

## Artículo de investigación

**National Identity of Mass Media: Retrospective Study of the Russian Language Mass Media Prevalence in Eastern Europe**

Национальная идентичность СМИ: ретроспективное исследование распространённости русскоязычных СМИ в Восточной Европе

La identidad nacional de los medios de comunicación de masas: Estudio retrospectivo de la prevalencia de los medios de comunicación rusos en Europa oriental

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**Abstract**

The research focuses on the issues, concerning the national identity of mass media in the era of globalization. It was the attempt to examine the linguistic situation in the multi-ethnic society, which consists of clearly defined groups of national minorities. Revealing the problems and consequences of language groups' shift through mass media became the main objective of the research. The retrospective data on the Russian language mass media prevalence in the Eastern European countries (for example, of Estonia) were used as an analytical background. In Estonia, almost half of the Russian-speaking population cannot follow mass media due to limited knowledge of the language. These particularities for 1998-2013 were described in this article. The obtained results led to the conclusion that the major part of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia mainly follows the Russian television channels and, therefore, is more integrated in the Russian information realm than in Estonian. The multidirectional dynamics of mass media activity on prevalence was revealed. The contradictions between the Russian and Estonian mass media, Estonia and the EU on multilingual social mass media role were highlighted in the article.

**Аннотация**

Исследование посвящено вопросам национальной идентичности средств массовой информации в эпоху глобализации. Предпринята попытка рассмотреть языковую ситуацию в полиэтничном обществе, где имеются четко выраженные группы национальных меньшинств. Основной целью исследования стало выявление проблем и последствий смещения языковых групп населения через СМИ. В качестве аналитической базы использовались ретроспективные данные о распространённости русскоязычных СМИ в Эстонии, где около половины русскоязычного населения не могут следить за средствами массовой информации на эстонском языке из-за недостаточного знания языка. Мы постараемся проследить эти особенности за период 1998-2013 годов. Полученные результаты привели к выводу, что большая часть русскоговорящего населения Эстонии в основном следит за российскими телеканалами и поэтому более интегрирована в информационное поле России, чем в эстонское. Выявлена разнонаправленная динамика в активности СМИ по типу распространения. В статье подчеркиваются противоречия между эстонскими и русскоязычными СМИ, между

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**Keywords:** Globalization, mass media, media-space, language groups, national identity, ethnic issues.

Эстонией и ЕС относительно роли мультязычных общественных СМИ.

**Ключевые слова:** Глобализация, средства массовой информации, медиа-пространство, языковые группы населения, национальная идентичность, этнические проблемы.

## Resumen

El estudio se centra en la identidad nacional de los medios de comunicación de masas en la era de la globalización. Se ha tratado de examinar la situación lingüística en la sociedad pluricultural en que existen grupos de minorías nacionales bien definidos. El observatorio principal del estudio fue la identificación de los problemas y las consecuencias del desplazamiento de los grupos lingüísticos a través de los medios de comunicación de masas. Como la base analítica, se utilizaron los datos retrospectivos sobre la prevalencia de los medios de comunicación de masas rusos en Estonia, donde alrededor de la mitad de la población que habla el idioma ruso no puede seguir los medios de comunicación de masas en Estonia debido a la falta de conocimiento del idioma. Trataremos de hacer un seguimiento de estas características durante el período 1998-2013. Los resultados han llevado a la conclusión de que gran parte de la población que habla el idioma ruso de Estonia está principalmente siguiendo los canales de televisión rusos y, por lo tanto, está más integrada en el campo de información de Rusia que de Estonia. Se ha identificado la dinámica diversificada en la actividad de los medios de comunicación de masas por el tipo de distribución. El artículo destaca las contradicciones entre los medios de comunicación de masas estonios y rusos, entre Estonia y la UE sobre el papel de los medios de comunicación de masas públicos multilingües.

**Palabras claves:** Globalización, medios de comunicación de masas, espacio de medios de comunicación, grupos lingüísticos de población, identidad nacional, problemas étnicos.

## Introduction

Globalization has significant consequences for society lifestyle (Tyukaeva, 2017). Mass media are explicitly involved in the processes of information globalization. They become those media, which control public consciousness. Nevertheless, globalization implies a general mutual dependency and openness. Diminishing or even demolition of the national and state sovereignty, driven by external forces, becomes the result of such circumstances (Gritsanov et al., 2003). Therefore, the conventional geopolitics is transforming into the information one nowadays.

The outlined processes of information globalization result in a fundamental change of well-established lifestyle. Economic and political life merges into information area that means mediatization of social relationships. Information precisely turns into key factor, exerting influence on the relationships between countries, way of achieving economic, political and other purposes in international relationship field. Under such circumstances, mass media serve as a tool for managing and appear to be involved in geopolitical process.

The destruction of social regimes in Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century resulted in a situation where mass media had to develop under new conditions. The countries were aimed to transition to democratic kind of statehood. The change in the media field were among the crucial components of that approach. Jakubowicz (2009) defined this process as "Europeanisation". The final outcome of Pan-European policy in the realm of mass media was preservation of cultural diversity and guarantee of pluralism for mass media.

The social and cultural crisis, being a clash of values, of that transition period in Eastern European countries and Russia was manifested as an identification problem. The identity problem is the result of systematic destruction of concepts, underlying national policy (Usacheva, 2012). Under such circumstances, the policy outcome depends on mass media position, as never before. However, mass media themselves are also influenced by global trends.

Some researchers assert that economic welfare is the predominant factor, which increases

economic and political influence of mass media in society. Robert Picard (2002) showed that generally public service broadcasters, as a rule, keep their leading position at the market and their high rates relates to the lower of public funding. McQuail D. (2010) brought out the same idea. According to his theory, one of the key factors, exerting influence on mass media development, is economy. In the meantime, the market-focused mass media system is not able to provide a full variety of political and economic interests within public (Curran, 1991). Market forces provide no guarantees that mass media will be perform their economic function as democratic institutions in society. Market forces outweigh in many regards, and affects the quality of the news, ethnic and language problems, prejudiced attitude in society segments, served by mass media (Hallin, 2008).

Speaking of economic backdrop of multilingual markets of mass media, Hezmondalsh D. (2018) refers to different ethnic groups' preferences. Whether it was possible to speak of general culture and "geocultural markets". Even if the common history takes place to be, its explanation still remains substantially different for the main ethnic groups. Hezmondalsh D. (2018) notes, that a certain country could belong to some geocultural markets, since almost every country has groups of people with distinct cultural identifications. Yessenbekova (2016), Dirzytė, Rakauskienė and Servetkienė (2017) adhere to the same position.

The ethical question is closely related to the language differentiation of society. The utmost linguistic cohesion almost never exists in modern states. In these conditions, any language policy is connected to the interaction of two natural, but opposed each other requirements. Define them as identity requirement and mutual comprehension requirement. Both of them stand together and satisfied automatically only in the completely monolingual society by themselves.

The influence of language over mass media development is undoubtedly indisputably. We will endeavor to explore these particularities in Eastern Europe over a period of 1998-2013. An illustrative example among the countries considered is Estonia. According to the Monitor of Integrations (2011), about 50% of Russian speaking population cannot follow mass media (print media, online, via radio and TV) due to limited knowledge of the language. The separation of the Russian-speaking people from the Estonian one, resulting from, among other things, language barrier, brings certain risks to national identity. In the meantime, Estonia is a

country with liberal market economy. Such an important fact for the further analysis of mass media is confirmed by many researches (Knell & Srholec, 2007). The contradictions, problems and consequences of language groups' shift of mass media and the ones of the Estonian population that take place will be analyzed hereinafter.

