

Independent Media Interventions in the Baltic States Aimed at Promoting Plurality and Balance in the Russian Language Media

A. Methodology

1. Countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

2. Implementing Partners: BBC Media Action in partnership with the **Baltic Centre for Media Excellence**. The partners will work together with the **3 National Public Service Broadcasters** Russian language programmes (ETV+ in Estonia, LSM in Latvia and LRT in Lithuania and their digital and social media platforms in all three countries. The partners will also work together with the biggest Russian portal in the region, **Delfi**, to produce content for youth audiences. Rus.Delfi.lv is the biggest news site in Russian in the region with monthly audience of 350 000 unique users (data by Gemius). About 70% of them are local Russian-speakers. Rus.Delfi.ee is the biggest news site in Russian in Estonia. Rus.Delfi.lt is the main web source of information about Lithuania in the Russian language.

3. Intended Beneficiaries: Russian-speaking populations in the three countries are divided into two audience groups – below 40 years and 40 plus years. The younger age group will be reached via digital platforms and the 40 plus age group via TV and radio.

4. Background:

Russian-language media has a strong audience base in the Baltic States which is due to the large Russian-speaking populations in these countries most of whom live in the cities. Especially in Estonia and Latvia, ethnic Russians make up a large proportion of the population (28% and 31% respectively) with Lithuania having a far smaller share of ethnic Russians. Ethnic Russians in the Baltics are much more likely than the ethnic Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians to trust Russian media and less likely to trust domestic media.

A report commissioned by the Tallinn-based International Centre of Defence and Security, entitled Estonia's "Virtual Russian World: The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia's Russian Speakers", underlines five principles that guide Russian speakers in how they consume Russian media:

1. Entertainment is primary, news is secondary
2. Scepticism about any and all news sources is rampant
3. Young people are tuning out, abandoning TV in favour of the Internet
4. Local news, not international, is of paramount interest
5. Cultural attraction to Russia does not necessarily equal political attraction

As the FCO Terms of Reference for this project indicate, older Russian-speakers in the 40+ category are more likely to be primary consumers of Russian narratives and 'culture'. The Russian state media strategy is seen as values marketing and promoting the cult of belonging to a "Russian world" which comprises all those who speak Russian and feel part of Russian culture. Russian-state propaganda tries to discredit Western values and especially amongst 40+ populations there is a lower level of trust in both the domestic and international media amongst Russian-speaking populations. There is the strong perception that the Baltic States' Russian TV and radio programmes favour a Baltic perspective rather than reflecting the Russian minorities' perspectives. There is also a degree of mistrust in the authorities especially around citizenship and language. In Latvia, for example there is a

complete discrepancy between the channels watched by Russian-language and Latvian language audiences. In addition, public broadcasting in the Baltic States is underfunded and the private media faces the challenges of small markets and audience shifts to the internet.

These principles are equally applicable to the other Baltic States. Reports on the Russian-state supported media state that it inundates viewers with superficial content – ‘frothy morning shows, high-decibel discussion shows, tear-jerker serials and song contests interspersed with tendentious news and current affairs’.

There is currently a gap in the media markets in the Baltic States in high quality local news, factual and entertainment programmes aimed at the Russian-speaking populations as well as the need to build the credibility and attractiveness of the national public service channels. The project will also test co-productions of content between the three national broadcasters which can serve as a basis for the wider Russian language ‘content exchange platform’.

The project will develop the investigative skills of journalists in these channels not only to identify injustices which can potentially aggravate fracture points between audiences but also to start national debates on issues concerning the Russian-speaking populations such as lack of inclusivity, inequality and corruption with a view to resolving issues as well as exploring the development of solutions-based journalism.

There is a clear difference in the consumption of media between the age groups with the young Russian speakers relying on the internet and social media and the older generation – predominantly on TV and radio.

Currently there is a lack of media content that engages Russian speaking youth. This project aims to address these gaps by working with the national public service broadcasters to produce inclusive and credible media content and improve their internet and social media offering to younger Russian-speaking audiences.

The project will also work with the biggest Russian portal in the region, Delfi, to produce content for youth audiences and potentially in Phase 2 of the project with the Riga-based Russian web portal, Meduza, to build their offering so that it is targeted not only at audiences inside the Russian Federation but also in the Baltics. Meduza is currently experiencing difficulties in raising advertising funds since it has been the target of more concerted criticism by the Russian authorities. The aim would be to create content which is good enough to have a pull effect amongst Russian-speaking youth in the Baltics.

5. Implementing Partners:

As outlined above, the project will be delivered by BBC Media Action in partnership with the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME), the 3 big national public service broadcasters and the biggest news web portal in the region. BBC Media Action meets the competencies in the project ToR and has extensive media and programme development experience with national broadcasters in Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina and across the wider Europe, through a regional project (DANIDA). We have a wide range of format and production experience with partners and beneficiaries including factual programming, dramas and the development of social media. BBC Media Action also has a very experienced Research team which has worked in many countries in the region. We support independent, inclusive and trusted media to furnish audiences with the facts and range of arguments that

enable each person to make their own mind up about an issue.

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence will complement BBC Media Action with local knowledge and resources and will be instrumental in developing locally relevant training and content. The project will allow the BCME to expand their reach and activities in the other Baltic States and beyond. BBC Media Action is simultaneously starting work with the newly formed Estonian TV channel for Russian audiences, ETV+, which will allow us to explore and produce new formats.

