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News Media in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine (years 2014–2016). Selected Cases

Introduction

The article analyzes the state of Ukrainian news media outlets in the aftermath of Euromaidan¹ events in years 2014–2016. Particular attention is paid to the changes of media presentation of governance reform on the example of decentralization processes and factors that influenced the media coverage of reforming attempts. As far as the research questions are concerned, the article focuses on three main areas and makes an attempt to explain whether Ukrainian media outlets may be regarded as an educator on the matter of reforming processes in Ukraine, the influence of the media ownership on the way their messages on Ukrainian reforms are presented, and whether media coverage of reforming processes leads to growing level of trust to Ukrainian politicians among Ukrainian citizens.

Literature Overview

Around two decades ago J.M. Balkin pointed out to the impact of mass media on the transparency of political systems. The author defines three main kinds of transparency which encompass separate political virtues: informational transparency, participatory transparency and accountability transparency.² This very statement of Balkin may be used in reference to media role in making the reforming processes in Ukraine clearer for Ukrainian citizens and international observers. Experts argue that the role of media in this regard is to inform and organize civic society around

¹ The term Euromaidan is used in reference to a series of anti-government protests in Ukraine which began on the 21 November 2013 in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (in English, „Independence Square”) in Kyiv as a reaction to the government’s decision to withhold from association with the European Union.

² J.M. Balkin, *How Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency*, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/media01.htm> [access: 12.02.2018].

necessary changes for efficient transformation processes to work.³ In other words, the task of today's media should be making efforts toward inclusion, participation, and transparency, mentioned by Balkin and making attempts to avoid challenges such as uneven access, misinformation, and exposure to harmful content. Consequently, as Martinsson asserts, if any democratic government wants to flourish, it should provide its citizens with access to accurate and objective information since given access is crucial for enhancement of level of trust among citizens, media, and state.⁴

A number of analysts address the issue of media literacy in context of active citizenship position and implementation of good governance practice. As Tornero puts it in *Media Literacy – New Conceptualisation, New Approach*, media literacy means critical thinking, problem solving, personal autonomy, and social and communicative skills.⁵ All these features may serve as a contributing factor to active position of a particular citizen, development of his or her competences and encouragement for further learning. At the same time, as Carlsson et al. argue, the role of media literacy is often not taken into consideration during the discussions on the topic of democracy and development.⁶

Norris and Odugbemi who conducted broad research on news media and governance reform have defined three roles necessary for news media to successfully influence good governance and accountability:

- 1) **media as watchdogs** – news media primary task should be protection of public interests from incompetence, corruption and misinformation by monitoring public and private domains of powerful sectors' leaders;
- 2) **media as “agenda-setters”** – news media should pursue the goal of raising awareness of their audience, both elected officials and their voters, informing them about urgent issues that demand action by local government or concerted efforts of social and political actors of particular region;
- 3) **media as gate-keepers or “indeed gate – openers”** – news media should perform the role of mediator bringing together all interested sides to debate on issues of public concern in order to inform citizens about their government on the one hand, and to keep political leaders responsive on the other.⁷

At the same time, in their analysis on news media roles and functions they should perform, authors use word “ideally” listing a range of obstacles for performance of functions mentioned above. The following limitations are presented as the major ones:

³ <http://www.salzburgseminar.org/mediafiles/MEDIA44723.pdf> [access: 8.02.2018].

⁴ J. Martinsson, *The Role of Media Literacy in the Governance Reform Agenda*, <http://sitere-sources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/CommGAPMediaLit.pdf> [access: 8.07.2018].

⁵ J. Tornero, *Media Literacy – New Conceptualisation, New Approach*, in: *Empowerment through Media Education – An Intercultural Dialogue*, eds. U. Carlsson, S. Tayie, G. Jaunot-Delaunay, J. Tornero, Goteborg 2008, p. 106.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 111.

⁷ S. Odugbemi P. Norris, *Do the news media act as watchdogs, agenda – setters and gate – keepers?*, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/WorldBankReport/Chapter%2015%20Odugbemi%20and%20Norris.pdf> [access: 8.07.2018].