### Literature review

The processes of media concentration, their structure and connectedness to government has a significant influence of information sphere (Sorokin et al., 2019). Greenberg R. draws attention to the problem of mass media dependence on government, an alarming trend concerning the deterioration of the situation with freedom of speech in many countries. One of the most prevailing and debatable options of editions existence is the whole or partial dependence of some mass media on state (Grinberg & Deikin, 2003). One of the characteristic features of modern journalism is the segmentation of specialized media by individual classroom groups. As an example of such segments, it is worth highlighting the energy press, which is increasingly shaping environmental policy (Strielkowski et al., 2019).

The Estonian mass media development is predominately due to the foreign investments. Their owners are the Scandinavian media groups most commonly. As compared to the Estonian mass media, the Russian ones have no foreign investments typically and are essentially bounded with fundraising inside Estonia.

Management and funding models, the terms of authority, statutory limits and relationships between mass media and the government differ widely (Harcourt, 2003). There are no tools or mechanisms defining the minimum quantity or public broadcasting quality, which is guaranteed by the state for the civils at EU level. The statutory regulation of the EU does not exist regarding public broadcasting. There are no any financial tools, intended for improving mass media. The decisions of the bailiwick, finance model and the funding level of public broadcasting left to the discretion of the EU member states. There is no unified model or the standard of public broadcasting, which can be applied to all countries (European Commission, 2011).

In his research, Jakubowicz states that implementation of the same legal EU framework in different EU member states gives other results, depending on the conditions (Jakubowicz &

Rude, 2001). The previous TV without frontiers European Union Directive (TVWF) and now Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) does not take into account such specific circumstances for a country as the media-market volume, economic states, cultural and historical context. Nevertheless, these are the essential factors, which have a great impact on mass media development (Lowe & Christian, 2011). Jakubowicz remarks that the crucial goals of public broadcasting are still cultural increase, education advancement, social cohesion maintenance and strengthen democracy. Public mass media must have enough amount of resources and loyal legislative framework for being succeed in compliance with those four criteria (Jakubowicz, 2006).

The final function of mass media is to serve public interests. Regulatory benchmarks describe it as strengthening, developing and serving social, political and cultural citizenship; the universality with high quality standards (Born & Prosser, 2001). According to McQuail the public interest conveys the idea of the expectations for and claims against mass media as a long-term public benefit to be expressed legally and result in limitations of the structure and activity of mass media (McQuail<sup>2010</sup>). The public broadcasting critics claim that the commercial broadcasters serve public interests (Jacka, 2003). On the other hand, the researchers are certain that the public broadcasting, aimed at all the social segments, and consequently available for following in various languages, is necessary in new, fast changing contexts more than ever (Murdock, 2005).

The language policy in a modern world is considered as the one, grounded on interaction of two natural, but opposed each other requirements. The identity requirement consist in the pursuit (consciously or unconsciously) to use their language, naturally learned in the early years of life, in any cases. The mutual comprehension requirement is that each of the communicators wants to understand his or her interlocutors whether the language is their mother tongue or not. In most states, the deliberate language policy aims to maintain the mutual comprehension requirement. The identity requirement of the minority-language speakers often suffers that may result in contradictions (Alpatov, 2013).

Today journalism, aimed to certain target groups of diverse ethnic-racial, cultural and language characteristics, becomes more relevant. The illustrative example of it is many editions and TV

channels, appeared in recent years in the world, focused on multicultural groups: they are published or showed in various languages and contain the information of both global and national importance (Polyakova, 2015). This fact is confirmed by the interpretation made by McQuail: “the mass media system, funded by the State and operating in a non-commercial way to satisfy different needs in information interaction” (McQuail<sup>2010</sup>). The researches emphasize the significance of multilingual public mass media for small countries such as Estonia (Lauk, 2008).

### Methodology

Revealing the problems and consequences of language groups' shift through mass media became the main objective of the research. The retrospective data on the Russian language mass media prevalence in Estonia, where almost half of the Russian-speaking population cannot follow them due to limited knowledge of the language, has been used as an analytical background.

The authors will try to explore these particularities over a period of 1998-2013.

The study is based on a comparative analysis of prevalence of the use of the Russian language in the media published in Estonia, including a comparison of prevalence of the Russian language with the language of a titular nation in different population groups according to a number of socio-demographic characteristics.