- 6. Project Impact:** Russian-speaking people across the Baltic States have access to more inclusive and balanced Russian language media content that represents Russian speaking audiences and supports greater understanding, social cohesion and tolerance

Outcomes:

- A Russian language media cluster among national public service broadcasters in the Baltic States, produce and share inclusive and balanced Russian language media content that represents their audiences and the values of objectivity, impartiality and trust.
- Digital Media based in the Baltic States develops improved youth focused online programming that engages young Russian speakers in the region

6.1 Outcome Indicators for the first 6 months:

Indicator	Baseline	Target (including date)	Source of information & who will collect
At least 3 new engaging and balanced factual formats are developed in pilot form with the 3 Baltic national broadcasters; one to be cross-regional.	Lack of trusted Russian language domestic sources of information in the 3 Baltic states.	Experimental programmes/formats are high-quality and attractive to Russian-speaking audiences and found to address their concerns and have the potential to win their trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme analysis by experts from the BBC, BCME and local broadcasters/digital media - General public feedback via audience focus groups and online/social media portals
3 national media broadcasters and the Delfi digital news portal group demonstrate increased capacity to produce more and engaging youth content. Production to be implemented in the second 6 months.	Specific baselines for each media partner will be collected at project start.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased skills levels and understanding of PSB needs of Russian speakers among media practitioners by end September 2016 - Increased skills levels to produce youth social media content which is expected to lead to significant increases in young audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre and post-training skills assessments - Interviews with managers and editors - Trainers' reports <p>Joint periodic programme reviews by project trainers with local partners'</p>

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6.3 Output 1: 60 media practitioners (journalists, editors and presenters, including 12 investigative journalists) demonstrate increased skills and knowledge to provide trusted, impartial and balanced information that includes a diversity of viewpoints and meets the needs of Russian-speaking audiences.

Activities

Activity Number	Activity	Expected date
1	Formative research (audience focus groups and stakeholder interviews) to feed into training design	July 2016
2	Delivery of 6 x 5 day editorial workshops held across the 3 Baltic States	July 2016 – November 2016

Indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target (including date)	Source of information & who will collect
Change in level of trainees' skills to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiment with new formats - Improve outlets websites and social media engagement with young people 	To be collected for individual participants at the start of training	At least 70% show skills improvements by the end of the training	Practical and scenario and format development exercises, conducted by project trainers and analysed by BBC Media Action

6.4 Output 2: The 3 national partner media organisations develop at least 3 new TV/radio formats for factual infotainment programmes to provide trusted, impartial and balanced information that includes a diversity of viewpoints and meets the needs of the Russian-speaking audiences. The 3 national broadcasters and Delfi produce 3 new pilot formats each for their websites designed to attract new young audiences.

Activities

Activity Number	Activity	Expected date
3	Delivery of 4 weeks onsite production consultancy for each partner, involving specialised workshops on formats and on-the-job training, resulting in the production of a minimum 3 new formats at least one to be cross-regional	July 2016 – November 2016
4	Formative research (audience focus groups and stakeholder interviews) to feed into format planning.	July 2016
5	3 experimental formats produced by national broadcasters (one to be cross-regional)	November 2016
	Design and management of social media platforms for the 3 national broadcasters.	September 2016

	Research to gather audience feedback, including focus groups	November 2016
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Indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target (including date)	Source of information & who will collect
Partners produce pilots for new formats aimed at delivering at least 3 new trusted programmes and formats by project-end.	To be collected in month 2 of the project	By November 2016, at least 70% of trained media practitioners at the four partner stations have: understanding of key tools to and have produced 3 pilots of new high quality and attractive programmes.	Assessment of pilot formats by programme panels Audience focus groups
Number of programme formats produced and social media redesign	N/A	At least 3 new programme formats produced that will win audiences 6 social media platforms redesigned and improved.	Programmes win approval by professional and target audiences Youth audience engagement figures improved by 20 percent.

Activities for second 6 months:

The second 6 months will be devoted to the production of the new programmes, including pan-regional programmes and new social media interventions.

7. Sustainability:

The project has been designed by BBC Media Action for sustainability, with project outputs specifically focused on creating lasting capacities within the national broadcasters and the Delfi web portal to produce engaging, creative and innovative factual and infotainment content post-project. BBC Media Action's learning-by-doing (experiential) methodology where trainers are embedded within an organisation for regular periods of time enables trainees to develop new skills and competencies within the context of support to the wider organisational systems, processes and behaviours. This approach helps to secure institutional buy-in for new approaches/philosophies and creates a supportive environment for the new skills to be applied within the workplace. The national broadcasters would be the most important channels for new content since they are also likely to have a minimum of assured funding post-project. The Delfi web portal will develop new youth-oriented content aimed at attracting younger audiences which will improve its market share. There are also a good number of producers who can work in Russian and who will get the chance to apply their skills in the future.

The involvement of the BCME and periodic audience research and the participatory social media community will further ensure content remains close to target groups' realities, interests and issues and thus promote buy-in from the target demographic. This local ownership in the broadest sense by the audience is critical to the project's sustainability and its long-term impact on the target group's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour.