

PERCEPTION OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS WITHIN LATVIAN SOCIETY

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The battle of narratives was a significant aspect of the Ukrainian crisis because the interpretations of events by parties involved in the conflict were very different. This paper addresses issues related to the perception of stories reported by the Russian and Latvian media about the Ukrainian crisis. Latvia was chosen as a case study because it is a country with a pro-Western geopolitical orientation where Russian media content is also widely available. It is estimated that as of March 2016, 25% of Latvia's television audience were regular viewers of Russian television channels, including the First Baltic Channel, which is registered in Latvia but largely retranslates media content from Russia.¹ Latvia also has a considerable number of Russian speaking ethnic minorities (Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians and others) that account for slightly less than 40% of the population. The theoretical component of this paper is based on scientific and doctrinal insights into the influencing of public opinion by media in the context of warfare. A combination of research methods was used to determine whose media narrative of the Ukrainian crisis – the Latvian or the Russian – has proven dominant in Latvian society. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify the main themes and messages regarding the Ukrainian crisis in the media. An online public opinion survey was used to ascertain the views of Latvian society in relation to the identified media stories. The research was carried out in November of 2015. One of the significant discoveries was that there is indeed a battle for public opinion taking place in Latvia with regard to the crisis in Ukraine because of the sharply opposing narratives that have been constructed by the Latvian and the Russian media. The views of Latvian speakers were mainly aligned with the Latvian media stories, whereas Russian speakers tended to agree with the narrative of the Russian media.

¹ TNS 2016. TV kanālu auditorijas 2016. gada martā (TV channel audiences in March 2016). – Media Studies, 04 April. <<http://tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=4936>> (accessed April 18, 2016).

Shaping public opinion as an element of warfare

The Ukraine crisis and the concomitant war in the southeast of the country is a visible manifestation of Russia's attempt to challenge the global dominance of the West. Russia has made use of diverse methods to encumber Ukraine's geopolitical turn to the West, including influencing domestic and international public opinion.² This is not surprising, as the shaping of public opinion has become an integral part of warfare in a media influenced world. J. Nye states: "In an information age it may be whose story wins is as important as whose army wins".³ The current media environment is not actually a conditioner of, but rather an amplifier of, the vagaries of the human mind. According to the stereotype model of W. Lippmann, people perceive reality indirectly via notions previously constructed in their mind.⁴ Thus human behaviour is primarily determined by an "image of reality" that can be developed in the human mind through the process of socialization, including media consumption.

This article focuses on two interconnected elements of the narrative battle – media and public opinion. The media is the primary means for governments and armies to disseminate narratives that will shape public opinion. Although the interaction between media content and public opinion is uncertain⁵, without a doubt the media is the main sources of information for people who are distant from a conflict zone. Many countries have standardized the process of influencing public opinion in their military doctrines and theories, and the overall aims for influencing public opinion are similar – to gain support for one's own actions while countering those of the adversary.⁶

² **Rácz, A.** 2015. Russia's Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. – The Finnish Institute of International Affairs. June 16. <http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/514/russia_s_hybrid_war_in_ukraine/> (accessed April 18, 2016).

³ **Nye, J.** 2011. The Future of Power. – Chatham House. May 11, p. 8. <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Meetings/Meeting%20Transcripts/100511nye.pdf>> (accessed December 23, 2015).

⁴ **Lippmann, W.** 1998. Public Opinion. Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick.

⁵ **McQuail, D.** 2006. On the Mediatization of War. The International Communication Gazette, Vol. 68, No. 2, pp. 107–118, p. 117. [**McQuail** 2006].

⁶ **NATO** 2011. NATO Military Public Affairs Policy. – MC 0457/2. February, p. 17. <<http://www.nato.int/ims/docu/mil-pol-pub-affairs-en.pdf>> (accessed November 17, 2015). [hereinafter: **NATO** 2011]; **Ministry of Defence** 2007. Media Operations. – Joint Doctrine Publication 3–45. 1. September, p. V. <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43336/jdp3451.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2015). [**Ministry of Defence** 2007]; **Office of the Secretary of Defence** 2011. Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China. – Annual Report to Congress.

The catalyst for the battle of narratives in the Ukrainian crisis is the strategic importance of Ukraine for the great powers. Z. Brzezinski sees Ukraine as one of “the key post-Cold War Eurasian geopolitical pivots” serving an important role in the designs of major geopolitical players, particularly Russia.⁷ Likewise, G. Friedman concludes that Russia may become indefensible if the West succeeds in dominating Ukraine⁸. Thus Ukraine’s geopolitical shift towards the West created tensions in the international arena, leading to a struggle for public support among all players involved in the crisis.

When considering the tools and techniques used to shape public opinion, the Western approach is at the forefront. It has been used as a template to shape the informational and psychological domains used by authoritarian governments of China and Russia in their attempts to counterbalance the dominance of the West in the international hegemony. The Three Warfares concept⁹ of China is based on the informational dissemination strategies that were used by the United States in the two Gulf Wars, and the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. In those wars, the interventions by NATO and the United States successfully built support for their military operations by undermining the international images of the leaders of the opposing states – Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic.¹⁰ The Chinese approach is also based on the “methods of mass persuasion from the Western world, including political public relations, theories of mass communication, and individual and group psychology”¹¹. Likewise, many Russian authors refer to the First Gulf War

⁷ **Brzezinski, Z.** 1997. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 41, 46.

⁸ **Friedman, G.** 2009. *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*. New York: Doubleday, p. 70.

⁹ **Cheng, D.** 2012. *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response*. – The Heritage Foundation. 26 November. <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/11/winning-without-fighting-chinese-public-opinion-warfare-and-the-need-for-a-robust-american-response>> (accessed November 4, 2015) [**Cheng** 2012]; **Jackson, L.** 2015. *Revisions of Reality: The Three Warfares—China’s New Way of War*. – Information at War: From China’s Three Warfares to NATO Narratives. Legatum Institute. September <<http://www.li.com/activities/publications/information-at-war-from-china-s-three-warfares-to-nato-s-narratives>> (accessed November 4, 2015); **Lee, S.** 2014. *China’s ‘Three Warfares’: Origins, Applications, and Organizations*. – *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 198–221.

¹⁰ **Cheng** 2012.

¹¹ **Walton, T. A.** 2012. *China’s Three Warfares*. – Delex Special Report-3. 18 January. <<http://www.delex.com/data/files/Three%20Warfares.pdf>> (accessed November 11, 2015), p. 7.

as an outstanding example of contemporary information and psychological warfare.¹²

In his analysis of the Persian Gulf War, R. Hiebert reached the conclusion that the successful public relations campaign, which was implemented on an unprecedented scale during the war, was a significant contributor to its success.¹³ His observation that public opinion is a critical element of warfare, was confirmed by US military officials who consistently referred to “media warfare” during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹⁴ The Iraq war of 2003 galvanized the emergence of a large number of books in the US and United Kingdom, which were rather critical of the increasing collaboration between the media, government, and military leaders of the Western countries.¹⁵ The crisis in Ukraine shifted the focus away from assessing the Western democracies methods of shaping public opinion, towards a study of the Russian approach to influencing the information environment.¹⁶

In Russia, the idea of shaping public opinion for military purposes was developed within the framework of informational and psychological warfare and is understood as the “overt and covert informative impact of social, political, ethnic, and other systems with the purpose of gaining certain material benefits, to provide informative superiority over the adversary and

¹² **Gordienko, D.** 2001. Iz opita lokalnix konfliktov. Moralno-psihologicheskaya ataka (Learning from the experience of local conflicts. Moral and psychological attack). – Na Stratzhe Rodini, No. 127, June 28, p. 5; **Klimenchenko, S.** 2000. Psihologicheskaya voina: ot drevnosti do nashih dnei. Oruzhiye ubivayuscheye dux (Psychological warfare: from antiquity to the present day. The weapon that kills the spirit). – Na Stratzhe Zapoliaryia, No. 010, February 2; **Oleinik, A.** 2009. Informacionno-psihologicheskii voini (Information and psychological warfare). – Morskoi sbornik, No. 4, April, pp. 37–41.

¹³ **Hiebert, R.** 1991. Public Relations as a Weapon of Modern Warfare. – Public Relations Review, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 107–116.

¹⁴ **Hiebert, R.** 2003. Public Relations and Propaganda in Framing the Iraq War: a Preliminary Review. – Public Relations Review, Vol. 29, pp. 243–255, p. 244.

¹⁵ **McQuail** 2006.