The study is implemented in the paradigm of secondary data analysis. When preparing the report, the authors used the results of the statistical review of:

- Print magazines and newspapers (the main data source – Estonian Newspaper Association (EALL));
- Radio and TV (the main data source – the Ministry of Culture of Estonia).

Several research methods are used in the work:

- a) An approach of the National Readership Survey (NRS) is devoted to measuring the volume of audience of publications, studying and analyzing the socio-demographic characteristics and consumer preferences of the media audience;
- b) An approach of the Media Content Analysis includes the process of studying and tracking the information,

converting the obtained quantitative material into a qualitative form through the classification of messages. This tool determines how key messages, topics, in disseminating of which an organization is interested, have actually spread in the media as a result of communication management. In this study, the Media Content Analysis consisted of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of information messages according to the parameters of a publication source and a publication language;

- c) An approach of the Sociolinguistic Analysis reveals causal links in the text between the language and the facts of public life. This direction can be effectively used to study the language of the press both in historical and modern aspects.

It should be noted that parameters of the Russian language mass media prevalence in Estonia used and described in this study are both subjective and objective. The Content Analysis and Sociolinguistic Analysis of the media are affected by the social norm. This fact needs to be taken into account when interpreting research results.

## Results and discussion

### *Russian print media in Estonia*

The Estonian mass media has considerably become dependent on the economic and political environment since 1991. The EU integration programme, launched in the second half of the 1990s, resulted in the shift of the mass media substantive content. That concerns both the Russian and the Estonian mass media. After the rapid transition period, the relative stability had been reached by the late 1990s. The Russian print media market had reached its peak in 2001, when the print-run of 17 newspapers was at least 1000 copies each. Rus.delfi.ee the first news portal appeared during this period. The other Russian news portals started their activity since 2005. Today Rus.delfi has 200,000 unique readers per week. The second most popular Russian news portal, Rus.postimees.ee, has about 90,000 readers per week (Estonica, 2012).

The period between 2004 and 2007 at the Russian print and online media market could be defined in terms of aggregation of capital. The economic crisis of 2007-2011 had a profound effect on the Russian press, and its consequences can be observed today. Both national and local press suffered from it. Only four national newspapers managed to overcome the crisis and continued working, as can be seen in the figure 1.

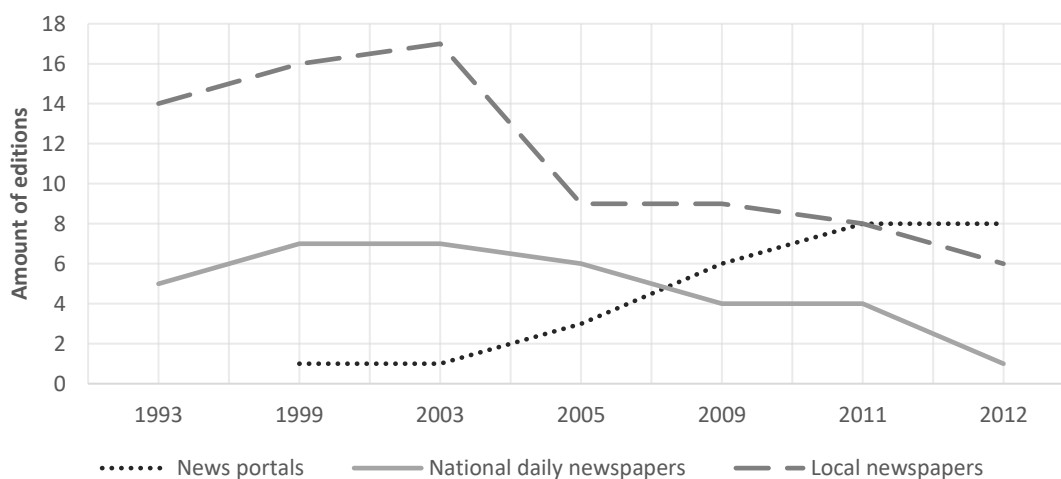


Figure 1. The development of the Russian press market and online editions of mass media in Estonia during 1993-2012

At the same time as the national Russian press started disappearing, the online news portals showed up extensively, which, in fact, took the place of the Russian language national daily newspapers in Estonia. Based on existing newspapers, several online-editions were created (“Postimees in Russian”, “Den za dnem”, “Delovye Vedomosti”, “MK Estonia”, “Stolitsa”). The public service broadcaster launched the internet-portal Rus.err.ee in May 2007. The Tallin City Hall launched its internet-portal Stolitsa.ee (since 2008) as an addition to the weekly newspaper “Stolitsa”. There is one weekly newspaper “Postimees in Russian” (the

circulation is about 11,600 copies) and two weekly newspapers of general content, one newspaper about business and one weekly newspaper, published in the Baltic states (the circulation is 4,700 and 12,500 each, respectively) in 2011 (Estonian Newspaper Association, 2011). The circulation of all six local newspapers was from 1,000 copies to 40,000 copies each. The national newspaper in the Russian language does not exist at the present time. The “Postimees in Russian” is published only three times per week now (Samost & Husar, 2016).

Table 1. The circulation of the Russian press media in Estonia over the period 1998-2012, thousands copies

Media	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
<i>‘Molodej Estonii’</i>	7.2	4.9	7.5	7.7				
<i>‘Estonia/ Vesti Dnya’</i>	8.7	7.9	6.3	6.3	9.2			
<i>‘Vesti Nedeli Plus’</i>	21.2	23.5	19.9	19.9				
<i>‘den za dnem’</i>	16.7	19.4	18.6	18.6	17	13	13.2	10.4
<i>‘Delovye Vedomosti’</i>	4.8	4.8	5.1	5.1	6	5.8	4.8	7
<i>‘Molodezh Estonii Subbota’</i>	9.9	7.1	10.3	10.3	11.5			
<i>‘MK Estonia’</i>					14.3	11	11.1	12.9
<i>‘Postimees in Russian’</i>					17.1	12.3	11.5	9.6

Source: EALL Estonian Newspaper Association (2011).

The fundamental trend is that the circulations of all the press media have been reducing since 1998. The daily newspapers are in the weakest position, whereas the weekly ones are more sustainable. As it is shown in table 1. This trend exists also in many other countries as the Slovak Republic (Lincényi, & Fabuš, 2017).

#### **Russian TV and radio broadcasting companies in Estonia**

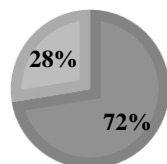
For the Russian-speaking people the changes, occurred in the early 1990s in Estonia, were dreadful. The amount of hours for programmes, available via on-air broadcasting in Russian, were shortened. The inside national TV-channel, focused on the natives Russian speakers, was not created. The demand for the programmes in the

Russian language was satisfied by cable TV providers, who expanded their nets and began retranslating the Russian channels.

The *Estonian media law (2014)* states that the radio can be broadcasted in Russian for Russian-language listeners. Only 10% of the week broadcasting time of own-produced on the channels can be in foreign languages, in particularly in Russian. 8 of 29 licenses for broadcasting were meant for the Russian programmes. Thus, it can be said that some radio stations in Estonia that broadcast in Russian language; the tendency of media outreach is negative. The proportion of Estonian and Russian radio programs represents the linguistic distribution of the population to a 3:1 ratio, as it is shown in the figure 2.

THE PROPORTION OF THE PRIVATE ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN RADIO STATIONS IN 2013

■ Private Estonian radio stations  
■ Private Russian radio stations



THE PROPORTION OF THE PRIVATE ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN RADIO STATIONS IN 2013

■ Public Estonian radio stations  
■ Public Russian radio stations

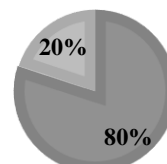


Figure 2. The Russian and the Estonian radio programmes in Estonia  
Source: The Estonian Ministry of Culture (2013).