- Censorship, state control and legal curbs on the media, criminal prosecution of journalists;
- Corruption;
- Sensation-oriented journalists;
- Lack of media literacy and access to different source of information, etc.⁸

Interestingly, as regards topic of media literacy in newer democracies, Voltmer states that in many of them, the news media are more effective in strengthening political interests and knowledge than in affecting people's abilities to evaluate politics. Additionally, Voltmer emphasises the fact that journalists in new democracies find it difficult to successfully perform watchdog function since "the functional interdependence between politicians and journalists is still overshadowed by the legacy of suppression and censorship during the old regime". Meanwhile, acceptance of adversarial press remains not an easy task for new political leaders despite their commitment to democratic values. However, scholar remains optimistic about positive media effects for democracy in general. As the most beneficial aspect of media impact Voltmer defines strengthening citizens' democratic orientation and the empowerment of citizens.⁹

State of Scientific Research on Ukrainian Media in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine

Since 1991 Independence Act Ukrainian media outlets have been developing together with the Ukrainian state. According to professor Kulyk, the basic feature of media in Ukraine since 1991 was its "post-sovietism"¹⁰ – radical change of their social role compared with Soviet times and, at the same time, preserving many Soviet features in social context of media.¹¹ In her turn, Marta Dyczok from University of Western Ontario adds that by the late 1990s, censorship began to reemerge, and oligarchs who received control over media resources illustrated that private media did not equal to freedom of speech.¹² In addition, Kulyk asserts that the post-Soviet changes in Ukrainian media might be analysed in terms of relations between producers and authorities who define the conditions of their business, and in terms of their interaction with customers who do not only dictate their preferences (also largely caused by social conditions), but also depend on media products offered by their producers.¹³

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ K. Voltmer, *The media, government accountability, and citizen engagement*, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/WorldBankReport/Chapter%206%20Voltmer.pdf> [access: 8.07.2018].

¹⁰ Translation of term 'postradianskist' used by professor Kulyk in his book *Dyskurs ukrainskich medii: identychnosti, ideologii, vladni stosunki*, Kyiv 2010.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 177.

¹² J. Dresen, *Media in Ukraine: A Domain of the State, the Oligarchs, or the Public?*, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/media-ukraine-domain-the-state-the-oligarchs-or-the-public> [access: 31.05.2018].

¹³ V. Kulyk, op. cit., p. 189.

Speaking about the controlling function of media in the Post-Euromaidan period scholars argue that military conflict in Donbas region of Ukraine becomes additional impediment for journalists to perform the role of an unbiased controller. *The Economist* brings example of Ukrainian journalists struggling with how to carry themselves in a war where the media plays an outsize role. The debate is centered on the issue of helping Ukraine without contradicting professional standards of journalism. Opinions between journalists are divided as well. On the one hand, as Olga Chervakova states, Ukrainian journalism is experiencing a “crisis of values”. On the other, constant threats addressed to Ukrainian journalists from separatist forces have made traveling to Donetsk and Luhansk too dangerous for most. That has resulted in negative approach of Ukrainian journalists towards not only separatists but toward those who sympathize them as well. According to *the Economist* the upshot of such situation is often one-sided reports and using label “terrorists” to all residents of occupied territories.¹⁴

Another range of studies discusses the performance of Ukrainian media in context of counteraction to Russian information war against Ukraine, and against the West in broader perspective. In fact, on 15 January 2015 European Parliament called on “the EU to pay particular attention to the “information war” pursued by Russia and ask the Commission to propose, within two months, a communication strategy to counter the Russian propaganda campaign directed at the EU, its eastern neighbours and Russia itself”.¹⁵

As Pomerantsev summarises, the Kremlin has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on English-language broadcasting, intellectual influencers, PR firms, and cultural-diplomacy campaigns serving as battalions in its informational attacks on opponents. The scholar poses a question “What can Ukraine do to strike back?” and tries to give recommendation to Ukrainian state on the matter, the major one of which is to create the Ukrainian press led by civil society, not the state. In terms of Post-Euromaidan challenges faced by journalists, they were not only about overcoming Kremlin disinformation but about sustaining constant pressure on their own officials to reform the country and defeat corruption.¹⁶

Not all western analysts agree with the concept of information war conducted by Russia against Ukraine and the West. Kofman and Rojansky differentiate the goals of Russian information campaigns in Ukraine and in the West. Their article states that the usage of Russian state-controlled media in information warfare campaign in Ukraine appeared to be “neither a new accompaniment to Moscow’s interventions in the post-Soviet space, nor has it proven especially successful in the past”. At the same time, authors point to a “vast gulf between Russia’s global broadcast-

¹⁴ *Russia has shown its mastery of the propaganda war: Ukraine is struggling to catch up*, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21646280-russia-has-shown-its-mastery-propaganda-war-ukraine-struggling-catch-up-battle-web> [access: 9.07.2018].

