

# THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

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## Abstract

Mass media is a double cutting edge sword, considering its role and influence within any human society. Pushed by their bosses or by their internal desire to become more famous, quite many journalists disrespect deontological principles of telling the truth, being impartial and not altering the information sent to the public. During the conflicts many publications, radio and TV stations become partisans of one part or another. This has happened and still happens in Ukraine's crisis too. Mass media from all over the world brought their contribution to stimulate tensions between parts involved in the Ukrainian crisis.

**Keywords:** *Ukrainian crisis, Crimea secession, MH-17 crash, journalist's code, partisan media.*

## 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The violent confrontation in Ukraine - which its inhabitants call country and the Russians border<sup>1</sup> - did not start on November 29, 2013 when President Viktor Yanukovici decided not to sign the Treaty of association with the European Union<sup>2</sup>. The Ukrainian President's gesture was the moment when a large part of the population's grievances could not be stopped and tens of thousands of people gathered in the Independence Square in Kiev to demand pro-Russian regime to steer the country towards the West, not to Moscow<sup>3</sup>.

Basically, on 29 November 2013, the opposition to Yanukovych regime used the grievances and disappointments of a part of the population to initiate a revolt against the government in Kiev. The background of the popular discontent which was converted into violent clashes was a political, ethnic-linguistic and religious one<sup>4</sup>, overlapping the faltering economy and the rampant<sup>5</sup> corruption that helped some "enterprising people" to become euro multimillionaires and billionaires.

As in most of the former communist states, in the former Soviet states during the transition from single controlled economy and party leadership to market economy and democracy was one where the institutional weaknesses of the states was promptly exploited by bold, unfair people who acquired an important part of state properties. Subsequently, to protect their accumulated wealth through unorthodox ways, the tycoons have become politicians, parliamentarians and leaders in various state institutions, positions that allowed them to influence the development of events in the direction desired by them.

## 2. THE POSITION OF UKRAINIAN AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TO THE CRISIS

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As expected, the political, economic, social and military events in Ukraine were the subject of several articles and audio and video broadcasted for the public by the domestic and international media.

Although the journalists have 'codes of conduct' and 'good practice standards' that put forward prominently the objectivity, the impartiality and fair presentation of facts to inform the public with relevant and real data, we find that many Ukrainian and foreign mass media journalists gave up most of the principles and commitments freely assumed and "enrolled" in the camps of the warring parties supporters.

The right, to their own image of the main individual actors was violated (the former Presidents Yanukovici and Poroshenko of Ukraine, the Russian President<sup>6</sup> and other important actors of the Ukrainian and international

political scene who involved in negotiations between the warring parties<sup>6</sup>) and collective ones - states (Russia, USA, Ukraine etc.), regional organizations (NATO, EU) communities within the states (the opposition to Yanukovici regime, the Ukrainian parliament, government and the Ukrainian army, the opposition to the current regime in Kiev, the leaders of the Crimean Autonomous Republic, etc.)

Several journalists and politicians in Ukraine and NATO and EU<sup>7</sup> member states accused Russia and its leaders that they generated the events in Ukraine to prevent it from getting nearer to the Euro-Atlantic structures. Russia argued the reason of its military intervention in Ukraine, to the United Nations Security Council<sup>8</sup>, by presenting the request of former Ukrainian President Yanukovici to President Putin to help restore order in the country<sup>9</sup>. In turn, the majority of mass media in Russia have accused the current leadership in Kiev and the US<sup>10</sup> policy of generating the violent events of February 2014 and the others that followed and led to armed confrontations with the opponents from eastern Ukraine. There are voices of some Westerners who say that the US orchestrated the events in Kiev, which could lead to a war with the Russian Federation<sup>11</sup>.

Informed by the means of mass communication which have remained independent but misinformed and even manipulated by the partisan media, about the course of events in Ukraine, the international community took action, first by addressing exhortations to calm and working out of contentious issues through negotiations. The upward trend tensions in Kiev and then a significant part of the country, which culminated in the secession of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, determined the United Nations to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

At the end of the debates in the World General Assembly, the Russian Federation was condemned by 100 votes against 11, 58 abstentions and the rest to 198 Member States did not vote<sup>12</sup>. The outcome of voting in the UN General Assembly reflects, on the one hand, the division of the international community and on the other the fear of some states of a conflict with the great power states. There is also the possibility that "information war" between the West and the

Russian Federation to have caused confusion among state leaders from other continents than Europe, which had no major interest in pursuing and resolving the crisis in the former Soviet republic.

