devoted to news and current affairs on LR4, the Russian-language public radio station. The study included the following programmes and 270 broadcasts: news on the half hour on weekdays; *Dome Square*, an informative morning musical programme; *Day After Day*, an educational programme; and *Open Question*, a discussion programme. The study was conducted between 9 and 7 March 2015 and again between 12 and 18 October 2015.

In the analysis of the LR4 programmes (**Table 6**), the greatest attention was paid to political events and the presentation of political views (35%); other important topics were macroeconomics (13%) and microeconomics (8%). The other research topics were dealt with only a few times during the survey period.

Overall, the programme topics are homogeneous; they have a rather narrow focus on political and economic developments. This could indicate that public broadcasting journalists consider it their obligation to thoroughly track and inform listeners about the activities of politicians and officials.

The second explanation for the thematic homogeneity of the LR4 broadcasts could be attributed to 'lazy' journalism. Journalists include the materials and themes proposed by the most active and resourceful public institutions in the news and documentary programming.

An analysis of the origins of the news indicates that LR4 informative programmes include news about the planned activities of officials, as well as news about regular events (26%). The proportion of information-based journalism produced by public relations professionals is indicated by many of the pseudo-events (26%). The LR4 programmers monitor previously aired news, create follow-up stories (28%); and a relatively small number of journalists search for information themselves (16%).

Most of the foreign information is comprised of unplanned events (34%) because information on accidents and crimes is provided by the international news agencies. Foreign news also plays an important role in the continuation of news and the development of events (24%), including information on planned events (21%), pseudo-events (13%) and journalist-based information (e.g. reporters' stories from Brussels; 8%).

Official sources predominate (33%). The actors, i.e. people at the centre of events or those implementing some project, are the sources for 20% of the storylines. The use of these people as sources reflects the journalists' efforts to complement official opinions with the public's view. However, considering the great share of pseudo-events in this group, it is evident that the people who organise social advertising campaigns, conferences or other events are among the sources. News agencies comprise 18% of the sources, and experts comprise 10%.

LR4 broadcasts diverse, topical and contemporary programming, thereby providing listeners with information that is unavailable on other radio stations. However, there is a lack of original topics, and no desire to report on events not promoted by the organisers or responsible institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The structure of the audiovisual media in Latvia and the analysis of the number of channels show that more than half of the available and most popular TV and radio stations are in Russian. From the language point of view, the amount of media available to the population of Latvia does not conform to the public structure. This situation is caused by the lack of a clear media policy, liberal media regulation and oligopolistic competition in the audiovisual media market.

Evaluating the channel structure according to viewing time and channel language, it can be concluded that more than 1/3, or 8 out of the 22 TV channels (1BM,

3+, CTC Baltics, NTV Mir Baltic, PBK, REN TV Baltic, RTR Planeta Baltija, TV5) that are included in the research done by TNS Latvia broadcast exclusively in Russian. In February 2016 their total share of viewing time was 33.6% (TNS Latvia 2016a). During the same period of time, the total share of the viewing time for the channels streaming in Latvian (LTV1, LTV7 [a part of the program is in Russian], LNT, TV3, and TV6) was 34.6%. This data shows the impact of Russian channels in Latvia.

An analysis of the structure of the radio stations shows that the situation is similar to the data for TV viewing: 18 of the national channels offered in Latvia broadcast in Russian and another 10 channels partly broadcast in Russian. Eleven of the 26 radio stations included in the TNS Latvia study broadcast in Russian. The share of the listening time of Russian-speaking radio stations is 24.8% and their total reach is 54% of all radio listeners. The channels streaming in Russian have a disproportionately large impact compared to the other radio stations.

An analysis of the radio and TV channel structure shows that the content available in Russian exceeds the content available in Latvian. Evaluating the offer of audiovisual media in Latvia and the media consumption habits of the audience, it can be concluded that the population in Latvia has a large number of channels and limited content diversity on both TV and radio stations.