¹⁵ *Ukraine: MEPs condemn terrorist acts and say sanctions against Russia must stay*, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20150109IPR06321/Ukraine-MEPs-condemn-terrorist-acts-and-say-sanctions-against-Russia-must-stay> [access: 9.07.2018].

¹⁶ *Can Ukraine Win Its Information War With Russia?*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/can-ukraine-win-its-information-war-with-russia/372564/> [access: 9.07.2018].

ing and public diplomacy goals and its operational goals in the post-Soviet space”, asserting that the primary task of Moscow is to sow doubts among international audiences on “anything and everything coming from the West”. That in turn would give opportunity to promote Kremlin interests on a global level.¹⁷

On the contrary, Esipova and Rey in their analysis entitled *Information Wars: Ukraine and the West vs. Russia and the Rest* for Harvard International Review stress the effectiveness and winning strategy of Russia in its media battle with the West as regards the audiences in former Soviet Union republics. As authors assert, only three countries, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Estonia, out of the eleven that Gallup surveyed in 2014 included sizable portions of the population saying they did *not* use Russian media for news about the situation in Ukraine and Crimea. The summary of Esipova and Rey is that for West to at least stay in contention in “the next information skirmish”, a number of communication strategy changes including tone and content should be made.¹⁸

As far as Ukrainian communication strategy changes, one of the most controversial was the decision to establish Ministry of Information Policy and appointing Yuriy Stets, close ally of President Poroshenko and former chief producer of the Five TV channel as the Minister. In accordance with the Regulation of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Ministry is “the main body of the central executive power system in the field of safeguarding information sovereignty of Ukraine, in particular in terms of distribution of socially important information inside and outside Ukraine, as well as providing functioning of the state information resources”.¹⁹ Despite the declarations from the authorities that the establishment of given ministry is based on the need to counteract Russian information aggression and propaganda, Ukrainian journalists and activists did not welcome such an initiative. Interestingly, many deputies related to media sphere of Ukraine did not vote for the initiative to establish Ministry of Information Policy or vote against it.²⁰

Summary of international research on media role in governmental reforms and current media role in Ukraine illustrate the topicality of study on the impact of Ukrainian media outlets on reforming processes in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine. The survey below presents an overview of major changes in media sphere of Ukraine during different political camps being in power in Kyiv. Particular attention is paid to changes in media environment that took place after the Euromaidan protests with particular attention to the role of media resources regarding the education of Ukrainian citizens on the matter of reforming processes such as self-governance and decentralization reform.

¹⁷ M. Kofman, M. Rojansky, *A Closer Look at Russia's "Hybrid War"*, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/7-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf> [access: 9.07.2018].

¹⁸ N. Esipova, J. Ray, *Information Wars: Ukraine and the West vs. Russia and the Rest*, <http://hir.harvard.edu/information-wars-ukraine-west-vs-russia-rest/> [access: 9.07.2018].

¹⁹ Ministry of Informational Policy of Ukraine, <http://mip.gov.ua/en/content/pro-ministerstvo.html> [access: 9.07.2018].

²⁰ A. Sventach, *De vaziaty informaciju pro ministerstvo informacii*, <http://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/media/de-vzyaty-informaciyu-pro-ministerstvo-informaciyi> [access: 9.07.2018].

Issue of Media Ownership in Ukraine

To speak about Ukrainian media and the relationship between their owners and authorities in broader context, it is necessary to emphasise the nature of media ownership in Ukraine overall. As a matter of fact, the issue of media as a powerful tool for Ukrainian oligarchs was raised repeatedly for many years by different scientific circles.

