

EUROPE CENSORED 2020

SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH
IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES
AND UKRAINE

RuBaltic.Ru Analytical report

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The report describes the forms and tools of pressure on the media and journalists in the Baltic countries and Ukraine. Monitoring of political processes reveals a tendency towards a systematic violation of the principle of freedom of speech in these countries. The report lists the most common practices and the most vivid cases of fighting dissent in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine. The purpose of the report is to explain why political censorship, the assertion of ideological monopoly, administrative pressure on the media, arrests and killings of journalists have become the norm in the Baltic States and Ukraine. Especially after the European integration of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and after the association of Ukraine with the EU.

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Table of Contents

10 Facts of Freedom of Speech Violations in the Baltics and Ukraine	4
Introduction	6
Part 1. Lithuania	7
1.1. The State Protecting Historic Myths	7
1.2. Pressure on Russian-Speaking Media	14
Part 2. Latvia	17
2.1. Fighting Alternative Views on History	17
2.2. Excluding Russian-Speaking Media and Experts from the Public Field	19
2.3. Persecution of the Protectors of Russian Schools	22
Part 3. Estonia	25
3.1. Pressure on the Media	25
3.2. The Campaign Against Sputnik Estonia	26
Part 4. Ukraine	29
4.1. Persecution of the Media and Journalists	29
4.2. Journalism Under Fire	34
4.3. Kiev's Social Policy as an Element of Pressure on Freedom of Speech	38
Conclusion	41
PERSONA NON GRATA. A timeline of the persecution of Russian journalists in the Baltics and Ukraine after 2014	42



10

FACTS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH VIOLATIONS IN THE BALTICS AND UKRAINE



FACT 1

Lithuania. In 2018, Klaipėda City Councilman Vyacheslav Titov spoke out against the display of a memorial plaque on the walls of Klaipėda University dedicated to the leader of the Forest Brothers Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas as well as saying that Ramanauskas was responsible for the murder of thousands of people. Titov's statement was investigated by the Prosecutor's Office, the prosecution insisting that the politician be given time in prison. Nonetheless, he only got a fine. This sentencing led to the Central Electoral Commission taking away his seat at the Klaipėda City Council.

FACT 2

Estonia. In 2019, Sputnik Estonia staff had to quit the company due to threats of criminal prosecution. They received these letters from the Police Department and the Border Guards. From 1 January 2020, the Sputnik Estonia agency staff had to break off their contracts with Rossiya Segondya due to pressure from the authorities. Since that day, the agency's site in Estonia is working in an emergency mode.

FACT 3

Latvia. In 2019, the Latvian State Security Service (VDD) started a criminal case against European Parliament member from the Latvian Russian Union Tatjana Ždanoka. She is charged with inciting national hatred by the following statement "We have come to the conclusion that Russians and the Russian-speaking population [of Latvia] are now in the same situation as the Jews before World War II. We are being punished."

FACT 4

Latvia. In early 2018, after a rally for the protection of Russian schools, the Latvian Security Police (renamed into the Latvian State Security Service in 2019) arrested two rally members: rights activist Vladimir Linderman and economist Alexander Gaponenko. Vladimir Linderman was released after two weeks in custody. The Law Enforcement insists that during his speech at the rally he violated three articles of the Criminal Code at once: article 80 "Actions against the foundations of the state", article 78 "Inciting ethnic dissention" and article 225 "Organizing mass riots." Alexander Gaponenko spent four months in prison. He was also charged with the articles 78 and 80, as well as article 81 – "Aiding a foreign state in its actions against the Latvian Republic." Gaponenko is de facto accused of state treason and might be sentenced to up to 8 years in prison.

FACT 5

Ukraine. 15 May 2018, after searches at the RIA-Novosti Ukraine office, the police arrested Kirill Vyshinsky, editor-in-chief of the outlet in 2014-2018. He was accused of state treason and supporting separatism. Vyshinsky spent 470 days in prison and was freed as part of an exchange of detainees between Russia and Ukraine.

FACT 6

Lithuania. In 2017, public figure Yuri Subbotin was found guilty in a Vilnius court, his "crime" was publishing a comment online "Thank you, Stalin, Sniečkus (leader of the Communist Party of Lithuania from 1940 to 1974) and the Soviet state, those who don't like being together with Russia – get out of Lithuania, suitcase, station, America." In court, Subbotin denied the authorship of this, but the court paid no attention to that. He was found guilty and sentenced to restriction of freedom for 1 year and 2 months.

FACT 7

Latvia. 17 June 2019, a Latvian Russian Union council member Alexander Filey, used his Facebook page to congratulate his followers with the anniversary of the Red Army entering Latvian territory and said that "this date must be respected and honored." The Latvian State Security Service stated that he "selected and interpreted historic events in his own interests, denied the occupation of Latvia that happened 17 June 1940 and presented the tragic event as something beneficial to the people of Latvia." The trial was set to 12 March 2020.

FACT 8

Estonia. In 2014, Estonian Internal Security Service (Kaitsepolitseiamet, KaPo for short) detained famous Italian writer and political figure Giulietto Chiesa. He spent a few hours in a cell and was deported back to Italy after the Italian ambassador to Estonia had to intervene.

FACT 9

Ukraine. In July 2019, due to direct threats of violence to members of the Ukrainian NewsOne TV Channel, as well as threats to their families, the management of the channel had to cancel a TV marathon "We Need to Talk" with representatives of the Russian Federation. A few days later, the 112 Ukraine TV Channel was the target of a terrorist attack. Someone fired a grenade launcher at the office. There was no reaction from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in response to this.

FACT 10

Lithuania. In 2010, the former vice-mayor of Vilnius Algirdas Paleckis was on a radio broadcast where he said "As it turns out now, our people were shooting our own" about the clashes on 13 January 1991 at the Vilnius TV Tower. A criminal case was started just for those words. The first court acquitted Paleckis, but a superior court then found him guilty and fined him 10 400 litas.

Introduction

After the Soviet Union's dissolution, the European Union has been steadily expanding its influence in post-Soviet space. Primarily this concerned the proliferation of democratic norms, institutes and practices. The main declared goal was the integration or association of the former Soviet Union republics with the EU – to increase their respect for democracy, human rights, freedom of speech and other commonly accepted values of modern Europe.

However, even after joining the European Union or associating with it, the actual political practices of the former Soviet republics are still far from democratic standards.

The Baltic Countries and the EU Eastern Partners are states that practice arrests, kidnappings and murder of journalists as well as administrative pressure on the media, threats of violence against opposition outlets and their staff, language-based discrimination.

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine have political prisoners, arrested for publicly speaking their minds. The plight of these people has been pointed out by Western human rights organizations, they are recognized as prisoners of conscience. The attacks against dissidents are not just done on the state level with the Prosecutor's Office and secret services, but also on a public activist level. This is most clearly seen in Ukraine, where paramilitary ultra-right groups, with the political leadership's tacit approval, attack journalists, obstruct their work, wreck offices, etc.

Joining the European Union and economic association with the Union allowed the Baltic and Ukrainian leadership to fly the banners of democracy and freedom of speech, while in actuality, ignoring them.

With Ukraine, the EU countries de facto gave up on their demands that Ukraine release political prisoners, conduct structural reforms in law enforcement, implementing freedom of speech and respecting minority rights. All so that president Viktor Yanukovich (later declared illegitimate) signed the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement and the Free Trade Zone between Ukraine and EU.

With the Baltics, Latvia and Estonia were allowed into the European Union while keeping the discriminatory institute of "non-citizenship" – a fundamental deprivation of fundamental rights from hundreds of thousands of people. Due to this, year by year, there are more and more violations of human rights.



Lithuania

I.1. The State Protecting Historic Myths

Pressure on Freedom of Speech in Lithuania is usually tied to the state's attempts to reinforce the official interpretation of historic events surrounding the Soviet period of their history. There, it is commonly accepted to think that from 1940 to 1991, the Republic was occupied by the USSR. In 2010, the Lithuanian Seimas (Parliament) adopted amendments to the Criminal Code, criminalizing the very act of doubting this version of events: "He who publicly, vocally or in writing supports the aggression undertaken by the USSR or Nazi Germany against the Lithuanian Republic, exonerates it, diminishes or denies it, vocally or in writing supports genocide or the other crimes against humanity, done by the USSR or Nazi Germany, <...> is punishable by a fine or imprisonment for up to two years."¹



Algirdas Paleckis / Photo: delfi.lt

In practice, this law is specifically aimed at stopping the spread of actual information pertaining to the 13 January 1991 events in Vilnius, which paint an unflattering picture of the founding fathers of post-Soviet Lithuania.

According to official sources, there were 13 victims of the clashes near the Vilnius TV Tower. Lithuania blames these deaths on the Soviet Military (and anyone who testifies otherwise will not even be questioned, because such words are viewed only as deliberate lies).

In 2010, immediately after the Criminal Code was adjusted, it was used against the former vice-mayor of Vilnius Algirdas Paleckis, who said in a radio broadcast where he said "As it turns out now, our people were shooting our own" about the clashes on 13 January. This led to a criminal trial which was accompanied by a wide human rights campaign and was even criticized by Western organizations.

¹ <https://www.infolex.lt/ta/66150:str170-2>

In his closing statement on the Paleckis case, prosecutor Egidijus Šleinius emphasizes that the persecution of the politician was specifically due to his stance on this event: "Thus, the objective side of this crime is the publicly spoken statement, aimed at an undefined circle of people, which expresses extreme denial, contemptuous and humiliating bias towards to the people who died and suffered in the fight for the preservation of the restored independence as well as their memory"².

The first court acquitted Paleckis, but an appeal court found him guilty and fined him 10 400 litas. After the sentence was passed, two of the witnesses who testified in defense of Paleckis also found themselves in the police's crosshairs. Danguolė Raugalienė and Jaunutis Lekas were also now charged with slanderous testimonies³.