¹⁶ **Pomerantsev, P., Weiss M.** 2014. The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money. – The Interpreter. 22 November. <<http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/>> (accessed April 19, 2016); **Nelson, E.; Orttung, R.; Livshen, A.** 2015. Measuring RT’s Impact on Youtube. – Russian Analytical Digest, No. 177. 8 December. <<http://www.stratcomcoe.org/russian-analytical-digest>> (accessed April 19, 2016); **NATO StratCom COE** 2015. The Manipulative Techniques of the Russian Information Campaign Against Ukraine. <<http://www.stratcomcoe.org/manipulative-techniques-russian-information-campaign-against-ukraine/>> (accessed April 19, 2016).

to cause him material, ideological and other damage”¹⁷. Information and psychological warfare are a set of tools used to influence the perceptions of people (their views, values, attitudes, behaviour, and other), as well as shape group norms, mass moods and mass consciousness in general.¹⁸ Russian military doctrine emphasizes the growing importance of informative processes in the military sphere. The document states that the presence of military dangers and military threats in the information space is increasing.¹⁹

The Russian approach to shaping public opinion is quite straightforward in relation to manipulation. For example, according to Russian thinking, the media is essentially manipulative, because they offer an alternative version of reality that does not coincide with actual reality. This characterization of the media determines its special role in information and psychological warfare.²⁰ This is in contrast to the Western countries, which are concerned with the loss of credibility if there are identifiable attempts to manipulate the public or the media.²¹ However, from the perspective of Russia, the Western states nevertheless manipulate the public. For example, in the view of V. Putin “the so called winners of the Cold War” have total control over the global media that allows them to present white as black, and black as white as needed.²² Likewise, S. Chekinov and S. Bogdanov have advanced the idea that information operations finesse the public into accepting the need to “fight tyranny and restore democracy”, but the “principal aim of the invasion is for the aggressor states to resolve their political, military, and economic problems”.²³ This formulation indirectly refers to the initiatives of Western countries to promote democracy.

¹⁷ **Veprincev, V. B., Manoilo, A. V., Petrenko, A. I., Frolov, D. B.** 2011. Operacii informacionno-psihologicheskoi voini: kratkiy enciklopedicheskiy slovar-spravochnik (Operations of information and psychological warfare: a brief encyclopedic dictionary-manual). Moscow: Goryachaya liniya-Telekom., p. 74. [**Veprincev et al.** 2011]

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ **Kremlin** 2014. Voeyannaya doktrina Rossiskoi Federacii (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation). – Kremlin.ru. December 26, p. 4. <<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>> (accessed November 18, 2015). [**Kremlin** 2014]

²⁰ **Veprincev et al.** 2011, pp. 380–381.

²¹ **NATO** 2011, p. 17.

²² **Kremlin** 2014. Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnogo diskussiongo kluba „Valdai” (The meeting on the international discussion club „Valdai”). – Kremlin.ru. October 24. <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>> (accessed April 19, 2016).

²³ **Chekinov, S. G., Bogdanov, S. G.** 2013. The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War. – Military Thought, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 12–23, p. 19.

In the post-Cold War period, the crisis in Ukraine was one of the most salient instances of Russia's intensive counteractions in the information environment, as it systematically provided alternative versions of events from those promoted by the US and its allies. For example, one of the fundamental discrepancies between Russia and the West arises from prior events in Ukraine. Russia asserts that the democratization processes, or the so-called "colour revolutions" advocated by the Western countries, are a de facto threat to security, because they "create zones which are not controlled by any government".²⁴ Russia's new National Security Strategy now clearly states that the Ukrainian crisis was the result of the US and EU support for an unconstitutional coup d'état.²⁵ Thus the Ukrainian crisis also evolved into a battle of narratives where Russia challenged the Western countries and the pro-Western Ukrainian government. The analysis of the narratives of the Ukrainian crisis in the Latvian media environment gives a more detailed insight into this battle and its effects on public opinion.

Method

The methodological aim of this paper is to measure the effects of the battle of narratives on Latvian society in relation to the Euromaidan protests and the Crimean annexation. The research was carried out in two steps. The first step was to identify and compare the main themes and messages used by the Latvian and Russian media to describe the Ukrainian crisis. In this study the term "media stories" is used to describe the narratives of the respective media organizations. The second part measures the degree to which these stories resonated with the views of the Latvian population. It must be emphasized that the impact of the media on the formation of opinion is beyond the scope of this paper. This study rather focuses on the dissemination of media stories within the society. It does not provide answers as to why people think the way they do. Consequently, the quantitative indicators of the transmission of certain themes and messages were not important for the achievement of the research goals. The assessment of the truthfulness of media stories is also

²⁴ **Kremlin** 2015. Strategiya nacionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federacii (National Security Strategy of Russian Federation). – Kremlin.ru. December 31, p. 5. <<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/18iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>> (accessed April 19, 2016).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

beyond the scope of this paper, and the study is limited only to the identification of the phenomenon.

Conventional qualitative content analysis was used to ascertain the main themes and messages inherent to the Latvian and the Russian media stories concerning the crisis in Ukraine. This method makes use of the inductive approach wherein the study begins by observing the phenomenon, then discerns the patterns from the data, and finally defines them during the data analysis.²⁶ In this study phase, the essential components of media content were extracted and constructed based on some of the key points that were later applied to public opinion research. The sample to be analysed was limited to two news broadcasts – *Panorama* from the Latvian state television, and *Vremya* from Channel One Russia, which is rebroadcast in Latvia via the First Baltic Channel. The Latvian news show *Panorama* was chosen, as it is one of the most viewed public media news telecasts²⁷. The Russian show *Vremya* was chosen, because First Baltic Channel is the most viewed television channel among Latvia's ethnic minorities²⁸. The study analyzed 50 news stories (26 of *Panorama* and 24 of *Vremya*) about the events in Ukraine from the 29th of November 2013, when Ukraine refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, until March 16th, 2014 when the referendum in Crimea took place.

A nationally representative quantitative survey to assess public opinion was carried out in November of 2015. Computer-assisted web interviews were the method used. The sample size of 1,005 respondents, aged 18 to 74 years, covered the entire geographical span of Latvia. The survey was comprised of nine questions related to perceptions of the Euromaidan protests and the Crimean annexation. In assessing the results, it should be taken into consideration that online surveys only query those people who have access to the internet. Overall, this demographic tends to be more politically educated and more socially active. Nevertheless, the sample was representative of the overall demographic of the Latvian society, and therefore indicates credible

²⁶ Hsieh, H. F., Shannon, S. E. 2005. Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. – *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 15, No. 9, pp. 1277–1288, p. 1286.

²⁷ TNS 2015. TV kanālu auditorijas un programmu TOP20 2015.gada oktobrī (TV channel audience and TOP20 programs in October 2015). – *Media Studies*, 09 November. <<http://www.tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=4868>> (accessed November 19, 2015).

²⁸ SKDS 2014. Piederības sajūta Latvijai: mazākumtautību iedzīvotāju aptauja (A sense of belonging in Latvia: minority population survey). – May-June, p. 37. <http://providus.lv/article_files/2682/original/atskaite_piederiba_08_2014.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2015).

trends, albeit displaying slightly sharper results than other survey methods have shown. The survey was conducted by the research centre SKDS.

Two versions of the Euromaidan and the Crimean annexation

The content analysis of the *Panorama* and *Vremya* broadcasts was based on five categories of analysis. The categories and the key messages in relation to them in the Latvian and the Russian media are summarized in Table 1.

1. The goal of the Euromaidan

The Euromaidan began immediately after the Ukrainian government's unexpected refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement during the Third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius on 28–29 November 2013. On November 29th, 2013, *Panorama* reported that the Vilnius Summit was the last chance for Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement “with it becoming closer to Europe, not only economically, but perhaps also politically”.²⁹ However, *Panorama* only turned its attention to Ukraine in January 2014 when the street riots turned deadly. At the time the Latvian media was focused on the collapse of the Zolitude shopping centre in Riga, which resulted in the deaths of 54 people and injuries to another 41 people. The event was followed by the fall of the government.