Dutsyk asserts that Ukraine inherited the Soviet system of party media. However, as time passed, the transition from planned Soviet economy to free market forced media find alternative sources – big capital owners who raised their wealth in different, not always legal, ways. As a result, media assets received considerable investments from their side that in turn led to the following negative aspects of new media functioning in Ukraine before 2004 revolution events:

- shady schemes of media functioning;
- media as a tool of influence on public opinion and a tool of protection from the state's pressure;
- political parties and their impact on media market;
- intensified pressure on Ukrainian media from authorities' side.²¹

All negative aspects mentioned above were one of the reasons for journalists to raise their objections to the existed system and go on protest. In fact, journalists took active part in 2004 protesting movements demonstrating against the heavy state censorship. Therefore, the Orange revolution gave hopes for the rise of free media. However, the process seemed to be longer than it was anticipated by protesters on Maidan. While experts agree that the Orange Revolution created opportunities and momentum for media transformations, the outcome was that the media received position between state and business influences.²² While observers recommended implementation of media transformation into a public broadcasting system, oligarchs were unwilling to resign from their influence on public opinion via media. However, the positive changes might have been noticed at the individual level, be it better awareness of common Ukrainians or attempts of many independent journalists to enhance the tone and quality of their publications. Moreover, the role of social media started to grow as well as creating new outlet and audience for writers.²³

However, other commentators underline the poor reputation of journalists as a group who were regarded as a tool in oligarchs' hands prior and during the Orange revolution in Ukraine. As a matter of fact, during 2004 Maidan events, one of the most memorable for average Ukrainian campaigns was spreading stickers with statement in Russian language "They lie"²⁴ in reference to major Ukrainian

²¹ D. Dutsyk, *Media Ownership Structure in Ukraine: Political Aspect*, http://www.rundfunk-institut.uni-koeln.de/sites/rundfunk/Tagungen/Tagung2010Cologne/Dutsyk_e.pdf [access: 31.05.2018].

²² J. Dresen, op. cit.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ For interview with the author of "they lie" slogan see: P. Solodko, *Liudy jaki stvoryly styl revoliucii*, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2006/01/26/3056735/> [access: 31.05.2018].

TV networks at that time to discourage people around Ukraine from watching pro-Yanukovich TV channels. Russian language was used with the view to reaching Russian-speaking population of eastern and southern Ukraine who traditionally voted for candidate supported by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine.

Meantime, Olechowska points to another important moment of media reforms in post 2004 Maidan Ukraine – the matter of broadcasting licenses. According to the author, there were 1,200 valid broadcasting licenses in Ukraine, 500 of which were active. At the same time, only 12 percent of active licenses properly functioned while the remaining ones were held and sold to politicians and their allies during election periods. That led to lack of transparency of the licenses' ownership and consequently, to further questions on media objectivity.²⁵

Furthermore, a number of authors argue that the Orange revolution gave birth to media influence on Ukrainian political life. Former journalist and current member of Ukrainian parliament Sergiy Leshchenko conducted a detailed research of media owners in the aftermath of Orange revolution. Having analysed major media networks of regional and national coverage, Leshchenko illustrated that at the beginning of year 2006, every media outlet which influenced political and social processes in Ukraine was controlled by Ukrainian or Russian businessmen or politicians. To name a few examples, former minister of economy of Ukraine Valerii Horoshkovskyy took control over the most popular TV channel "Inter", Oligarchs Pinchuk and Ahmetov owned a number of national and regional media resources operating in eastern parts of Ukraine.²⁶

In this regard, Dutsyk adds that Viktor Yushchenko administration did not put great pressure on media content. However, the process of redistribution of media and consolidation of media groups which began at the time of Leonid Kuchma continued. Particular attention is put on changes that took place around the ownership of two most popular TV networks: "Inter" and "1 + 1". As of September 2010, Khoroshkovskyy managed to keep control over "Inter" while oligarch Igor Kolomoyskyy became the owner of "1 + 1" TV Channel. Dutsyk states that the unclear schemes under which the ownership of Ukrainian leading TV channels was changed illustrated that the great media business in Ukraine could not exist outside politics in Ukraine.²⁷

Ryabinska points to the fact that Yushchenko cancelled so called *temnyky*, or prepared messages for journalists issued and agreed by presidential administration that were popular during times of Kuchma presidency. In terms of the ownership of Ukrainian media, the most prominent of them were owned by industrial and financial magnates with strong political connections. That very feature distinguishes

²⁵ J. Dresen, op. cit.

²⁶ For more information on Leshchenko research see: S. Leshchenko, *Orbita politychnych media: sfera vplyvu Pinchuka, Ahmetova, Poroshenka, Yushchenka...*, http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2006/12/6/4409790/view_print/ [access: 31.05.2018].