Eager to assert and have exclusive broadcasting to the public of important events or maybe intending to serve certain interests, which we could learn about when it will be possible to consult the secret archives, quite many journalists have forgotten or abandoned the deontologic professional code to which they are signatories. The breaking news "flooded" the newspapers and magazines, television screens were filled with shocking images and crowded the radio broadcasts with reports from the site. Despite *the Code of Ethics for Journalists* which requires them to avoid the description or publishing of photographs or films about violent events, news agencies and television channels worldwide publish photos and movies about the clashes that produce victims, destruction and suffering. The warnings such as "the images that follow may produce a strong emotional impact" aroused the curiosity of viewers and readers, rather than lead them to change channels or not to look to apocalyptic scenes.

The news about the passengers plane crash MH-17, of the Malaysian Airlines has kept the "headline" of most news agencies, newspapers and radio and television stations. Images from the site of the plane crash site have spread worldwide. Journalists with doubtful ability to discern matters rushed to accuse Russia, the separatists in Eastern Ukraine or the military regime in Kiev, taking over the opinions of some Ukrainian, Russian and Western officials.

The accusations and images really had a strong emotional impact on the victims' relatives and friends and the leaders of their countries. Influenced by images and comments of the journalists, the leaders in those states joined the chorus of accusers and promised tough sanctions against perpetrators.

To argue expression "journalists with doubtful ability to discern matters," I only remind that experts who examined the records of so-called "black box" of the crashed plane said they needed more time to decide! If they could not give a verdict having the data that could not be

challenged, then how come that the journalists knew who the culprits after a few hours from the disaster? Let us remember that the media loyal to the regime in Kiev and a good part of the Euro-Atlantic area related the news that gave the passenger plane with 298 people on board was shot down by the pro-Russians rebels with ground-air missiles, Buk type, supplied by Russia. At the same time, the Russian media accuse the military regime in Kiev that they may have downed passenger plane with SU-25 planes, the news being also confirmed by several media outlets which kept their neutrality<sup>13</sup>. In these circumstances, I wonder who and when observed the ethical principle of journalists concerning the "transfer of information to the public only with verified data" and the principle of "real data information of the public" respectively?

To remove all doubts about the tragic event, the Intelligence Professionals Association (Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity - VIPS), headquartered in the US, urged President Obama to order American state structures in the matter to go public with the records they stated that they hold about that unfortunate event<sup>14</sup>. For now request of the members of the association has not received any response.

Another breaking news circulated by the media referred to a statement that the Russian President Vladimir Putin might have made in the discussion with the President of the Council of Europe - Jose Manuel Barroso. Mr. Barroso said the Russian president had stated that if he wanted he could occupy Kiev in two weeks. The news was denied the presidency spokesman in Moscow<sup>15</sup>.

All the events submitted by the partisan media have contributed to increased tensions between Russia on one side and NATO, along with the EU, on the other. Tensions were followed by mutual sanctions in the political, diplomatic, economic, financial and military areas, in which all parties lose.

Currently, the violence in Eastern Ukraine was reduced, a truce was signed which is violated from time to time, and both parties involved in the conflict accuse each other the failure of the ceasefire agreement, demonstrating that distrust between the former combatants is deep enough.

Maintaining the dialogue between the parties who have confronted each other and are "foot

gun" on the agreed positions, ready to resume fighting or to lay down the weapons, maintain the hope of a negotiated solution to the conflict.

For now the positions of the parties appear to be irreconcilable. President Poroshenko does not agree to any other solution than the restoring the territorial integrity of the country. The Eastern rebel leaders want the confirmation of the state of independence which they self-proclaimed, and Russia does not accept that the former Autonomous Republic of Crimea to become again part of Ukraine<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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The polarization (giving up the objectivity and independence) of some journalists and domestic and international mass media when they approached the crisis in Ukraine, unfortunately, follows the series of similar actions concerning the crises in the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East, North Africa and other parts of the world.

Caught between a sense of duty, which the professional ethics code compels them and pressure of employers, policy makers or the desire to assert any price, some journalists have forgotten the ethics principles of specific to their profession and "enrolled" in the campaign in Ukraine, supporting one of the warring parties.

The developments in Ukraine was negatively influenced by the attitude of domestic and international media in the way of increasing the tension and determining emotional reactions, followed by the direct involvement of the public in the country and the international community.

Although they were in the minority, the journalists, editors and owners of media outlets who have maintained the crest of real professionals through objectivity with which they presented the events in Ukraine, they have contributed to maintaining the credibility of the role of the "watchdog of democracy" assigned media.

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