Both bore witness to the events at the Vilnius TV Tower and said that the Soviet troops did not shoot at the people. Danguolė Raugalienė was found guilty and fined, however the Vilnius District Court acquitted her case on appeal.

In 2018, blogger Simonas Zagurskas was also fined for denying the official version of those events.

☞ "13 January 1991 in Vilnius many were shot by local snipers, former special forces. Some of them are considered criminals now. Their names are known. Among them were Romas Čėponis and Rimas Grainys" wrote Zagurskas. And the state experts found those words to have "traits of insulting the Lithuanian Republic", "a drive to humiliate the Lithuanian Constitutional Order" and "inciting violence towards state institutions"⁴.

²<https://newsbalt.ru/analytics/2011/11/prokuror-o-dele-paleckisa-radi-kak/>
³<https://www.kp.rudaily/25916/2870195/>
⁴<https://baltnews.lt/authors/20181002/1018407968/lithuania-sud-delo-grabauskas.html>



13 January 1991 Events in Vilnius

VERSIONS OF HOW THE EVENTS TOOK PLACE:

Russia

0 civilian

casualties caused by the actions of the Soviet troops and the KGB Alpha Group

1 member

of KGB Alpha Group died during the storming of the TV Center

Lithuania

14 people

died due to the actions of the Soviet troops and the KGB Alpha Group

More than 600 people

were injured due to the actions of the Soviet Army and the KGB Alpha Group

"The 13 January Case"

BECAME THE BIGGEST TRIAL IN THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA'S JUSTICE SYSTEM

The
Trial on the
13 January Case
lasted from
January 2016
to
27 March 2019

67 people

the Vilnius District Court found them guilty of "war crimes and crimes against humanity" without any real evidence

2 people

out of the 67 accused were present in the court building during the verdict



These two were Kaliningrad resident reserve colonel Yuri Mel, who was detained in Lithuania in 2014

**sentenced
to 7 years in prison**

And Russian citizen who was living in Lithuania, Gennady Ivanov

**sentenced to 4 years
in prison**

Legal Evaluation of the 13th January Case in Russia:

In Russia, 13th January Case is viewed as a political process "in the worst traditions of punitive justice", in no way connected to the protection of human rights, contradicting the rules of international law and flagrantly anti-Russian

Investigative Committee of Russia started an investigation against the Vilnius District Court judges, charging them with part 2 of article 305 of the Russian Criminal Code "Issuing an intentionally unjust sentence"

PART 1 | LITHUANIA

So far, the most severe of punishments fell on historian, public figure and publicist Valery Ivanov. He said that first he was incriminated with the murder of a certain mister Kanapinskas on the night of 13 January 1991, but ultimately he was sentenced for "creating an anti-government organization and anti-government activity." (a political crime back from the Soviet times)⁵.

Upon being published, Ivanov released a book titled Lithuanian Prison dedicated to the tragic events next to the Vilnius TV Tower. After it was presented at the Russian Federation State Duma, the historian got another prison sentence in Lithuania.



Valery Ivanov / Photo: DELEFI / Tomas Vitrckas

In 2018, Algirdas Paleckis was arrested again, this time with charges of espionage in Russia's favour. It was over a month until the Lithuanian and foreign public found out that the former chairman of the Socialist People's Front (Socialistinis liaudies frontas) party of Lithuania was under arrest. During the writing of this report, the Appeals Court put Paleckis under house arrest (six months of not being able to leave home and an electronic bracelet) and set a 50 000 Euro bail.

His lawyer Algis Petrulis noted that during his time in prison, Paleckis health has suffered substantially. With a height of 188 cm, (6'1") his weight dropped to 60 kg (132 lbs.).

“He is in a solitary cell and he is let out for a walk only for an hour into a courtyard where you can't see the sun or anything, just a four by three room. There is already a decision that he can't meet his wife and parents,” said the lawyer⁶. In November 2019, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OSCE Alexander Lukashovich said that he was waiting for OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir's reaction to the persecution of Paleckis, but there was no reaction. Russian and Baltic rights activists unsuccessfully tried to get this question to the international organization level.

In 2013, the First Baltic Channel (Pirmais Baltijas Kanāls - PBK) was taken off the air for a journalistic investigation of the Vilnius TV Tower events. This channel also rebroadcasted the programming of the Russian Channel One. This event caused an international response with OSCE

criticizing the shutdown of the PBK in Lithuania.

“Altogether, any attempts to limit pluralism in the media must be met with resistance. The Freedom of the Media depends on a healthy and energetic media field, which includes media channels that present the news in different languages and from different countries.” said Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the suspension of the PBK Channel⁸.

In 2016, the state used police and administrative pressure against the publisher of Russian journalist Galina Sapozhnikova's new book *The Lithuanian Conspiracy and the Soviet Collapse: Investigation into a Political Demolition* which included eyewitness accounts of the events at the Vilnius TV Tower. The State Security Department of Lithuania (VSD) confiscated the whole printing run of Sapozhnikova's book in Lithuanian, and the 78-year old journalist Povilas Masilionis who published the book found himself charged with "denying occupation." Sapozhnikova herself was banned from entering the country, presentations of her book in Lithuania were disbanded and, in addition to that, Lithuanian diplomats tried to sabotage the book's presentation in Rome, Milan and Minsk¹⁰.

Another person who wrote of the many inconsistencies in the 13 January Case was Vytautas Petkevičius, one of the founders of Sąjūdis movement (a socio-political organization which played the leading role in Lithuania's exit from the USSR in 1988-1990). In his book *The Ship of Fools* he puts the blame for the



Galina Sapozhnikova / Photo: from Galina Sapozhnikova's personal archive

tragedy on the first leader of independent Lithuania and his closest ally:

“The blood of thirteen victims is on [Vytautas] Landsbergis' and [Audrius] Butkevičius' hands. It is by their will that a few disguised border guards were placed at the Vilnius TV Tower. They shot down at the crowd with live rounds. I saw it with my own eyes as the bullets hit the asphalt and the ricochets flew by my feet.”

⁶ <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/Baltics/20190807/12230252/Advokat-Paletskis-SIZO-derzhatodinochke-lechat-itaminami.html>

⁷ <https://tass.ru/politika/7091273>

⁸ <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/obse-ogranichenie-smi-v-pribaltike-nuzhno-prekratit>

⁹ <https://www.ritmeurasia.org/news--2017-04-11--pochemu-vlasti-litvy-objavili-voynu-knigerossijskoj-zhurnalistki-29513>

¹⁰ Посольство Литвы в Италии протестует против презентации книги о Литве URL: <http://m.baltnews.lv/news/20161012/1017779380.html>



That book was ill-fated: after the writer's death, Lithuanian court found it to be libel against the good name and reputation of Vytautas Landsbergis and his father Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis. Petkevičius' daughter Liudmila Petkevičiūtė tried to appeal this decision in the European Human Rights Court, but they refused her appeal¹¹.

Trouble also awaits those who criticize the Forest Brothers movement – partizans from the nationalist underground, which fought the Soviet authority in the Baltics after World War II.

Rūta Vanagaitė / Photo: DELFI / Domantas Pipas



The most prominent example would be writer Rūta Vanagaitė. In 2017, she spoke against the glorification of the Forest Brothers and their leader Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas in Lithuania. Vanagaitė said that during the war many of the future partizans cooperated with the Nazis and took part in killing Jews, while their leader Vanagas was an NKVD agent and before being executed sold out his allies to the Soviets.

For these words, Vanagaitė's opponents contacted the Prosecutor's Office, asking them to start a criminal case, her books were taken from stores, publishing agencies refused to work with the writer, threats followed her on the streets and online. And Vytautas Landsbergis told Vanagaitė to "go and hang herself in the forest." Ultimately, she was forced to emigrate out of Lithuania.

¹¹<https://lt.sputniknews.ru/society/20180227/5268113/echr-zhaloba-liudmila-petkeviciute-durnius-laivas.html>

¹²<https://inosmi.ru/social/20171208/240965062.html>

A similar problem arose for Klaipėda City Councilman Vyacheslav Titov. He spoke out against the display of a memorial plaque on the walls of Klaipėda University dedicated to the leader of the Forest Brothers Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas as well as saying that he was responsible for the murder of thousands of people. Titov's statement was investigated by the Prosecutor's Office, the prosecution insisting that the politician be given time in prison. Nonetheless, he only got a fine. This sentencing also led to the Central Electoral Commission taking away his seat at the Klaipėda City Council¹³.

In March 2020, the police detained Titov's colleague from the Klaipėda City Council Ella Andreeva (Titov and Justice committee), as well as two organizers of the Immortal Regiment – Tatiana Afansieva-Kolomiets and Alexey Greychus. And while Andreeva and Kolomiets were searched and released, Greychus was arrested for three months for suspected espionage in favour of Russia.

The Russian Ambassador to Lithuania Alexander Udaltsov commented on the investigation into the Immortal Regiment organizers, calling the actions of the Lithuanian government politically motivated provocations.

At the same time as the organizers of the Victory Day events in Klaipėda were arrested, The Lithuanian MFA brought a project resolution to the Seimas, stating the Russia was "rewriting the history" of World War 2. The resolution calls for a condemnation of the "Russian Federation's historic revisionism and spread of disinformation, which denies the role of the Soviet Union as one of the main instigators of World War 2 in order to force it to the victims of its aggression."



Authorities in Klaipėda decided to commemorate the leader of the Forest Brothers Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas / Photo: delfi.lt

Approving of Soviet government in Lithuania is legally punishable.