²⁷ D. Dutsyk, op. cit. For more information on scandals related to ownership issue of "Inter" channel see: M. Nayem, S. Leshchenko, *Oliharhichni vijny: jak prodavaly kanal "Inter"*, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2008/07/29/3503640/> [access: 31.05.2018].

Ukrainian market from markets in most post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁸

As far as the issue of media ownership transparency is concerned, on 10 December 2008 the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine opened access to the State Register of print media and news agencies. The website <http://dzmi.informjust.ua> provides necessary information on the ownership structure be it: registration series and number, registration date, type of publication, information about the founders.²⁹ Furthermore, the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine includes list of owners of media resources in Ukraine which is required by the Law “On television and radio broadcasting”.³⁰ Interestingly, as of 18 May 2016 the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine applied penalties to 52 bodies for violation of legislation on submission to the regulatory body the information on the ownership structure.³¹

At the same time, practitioners criticize the activity of the Board stating that it has only the information on direct founders and participants of broadcasting which is not enough to make a complete picture of media owners. Media experts assert that the openness of information on Ukrainian participants of broadcasters does not remove the basic problem of transparency because on a regular basis one might find foreign companies who in turn are registered in offshore zones. Such registration makes it practically impossible to have legal mechanisms to find information on founders of particular company.³²

Major Developments of Media Functioning

As a matter of fact, Yanukovich administration in 2010–2013 was associated with threats to press freedom. During the first six months of new president, *The Kyiv Post* counted 16 events, the most visible of which was march of more than 100 journalists and activists against censorship that took place in Kyiv on 6 June 2010.³³ In the following years, the situation around freedom of press underwent further dramatic changes. The 2013 Freedom House report defined press in

²⁸ N. Ryabinska, *The Media Market and Media Ownership in Post-Communist Ukraine*, http://www.academia.edu/1269584/The_Media_Market_and_Media_Ownership_in_Post-Communist_Ukraine [access: 2.06.2018].

²⁹ *The State Register of print media and news agencies*, <http://dzmi.informjust.ua/> [access: 2.06.2018].

³⁰ *Zakon pro telebachennia i radiomovlennia*, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3759-12> [access: 2.06.2018].

³¹ *Ponad 50 licenziatam pryznacheno shtraf za porushennia norm zakonodavstva*, <http://www.nrada.gov.ua/ua/news/radanews/30861.html> [access: 2.06.2018].

³² D. Dutsyk, op. cit.

³³ Chronology of threats to press freedom since President Viktor Yanukovich took power February 25, <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/chronology-of-threats-to-press-freedom-since-presi-69288.html> [access: 2.06.2018].

Ukraine as “partly free” (similar to 2012 Report³⁴) stating that year 2012 bought further erosion of press freedom as Yanukovych continued his authoritarian style of rule. Finally, year 2013 brought most dramatic and unexpected to many observers acts of violence against journalists and press overall. According to Leshchenko, there were more than 100 acts of violence against journalists in Ukraine in 2013, and nearly half of these occurred in December as riot police unleashed a wave of violence during the ongoing Euromaidan protests.

Apart from acts of physical aggression toward journalists, Yanukovych and his allies used a wide range of other means of pressure on reporters of media resources under their control. As a result of ownership change in some Ukrainian media, their reporters resigned in order to protest against censorship attempts.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, facts mentioned above had serious consequences for freedom of the press evaluation and for *The Freedom House* report changed status from “Partly Free” to “Not Free” giving Ukraine 63 as freedom press score where 0 = best, and 100 = worst.³⁶

As far as the Post-Euromaidan period is concerned, *Freedom House* reported the status of press freedom in Ukraine in 2015 as improving from “Not Free” to “Partly Free” justifying the change with the fact that there were significant changes in media environment in context of political pressure on state-owned media and legal improvements to the law on access to information and referring the broadcasting regulator. The concerns, meanwhile regarded big business control over private outlets.³⁷ In fact, most media in Ukraine were controlled by private entities. The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council reported that at the end of 2014 there were 1,563 valid broadcast licences in Ukraine, of which 1,229 were held by private stations, 298 by communally owned broadcasters, and 36 by state broadcasters.³⁸

Overall, concerns named in *Freedom House* report echo concerns existed in Ukrainian press environment since 90th. The table below compares the situation with freedom of press in last decade taking into account major scores that constitute press status defined by Freedom House organization. The scores analysed are: legal environment (0 = best, 30 = worst), political environment (0 = best, 40 = worst), economic environment (0 = best, 30 = worst). Their summary illustrates the press

³⁴ 2012 *Freedom House Report on Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/ukraine> [access: 2.06.2018].