From the 18th to the 21st of February 2014, the violence peaked at the Euromaidan protest, with a loss of life of more than 70 people. On the 19th of February, *Panorama* compared the Euromaidan protests to the *Barricades* in Riga in 1991, when Latvia was fighting for its independence from the Soviet Union. The former leader of the Popular Front of Latvia, Dainis Īvāns, stated that the barricades in Ukraine, were analogous to the *Barricades* in Riga, and would decide the fate of Europe, European values and democracy. In his words “the Baltic governments know better than anyone the enemy that wants to destroy the Ukrainian nation”, and stated that Russia must refrain from interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine.³⁰ On February 20th, 2013, the Euromaidan fatalities were mentioned at a rally held at the Ukrainian

²⁹ **Panorama** 2013. Eiropa pagaidām paliek bez Ukrainas (Europe currently remains without Ukraine). – 29 November. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/29.11.2013-eiropa-pagaidam-paliek-bez-ukrainas.id21290/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁰ **Panorama** 2014. Panorāma. – 19 February. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/19.02.2014-panorama.id25010/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

embassy in Riga. One participant admitted that her feelings were very much like those that had existed in Latvia during its independence movement.³¹ In similar fashion a protester at the Euromaidan stated: “I am here to keep Ukraine from being bound by Russia’s chains”.³² Hence *Panorama* drew parallels between the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine and the restoration of Latvian independence during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Vremya devoted considerably more time to the Ukrainian crisis than did *Panorama*, and it reported on the Euromaidan extensively from the very beginning. According to the Russian media, the participants of the Euro-maidan were motivated by a false hope that European integration would resolve all the problems of Ukraine.³³ *Vremya* also drew parallels with the protests that occurred during the collapse of the Soviet Union, but instead portrayed them as an illusion engendering false hope among the population and argued that they would result in a deterioration of living standards. To emphasize the protesters’ misconceptions, a story was circulated asserting that the protesters had not actually read the agreement and did not understand it. According to *Vremya*, the protesters actually sought to leave the country and improve their individual living conditions, which was something the association agreement did not provide for.³⁴ Lithuania and the other Baltic nations were used as examples showing that EU integration had actually degraded their economies. Losses in the agricultural sector were used as an example. The same report also stated that Poland had lost 70% of its economy after joining the EU.³⁵

The Russian *Vremya* argued that Western countries were interfering in Ukraine’s internal affairs. *Vremya*’s description of Kiev’s decision not to sign

³¹ **Panorama** 2014. Panorāma. – 20 February. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/20.02.2014-panorama.id25048/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³² **Panorama** 2014. Ukrainas galvaspilsētā trausls pamies (Fragile peace in Ukrainian capital). – 23 January. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/23.01.2014-ukrainas-galvaspilseta-trausls-pamiers.id23803/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³³ **Vremya** 2013. Mitinguyshiye na Maidane obyavili o nachale obschenacionalnoi zabastovki (The Maidan protesters announce a nationwide strike). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247381>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁴ **Vremya** 2013. Evropeiskiye emisari s tribumi Maidana prizivayut k nepovinoventiy vlasti (Euromaidan emisaries from the rostrum of the Maidan call for disobedience to authority). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247371>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁵ **Vremya** 2013. Resheniye Kiyeva otlozhit vopros o Evrointegracii vizvalo u Zapada buryu emociy (Kiev’s decision to postpone the issue of European integration has caused a storm of emotions in the West). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247372>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

the agreement was characterized as having caused a storm of emotions for the “superintendents of European integration”³⁶, which indicated that Ukraine was not independent in its decision making. The support of EU politicians for the Euromaidan was also interpreted as Western interference.³⁷ It was also mentioned that the agitation for European integration had been paid for by various European funds and state budgets.³⁸ From *Vremya*’s point of view, European integration was in the interests of the EU, and not in Ukraine’s. The Russian economist and academic Alexander Nikonov stated that the main goal was to give nothing to Ukraine, to use it as a market and as a source of cheap labour.³⁹ In short, the Russian media focused on the economic aspects of European integration. It asserted that the objectives of the Euromaidan were the substantiation of the false hopes of the Ukrainian people, who believed that their individual living conditions would improve, and the mercenary economic interests of the EU.

2. Ukraine’s strategic partnership

Unlike *Vremya*, *Panorama* did not question Ukraine’s strategic partnership choices. From the *Panorama* telecasts it was evident that the primary goal of the EU association agreement was to support Ukraine in its pursuit of political reforms, which, according to the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, would make it “a member of the European democratic community of nations”.⁴⁰ The Director of the Centre for East European Policy Studies, Andis Kudors, asserted that the reforms were necessary for

³⁶ **Vremya** 2013. Resheniye Kiyeva otlozhit vopros o Evrointegracii vizvalo u Zapada buryu emocij (Kiev’s decision to postpone the issue of European integration has caused a storm of emotions in the West). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247372>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁷ **Vremya** 2013. Mitinguyschiye na Maidane obyavili o nachale obschenacionalnoi zabastovki (The protesters on Maidan announced a nationwide strike). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247381>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁸ **Vremya** 2013. Evropejskiye emisari s tribumi Maidana prizivayut k nepovinoventiy vlasti (Euromaidan emissaries from the rostrum of the Maidan call for disobedience to authority). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247371>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

³⁹ **Vremya** 2013. Resheniye Kiyeva otlozhit vopros o Evrointegracii vizvalo u Zapada buryu emocij (Kiev’s decision to postpone the issue of European integration has caused a storm of emotions in the West). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247372>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

⁴⁰ **Panorama** 2013. Eiropa pagaidām paliek bez Ukrainas (Europe currently remains without Ukraine). – 29 November. <<http://lvm.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/29.11.2013-eiropa-pagaidam-paliek-bez-ukrainas.id21290/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

Ukraine, and that the main premise of the Eastern Partnership Policy was about values, as Europe needed democratic and safe neighbours.⁴¹ Thus, according to the Latvian media, Ukraine's strategic partnership with the EU was primarily based on political values. The association agreement with the EU would encourage the political reform process, which was necessary for the development of democracy in Ukraine.

Vremya focused on the economic aspects of cooperation and emphasized that Russia was a more favourable partner for Ukraine than the EU. It stressed that "the scale of Russian and Ukrainian economic relations is such that due to a simple customs conflict with Russia /.../ Ukraine has lost 25 thousand jobs a day"⁴². Consequently, *Vremya* forecast increasing unemployment in Ukraine if it were to distance itself from Russia.⁴³ It also emphasized that the EU would be unable to provide sufficient economic support for the needs of Ukraine. The promised European aid would only amount to 610 million euros, whereas the Ukraine actually needed 164 billion euros for European integration.⁴⁴ On February 2nd 2014, *Vremya* reported that the opposition leaders Arseny Yatseniuk and Vitali Klitschko visited the 50th Munich Security Conference and met with the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, who promised the opposition financial support to the amount of 15 billion dollars which was equal to the amount that Russia's President Vladimir Putin had promised the government in power in December 2013.⁴⁵ In relation to Ukraine's strategic partnership, the Russian media promoted the idea that cooperation with Russia was beneficial to Ukraine's economy, while a partnership with the EU would be harmful.

⁴¹ **Panorama** 2014. Intervija ar Andi Kudoru (Interview with Andis Kudors). – 19 February. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/19.02.2014-intervija-ar-andi-kudoru.id25005/>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

⁴² **Vremya** 2013. Resheniye Kiyeva otlozhit vopros o Evrointegracii vizvalo u Zapada buryu emocij (Kiev's decision to postpone the issue of European integration has caused a storm of emotions in the West). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247372>> (accessed November 21, 2015).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ **Vremya** 2014. Na Ukraine ekstremisti otkazivaytsa osvobozhdat zahvachenniye zdaniya, nesmotrya na ustupki Yanukovicha (In Ukraine, the extremists refuse to vacate occupied buildings, despite the concessions of Yanukovich). – 02 February. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/251492>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

3. Responsibility for the Euromaidan violence

Panorama's perspective on the violence at the Euromaidan was that the responsibility lay with the Ukrainian government and the officials who ordered the violent suppression of the demonstration. This was stated by Latvian Foreign Minister, Edgars Rinkevičs, who also emphasized that the Euromaidan demonstration was peaceful when it started. In the same interview, he noted that the opposition and the government should address problems through dialogue, and admitted that there was a possibility for provocations at the demonstration.⁴⁶ On January 24th 2014, demonstrators picketed the Embassy of Ukraine in Riga in support of the Ukrainian people who were caught in the conflict. One participant of the protest stated that she supported freedom of speech, because it was unacceptable that people were being killed for saying what they did and didn't believe in. In their coverage of the event, *Panorama* also interviewed a Russian speaking man who voiced his disapproval of the methods used by the protesters in Euromaidan⁴⁷, thus showing the other side of the story, as well.

On the same day, *Panorama* reported on protesters occupying administration buildings in several cities.⁴⁸ The protesters' weapons, according to *Panorama*, were "big, long wooden sticks, truck tyres, and firecrackers", but the police "responded with tear gas and sound grenades"⁴⁹. The Euromaidan participants interviewed said that people should be able to defend their rights, and that they were fighting against police arbitrariness and brutality.⁵⁰ *Panorama* also reported a statement by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vitaliy Zaharchenko, about the losses on the police side, but ended the story with the viewpoint of the "so-called National resistance headquarters" asserting

⁴⁶ **Panorama** 2014. Panorāma. – 22 January. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/22.01.2014-panorama.id23768/>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁴⁷ **Panorama** 2014. Akcija Rīgā par atbalstu Ukrainai (Action in Riga on assistance to Ukraine). – 24 January. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/24.01.2014-akcija-riiga-par-atbalstu-ukrainai.id23857/>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁴⁸ **Panorama** 2014. Janukovičs sola reformēt valdību; nemieri (Yanukovich promises to reform the government; unrest). – 24 January. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/24.01.2014-janukovichs-sola-reformet-valdiibu-nemieri.id23852/>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁴⁹ **Panorama** 2014. Janukovičs piedāvājis premjera krēslu opozīcijas līderim (Yanukovich offered the prime minister's chair to opposition leader). – 25 January. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/25.01.2014-janukovichs-piedavajis-premjera-kreslu-opozicijas-liiderim.id23876/>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

that the information about police detention was a deliberate provocation.⁵¹ In *Panorama*'s reporting of the memorial event to the Euromaidan fatalities, citizens of Kiev stated that it was a crime to give orders to armed units to shoot demonstrators who were wearing only raincoats and had only sticks in their hands.⁵² As to the shooting by snipers that resulted in the largest number of fatalities, *Panorama* reported that "snipers were here, police used real battle bullets here"⁵³. *Panorama*'s story placed the onus of responsibility on the government of Victor Yanukovich and its subordinate police, and the *Berkut* special task unit for the bloodshed during the Euromaidan.

From the beginning of the Euromaidan, *Vremya* characterized the demonstrations as aggressive. On December 1st 2013, it reported that opposition supporters had seized the City Hall and the House of Trade Unions buildings. Visually this message was supported with footage of people swathed in Ukrainian flags, breaking down doors, beating the windows, and causing mayhem.⁵⁴ *Vremya* emphasized that the police responded with force only after being physically attacked by the protesters, and that the police were more vulnerable than the crowd. For example, on December 1st, 2014, *Vremya* reported that the soldiers of the Special Forces had resorted to force only after protesters threw stones, bottles and burning logs at them.⁵⁵ The same pattern can be seen in the report on January 19th, 2014, when *Vremya* reported that what was being called a "peaceful popular assembly" was in fact an attack on police by young people in masks, armed with baseball bats, wooden shields and gas masks. According to *Vremya*, it was a planned provocation, and the "hooligans managed to deprive the police of at least five buses".⁵⁶

On January 26th 2014, *Vremya* provided information about a turning point in the Euromaidan when a group of radicals separated from a peaceful rally, and undertook a "senseless and ruthless pogrom". *Vremya* termed it *Maidan 2.0*, which began with radical groups ignoring the calls for non-violence.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² **Panorama** 2014. Miliči pamet pilsētas centru, protestētāji paliek (Police is leaving the city center, protesters remain). – 21 February. <<http://lv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/21.02.2014-milichi-pamet-pilsetas-centru-protestetaji-paliek.id25078/>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ **Vremya** 2014. Mitinguyschiye na Maidane obyavili o nachale obschenacionalnoi zabastovki (The protesters on Maidan announced a nationwide strike). – 01 December. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/247381>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ **Vremya** 2014. V centre Kiyeva proizoshli ozhestochenniye stolknoveniya mezhdutim-guyuschami i miliciyei (In the city center there have been violent clashes between protesters and police). – 19 January. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/250479>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

The first victims of the aggressors were policemen whose faces and hands were burned to the bone by Molotov cocktails. *Vremya* supplemented the report with information about a training camp at the centre of the Euromaidan where “experienced instructors explained how to do this in the hot spots”.⁵⁷ *Vremya* stressed that police have an imperative to suppress violent protests, and as reinforcement they interviewed two lawyers from Germany. The lawyers confirmed that in similar circumstances the reaction of the German police would also be extremely harsh.⁵⁸ But as to the snipers, *Vremya*’s position was unclear. The former Chairman of the Security Service of Ukraine, Alexander Yakimenko, stated that the shooting took place from a building that was under the control of the Maidan commandant, Andrei Parubiy, and that the snipers had “supported an armed attack on the Interior Ministry’s employees who were already demoralized and, who were in fact, fleeing”.⁵⁹ *Vremya* maintained that radical and ultranationalist groups were primarily responsible for the Euromaidan violence, and that the police and the *Berkut* special unit were actually the victims.

4. The change of Government in Ukraine

As the Ukraine changed its government, *Panorama* focused on the course of events and did not question the legality of what was happening. From the *Panorama* broadcasts, it was clear that V. Yanukovich’s legitimacy was invalidated after the violent reprisals were initiated at the Euromaidan. As a result Yanukovich was portrayed as a criminal, and not the legitimate president of Ukraine. For example, on February 22nd 2014, Ostop Krivdik, the International Relations Secretary of the Self-defence Units, said that V. Yanukovich had left Kiev forever and would not come back, because he had killed people.⁶⁰ Likewise, the people interviewed during the commemoration

⁵⁷ **Vremya** 2014. Ukrainskaya opozitsiya ne primimayet predlozheniy vlasti dazhe pered licom realnoi ugrozi razvala strani (Ukrainian opposition did not accept the offer of power, even in the face of a real threat of collapse of the country). – 26 January. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/250972>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ **Vremya** 2014. Kto oni – politiki, zanyavshiye klycheviye mesta v novom pravitelstve Ukraini? (Who are they? The politicians taking key positions in the new government of the Ukraine?). – 16 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/254256>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁶⁰ **Panorama** 2014. Opozicionāri pārņem prezidenta administrācijas ēku (Opposition takes over the presidential administration building). – 22 February. <<http://1tv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/22.02.2014-opozicionari-parņem-prezidenta-administracijas-eku.id25097/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

of the protest fatalities, alleged that V. Yanukovich must be punished for the murders and that it was necessary to change the entire government.⁶¹ Another factor undermining V. Yanukovich was his suburban residence of Mezhygorye, which was opened to the public after he fled Kiev. Its opulence provided visual evidence of the scope of the corruption, and many of the Kiev residents who were interviewed concluded that it was built with taxpayers' money.⁶² *Panorama* advanced the position that the Ukraine needed a government that would be comprised of the people who had organized the barricades, and that the ministers must be professionals with good reputations.⁶³

From *Vremya*'s perspective, the change in government in the Ukraine was a scheme that the West had often implemented in foreign countries. The events had transpired despite an agreement being reached for a settlement of the crisis.⁶⁴ The agreement was concluded on February 21st 2014, between V. Yanukovich and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition with mediation by representatives of the EU. The political analyst Fyodor Lukyanov commented that when the events at the Euromaidan became chaotic, the West was quick to enact a program that they had applied in other countries such as Libya, Syria and Egypt.⁶⁵ Paul Craig Roberts, the American economist and blogger who is famous for his sharp criticism of US foreign policy, further expounded on the nature the West's involvement. In his interview with *Vremya* he stated: "The main problem of the crisis that Washington has provoked in Ukraine lies in the fact that over the last two decades, the US is trying to drag Ukraine in NATO, to place a military base on its territory."⁶⁶

⁶¹ **Panorama** 2014. Kijevas Neatkarības laukumā piemin nogalinātos (Commemoration for the victims in the Kiev Independence Square). – 24 February. <<http://lsm.lv/lv/raksts/24.02.2014-kijevas-neatkariibas-laukuma-piemin-nogalinatos.id25226/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶² **Panorama** 2014. Politiskās elites izšķērdīgā greznība šokē tautu (The wasteful luxury of the political elite shocked the nation). – 23 February. <<http://lsm.lv/lv/raksts/23.02.2014-politiskas-elites-izshkjerdiiga-grezniba-shoke-tautu.id25159/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶³ **Panorama** 2014. Gaida Ukrainas valdības apstiprināšanu (Ukraine is waiting for governmental approval). – 26 February. <<http://lsm.lv/lv/raksts/26.02.2014-gaida-ukrainas-valdibas-apstiprinashanu.id25307/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶⁴ **Vremya** 2014. Verhovnaya Rada vozlozhila obyazannosti prezidenta Ukraini na spikera parlamenta Aleksandra Turchinova (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine assigned duties of the president to the parliament speaker Oleksandr Turchinov). – 23 February. <<http://www.ltv.ru/news/world/252828>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ **Vremya** 2014. V tom, chto politicheskiy krizis na Ukraine voshel v ostruy fazu, ne somnevayetsa nikto (No one doubts that the political crisis in the Ukraine has reached a critical phase). – 02 March. <<http://www.ltv.ru/news/polit/253274>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

On March 2nd, 2014, the Chairman of the Coordination Council of the Sevastopol City Administration for Support Services in Sevastopol, Alexey Chaly, declared that what had taken place in Kiev on February 21st was in fact an unconstitutional coup. This was based on the fact that the transition to a parliamentary republic must follow certain procedures, and that these procedures had not been observed.⁶⁷ The same day *Vremya* also reported that, according to data from WCIOM public opinion research centre, 25% of the Russians who were polled held the opinion that what occurred in Kiev was a violent seizure of power and amounted to a coup.⁶⁸ The questionable legitimacy of the transition of governments in Kiev was also underscored by the fact that the Maidan movement was not representative of all people, but only those who were on the square. People in the south were of a different opinion⁶⁹, and therefore chose not to comply with the new government.⁷⁰ From the *Vremya* perspective, the change of government in Ukraine was a coup d'état backed by the West.

5. Interpretation of the Crimean annexation

Pro-Russian activities were initiated in Crimea, and in other regions of the south, as a result of the change of government in Kiev. This resulted in tense relations between the Western countries and Russia. For example, *Panorama*'s report showed contradictory views from personnel at the US, British, and Russian Embassies. Western diplomats opined that Russia's involvement in Crimea was an illegal military operation, whereas the Russian ambassador stressed that it was self-defence.⁷¹ *Panorama* reports offered viewers opposing assessments of the situation. On March 1st 2014, *Panorama*

⁶⁷ **Vremya** 2014. Novosti iz Ukrainskix regionov napominayt svodki s fronta (News from the Ukrainian regions are reminiscent of reports from the front). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253272>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶⁸ **Vremya** 2014. Za sobitijami na Ukraine, sudya po oprosam, sledyat tri chetverti Rossiyan (According to polls three quarters of the Russian population are following the events in the Ukraine). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/253286>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁶⁹ **Vremya** 2014. Situacija v Kijeve opisiviayetsa odnoi frazoi: bitva za vlast vo vremya bez-vlastiya (The situation in Kiev is described in one sentence: the battle for power in a time of anarchy). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253273>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁰ **Vremya** 2014. Novosti iz Ukrainskix regionov napominayt svodki s fronta (News from Ukrainian regions are reminiscent of reports from the front). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253272>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷¹ **Panorama** 2014. Okupācija vai pašaisardzība (Occupation or self-defence). – 03 March. <<http://lsm.lv/lv/raksts/03.03.2014-okupacija-vai-pashaizsardziiba.id25511/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

reported a statement issued by senior Latvian officials stating that Latvia strongly supported the territorial integrity of the Ukraine, and categorically condemned any measures seeking to undermine the Ukraine's unity and its territorial integrity.⁷² Reacting to Russia's military involvement in Ukraine, the former President of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, declared that Russia's actions were an unjustified aggression against an independent, sovereign state.⁷³ The former Latvian Foreign Minister, Georgs Andrejevs, explained that Russia had enormous geopolitical interests in the Ukraine and therefore it would not hesitate to use its influence to defend those interests.⁷⁴

On March 6th, 2014 *Panorama* reported that OSCE observers had been denied entry to Crimea. This was in contravention to legal norms and laws. The same report provided information about the Tatar community's call for UN peacekeeping forces to enter Crimea and that the Tatars would not take part in the referendum.⁷⁵ On March 15th 2014, *Panorama* reported on a demonstration in Moscow that supported Ukraine and condemned the war and annexation of Crimea. According to *Panorama*, there were many more participants at the anti-war demonstration than there were at the demonstration supporting the reunion of Crimea and Russia, which was taking place simultaneously.⁷⁶ On March 16th 2014, *Panorama* reported that Latvia refused to recognize the legality of the Crimean referendum.⁷⁷

On February 2nd 2014 *Vremya* began reporting on potential separatism and the formation of self-defence units against extremism.⁷⁸ On February

⁷² **Panorama** 2014. Panorāma. – 01 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/01.03.2014-panorama.id25410/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷³ **Panorama** 2014. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga par situāciju Ukrainā (Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga on the situation in Ukraine). – 02 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/02.03.2014-vaira-viikje-freiberga-par-situaciju-ukraina.id25448/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁴ **Panorama** 2014. Ukrainas iespējamie scenāriji var pārveidot Eiropu (Possible Ukrainian scenarios can transform Europe). – 02 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/02.03.2014-ukrainas-iespejamie-scenariji-var-parveidot-eiropu.id25443/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁵ **Panorama** 2014. Žurnālists S.Semjonovs par situāciju Krimā (Journalist S.Semjonovs about the situation in Ukraine). – 06 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/06.03.2014-zurnalists-s.semjonovs-par-situaciju-krima.id25679/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁶ **Panorama** 2014. Maskavā atbalsta Ukraina (Ukraine is being supported in Moscow). – 15 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/15.03.2014-maskava-atbalsta-ukrainu.id26114/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁷ **Panorama** 2014. Panorāma. – 16 March. <<http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/16.03.2014-panorama.id26179/>> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷⁸ **Vremya** 2014. Na Ukraine ekstremisti otkazivaytsa osvobozhdat zahvachenniye zdaniya, nesmotrya na ustupki Yanukovicha (In Ukraine, the extremists refuse to release the captured buildings, despite the concessions of Yanukovich). – 02 February. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/251492>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

23rd 2014, *Vremya* reported that large anti-Maidan rallies were being held in Odessa and Luhansk, and that Crimean self-defence units were being given St. George ribbons and weapons training.⁷⁹ There were also reports of rallies in Russia to support their compatriots in Crimea. War veterans said that they were against the double standards of the West, where everything begins with democracy, but ends with the use of weapons like in Syria and Libya.⁸⁰ Other themes were also presented in the same report, such as the position that Russia was a peaceful country that never attacks, pre-emption of the *brown plague*, and that the secession of Ukraine and Belarussia from Russia was part of Hitler's plan to conquer Russia.⁸¹ It was also argued that Crimea had always belonged to Russia and had only become part of the territory of Ukraine as a result of a misunderstanding.⁸²

In response to the concerns of Western political leaders about the use of Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, V. Putin drew attention to the provocative and criminal activities of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, and emphasized that there was a real threat to the lives of Russian speaking citizens. It was therefore necessary for Russia to be ready to take all steps within the framework of international law.⁸³ According to *Vremya's*, coverage the people of Crimea enthusiastically embraced the news that Russia was ready to protect them.⁸⁴ For more than 20 years they had been waiting for a reunion with Russia, and even the Crimean Tatars supported the referendum and were of the opinion

⁷⁹ **Vremya** 2014. Verhonaya Rada vozlozhila obyazannosti prezidenta Ukraini na Aleksandra Turchinova (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine assigned duties of the president to the parliament speaker Oleksandr Turchynov). – 23 February. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/252828>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸⁰ **Vremya** 2014. Akcii v podderzhku sootchestvinnikov v Krimu proshli v neskolkih gordax Rosii (Rallies in support of compatriots in Crimea were held in several cities in Russia). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/253287>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² **Vremya** 2014. Vopros „chya zdes zemlya” dlya Krima – istoriya davnaya (In Crimea, the question “whose land is it” has a long history). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253275>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸³ **Vremya** 2014. Situacii vokrug Ukraini bil posvyaschen ryad vazhnih telefonnih razgovorov Vladimira Putina (The Ukraine situation was discussed in a number of important telephone conversations of Vladimir Putin). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/253265>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸⁴ **Vremya** 2014. Zhiteli Krima s voodushevleiyem vosprinyali izvestiye, chto Rossiya gotova vstat na ih zaschitu (The inhabitants of Crimea are encouraged by the news that Russia is ready to come to their defense). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253242>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

that they must join with Russia.⁸⁵ Kosovo's declaration of independence was used to legitimize the Crimea referendum,⁸⁶ although it was admitted that the principles of international law were conflicting, and open to interpretation.⁸⁷ On March 16th 2014, *Vremya* reported that the referendum was well organized, it had experienced a high turnout, including in the areas populated by Crimean Tatars, and that international observers had not noticed any serious violations of law.⁸⁸

Table 1. Coverage of the Ukrainian crisis in the Latvian and the Russian media.