In 2017, famous public figure Yuri Subbotin was found guilty in a Vilnius court, his "crime" was publishing a comment online "Thank you, Stalin, Sniečkus (leader of the Communist Party of Lithuania from 1940 to 1974) and the Soviet State, those who don't like to be together with Russia – get out of Lithuania, suitcase, station, America." In court, Subbotin denied the authorship of this, but the court paid no attention to that. He was found guilty and sentenced to restriction of freedom for 1 year and 2 months. "The defendant was sentenced using the article that establishes a punishment for the public approval, denial or gross belittling of the Soviet or Nazi international crimes against the Lithuanian Republic or its residents." said the judge¹⁴.



The Ship of Fools (Durnių laivas) by Vytautas Petkevičius

Lithuanian court found it to be libel against the good name and reputation of Vytautas Landsbergis and his father Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis.

”

We are writhing in agony. Today our social degradation is getting out of control. The Landsbergists have turned our life into Social Darwinism.

Vytautas Petkevičius



The Lithuanian Conspiracy and the Soviet Collapse: Investigation into a Political Demolition by Galina Sapozhnikova

The State Security Department of Lithuania (VSD) confiscated the whole printing run of Sapozhnikova's book in Lithuanian, and the 78-year old journalist Povilas Masilionis who published the book found himself charged with "denying occupation." Sapozhnikova herself was banned from entering the country.

”

Galina Sapozhnikova's book gives a voice to the victims of that difficult time, letting them speak of the tragedy of an abandoned nation.

Giulietto Chiesa



РУТА ВАНАГАЙТЕ, ЭФРАИМ

СВО

ПУТЕШЕСТВИЕ С В



Our People: Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust by Rūta Vanagaitė

The books were taken off the shelves of Lithuanian libraries, the author became a target for public harassment and was forced to emigrate.

”

A few thousand Lithuanians are part of the murder of around two hundred thousand Lithuanian Jews who lived on that led. It's not a 'they' killed 'them', but a 'we' killed 'us.'

Christoph Dieckmann

THE "WRONG" BOOKS

I.2. Pressure on Russian-Speaking Media

The Baltics' secret services almost always have their sights on media and journalists who operate in the non-state languages: mainly in Russian (and in Lithuania, in Polish as well). The actions of Russian and Russian-language media of the opposition are usually painted to be part of the Kremlin's information policy, a plot of the neighboring country to discredit the Lithuanian state, to warp the historic truth, etc. The main instrument to apply this pressure is the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania (LRTK).

In February 2019, the LRTK declared that two channels have violated the rules, they alleged that the channels spread false information about Lithuanian partisans. This was aimed at the programs of the First Baltic Channel (PBK) Lithuania and NTV Mir Lithuania. In March 2019, journalists from Russian media, including RIA-Novosti, RT, Channel One, Izvestia and Channel Five were not allowed into the Vilnius court for the sentencing of 13 January 1991 Vilnius events case, with more than 60 Russians actually being part of the case. These actions of the Lithuanian government were condemned by international organizations, including the European Federation of Journalists. Between May and July 2019, attacks against Sputnik Lithuania were on the rise, just in time for the presidential election in the Republic. Editor-in-chief of Sputnik Lithuania, Marat Kasem was banned from entering the country for five years. The journalist himself called this a "planned action" of the Lithuanian secret services ¹⁶.

In July 2019, the LRTK used a court order to lock access to the Sputnik Lithuania site, due to an alleged violation of copyright. The formal excuse for the blocking of the site was a complaint from Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT), which said that Sputnik Lithuania used LRT materials on their site without permission ¹⁷.



Marat Kasem / Photo: Facebook

**Official Russian
MFA Representative
Maria Zakharova
called Vilnius'
decision "Clear
repressions against
unwanted media."
The site was later
unblocked once
the alleged
copyrighted
materials were
deleted.**

14 ¹⁵ <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/baltics/20190724/9717263/Zablokirovat-i-obyavit-ugrozoy-Kakpritesnyayut-rossiyskie-SMI-v-Baltii.html>

¹⁶ <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/society/20190529/9171432/Shef-redaktor-Sputnik-Litva-schitaet-svoezaderzhanie-produmannoy-aktsiey.html>

¹⁷ <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/society/20190712/9589037/Vilnyus-blokiruot-dostup-k-saytu-SputnikLitva.html>

¹⁸ <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/russia/20190729/9775078/V-MIA-Rossiya-segodnya-otreagirovali-nasnyatie-blokirovki-so-Sputnik-Litva.html>

The systematic struggle of foreign language media in Lithuania even drew the attention of the United Nations. The UN Human Rights Committee 2018 report states that: “The State party should cease publicly referring to individuals and entities that exercise their freedom of expression as “national security threats”. It should ensure that all of its initiatives, legislative or otherwise, guarantee that authors, journalists, human rights defenders and other individuals and associations are able to freely exercise their right to freedom of expression”¹⁹.

According to Lithuanian Courier (kurier.lt) publisher and editor-in-chief Valery Tretyakov, businesses don't want to work with outlets that are traditionally seen as pro-Russian:

“If ten years ago, before [the election of president Dalia] Grybauskaitė, we had local advertisers, but with the new president, none of that remains. The businesses don't want to work with us,

Vilnius' policy is leading to Russian-speaking outlets also encountering business difficulties.

playing it safe. I know many business owners personally. I tell them ‘Help me out, give me at least some ad orders’ and they answer ‘I could help you personally. I could give you some money out of my pocket. But not into the newspaper. I don't want any problems with the state and searches’²⁰.

In 2017, the Seimas decided to increase the amount of rebroadcast and spread channels online in official EU languages to 90%.

One of the authors of this initiative Laurynas Kasčiūnas from the Homeland

Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) party directly said that the amendments to the law are aimed directly against radio and TV shows in Russian:

“We hope that this decision will spur our TV channels to pay more attention to European content, because the amount of Russian content on our screens is too high. Since 2007, its frequency on our channels has gone up by 2.5 times. And in a certain sense, this content is not just a piece of television, it obviously used for cultural influence, soft power”²¹.

Earlier, the same Kasčiūnas addressed the head of LRTK Edmundas Vaitekūnas with a request to monitor channels and measure if there is maybe too much Russian content on Lithuanian TV²². Lithuanian MFA Linas Linkevičius also called for measures against this on an international level: his idea boiled down to making Russian TV channels unavailable to all viewers in all EU countries²³.

State Security Department of Lithuania mentions Russian media in its annual reports. For example, the report on threats to national security in 2019, we can find accusations against the RuBaltic.Ru analytics site:

“Representatives of Russian State have unambiguously stated that they

will not leave the sentence of the Lithuanian court on the 13 January case without a response. Efforts were made to discredit the court trials happening in Lithuania in the eyes of the international community. 20 February 2019 in Brussels, in the building of the European Parliament, during an event, they presented an investigation by the information-analytical portal RuBaltic.Ru, which spreads aggressive Russian propaganda, the report in question concerned political repressions in the Baltic states. A large portion of it was dedicated to the 13 January case. Later, Russian NGOs who support Russia's aggressive foreign and internal policies asked the OSCE to pay attention to this alleged political persecution in Lithuania”²⁴.



Photo: RuBaltic.Ru Discussion Club dedicated to the Yuri Mel case, 14 February 2019

¹⁹<https://ru.delfi.lt/news/politics/komitet-oon-prizval-litvu-polnostyu-rasseyat-podozreniyaotnositelno-tyurmy-cru.d?id=78680149>

²⁰https://baltnews.lt/freedom_of_speech/20200203/1019731628/Roznitsa-tolko-shitany-i-podderzhivaet-Kak-v-Litve-vyzhivaet-russkoyazychnaya-prensa.html

²¹<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2018/06/30/v-litve-zakonodatelno-ogranichili-russkoyazychnoe-tele-i-radioveshchanie>

²²<https://lt.sputniknews.ru/society/20170313/2449401/vlasti-litvy-proveryat-litovskie-telekanaly-naschet-rossijskoj-teleprodukcii.html>

²³<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5322542>

²⁴<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/05022020-litva-ispugalas-mezhdunarodnoy-aktivnosti-rubaltic-ru/>

With this situation, people are even more fearful of the amendments to the reconnaissance law that were made by Lithuanian president Gitanas Nausėda, which would only give the secret services more power. It would allow them to summon citizens for preventive talks, check their personal documents and use administrative arrests.

Photo: Russian-speaking Population in the Baltics and Ukraine: Minority Rights Issues roundtable at the UN Forum in Geneva, 29 November 2019.



In particular, the “preventive talks” can be used if the secret services have “information that the person may be linked <...> with activities that can increase risk or prove to be a threat to national security or Lithuania’s state interests”²⁵. Media workers could very well be in a list of such “activity.”

PART 2.

Latvia

2.1. Fighting Alternative Views on History

Latvian law enforcement, just like in Lithuania, have a very harsh reaction to attempts at re-evaluating history. In particular, the history of Stalin's deportations – forced relocation of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian residents to Siberia in 1941 and 1949. The Baltic states call these deportations “genocide”, equating it to the Holocaust. They use this as an argument for their idea of the Soviet Union and the Third Reich being equally criminal regimes and calling the Soviet period a “cruel inhumane occupation.” In 2012, Latvian State Security Service (VDD) started a criminal case against publicist Alexander Gilman for his

then the VDD's modus operandi has had a cardinal change. “I must say, they used to be very polite and forthcoming to me personally. I was asked to confirm that I wrote the comment that started the criminal case. I confirmed that. That was it, no one took my PC or trashed my home. Now everything has changed: there are searches, even if they are not really needed. Special Services take all communications devices and keep them longer than they need to. It is known that the PC has been cracked, all of the data taken, but still they don't give it back for months. So now the Security Service has a different strategy. because there is no



Alexander Gilman / Photo: LETA

article on the IMHOclub.lv site. In said article, Gilman thanked Joseph Stalin for deporting his family to Siberia in 1941, noting that almost all Latvian Jews who were not deported were later killed by the Nazi and their Latvian collaborationists. Similarly, six years earlier the authorities tried to accuse Gilman of calls to overthrow the government.