³⁵ More on freedom press restrictions in 2013 see: S. Leshchenko, *Ukraine's leaders are silencing the independent media*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ukraines-leaders-are-silencing-the-independent-media/2013/12/30/6cb58120-6f2e-11e3-a523-fe73f0ff6b8d_story.html [access: 2.06.2018].

³⁶ 2014 *Freedom House Report on Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/ukraine> [access: 2.06.2018].

³⁷ 2015 *Freedom House Report on Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/ukraine> [access: 3.06.2018].

³⁸ 2014 *Report of The National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine*, http://www.nrada.gov.ua/userfiles/file/2014/Zvitna%20informacia/Zvit_2014.pdf [access: 3.06.2018].

freedom score (0 = best, 100 = worst). The decade presented in table shows the change of the press freedom score as well as dynamics in legal, political and economic environments of press functioning in Ukraine in 2005–2016.

During twelve years taken into account the status of press in Ukraine was Partly Free with the exception of the 2014 report defining the position of Ukrainian press as Not Free.

Table 1. Press Freedom Score in Ukraine in Years 2005–2016

Year	Legal environment	Political environment	Economic environment	Press freedom score
2005	15	21	23	59
2006	13	19	21	53
2007	13	19	21	53
2008	14	19	20	53
2009	15	20	20	55
2010	15	18	20	53
2011	16	20	20	56
2012	18	21	20	59
2013	19	21	20	60
2014	19	24	20	63
2015	14	26	18	58
2016	13	24	16	53

Source: author's summary of *Freedom House* reports' analysis (years 2005–2016).

The situation analysis in Post-Maidan Ukraine shows that the international observers notice the positive dynamics in conditions for journalists' activity in all three environments: legal, political, and economic. In fact, the 2016 report on changes that took place in 2015 underlined three key developments:

- 1) adoption of several pieces of media legislation including laws on access to information, protections for journalists who are attacked in the course of their work, and the privatization of publicly owned print media;
- 2) significant decrease of reports of attacks and intimidation against journalists;
- 3) the governmental support for the process of transforming Ukraine's state television and radio stations into public-service broadcasters.³⁹

Meanwhile, in accordance with the June 2015 survey entitled *Attitude of population to media, propaganda and media-reforms during the conflict time*, Ukrainian media were losing credibility almost all over Ukraine except for the Western region. In the South, East and Center, the share of respondents saying that their opinion about Ukrainian media deteriorated since the beginning of the year prevailed

³⁹ 2016 *Freedom House Report on Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/ukraine> [access: 3.06.2018].

over the share of respondents with improved opinion. Speaking about Ukraine in general, 65% of respondents did not change their opinion, 19% deteriorated and 11% improved their view on the matter.⁴⁰ Observers note that the gradual loss of credibility to Ukrainian mass media is critical in the information war, though it is compensated by much more intense decrease in credibility to Russian media in the East and South. Only 1% of respondents in Ukraine said that they improved their attitude to Russian media since the beginning of the year, whereas 60% deteriorated it and 28% did not change their approach.

Another important conclusion of the survey is that Ukrainians did not have clear opinion about censorship and propaganda in mass media. On the one hand, 56% of respondents totally or rather agree that the journalists can make propaganda reports for the sake of Ukrainian State (other 22% do not agree and 21% cannot answer). The position is rather unanimous all over the regions though over one third of respondents in the East do not have clear opinion on this matter. On the other hand, 54% of respondents totally or rather agree that the journalists are allowed to criticize the Ukrainian army (other 24% do not agree and 21% cannot answer). This statement is more supported than not in all regions.⁴¹

As far as media coverage of governance reforms, the self-governance reform may serve as an example. As a matter of fact, the position of analysts and observers of the issue was not unanimous. Ukrainian philosopher and commentator Daciuk argued that media sabotaged the issue of decentralization and did not pay enough attention to it. As a result, there was lack of awareness on the matter inside Ukrainian society leading to misconception of decentralization and its false association with federalization, constitutional reform or administrative-territorial reform.⁴²