Several radio stations, broadcasting in Russian, are presented in Estonia. The public radio station “Radio-4” is the leader among the Russian population of Estonia, but the trend of media outreach is markedly negative, as it is shown in

the Figure 3. The other radio stations, oriented on entertainment, are increasing their share at the market. It will be difficult for the public broadcasting to hold its position at the Russian radio market.

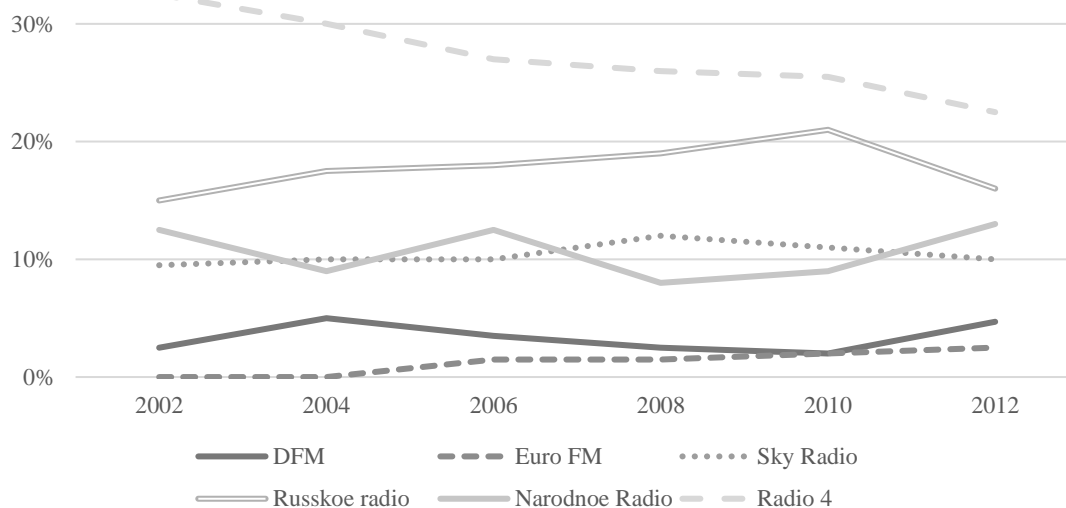


Figure 3. The media outreach of the Russian language radio stations, %  
Source: TNS Emor (2019).

In the early 1990s, Russian TV periodical press in Estonia existed only on ETV channel. In the early 2000s, the crisis resulted in the recession in all scopes of activities, including producing Russian TV programmes on ETV. By April 2000, the Russian programmes budget had reduced by five times since 1998, and allowed to produced only a 30 minutes program per week (PRTM, 2000). After the crisis, the original Russian programmes, that continued to be funded by the ETV budget, were usually broadcasted. The budget crisis of 2000-2002 in ETV resulted

in reducing of several programmes sectors, the Russian programmes block were closed. The Russian programmes production was resumed, but in more simplified form (co-producing of programmes between independent producers and the staff of ETV). The amount of the Russian language programmes fell to the level of the middle of the earlier decades, as it is shown in figure 4. Only one TV programme was prepared for the Russian-speaking audience, which also was funded by the external sources.