In a 2018 interview to a RuBaltic.Ru journalist, the publicist emphasizes that since

guarantee that the court will side with the prosecution, they need to sufficiently intimidate the accused beforehand, so that person wouldn't do whatever they did again”²⁷.

In 2014, the Latvian Saeima (Parliament) changed the criminal legislation, allowing a punishment of up to 5 years in prison for “public glorification, denial, exoneration of the genocide or crimes against humanity done by the Soviet or Nazi occupational regimes”²⁸.

²⁶<https://imhoclub.lv/ru/material/mifi-14-ijunja>

²⁷<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/11092018-vsedomvolennost-i-bespredel-cto-govoryat-o-deystviyakh-latviyskikh-spetssluzhb-pobyvavshie-pod-pres/>

²⁸<http://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/22198-saeima-kriminallikumaieklauj-noradi-uz-psrs-un-nacistiskas-vacijas-nodarjiem-pret-latviju-un-tas>

PART 2 | LATVIA

Five years later, the Riga Court District Prosecutor's Office used this new criminal article against a high-ranking member of the Latvian Russian Union and RuBaltic.Ru contributor Alexander Filey. Filey used his Facebook page to congratulate his followers with the anniversary of the Red Army entering Latvian territory and said that "this date must be respected and honored." The Latvian State Security Service stated that he "selected and interpreted historic events in his own interests, denied the occupation of Latvia that happened 17 June 1940 and presented the tragic event as something beneficial to the people of Latvia" ²⁹.



Alexander Filey / Photo: BaltNews.lv/Dmitry Zhilin

Filey used his Facebook page to congratulate his followers with the anniversary of the Red Army entering Latvian territory and said that "this date must be respected and honored."

As correctly noted by Latvian rights activist Vladimir Linderman, the accusation is absurd on its own, as denying "Soviet occupation" is not a criminal offense in Latvia. ²⁹ "To those of you who don't know or forgot, let me say that in 2014, the Saeima added into the Criminal Code a certain Article 74 Prime, which punishes the 'exonerating genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and war crimes.' A part of the MPs wanted to add a punishment for 'justifying the aggression of the Soviet Union against Latvia,' but that proposal did not make it through." ³⁰ said Linderman.

And "public glorification, denial or exoneration of USSR's war crimes against Latvia and its residents" (as said in the law) also doesn't fit this case, because as of 17 June 1940, Latvia was not in a state of war.

A part of the MPs wanted to add a punishment for 'justifying the aggression of the Soviet Union against Latvia.'

18 ²⁹<https://mixnews.lv/latviya/2019/12/08/prokuratūra-obvinila-chlena-pravleniya-rls-l-v-otriczhanii-sovetskoj-okkupaczii/>

³⁰https://lv.baltnews.com/school_Russian/20191120/1023515886/Delo-Fileya-otkuda-vzyalis-voennye-prestupleniya-esli-ne-bylo-voiny.html



2.2. Excluding Russian-Speaking Media and Experts from the Public Field

In Latvia, the campaign against Russian and Russian-speaking media is coordinated by the National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP). This is the agency that is responsible for the State's media policy for TV, radio and online media. Formally independent, the NEPLP is financed from the state budget and formed by the Latvian parliament, where the ruling coalition adheres to a strict anti-Russian course. The Council doesn't even hide the fact that they pay special attention to Russian media. Sometimes they are assisted by the MFA, Ministry of Defense, the VDD or even the president.

In recent years, there has been an increase in country entry bans and deportations from the Baltics, with dozens of publicists, film crews, public experts, historians, writers, actors and singers affected by this. In certain situations, the state agencies deport people who were already allowed to enter the country, as it happened with the head of the National Energy Security Fund Konstantin Simonov. As the expert was having lunch in Riga, the Latvian State Security Service barged into the restaurant and told him he would be deported from Latvia³¹.



Konstantin Simonov / Photo: Sputnik / Vladimir Trefilov

In recent years, there has been an increase in country entry bans and deportations from the Baltics, with dozens of publicists, film crews, public experts, historians, writers, actors and singers affected by this.

In 2015, the Latvian Enterprise Registry refused to register the Latvian offices of the Rossiya Segodnya Russian media agency. The state agency stated that the declaration and enclosed documents did not follow the Constitution of the Latvia Republic and other legal acts. Earlier, the Enterprise Registry asked the National Electronic Media Council's opinion, who said that Rossiya Segodnya allegedly spreads manipulative information that benefits the Russian Federation's foreign policy³². Obviously, this evaluation predetermined the refusal in registration.

In 2018, National Electronic Media Council decided to prohibit Latvian Television and Latvian Radio from using photos from Sputnik Latvia because it "strengthens the brand" of the Russian outlet³³. In July 2019, Latvia's MFA demanded the NIC.lv domain name registrar to block access to the Baltnews.lv site. The excuse for this was the EU Council's Regulation No. 269/2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. The ministry also threatened to prosecute the journalists working at Baltnews.lv with the new Criminal Code of Latvia.

An analysis of the acting EU legislation showed that the EU Regulation in question does not affect the work of media coverage of Ukraine in any way. This norm only allows the limitation of travel and economic sanctions on people and corporate entities.

³¹<https://rus.tvnet.lv/4790415/skandal-rossijskogo-eksperta-deportirovali-iz-latviivo-vremya-ego-obeda>

³²<https://www.kp.ru/daily/26426.5/3298688/>

³³<https://lv.sputniknews.ru/politics/20180404/7883860/nep-lp-spravka.html>

In November 2019, the Latvian National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP) decided to stop broadcasts of nine Russian-language channels on the Republic's territory: Time: Near and Far (Время: далекое и близкое), Beaver (Бобер), Movie Home (Дом Кино), Movie Home Premium (Дом Кино Премиум), First's Music (Музыка Первого), O! (O!), Let's Go (Поехали), Telecafe (Телекафе) and Petersburg-Channel Five (Петербург-Пятый канал).

According to the NEPLP vice-chairman Ivars Āboliņš, the main beneficiary of these was Yuri Kovalchuk, who was under EU sanctions³⁴.

The Russian Union of Journalists called this a clear case of repressions against the unfavourable media: “Suspending the broadcast of nine channels is nothing more than a politically-motivated action and is direct pressure on the media, limiting not only the broadcasts of our media, but also limiting their own citizens, the viewers, from getting unbiased alternative information on processes that happen not just in the Republic and Russia, but also, the world”³⁵.

In March 2020, First Baltic Channel (PBK), a rebroadcaster of the Russian Channel One, was forced to close down its original programming in Latvia and Estonia (in particular, the program Latvian Times). This decision was made due to pressure from state agencies and law enforcement on the Riga-based Baltijas Mediju Alianse holding which includes PBK. Earlier, the Latvian State Security Service came to the holding's offices for criminal procedures, its co-owner and chairman of the board Oleg Solodov was suspected of violating international anti-Russian sanctions³⁶.

In Latvia, as is the case in the neighboring Baltic Republics, there are language quotas for the media. For example, the quota for Russian-language broadcasts in different years fluctuated from 25% to 35% of all broadcasts³⁷.

In February 2020, Latvian president Egils Levits proposed that the Parliamentary Human Rights and Public Affairs Commission make amendments to the law, shifting the proportion of TV content in EU and Eurozone official languages, thus decreasing the share of Russian language programming³⁸. This idea

The Latvian National Electronic Media Council decided to stop broadcasts of nine Russian-language channels on the Republic's territory: Time: Near and Far, Beaver, Movie Home, Movie Home Premium, First's Music, O!, Let's Go, Telecafe and Petersburg-Channel Five.

was heavily criticized by co-chairman of the Latvian Russian Union Miroslav Mitrofanov: “If the president's most recent fit of idiocy makes it through, then the elderly and low-income population who can't escape from Levits into the internet will be impacted. This will also impact children who currently have Russian-language educational and scientific programs on cable TV”³⁹. However, Levits' view on this is shared by the head of National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP) Ivars Āboliņš.

According to him, there is no place for Russian language content on television: “The Media Council, as well as Latvian Television see that content for national minorities is moving from regular TV to the internet. Thus, we plan to develop television specifically in Latvian, and national minority languages should stick to online”⁴⁰. Exclusion of Russian-language content from Latvia's media field is becoming a trend.