Category of analysis	<i>Panorama</i> story	<i>Vremya</i> story
Goal of the Euromaidan	To gain independence from Russia and to strengthen ties with Europe through a commitment to European values and democracy. The Euromaidan is analogous to the <i>Barricades</i> in Riga in 1991.	Raising false hopes for the Ukrainian people that their individual living conditions will improve, as well as the one-sided economic interests of the EU.
Ukraine's strategic partnership	Strategic partnership with the EU will encourage political reforms and the development of democracy in Ukraine.	Strategic partnership with Russia is beneficial to the Ukrainian economy, unlike the partnership with the EU.
Responsibility for the Euromaidan violence	The government of V. Yanukovich, the police and the <i>Berkut</i> special task force unit. The snipers were from the police.	Radical and ultra-nationalist groups. The identity of the snipers is unclear.

⁸⁵ *Vremya* 2014. V Krimu gotovyatsa k referendumu, Kiev okazivayet protivodeistviye. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253773>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸⁶ *Vremya* 2014. V tom, chto politicheskiy krizis na Ukraine voshol v ostruy fazu, ne somnevayetsa nikto (Nobody doubts that the political crisis in Ukraine is in the acute phase). – 02 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/253274>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸⁷ *Vremya* 2014. Politologi i ekonomisti sravnivayut situaciy v Krimu s drugimi pohozhimi sluchayami v mirovoi istorii (Political scientists and economists compare the situation in Crimea with other similar cases throughout the history of the world). – 16 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/254250>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

⁸⁸ *Vremya* 2014. Mezhdunarodniye nablydateli otmetili prekrasnuy organizaciy referendumu v Krimu (International observers noted the excellent organization of the referendum in Crimea). – 16 March. <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/254260>> (accessed November 24, 2015).

Table 1. Continuation

Category of analysis	<i>Panorama</i> story	<i>Vremya</i> story
The change of government in Ukraine	A logical outcome of the Euromaidan. The people demanded a change in government and V. Yanukovich's credibility was nullified by the killings during the Euromaidan and the use taxpayer's money to support his opulent lifestyle.	A violent coup backed by the West.
Interpretation of the Crimean annexation	Russian aggression against an independent state to retain influence in Ukraine. The Crimean annexation was a violation of international law.	Russia's involvement in Crimea was necessary to protect the Russian speaking population in Ukraine. The Crimean referendum was democratic and legal. Crimea has historically belonged to Russia and the people of Crimea supported the reunion with Russia.

The synopsis of the Ukrainian crisis narratives of *Panorama* and *Vremya* demonstrates that the Latvian and Russian medias constructed separate “realities”. From the Latvian media perspective the essence of the crisis was about the Ukraine’s efforts to gain independence from Russia, integrate into the EU, promote political reforms, and democratize. *Panorama* was critical of the Yanukovich government and supportive of the government that was established as a result of the Euromaidan. Regarding the annexation of the Crimea, *Panorama* reiterated the official positions of the Latvian government and the EU. In contrast to *Panorama*, *Vremya* placed the emphasis on economic issues asserting that a strategic partnership with Russia would more beneficial for the economy of Ukraine, and that the protesters had been manipulated with the false hopes that their living conditions would improve if Ukraine would form a strategic partnership with the EU. *Vremya* was neutral in relation to the Yanukovich government and blamed radicals and ultra-nationalists for the violence of the protests. The Russian media was very critical of the post-Euromaidan government, deeming it unconstitutional and accusing it of being backed by the Western countries, mainly the U.S. *Vremya* also justified the Crimea annexation stating that it was legal, and necessary.

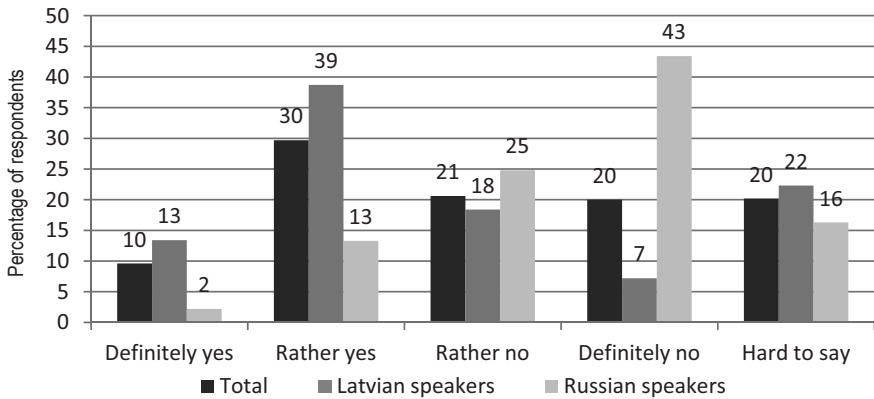
Which narrative of the Ukrainian crisis prevailed in Latvia?

To determine the effect of the conflicting narratives on Latvian society, an opinion poll based off of each the categories of analysis, as enumerated in Table 1, was conducted. The respondents were asked nine questions in total. Each question reflected either the Latvian or Russian media perspective, which was determined by applying the media content analysis. The exception was the final question that addressed the attitude of the respondents towards the media in general. To assess the impact of the Latvian and Russian media narratives on Latvian society, it is assumed that the prevailing narrative was the one that gained the greatest public support.

The first question of the survey addressed the overall aim of the Euro-aidan (Figure 1). The survey sought to find the extent to which Latvian society agreed with the idea expressed on *Panorama* that the goals of the Euromaidan protesters were similar to those of the participants in the *Barricades* in Latvia in 1991. In total, 40% of the respondents agreed (10% “definitely yes” and 30% “rather yes”) with the narrative of the Latvian media, and 41% disagreed (21% “rather no” and 20% “definitely no”). 20% of the respondents had no opinion. When basing the data off of ethnicity, it becomes evident that 52% of Latvian speakers saw a parallel between the Euro-aidan movement and the *Barricades* in Latvia in 1991 (13% “definitely yes” and 39% “somewhat yes”), while only 15% of the Russian speakers held a similar view (2% “definitely yes” and 13% “rather yes”). 68% of the Russian speakers interviewed disagreed with the statement in question (25% “rather no” and 43% “definitely no”). It can therefore be concluded that the perception of the *Barricades* in Latvia in 1991 as being analogous to the events in the Ukraine, was actually rather widespread in Latvia, albeit mainly among the Latvian speaking population. The fact that the majority of Russian speakers disagree, is evidence of a polarization of opinions among Latvian and Russian speakers in Latvia.

The second question studied the views of the respondents in relation to the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine from the perspective of economic benefits (Figure 2). When asked which strategic partnership would be more beneficial to the Ukrainian economy, 41% of respondents answered that cooperation with the EU would be better for the economy of Ukraine, while 33% were of the opinion that Russia would be a better strategic partner. 26%, however, could not answer the question. Although it is evident that the Latvian society supported the Latvian media narrative that Ukraine should be further integrated into the EU, nevertheless, just as was the case in the previous ques-

tion, there was a sharp polarization of opinions among Latvian and Russian speakers. 59% of Latvian speakers support Ukraine’s partnership with the EU, while only 8% of Russian speakers express a similar view. And while, 66% of Russian speakers were of the opinion that Russia would be a better strategic partner for Ukraine, only 16% of Latvian speakers agreed with this.



Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

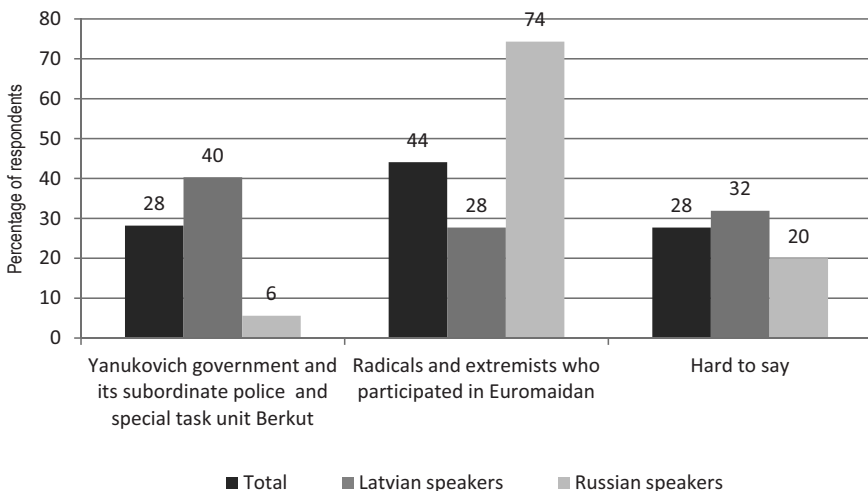
Figure 1. Do you think that the objectives of the Euromaidan were similar those of the Latvian Barricades in 1991, when participants were fighting for freedom and human rights?



Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

Figure 2. Who would be more beneficial to the Ukrainian economy?

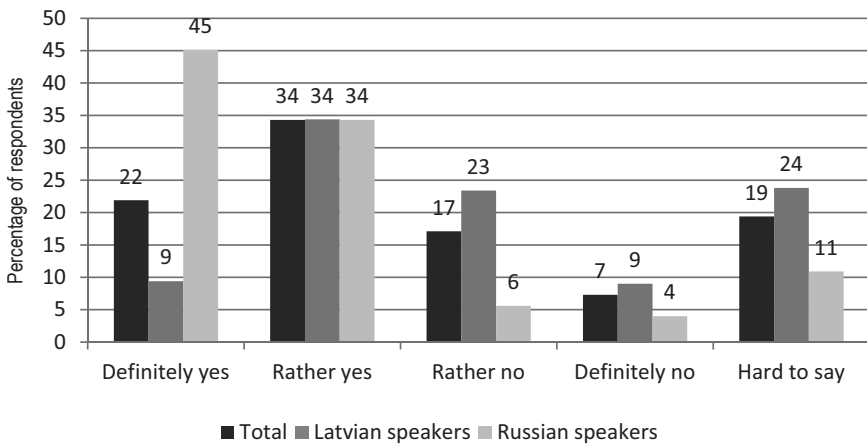
As to the party responsible for the violence at the Euromaidan, *Vremya*'s story dominated in Latvian society (Figure 3). Only 28% of the respondents agreed with *Panorama*'s position that the government of V. Yanukovich, its subordinate police, and the *Berkut* special task unit was responsible for the bloodshed. The opinions of the majority of the respondents – 44%, were aligned with the *Vremya* reports asserting that radicals and extremists were responsible for the violence at the Euromaidan. The overall trend of Latvian speakers expressing viewpoints similar to the *Panorama* stories, and Russian speakers sharing views similar to those disseminated by *Vremya*, could also be detected in the answer patterns for this question. The view that V. Yanukovich was to blame for the violence was supported by 40% of Latvian speakers, but by only 6% of the Russian speakers. However, a relatively large proportion of Latvian speakers – 28%, and the majority – 74% of Russian speakers, supported the Russian media narrative asserting that the radicals and extremists were responsible for the violence. It is also important to stress that a very large proportion of respondents – 28% did not answer this question, which could mean that they were either confused by the contradictory media stories, or, perhaps, that the events in the Ukraine were not important enough for them to formulate a view on the issue, especially as it was such a complicated one.



Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

Figure 3. Which group was responsible for the violence and bloodshed during the protests at the Euromaidan?

The respondent's answers to the questions concerning the change of government in Ukraine also indicated greater support for *Vremya*'s version rather than for *Panorama*'s. 56% of all respondents supported the view (22% “definitely yes” and 34% “rather yes”) that the change of government, which took place as a result of the Euromaidan, should be regarded as a coup d'état (Figure 4), which “by definition is illegal”⁸⁹. This idea was not only supported by 79% (45% “definitely yes” and 34% “rather yes”) of the Russian speakers, but also by 43% of the Latvian speakers (9% “definitely yes” and 34% “rather yes”). Only 32% of the Latvian speakers (23% “rather no” and 9% “definitely no”) and 10% of the Russian speakers (6% “rather no” and 4% “definitely no”) disagreed. A greater number of Latvian speakers had no opinion on this matter – 24%, compared to 11% of the Russian speakers. And despite the fact that a large proportion of Latvian speakers tend to be pro-Western (see Figure 2), many did not consider the change of government in Ukraine to be legitimate.



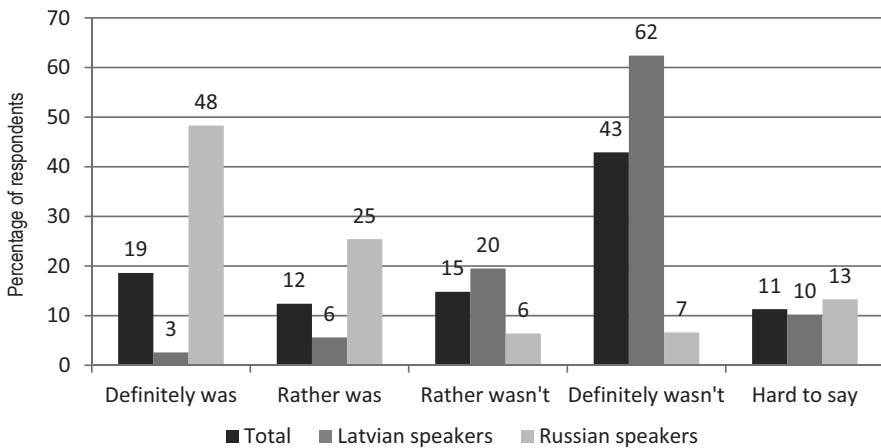
Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

Figure 4. The change of government in Ukraine resulting from the Euromaidan, should be regarded as a coup d'état.

The next four questions addressed various aspects of the Crimean annexation. The answers show that on these issues the views of respondents were more in accord with the *Panorama* position. However, the trend of Russian

⁸⁹ **Luttwak, E.** 1979. *Coup d'Etat: Practical Handbook*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 172.

speakers expressing views similar to those of *Vremya* nevertheless persists. 58% of the respondents (43% “definitely wasn’t” and 15% “rather wasn’t”) disagreed with the idea that the referendum on Crimea’s accession to Russia was lawful and in accordance with international law (Figure 5). This view was expressed by 82% of Latvian speakers (62% “definitely wasn’t” and 20% “rather wasn’t”). 31% of the total number of respondents considered the Crimean referendum to be legal, and in accordance with international law (19% “definitely was” and 12% “rather was”) with 73% of the Russian speakers holding this view (48% “definitely was” and 25% “rather was”). A very sharp polarization of opinions can be identified with regard to the legitimacy of the Crimean referendum. As can be seen, the majority of the Latvian speaking and Russian speaking respondents selected answers that the referendum either “definitely wasn’t” or “definitely was” legal. 11% of all respondents had no opinion in this regard. This is more than 50% less when compared with other questions in the survey (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). On this issue, the majority of respondents had clear and strong positions.



Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

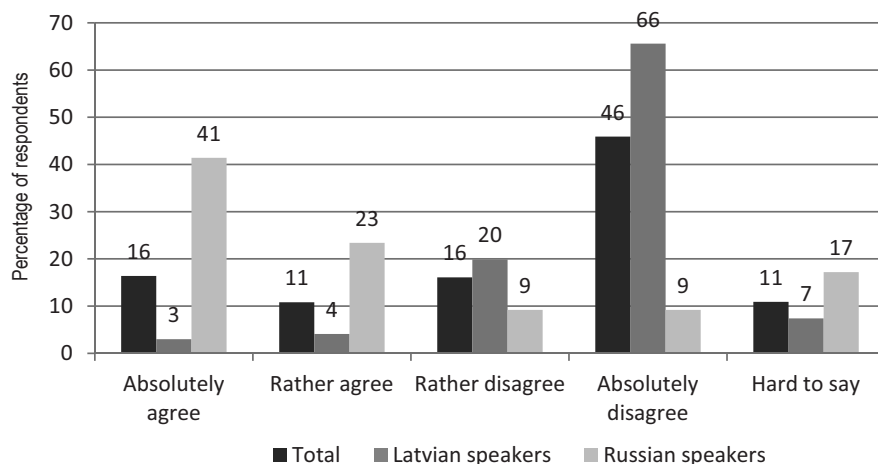
Figure 5. The referendum on Crimea’s accession to Russia was lawful and was in accordance with international law.