In fact, both notions, “decentralization” and “federalization”, could have been often met in local media outlets across Ukraine. According to research of regional mass media conducted by media communication centre “New Ukraine” in terms of “Media Transparency” project, from 7 April 2014 to 18 May 2014 the notion “decentralization” was used much more than “federalization”. According to the detailed analysis of 247 regional media outlets, the source of “federalization” notion was often central media or events of national scale (about 65%), while 35% of texts on given notion is the result of the regional press. In its turn, “decentralization” mainly came from national media outlets in the regions (82%) and rarely was a matter of public debate in the regional press. In many cases such situation was a reflection of agenda-setting formed by the central and regional authorities.

Overall, authors of the research remained optimistic despite the results. The survey outcomes show that idea of “federalization” occupied the agenda of the

⁴⁰ *Attitude of Population to Media Propaganda and Media Reforms during the Conflict Time*, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/in_english/survey_attitude_of_population_to_media_propaganda_and_ediareforms_during_the_conflict_time/ [access: 9.07.2018].

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² S. Daciuk, *Mediasabotazh decentralizaciji prodovzhujetsia*, http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/datsuk/557fb2295692e/view_print/ [access: 9.07.2018].

regional media where roughly every 5th article included substitution of concepts. In this context, authors posed a question on the legal literacy of society. However, the rising trend of using the word “decentralization” shows the change of debate into the constitutional, legal channel. Therefore, it was of crucial importance to support discussions at the regional level explaining in detail plans for decentralization for particular region.⁴³

It should be particularly underlined that the issue of increasing role of journalists in educating civil society on peculiarities of decentralization and self-governance reform in Ukraine becomes topical in expert circles not only in Kyiv but in Ukrainian regions as well. Particular attention is paid to the role of local media since it is the local media that have the best opportunity to present the implementation of decentralization in certain area. It was claimed that the main task of the media in the aftermath of Euromaidan was to include more people in the process of decentralization and to convince the audience that every community member may have become a reformer in their area. As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of given reform directly depends on the way people approach it. Both theorists and practitioners agree that the rejection of decentralization in Ukrainian regions was mainly caused by lack of understanding of the reform.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The article puts focus on the explanation of major developments in news media outlets in the aftermath of Euromaidan protests and analyses the main factors that had impact on media presentation of governance reforms in 2014–2016. According to *2016 Freedom House* report, the status of the press in Ukraine was “partly free” meaning that there remained some state pressure on outlets and journalists at the national and subnational levels.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the content of private media outlets appeared to be often influenced by the political or commercial interests of their owners referring to the reforming processes. On the bright side, however, year 2016 has brought new initiatives and projects on journalists’ engagement into reforming processes and education of citizens on key moments of planned reforms.

Abstract

The article analyzes major developments in functioning of Ukrainian news media with particular accent on years 2014–2016. The state of scientific research on the issue and analysis of international reports are conducted in order to explain the significant factors influencing the functioning of media outlets in Ukraine. Additionally, there is made an

⁴³ *Decentralizacija: nazdognaty chy peregnyaty federalizaciju*, <http://newukraineinstitute.org/new/404> [access: 9.07.2018].

⁴⁴ *Decentralizacija: jakoju je rol zhurnalista*, <http://decentralization.gov.ua/news/item/id/2099> [access: 9.07.2018].

⁴⁵ *2016 Freedom house Report on Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/ukraine> [access: 11.07.2018].

attempt to analyze media coverage of governance reforms in central and local media and answer the questions whether news media performed education function and raised the awareness of their audiences on the matter of political processes in Ukraine.

Keywords: news media, media ownership, media coverage, decentralization.

Media informacyjne na Ukrainie w latach 2014–2016. Wybrane zagadnienia

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono warunki funkcjonowania ukraińskich mediów informacyjnych w latach 2014–2016. W oparciu o literaturę oraz międzynarodowe raporty dokonano analizy czynników wpływających na ich funkcjonowanie. Ponadto podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na następujące pytania: czy media informacyjne należycie pełniły funkcję edukacyjną oraz jaki miały wpływ na wzrost świadomości odbiorców na temat procesów politycznych zachodzących na Ukrainie.

Słowa kluczowe: media informacyjne, medialna relacja, decentralizacja.