³⁴<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7163013>

³⁵<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7164619>

³⁶<https://ria.ru/20200320/1568873345.html>

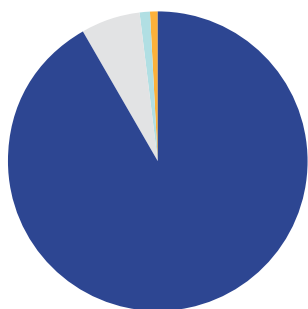
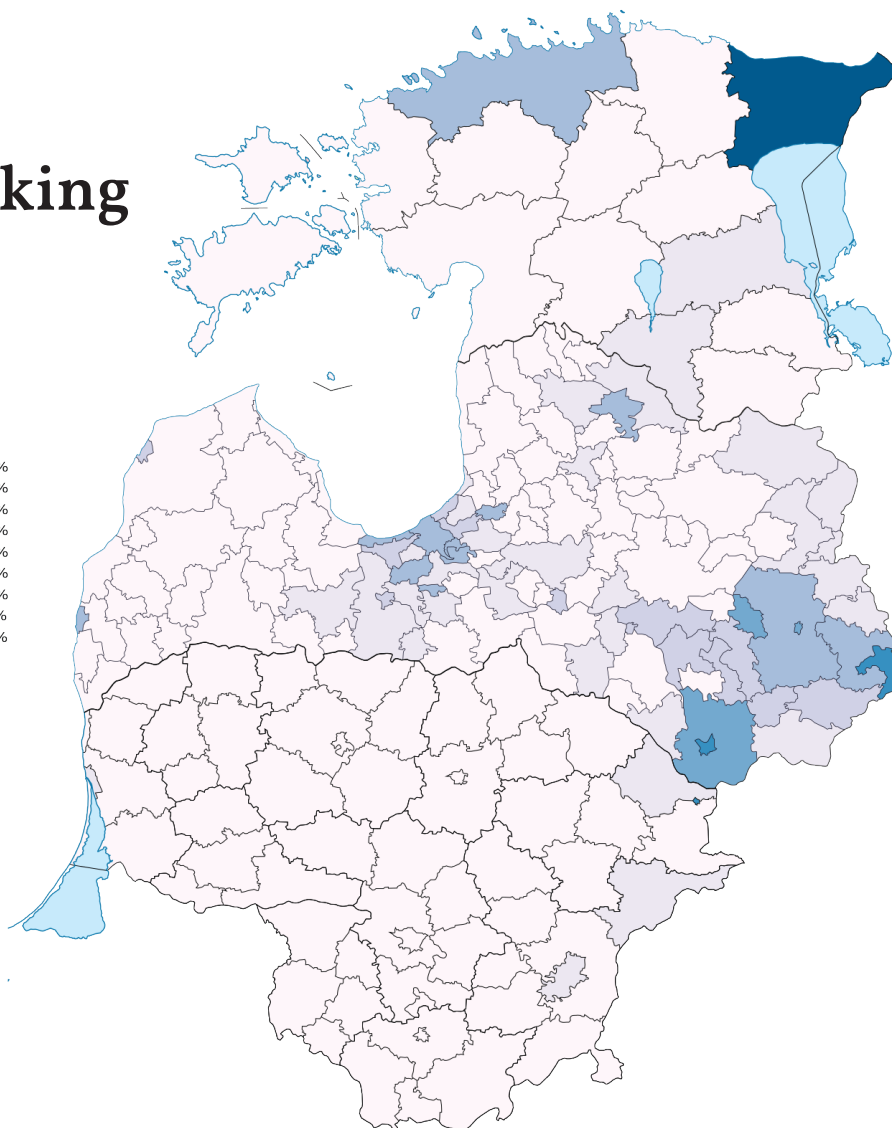
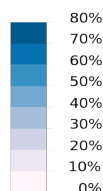
³⁷<http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/sejm-vvel-yazykovye-kvoty-na-televidenii.d?id=32542527&all=true>

³⁸<https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/11022020-prezident-latvii-predlozhit-umenshit-kolichestvo-teleprogramm-na-russkom-yazyke/>

³⁹<https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12022020-mitrofanov-ideya-levitsa-izgnat-russkie-telekanaly-v-latvii-privet-k-massovomu-otkazu-ot-tv/>

⁴⁰<https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/18122019-glava-soveta-po-smi-latvii-russkomu-yazyku-mesto-v-internete/>

Russian-speaking population in the Baltic countries

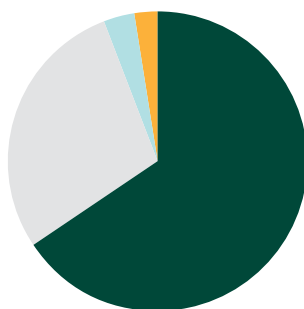


Lithuania 2011

Lithuanians	2 561 314
Russians	176 913
Belarussians	36 227
others	16 423

Russian speaking 229 563

Population 3 043 429

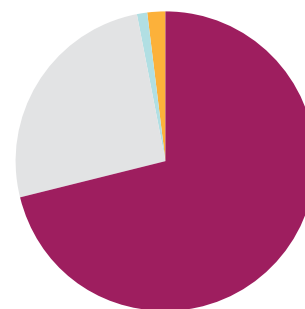


Latvia 2011

Latvians	1 284 194
Russians	556 422
Belarussians	68 174
others	45 699

Russian speaking 670 295

Population 2 067 887



Estonia 2016

Estonians	905 805
Russians	330 263
Belarussians	12 171
others	23 256

Russian speaking 356 690

Population 1 315 944

2.3. Persecution of the Protectors of Russian Schools

The most impactful cases with rights activists getting arrested are the ones of protecting Russian schools in Latvia.

The execution of the education reform in the Baltic republic started in 2004. The main goal was to gradually increase the share of subjects that were taught in Latvian within national minority schools. These “innovations” faced backlash from opposition politicians, international organizations and the numerous Russian community of Latvia. Nonetheless, the Latvian authorities did not give up on this plan: in 2017, the Education and Science Minister Kārlis Šadurskis decided to fully switch middle school education to Latvian. Opponents of the reform regularly did protest rallies to prove that the true goal of the government was not to improve education, but to deprive the Russian children from receiving an education in their native language.

In early 2018, opponents of the reform organized the All-Latvian Parents’ Meeting, after which the Latvian State Security police arrested two members of this event, the aforementioned Vladimir Linderman and famous scientist, publicist and economist Alexander Gaponenko.

Vladimir Linderman was released after two weeks in custody. The Law Enforcement insists that during his speech at the rally he violated three articles of the Criminal Code at once: article 80 “Actions against the foundations of the state”, article 78 “Inciting ethnic dissention” and article 225 “Organization of mass riots.”

According to the rights activist himself, the goal of the attack by the police were not specific people, but the protesting



Vladimir Linderman / Photo: BaltNews.lv

community itself: “I think they had the mission of hitting the resurfacing movement to protect Russian Schools. To intimidate the normal people and take out the leaders. So for the secret services it was a clear element of pressure”⁴¹.

Alexander Gaponenko, known for his unrelenting opposition to NATO’s policies and radical forms of nationalisms, has spent four months in prison. He was charged with articles 78 and 80 of the Criminal Code, as well as article 81 (helping a foreign state’s activity against the Latvian Republic). In other words, the scholar is accused of state treason, he is looking at 8 years in prison.

“For these four months that I spent in prison, they never really charged me with anything. They said that I must confess, but when I asked what I was to confess about, they would just say that I’d know what to confess. Eventually, the Prosecutor’s Office gave me three pages of my “crimes”, saying that I published articles on

Facebook from September 2017 to April 2018. But when I asked the Prosecutor which statements and articles in particular are ‘worth’ 8 years in prison, and I never got a clear answer.” said Gaponenko⁴². During the writing of this report, his trial is still ongoing.

Another detainment from the All-Latvian Parents’ Meeting case was Saeima candidate, Latvian Russian Union councilman Ilya Kozyrev. However, the State Security Service did not end up committing to arresting him. Latvian Human Rights Committee chairman Vladimirs Buzajevs said that Kozyrev’s detainment was no surprise to the Latvian Russian Union: “We already provided instructions on how to act during investigations, because we have nine people ‘on the hook.’ There is no room for democracy in our country any more”⁴³.



Ilya Kozyrev / Photo: Ieva ka/LETA



The State Security Service did another search at Alexeev's house, taking all of his computer equipment, even the old CD disks

Yuri Alexeev, the founder and editor-in-chief of one of Latvia's most popular online sites IMHO-club.lv is also under travel restrictions. In late 2017, the State Security Service conducted a search in Alexeev's apartment and found live ammunition. There is now a criminal case against Alexeev, with the journalist saying that the live rounds were planted there ⁴⁴. In March 2018, Alexeev was dubbed a suspect and placed under travel restrictions, and in November, they started new cases on articles 80 and 81. Until then, the secret services did another search at Alexeev's house, taking all of his computer equipment, even the old CD disks.



Tatjana Ždanoka / Photo: izborsk.md

In 2019, the Latvian State Security Service (VDD) started a criminal case against European Parliament member from the Latvian Russian Union Tatjana Ždanoka. She is charged with inciting national hatred by the following statement ⁴⁵ "We have come to the conclusion that Russians and the Russian-speaking population [of Latvia] are now in the same situation as the Jews before World War II. We are being punished" ⁴⁵.

It is notable that in the very same speech, Ždanoka also listed all of the anti-Russian statements by Latvian politicians. The most prominent example would be Saeima member Edvīns Šnore, who in one of his articles, used the phrase "Russian pests."

⁴⁶ "We frequently asked the State Security Services to check these statements for violations of the law. In all cases, they said there was no violation. So in the end of this speech I come to the conclusion of double standards. They are singling out a group of people who can be punished and a group who have an indulgence for any sin." said Ždanoka ⁴⁶.

⁴⁴<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/18122017-yuriy-alekseev-politsiyabezopasnosti-nashla-v-moey-kvartire-patrony-dlya-makarova/>

⁴⁵<https://lv.sputniknews.ru/politics/20190307/11111556.html>

⁴⁶<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20190315-zhdanok-reabilitatsiya-natsizma-v-stranakh-baltii-stanovitsya-problemy-vsey-evropy/>

PART 2 | LATVIA

How Latvia is excluding Russian language from its education

Class

REGULATION BEFORE THE REFORM

AMENDMENTS IN 2018

TAKING EFFECT

10 – 12 classes

At least 60% of the education must be in the Latvian language in state schools

All education must be Latvian, with the exception of official EU languages and ethnic and cultural studies

2020 – 2021

7 – 9 classes

At least 60% of the education must be in the Latvian language in state schools

At least 80% of the education must be Latvian

2019 – 2020

(with exceptions)

(with the exception of official EU languages)

1 – 6 classes

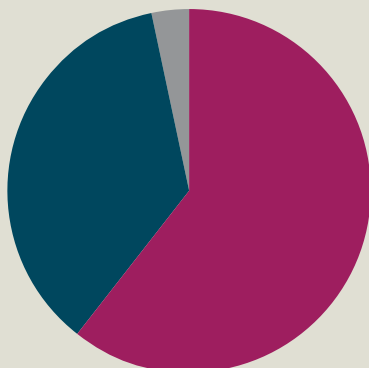
No mandatory language proportions

At least 50% of the education must be Latvian

2019

(with the exception of official EU languages)

Native language for Latvians



60,8%
Latvian

36%
Russian

3,2%
Other



Estonia

3.1. Pressure on the Media

Estonia utilizes the usual Baltic practices of deportations, intimidation, administrative and economic pressure on media. The Estonian Internal Security Service (KaPo), just like the Latvian State Security Service (VDD) and State Security Department of Lithuania (VSD), publishes public reports which act like a blacklist for journalists and whole outlets: state officials refuse to give them interviews and comments, they are refused accreditation to events. And those mentioned in these secret service reports are also potential targets for radical nationalists.