The distribution of answers in regards to the question of whether Crimea was an integral part of Ukraine followed a similar pattern. 55% of all respondents admitted that it was (35% “definitely is” and 20% “rather is”), but 34% disagreed (22% “definitely isn’t” and 12% “rather isn’t”). 77% of the Latvian speaking respondents were of the opinion that Crimea belonged to Ukraine (50% “definitely is” and 27 % “rather is”), but 75% of the Russian speakers

answered that they disagreed with this (53% “definitely isn’t” and 22% “rather isn’t”).

The position forwarded by the Russian media that Crimea had historically belonged to Russia seems to have been accepted by many Latvian speakers as well. The distribution of answers in support of each of the positions was almost equal with 43% of the respondents agreeing that Crimea historically belonged to Russia (25% “definitely is” and 18% “rather is”), 40% disagreeing (21% “definitely isn’t” and 19% “rather isn’t”), and 17% being unsure. 83% of the Russian speakers agreed with the statement (61% “definitely is” and 22% “rather is”), and 22% of the Latvian speakers also held a similar view (6% “definitely is” and 16% “rather is”). An indication that opinions of Latvian speakers were mixed on this issue was evidenced by the fact that only 29% of them were categorical in agreeing that Crimea “definitely isn’t” when asked if Crimea had historically belonged to Russia. This is in contrast to the previous two questions about the Crimean referendum, where the clear majority of Latvian speakers chose answers that supported the most emphatic positions. As to Crimea historically belonging to Russia, 28% of the Latvian speakers answered that it “rather isn’t”, and for 20% it was hard to say. In comparison – only 11% of the Russian speakers found this question difficult to answer, which means that they held stronger views in this regard than the Latvian speakers.

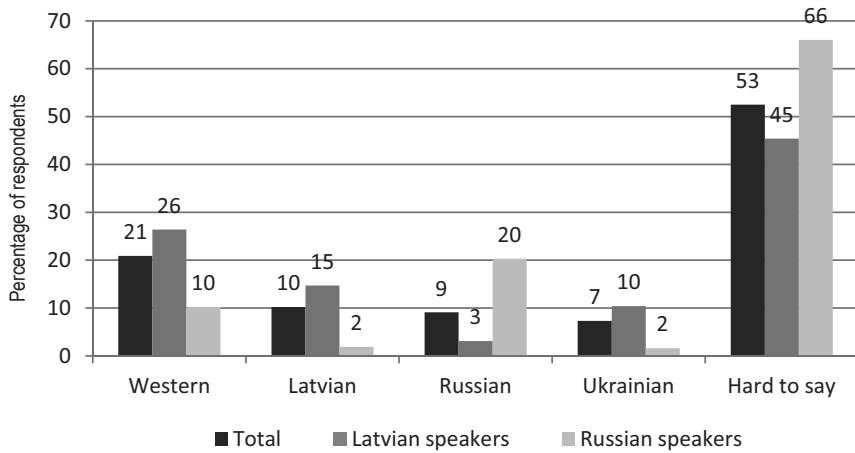
The last question about the Crimean annexation examined the Latvian society’s reaction to the argument that the event was justified by a need to protect the Russian speaking population (Figure 6). Only 27% of the respondents agreed (16% “absolutely agree” and 11% “rather agree”) that the Ukraine’s territorial integrity could be violated in order to protect the Russian speaking population. 62% of respondents disagreed with this (46% “absolutely disagree” and 16% “rather disagree”). 64% of the Russian speakers agreed with this statement (41% “absolutely agree” and 23% “rather agree”), which is slightly less than in other questions where, on average, more than 70% of Russian speaking respondents expressed views similar to those of the Russian media stories. Latvian speaking respondents had a clearly negative attitude towards the statement in question with 86% disagreeing (66% “absolutely disagree” and 20% “rather disagree”), while only 7% of Latvian speakers found it hard to answer this question. The data showed that the justification for Russia’s involvement in other states to protect the Russian speaking population was largely rejected by Latvian society. Nor did this idea have broad support within the Russian speaking population, who otherwise tend to share the world-view promoted in the Russian media.



Source: SKDS 2015. Quantitative online survey.

Figure 6. Crimea's union with Russia was necessary to protect the Russian speaking population from ultra-national and radical groups.

Finally, the respondents were also asked which media provided the most objective information about the events in Ukraine: the Western, Latvian, Russian or Ukrainian (Figure 7). Interestingly enough, the majority of respondents 53% thought that it was “hard to say” meaning that none of the media was perceived as objective. In Latvia, the Western media was considered to be the most objective with 21% of the respondents validating it. The Latvian media was mentioned by 10%, while the Russian media was favoured by 9%. The Ukrainian media was supported by only 7%. There were also marked differences in the views of Latvian and Russian speakers on this issue. Latvian speakers considered the Western (26%) media to be the most impartial, followed by the Latvian media (15%), then the Ukrainian (10%), and finally the Russian (3%). This was somewhat inverted for the Russian speakers. In their view, the most objective information about the Ukraine crisis was provided by the Russian media (20%), followed by the Western (10%), but only 2% mentioned the Latvian and Ukrainian media as exemplars of providing impartial information about the Ukraine. There were more Russian speakers (66%) than Latvian speakers (45%) who disbelieved all media outlets. Thus it can be concluded that the contradictory media stories within the society diminished the credibility of all of the media outlets.



Source: SKDS. 2015. Quantitative online survey.

Figure 7. Which media provided the most objective information about the events in Ukraine?

By and large the results of the public opinion survey indicate that the views of the Latvian society regarding the crisis in the Ukraine mostly aligned with the position of the Latvian media. The strongest positive correlation of the views of Latvian society and the Latvian media narratives can be found in relation to the Crimea annexation. However, Latvian society also supported the Russian media narratives on the issues of the Euromaidan violence, and the change of government in the Ukraine. The survey also gives insight into the polarization of opinions among Latvian and Russian speakers. It is also important to stress that for many respondents it was hard to answer the questions, which means that the crisis in Ukraine is not always an important and clearly defined event for the respondents. The combination of media content analysis and public opinion survey gives a better understanding of perceptions than a focus on media content alone could. Narrowing the study only to media content does not provide an actual understanding of the battle of narratives. This is due to the fact that people tend to make their own conclusions and judgements based on their conceptions of the issues.

Conclusions

The chosen methodological approach of combining media content analysis and a public opinion survey was an effective means of gaining insight into the effects of public opinion warfare on Latvian society. Different and

contradictory themes and messages can be detected in the Latvian and the Russian media stories. This leads to the conclusion that information warfare was occurring in Latvia during the Ukrainian crisis.

The public opinion survey made it possible to measure, which media stories best coincided with the views of the overall population. For the most part, the majority of Latvians thought along the same lines as the Latvian media, but there was also considerable support for the Russian media narratives. The Latvian media narratives correspond largely with the views of the Latvian speaking population, whereas the views of Russian speakers were aligned with the Russian media position. In general, it can be said that the breadth of Russian media influence regarding the Ukrainian crisis in Latvia was determined by the size of the Russian speaking population. The Russian media stories had less purchase with the Latvian speaking audience. Considering the contradictory content of the Latvian and the Russian media, one of the most important consequences of the public opinion warfare in Latvia was the polarization of opinions among Latvian and Russian speakers.

The existence of contradictory views in Latvian society poses an indirect, albeit long-term problem for the Latvian government. The polarization of opinions makes it difficult to develop policies that are acceptable to majority of society. Latvia's condemnation of the Crimean annexation can be mentioned as one example. The official position of Latvia was in contravention to the view held by many Russian speakers, who considered the referendum on the Crimean annexation to be legal. Absence of public consent for a government's policies widens the gap between the state and the populace. The problem is not then just limited to effective governance, but may extend to national security if war is conducted by non-military means. Another long-term negative consequence of public opinion warfare is that if people are confronted with contradictory and unverified media stories, they will tend to disbelieve all media stories as a result. Consequently, if trust in the media, which is the main source of political information is undermined, then the government's ability to communicate with the populace becomes significantly more complicated.

To mitigate a polarization of opinions among Latvian and Russian speakers and to decrease the gap between the government and the populace, it is necessary to adopt a strategy of operating in a divided society. It is difficult for the Latvian government to counter Russia's narratives in relation to the crisis in Ukraine, but it is of paramount importance to address the issues within the Latvian society that are important for all the major social groups in a manner that demonstrates consistency between words and deeds. This

could be one of the most effective long-term methods for strengthening the relationship between the government and society in Latvia and reducing the impact of foreign influence.

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