Answers to research questions:

- 1) What kind of audiovisual media content does the Russian-speaking population in Latvia consume?

Most non-Latvians consume content from commercial channels, linking their usage to an awareness of current affairs and entertainment. The representatives of the Russian-speaking population are interested in following events in Latvia, and the most popular TV broadcasts are news and current affairs programmes designed in Latvia. It is important to stress that Russian TV channels are mostly watched by the

Russian-speaking people living in the cities of Latvia, who are aged 40 and above, and most of the viewers are aged between 60 and 69 years. The young and economically more active people aged 18 to 35 years are not among the permanent audience of the Russian TV channels.

Most Russian TV viewers regularly watch several channels. In the qualitative research, the usage of the various popular Russian government-controlled TV channels was considered to be a diversified usage of information (SKDS 2014b).

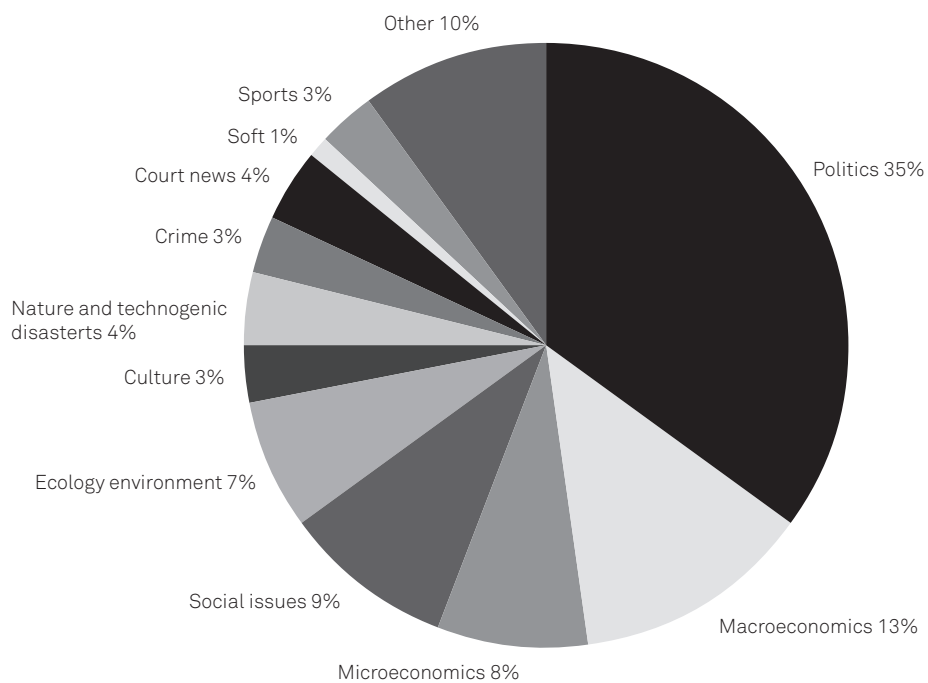
One can draw similar conclusions by analysing the interaction between the audience and the content of the radio stations streaming in Russian. Only a few radio stations offer qualitative information (LR4, Baltkom SWH+), most broadcast popular music, and some retransmit it from Russian channels.

However, the comparison of the content structure of the audience and the most popular Russian TV channels show that multi-channel usage does not mean that diversified information is accessed; the majority of Russian-speaking audience in Latvia receives information and entertainment from one-sided, Russian government-controlled TV channels, but for radio listeners, a music targeting a mass Russian audience is offered.

- 2) How should the content of the news and current events broadcast in Russian on the public radio station LR4 be characterised?

Compared to the other channels targeting the Russian-speaking audience, the public service radio station LR4 has the largest share of listening time (5.7%) and a total weekly audience of 130,000 listeners, or 7.7% of all radio listeners (TNS 2016a). LR4 is the only radio station that provides a diversity of subjects, genres and authors. The content analysis shows that LR4 news programmes follow the political agenda to great extent. The excessive use of official sources provides recognition to officials but reduces the opportunity to discuss their

Topics of news  
and current affairs programs



**TABLE 6.** Topics included in the news and current affairs programmes on LR4.



decisions or the quality of their professional conduct. The content of the LR4 news and current affairs programming confirms the conclusions expressed by the Russian-speaking TV news audience in a study (Juzefovičs 2013), i.e. the Russian-speaking audience representatives perceive it as state communication, and the tone as conservative and formal.

Listeners, recognising the quality of the LR4 content find that the radio (and other public media channels) is excessively oriented to the reporting of politics or is 'politicised', and related to the power of state. This creates a distance between the public radio content and the audience.

The influence of Russian TV and radio stations is based on availability, established viewing and listening habits, and insufficient content from other Russian media in Latvia. Cultural factors play an important role, i.e. the Russian-speaking population associates its ethnic identity and the perception of the world with Russian TV programs (SKDS 2014b), highlighting the opportunity of receiving qualitative content in their native language. The Russian-speaking population is sufficiently interested in events in Latvia, but a sufficient diversity and amount of programming is not available and thus, the largest part of the audience (especially TV viewers) chooses Russian stations. Based on the media usage patterns of the Russian-speaking population, the political construct of 'two information spaces' in Latvia should be redesigned as a question on the real interrelations between Latvia's information space and Russia's information space.

The quantitative data on media usage show the isolation of an audience divided by language, since the Latvians and non-Latvian portion of the population consumes different audiovisual media. Qualitative data (SKDS 2014b) show that the Russian-speaking population is not homogeneous. The usage of Russian audiovisual media does not mean that all non-Latvians are influenced by the information they received from Russian TV channels. On the other hand, some non-Latvians are critical of the

content of both Russian and Latvian media. This data conforms to the case study of the Russian-speaking audience (Juzefovičs 2013), which showed that non-Latvians are not a group of passive media users. Their unwillingness to use PSM content does not mean that all Russian-speaking audience are uncritical about the information provided by the Russian TV channels, nor that all of them feel alienated and uninterested in events in Latvia.

The objectives outlined in documents related to Latvian media policy and the actual political decisions are contradictory. On the one hand, all of the strategic documents emphasise integration based on the Latvian language; on the other, the data show that this political idea has not been fulfilled nor is it rational. Media streaming in Latvian language does not reach enough of the Russian-speaking population.

The media policy documents and discussion on Russian speaking audiences shows that the behaviour of the viewers and listeners of minority media in Latvia are explained from the point of view of the 'host' country's political system (Siapera 2010). This means that their attitudes towards life in Latvia are believed to be depending by their media choices – i.e. if they consume either domestic programmes or content from Russia. The core presumption of the Latvian media policy is that minority audiences are not fully dependent on Russia's media but may be influenced by it. That is, it is possible that the behaviour of people living in Latvia could be influenced by information provided by Russian authorities. Non-Latvians were usually characterised as one large group, i.e. those who entered Latvia after World War II and their descendants, even though there are different ethnic groups living in Latvia (Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, Estonians, Lithuanians and Poles) who have arrived at other times or who lived in Latvia before the war.

As in other EU countries PSM activities in Latvia are increasingly determined by a growing tendency to adapt to market values. The ability to provide content for the minority audiences of public service media

depend on unstable funding. However, increasing investment can help to keep a minority audience (Cola et al. 2015), and in Latvia, increasing the PSM content in Russian has attracted a larger Russian-speaking audience in a short period of time. The development of PSM content indicates a noticeable shift in Latvia from the strategy of multiculturalism (at LTV) to the strategy of cultural diversity (LR4 content).

However, the political discourse has not corresponded to these achievements. Nor has there been further investments in Russian language content provision on public service media channels. Media policy decisions in Latvia are determined by how the Russian-speaking population are viewed by nationalist Latvian politicians who see the former as a homogeneous group and for whom investments in Russian-language content are not economically and ideologically justified. Therefore, the further changes in the provision of Russian language audiovisual content and its consumption by the Russian-speaking population cannot be predicted.

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