In 2014, the KaPo detained famous Italian writer, publicist and political figure Giulietto Chiesa in the Tallinn Airport. He spent a few hours in a cell and was deported back to Italy after the Italian ambassador to Estonia had to intervene. The Chiesa case caused a diplomatic scandal between Tallinn and Rome: the

correspondents from entering the country and charge them with ideological crimes. This apparently “discredited” the situation in the Baltic countries with the use of “deliberate misinformation”⁴⁷.

In 2017, the Propastop site (which is part of the Kaitseliit, a volunteer Estonian Defense League) published a blacklist of media outlets, caught in alleged anti-Estonian propaganda. Among them were the sites: Sputnik News (sputnik-news.ee); AIS (vg-news.ru); Lenta (lenta.ru); RT (rt.com); International news 24 (in24.org); Eye of the Planet (oko-planet.su); Regnum (regnum.ru); Gazeta (gazeta.ru); TASS (tass.ru); Life (life.ru); Russian Gazette (rg.ru); Rex Information Agency (iarex.ru); blogs rurik-l.livejournal.com and oppps.ru; TV Channels: Channel One (1tv.ru);

First Baltic Channel (1tv.lv); VESTI (vesti.ru); Rossiya-1 (russia.tv); Russia-RTR (rtr-planeta.com); Ren-TV (ren.tv); NTV (ntv.ru); Zvezda (tvzvezda.ru); TV Centr (tvc.ru); RosBusinessConsulting (rbc.ru) and others. The creators of this blacklist asked businesses not to work with these outlets, in order to cut off monetary support for them⁴⁸. In January 2019, Director for Government Communication Urmas Seaver officially stated in an interview to Estonian outlets that to state agencies certain channels, that are not independent and do not follow the good behavior rules of the journalistic field, will not even be considered media. According to him, such channels are the Rossiya Segodnya media group, which includes Sputnik and RIA Novosti⁴⁹.

In August 2019, Propastop began a petition to take the “.ee” domain from Russian portals Sputnik Eesti and Baltnews. According to Propastop administrators, “the situation where one country finances the activities that divide society in another country can be viewed as hostile propaganda.”

The Chiesa case caused a diplomatic scandal between Tallinn and Rome.



Giulietto Chiesa / Photo: Zurab Dzhavakhadze/TASS

Estonian government failed to explain to their Italian colleagues how political views can be a reason to stop an EU citizen from entering Estonia, especially considering the EU Agreements of freedom of travel.

Estonian intelligence added the analytical site RuBaltic.Ru to the list of organizations that are used to “further Moscow’s foreign policy.” The editors of the Annual Report on international security mention that in September 2019, RuBaltic.Ru presented two reports at the OSCE, one of which was dedicated to the persecution of journalists in the Baltics. In particular, it mentioned how the Baltics ban unfavorable



KaPo Emblem / Photo: DELFI.ee

⁴⁷<https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12022020-estonskaya-razvedka-vklyuchila-rubalticru-v-spisok-ugroz-natsbezopasnosti/>

⁴⁸<https://lv.sputniknews.ru/Baltics/20170207/3839207/chernyj-spisok-vrazhdebnye-smi-jestonija-sputnik.html>

⁴⁹<https://news.rambler.ru/baltic/41638919-pravozaschitniki-sputnik-v-estonii-nezakonno-lishayutdostupa-k-informatsii/>

3.2. The Campaign Against Sputnik Estonia

The Estonian state's attempts to pressure Sputnik, who broadcast in Estonian and Russian, started back in 2015, before the site was even online. A month after it opened a bank account, it was blocked, the reason was given that the CEO of Rossiya Segonya Dmitry Kiselev was under EU Council sanctions.

The journalists in the Sputnik office in Estonia are subjected to frequent pressure. Part of the Estonian staff had to quit for various reasons, including the quickly spreading opinion that working in Sputnik Estonia was a black mark in terms of living in the country or finding further work. Some staff had to quit after talks with Estonia's authorities.

Since its first day online, Estonian government officials said they refused to work with Sputnik Estonia.



Dmitry Kiselev / Photo: RIA Novosti / Vladimir Trefilov

The agency's journalists are banned from entering any state institutions, practically all public events with state participation, they are denied official comments on any issues.

Spring 2018, there was an incident in Kuperjanov Infantry Battalion's 2nd Infantry Brigade of Estonia's Self-Defense Forces, with a conscript shooting himself in the leg. And one of Sputnik's sources reported a different version to that of the official incident's explanation.

The editors sent questions to the Defense Ministry in order to get a confirmation or denial of the information they received. The Ministry did not answer the inquiry, but they did send the questions Sputnik sent them to all of the leading media, adding their own accusations towards to the site to them. As a result, Sputnik filed a complaint about the Estonian media involved to the Press Council, citing the Code of Journalistic Ethics of Estonia. The Council took the side of the Estonian media.

In Fall 2019, Estonia's pressure on Sputnik Estonia reached a new level.

Sputnik reporters were frequently kicked out of events where one doesn't even need accreditation. Requests for accreditation are either ignored or refused and accompanied with comments such as "You were not given accreditation, because Sputnik is not journalism, it is a propagandist channel of Putin's regime. We ask that you no longer contact the Ministry of Defense" and "Sadly, we cannot give you accreditation. The event is for journalists only."

All of the editors' attempts to figure out what kind of criteria some official uses to determine whether they are journalists are not, failed, especially considering the country has no law about media.

With a prompt from the government, the local banks froze the monetary transactions tied to the outlet's upkeep (salaries, office rent, taxes). The rent giver demanded that the agency vacate the Tallinn office before the end of February.

Later, the agency's staff were forced to quit under the threat of criminal prosecution. The Police Department and Border Guards sent the appropriate letters.

The demand itself sounds absurd: if the Sputnik Estonia office is guilty of some crime or administrative felony, then the law enforcement agencies need to investigate the facts and not send out letters of threats.

Tallinn cites the sanctions against Rossiya Segodnya CEO Dmitry Kiselev. But, from a legal perspective, this is a weak argument. "We would like to remind everyone that Rossiya Segonya is not in any EU sanctions list. We find the actions of the Estonian government an egregious abuse of power and plan to write to international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, UNESCO, ECHR, demanding that they evaluate this unprecedented violation of Freedom of Speech and to take measures in facilitating the rights of our journalists to conduct their professional actions." stated the Sputnik editors⁵⁰.

The pressure on Sputnik Estonia did not go unnoticed by international rights groups. After the journalists received the threatening letters, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir stated on Twitter: "I wrote to Estonia authorities about measures targeting journalists of Sputnik Estonia following individual sanctions against Mr Kiselev. I encourage authorities to refrain from unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign media which can affect the free flow of information"⁵¹.

Afterwards, Désir clarified his position: in his opinion, Sputnik Estonia is not part of the EU sanctions list, so spread of individual limitations imposed on Kiselev to journalists is a serious step in the legal sense.



⁵⁰https://ee.sputniknews.ru/estonian_news/20191218/18790612/MIA-Rossiia-segodnya-vlasti-ugrozhayut-sotrudnikam-Sputnik-Estoniya-ugolovnym-delami.html

⁵¹https://ee.sputniknews.ru/estonian_news/20191221/18815348/Predstavitel-OBSE-prizval-vozderzhatsya-ot-davleniya-na-Sputnik-Estoniya.html



From that day forward, the agency’s site in Estonia is working in an emergency state.

“In recent days of last year, we have frequently discussed the current situation and came to the conclusion that, despite the, frankly speaking, absurd demands of the state and the threat that we really don’t want to believe, we have no right to risk the wellbeing of our staff. The site will continue to work in full, but in order to organize it in a way that won’t have us living under constant pressure from the Estonian government will take some time. Naturally, we will try to resume work as fast as possible.” said editor-in-chief of Sputnik Estonia Elena Cherysheva⁵².

According to the Russian MFA, this story did not have the proper impact in Europe. In particular, the Department of European Cooperation head Nikolay Kobrinets noted that the European Parliament did not react at all: “MEPs, who are usually very sensitive about Freedom of Speech in other countries, refuse to see the abuse of it within the EU itself, in particular, in Estonia. There they have a simple rule of “friend-or-foe” once again assuming themselves to be the only ones to hold democratic ideals”⁵³.

There is cause to fear that pressure on Russian-speaking media will only increase.

In February 2020, the Estonian Interior Minister and leader of the ruling coalition’s Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) Mart Helme expressed a desire to ban the broadcast of several Russian TV channels:

“We [EKRE members] have stated multiple times that the Russian information channels that work in the Baltics could be closed in Estonia, as they have been by our Southern neighbors”⁵⁴. According to Helme, he proposed this idea during the coalition talks, but the other parties refused.