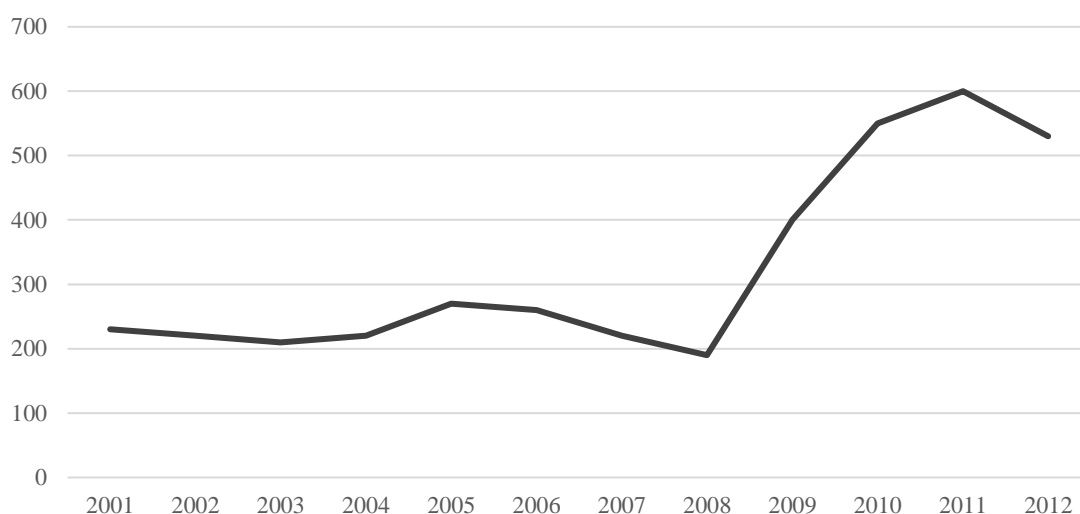


Figure 4. The total hours a year of the ETV airtime for the Russian-speaking audience  
 Source: Mapping Digital Media: Estonia A Report by the Open Society Foundations (2013).

The launch of the second public broadcasting channel (ETV2) was successful in 2008. The share of the niche programmes and for the national minorities ones was increased although the decision to move the Russian language news feed from ETV to ETV2 resulted in a significant loss of the audience. The development program of public broadcasting includes the extension of the Russian-language products. Enhancing the role of mass media in the digital field including provision of educational and information services will become the background for sustainable development (Giessen, 2015). Nevertheless, the first concept of this new channel, broadcasting in Russian at least on prime time, was reconsidered. Today the main topic of the channel is cultural and educational programmes, and this is provided primarily with ETV records.

ETV2 broke new grounds, and from 2009 the amount of the Russian-language content had considerably increased despite the fact that the main part of own production (except for the news) being funded by the external sources. Besides, the programmes in Estonian with Russian subtitles from the ETV records were rerun.

The decrease of the Russian language audience in 2012 was caused by reducing the original Russian programmes production. In 2012 the ETV programmes took only 1.8 % of the programme runtime for the Russian audience in Estonia (The Open Society Foundations, 2013). In particular, the considerable increase of the news volume in Russian took place after the Russian news content had been taken to ETV2, where was available for longer watching. Unfortunately, moving to ETV2 implied the Russian news to have lost its audience partly.



Despite the efforts of the public broadcasting, it was not enough to attract Russian people and integrate it into the Estonian information realm.

The 14 licenses for TV broadcasting were valid in 2013. Three of them (“Orsent-TV”, “TV-N” and “LiTeS”) were meant for the Russian audience. It is worth noting, that there are several foreign TV channels in Russian, available via cable TV. These “other” channels all together took 87% of broadcasting and 39% of their

runtime in 2012, as it is shown in figure 5. Satellite and cable TV made Russian TV channels more available for the Russian audience in Estonia. This trend could be followed through the dynamics of a TV channels audience, online-resources in comparison to the ones of print media [the reasons of this sometimes goes beyond human sciences (Vlasov & Demin, 2017)]. Replacing press media with online or TV resources has become a predominant trend of the modern mass-media landscape.