Elena Cherysheva/ Photo: sputnik.by

28 ⁵²https://ee.sputniknews.ru/estonian_news/20200101/18893606/Shef-redaktor-Sputnik-Estoniya-Elena-Cherysheva-skoro-vernemsya.html

⁵³<https://iz.ru/975164/2020-02-12/mid-rf-zaiavil-ob-otsutstvii-dolzhnoi-reakcii-ep-na-problemy-sputnik-estoniia>

⁵⁴<https://ria.ru/20200212/1564619672.html>

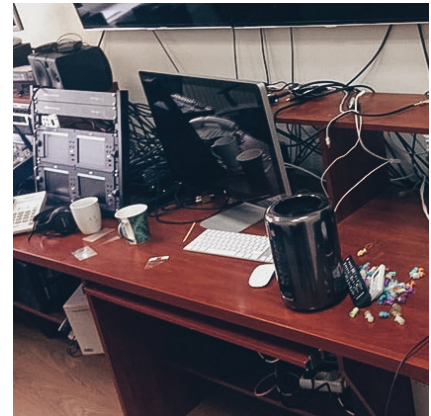
Ukraine

4.I. Persecution of the Media and Journalists

The situation with Freedom of Speech in Ukraine remains unacceptable even after the power shift in 2014 and the elections. In the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index Ukraine is ranked 102 out of 180. The report notes that Ukrainian media are usually motivated by the interests of their owners and serve as support for their political and economic influence. The lack of structural reforms in this field is a direct result of extremely close ties between politics and business. International rights organizations (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Reporters Without Borders, Solidaritätsnetz Bern) regularly document facts of pressure on opposition media, specific journalists and opinion leaders. In order to fight outlets who don't share the official position of the state, they frequently resort to violence.

The most prominent example, is the fate of Channel 17, which frequently had live link-ups with the Donbass territories that Kiev does not control. In February 2016, some unknown individuals wrecked the channel's studio and stole all of the equipment needed to go on air⁵⁵.

**The criminals
and the ones
who ordered
it were never
determined
and Channel 17
had to stop its
broadcasts.**



The aftermath of the attack on Channel 17 / Photo: Andrey Pavlovsky, Channel 17

The list of channels that meet interference from the Ukrainian state are Inter, 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK. The latter three are tied to the head of the Opposition Platform — For Life (OP-FL) party council member Viktor Medvedchuk, who openly opposes former president and now party leader Petro Poroshenko and current president Volodymyr Zelensky. The reason behind the attacks against Inter in 2018 was the broadcast of a celebratory concert for Victory day,

during which the hosts condemned the policy of casting the Great Patriotic War into oblivion and glorifying the Nazi collaborationists.

The National Council of TV and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine's statement said that this event was aimed at dividing society and just another attack in the information war. In order to stop the broadcast of the concert, ultra-right groups blocked the TV Channel's building and tried to set it on fire.

⁵⁵<https://rsf.org/en/ukraine>

⁵⁶<https://strana.ua/news/2031-nochyu-v-kieve-razgromili-redakciyu-17-go-kanal.html>

PART 4 | UKRAINE

In 2018, Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada (parliament) recommended that the National Security and Defense Council impose sanctions against the parent companies of 112 Ukraine and NewsOne (this movement was supported by 229 MPs).

Ultimately, the sanctions did not go through, but there is still a wide range of legal and illegal instruments at work to pressure 112 Ukraine and NewsOne: irregular inspections, warning from National Council of TV and Radio Broadcasting, attacks on journalists, etc.

In July 2019, due to direct threats of violence to members of the Ukrainian NewsOne TV Channel, as well as threats to their families, the management of the channel had to cancel a TV marathon "We Need to Talk" with representatives of the Russian Federation⁵⁷.

A few days later, the 112 Ukraine TV Channel was the target of a terrorist attack. Someone fired a grenade launcher at the office. There was no reaction from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in response to this. Among online media, the opposition site Strana.ua (Страна.ua) has found itself some serious trouble. Its reporters have been victims of many attacks, the office has been searched by Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Before the presidential elections, the data center in France was attacked with Strana.ua saying that this was the doing of Ukrainian secret services⁵⁹.



Thus, there was an attempt to stop the broadcasts of the country's leading news channels while sidelining the court system. The parliament's decision was met with ambiguous reactions within Ukraine and internationally.

112 Ukraine office after being shot with a grenade launcher/ Photo: 112.ua



Azov battalion paramilitaries (banned in the Russian Federation) block Inter / Photo: ERA/Radio Liberty

⁵⁷<https://newsone.ua/news/iz-za-prjamykh-uhroz-fizicheskoy-raspravy-v-adres-kanala-zhurnalistov-i-ikh-semej-newsone-soobshchaet-ob-otmene-telemarafona-nado-pohovorit.html>

⁵⁸<https://112.ua/glavnye-novosti/v-noch-na-13-myulya-dvoe-neizvestnyh-iz-granatomet-obstreljali-zdanie-112-kanala-499728.html>

⁵⁹<https://ukraina.ru/news/20190306/1022905232.html>



Russian journalists are de facto unable to work in Ukraine. In 2015, all state agencies were banned from giving accreditation to all Russian media, aside from TV Rain (later, even this channel was banned in Ukraine though). Ukraine also deported or banned the entry of many journalists (among them were Zakhar Vinogradov, Anna Kurbatova, Maria Remizova, Daria Grigороva, in June 2018, they did not allow Evgeny Primakov Jr. and South African RT reporter Paula Slier, who were supposed to take part in an OSCE event.) There is an intense persecution of journalists working in Ukraine by the local secret services and radical groups tied to them. 2014 was one of the most intense years for detainments, arrests and abductions. The most prominent incident was with two LifeNews Russian journalists Oleg Sidiyakin and Marat Saichenko, who were detained by Ukrainian law enforcement and unlawfully imprisoned for a week. Sidiyakin and Saichenko were baselessly accused of terrorism and threatened with a firing squad.

In August 2014, Members of the Right Sector (an organization banned in the Russian Federation) imprisoned Rossiya Segodnya and France Press photoreporter Maxim Vasilenko and Telegraph of Crimea reporter Yevgenya Korolyova.

In early August 2014, 112 Ukraine journalist Roman Gnatyuk was kidnapped along with two of his colleagues, Sergey Belous and Sergey Boyko. Gnatyuk blames the Kryvbass Battalion (banned in Russia – editor note) in his abduction and spoke about the cruel treatment live on 112 Ukraine.

20 August 2014, Ukrainian law enforcement detained French poet of Ukrainian descent Yuri Yurchenko, who came to East Ukraine to translate their news and statements into French for European media. Yurchenko said that in detainment, they broke his ribs and legs⁶⁰.

⁶⁰<https://lenta.ru/news/2014/09/08/poet>



In February 2015, opposition journalist and blogger Ruslan Kotsaba, who called for a boycott of the fourth wave of military mobilization in Ukraine, was detained.

Kotsaba’s arrest and trial prompted intense scrutiny from Amnesty International, who called for an immediate release of the prisoner of conscience. The Kotsaba case was criticized by Ukraine’s Independent Media Trade Union, Mass Information Institute and Ukrainian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

12 May 2016, Kotsaba was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison, however, following an appeal on 14 July 2016, he was found to be not guilty and acquitted.



PART 4 | UKRAINE

In September 2017, Andrushivka Court of the Zhitomir Region gave a 9 year prison sentence to Ukrainian journalist Dmitry Vasilets and cameraman Evgeny Timonin. The reason for their arrest was a trip to Donetsk in Summer of 2014. According to the SBU, the accused helped set up a YouTube channel and other services for Novorossiya, so they have done something that is qualified as “accomplices to terrorism.” Eventually Vasilets and Timonin were set free.

15 May 2018 marked searches in the RIA-Novosti Ukraine office and the subsequent detainment and arrest of Kirill Vyshinsky,

the outlet’s editor-in-chief in 2014-2018. He was accused of state treason and supporting separatism. As proof, they pointed out his awards from the Russian Government, in particular a “For the Return of Crimea” Ministry of Defense medal, as well as a printed out map of Novorossiya. However, the authenticity of the medals, nor the facts of Vyshinsky’s alleged violation of Ukrainian law were never determined.

Vyshinsky’s arrest was criticized by the UN Human Rights Office, The International Federation of Journalists general secretary Anthony Bellanger, head of the Eastern

Europe and Central Asia desk at Reporters Without Borders Johann Bihl, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir, secretary general of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland and many other international organizations.

Vyshinsky spent 470 days in prison and was freed as part of an exchange of detainees between Russian and Ukraine.

Kirill Vyshinsky in court / Photo: Andrey Gudzenko / LIGA.net



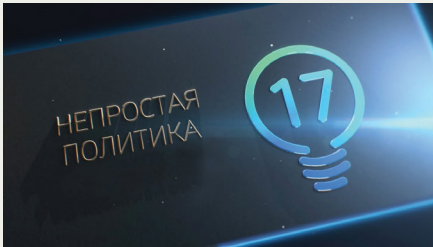
In March 2019, there was a search in the house of famous Kiev journalist Vladimir Skachko. On the next day, the Ukrainian Prosecutor’s Office of Crimea (not actually in Crimea), charged him with part 2 of article 110 of Ukraine’s Criminal Code (attempts on the country’s integrity). Under the threat of punishment, Skachko had to flee the country.

Another example of pressure on Freedom of Speech is the Myrotvotrets site, which gathers files on Ukrainian citizens and foreigners it deems potentially dangerous to the regime. After getting into this blacklist, there is a risk of arrest or deportation. Journalists and other people have their personal data published by Myrotvoret, which has led to scrutiny from multiple Western journalists, European Union and OSCE.

There were expectations for Zelensky and his team to take decisive action to improve the situation. But as time went on, it became obvious that the new administration is also interested in taking control of Ukraine's media field.