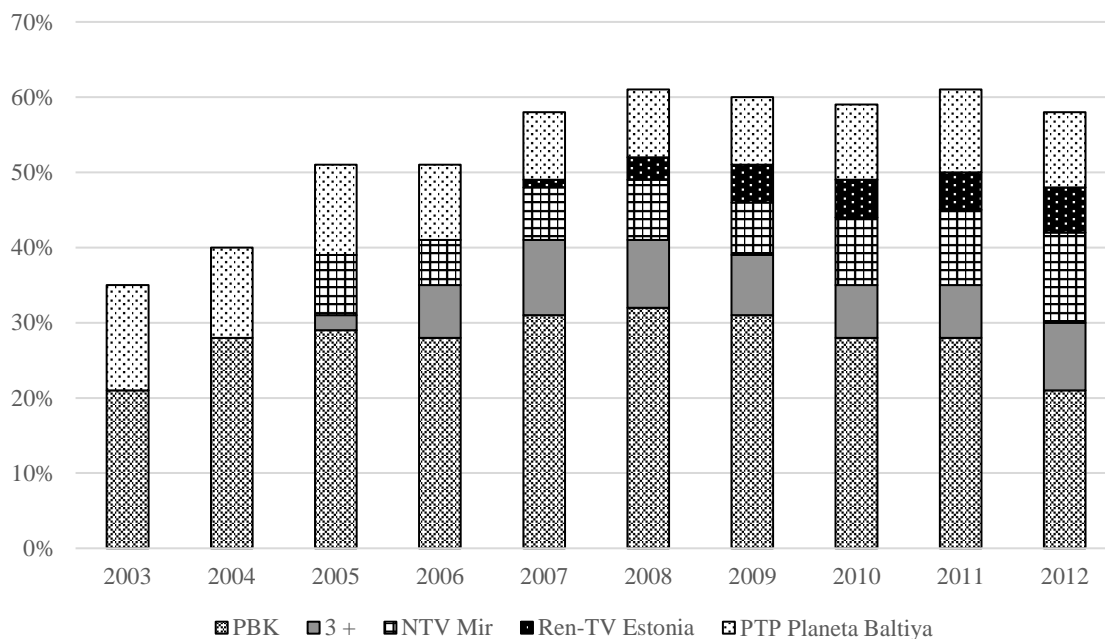


Figure 5. The proportion of the ethnic Russian audience of the Russian language channels in Estonia  
Source: Kantar EMOR (2019).

In case of the Estonian public broadcasting the question of meeting the national minority’s needs has been discussed for a long time. However, the idea concerning the increase of the Russian language broadcasting all over media-platforms, especially TV, was not politically supported and it became the reason of lack fundraising of the Russian language mass media. Therefore, TV programmes in Russian are still not able to attract target groups.

Based on the data, it can be said that the major part of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia mostly follow the Russian TV channels and thus are integrated more in the Russian information sphere, than in the Estonian one. It is evident that the Russian-speaking population in Estonia still prefers information in their mother-tongue language and this trend will be kept in the future. In the meantime, the amount of time for watching of any Estonian TV

channel is reducing among Russians. In terms of social and cultural coherence, it is a negative trend for Estonia.

It is worth noting that the Russian language mass media in Estonia remain unsteady due to lack of investments for maintaining the work. Nevertheless, the national Estonian media-companies get enough funds from North Europe that equalizes them. These and the other reasons resulted in a situation where in 2013 there was no newspaper, published in Estonia.

## Conclusion

As we clarified earlier, the most powerful tool of geopolitical interests implementation is mass media. The mass media language operates on the spiritual continuum, including policy, ideology, culture, economy. The state policy regarding the national

minorities' languages may vary: from prohibition and forcible assimilation of the speakers to cultural independence and legal equality. The bilingual population status along with the state policy regarding it are diverse, however inequality with unilingual speakers of prevailing language can take place to be and create a potentially conflict situation.

Observing the Russian language mass media in Estonia with the country having gained its independence, the Europeanization process and the occurring difficulties can be followed. Different language groups of Estonia appear to be in diverse information spheres and are split up. According to the Monitor of Integrations, about 50% of Russian speaking population cannot follow mass media due to limited knowledge of the language. For the Russian-speaking people the changes, occurred in the early 1990s in Estonia, were dreadful: the amount of times for programmes, available via on-air broadcasting in Russian, was significantly shortened. TV programmes in Russian are still not able to attract the target groups. The results of our research shows that the major part of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia mainly follows the Russian television channels and therefore is more integrated in the Russian information realm than in Estonian one. The amount of time for watching of any Estonian TV channel is reducing among Russians. In terms of social and cultural coherence, this turns out to be a downward course for Estonia.

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