A prominent example is the proposed Media law, which gives more power to the National Council of TV and Radio Broadcasting and makes it easier to impose sanctions on media. A different proposed law concerning disinformation follows suit. This law allows punishments of huge monetary fines and imprisonment "from the period of Russian aggression and up to the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity" for spreading intentionally inaccurate information (maximum punishment for this is 7 years in prison.) The law was criticized by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and OSCE.

Attacks on Ukrainian TV channels



CHANNEL 17

In February 2016, some unknown individuals wrecked the channel's studio and stole all of the equipment needed to go on the air. The channel was forced to stop its broadcasts.



INTER

In May 2018, in order to stop the broadcast of a Victory Day concert, ultra-right groups blocked the TV channels office and tried to set it on fire.



NEWSONE

In July 2019, due to direct threats of violence to members of the Ukrainian NewsOne TV Channel, as well as threats to their families, the management of the channel was forced to cancel a TV marathon "We Need to Talk" with representatives of the Russian Federation.



112 UKRAINE

In July 2019, the channel was the target of a terrorist act, with the building being shot by a grenade launcher.

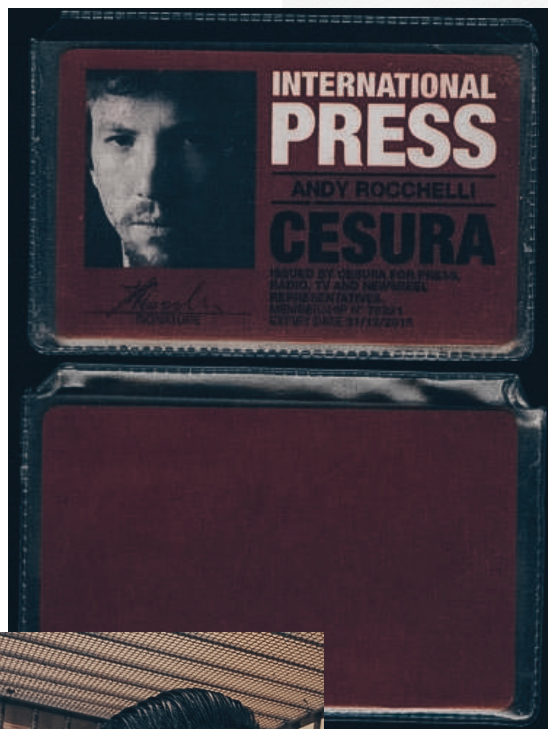
4.2. Journalism Under Fire

After the 2014 Maidan, around 20 journalists died in Ukraine, many in the combat zone. The first media worker to become a victim of the Donbass conflict was Italian freelance photoreporter, one of the founders of the Censura photographers collective Andrea Rocchelli. 24 May 2014, Rocchelli was caught in a shelling not far from Sloviansk. The Russian rights activist who accompanied him there, Andrey Mironov, was also killed, and William Roguelon was wounded, but managed to find shelter from the shelling at a rebel guard post.

Immediately after the tragedy, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović demanded an immediate and thorough investigation of the incident to bring the culprits to justice⁶¹, because the Ukrainian side showed a lack of effort in figuring out the circumstances of Andrea Rocchelli's death.

Thanks to the insistence of Rocchelli's relatives, the Italian police continued the investigation and on 30 June 2017, they detained Ukrainian trooper Vitalii Markiv. The trial took place in the Court of Assize of the Tribunal of Pavia starting in 2018 (Markiv had dual citizenship, so he was tried like an Italian citizen).

Andrea Rocchelli's ID / Photo: Censura.it



Vitalii Markiv / Photo: Radio Liberty

The Ukrainian diplomatic office was convinced that “the death of two journalists happened due to an artillery strike from the Russian-Terrorist troops”⁶². President Zelensky personally petitioned for Markiv's release during his visit to Italy in February 2020.

In July 2019, Markiv was sentenced to 24 years of prison, which led to dismay in the Ukrainian MFA.

⁶¹https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140526_slavyansk_journalists_death.shtml

⁶²http://mvs.gov.ua/ua/news/8983_Oficiyna_pozyciya_MVS_vidnosno_zatrimannya_viykovosluzhbovcya_NGU_Vitaliya_Markiva_v_Italii_ONOVLENO.htm

The next victims of Ukraine's war on the East were Russian journalists. In June 2014, at the hamlet of Metallist near Luhansk, a mortar strike hit VGTRK reporter Igor Kornelyuk (died at the hospital) and sound director Anton Voloshin (died on site).

29 June 2014, a bus was shot at by gunfire and Channel One cameraman Anatoly Klyan was mortally wounded. In late August of the same year, there was official confirmation of the death of Rossiya Segodnya photoreporter Andrey Stenin, who was missing in action for a month.

The Russian Investigative Committee started an investigation into the death of these four journalists, with a 2016 trial calling Ukrainian servicewoman Nadiya Savchenko guilty of the murders of Kornelyuk and Voloshin. Although Savchenko was later pardoned. In the investigation of Anatoly Klyan's death, the Russian Investigative Committee also gave an accusation in absentia to division commander of the Donetsk AA Rocket Regiment of Ukrainian Armed Forces Air Command Center lieutenant-colonel Nikolai Malomen⁶³.

The circumstances of Andrey Stenin's death are still being determined.



There were also investigations into the journalists' deaths started in Ukraine, but they have not shown any results.



Nadiya Savchenko / Photo: Reuters

⁶³<http://sledcom.ru/news/item/1205789>

Andrey Medvedko and Denis Polishchuk / photo: aif.ru collage

There could have been even more victims of the Donbass conflict among journalists: many media near the frontlines continue to be caught up in mortar bombardments and gunfire.

But the two most impactful journalist murders in Ukraine did not happen in the combat zone, but in the country's capital. Oles Buzina, a famous Ukrainian writer, was shot near his home in Kiev on 16 April 2015. However, reactions to the journalist's murder in Ukraine itself were mixed. The social networks were full of support of the murder, some Ukrainian media and state officials called Buzina an Ukrainophobe⁶⁴.

18 June 2015, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov announced the arrest of three possible assassins, who were members of radical right wing movements. Among them were Andrey Medvedko and Denis Polishchuk (the

third suspect was released due to a lack of evidence). After the investigation, Polishchuk was released on house arrest on 9 December 2015, the same happened with Medvedko on 31 December. On 25 March 2016, Polishchuk's house arrest was not prolonged by the court, and Medvedko's house arrest was replaced with personal recognizance. The second charge was to be examined on 28 November 2017. And since then, Buzina's case was de facto frozen. And apparently the trials are happening with



multiple violations and not examining the core of the incident. After the administration changed in Ukraine, the murdered journalist's mother Valentina Buzina asked for a personal audience with the new president Volodymyr Zelensky, but she never did manage to meet him⁶⁵.

Oles Buzina / Photo: Reuters



Oles Buzina, a famous Ukrainian writer, publicist, former editor of the Segodnya newspaper, was shot near his home in Kiev on 16 April 2015. Previously, he received multiple threats of attacks. Representatives of the OSCE and UN expressed their condemnation of the murder and offered condolences. Reporters Without Borders, USA Committee to Protect Journalists, UNESCO, Human Rights Watch all called for a thorough investigation.

Another noteworthy fact is that under the new president, the suspects of Oles Buzina's murder got new posts: Medvedko was appointed a member of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Polishchuk became head of one the Veteran Ministry's work groups⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ <https://ukraina.ru/exclusive/20171122/1019552625.html>

⁶⁵ <https://strana.ua/news/220793-mama-ubitoho-olesja-buziny-rasskazala-kakoj-otvet-poluchila-na-pismo-zelenskomu.html>

⁶⁶ <https://strana.ua/news/241845-podozrevaemyj-v-ubijstve-buziny-polishchuk-poluchil-dolzhnost-v-minveteranov.html>

20 July 2016, Radio Vesti host, Ukrayinska Pravda editor Pavel Sheremet was murdered. He died in an explosion from a bomb in a car that belonged to Sheremet and his domestic partner Alena Pritula. The police initially said that the target of the attack could have been Pritula herself. For a long while it seemed like the investigation of Pavel Shemeret's murder came to a dead end. There was no information on the assassins or who hired them. As late as December 2019, Interior Minister Arsen Avakov reported that arrests have been made as part of the investigation.

ΠAccording to deputy Interior Minister Anton Gerashchenko, the investigation

had evidence that the suspected assassins had ties to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) ⁶⁸. Nonetheless, the investigation was hindered by the resistance of nationalists, who accuse the police of trying to demonize the Ukrainian Army and volunteer movement.

On 10 January 2020, Reporters Without Borders have expressed their concern over "inconsistencies in the evidence for the Ukrainian authorities' claim to have solved the murder."

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The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) regularly speaks of the unacceptable levels of violence towards media. According to the Index of Physical Safety of Ukraine's Journalists, which the NUJU does with its partner organizations, in 2019, there were 75 incidents with physical force used against journalists. Frequently the attacks are of an extremely cruel nature.

For example, following an attack in downtown Cherkasy, investigative journalist Vadym Komarov died in the hospital after being in a coma. According to the NUJU head Sergey Tomilenko, there are very few chances that the journalist's murderers will be brought to justice⁶⁹.

All five suspects were tied to the volunteer paramilitary movements, three of them – the rock musician and serviceman Andrii Antonenko, surgeon Yulia Kuzmenko, military nurse Jana Dugar – received official charges⁶⁷.



Pavel Sheremet / Фото: Radio Liberty



Vadym Komarov / Photo: from Vadym Komarov's Facebook page

⁶⁷<https://112.ua/statji/ne-veryat-reakciya-izvestnyh-lyudey-na-zaderzhanie-podozrevaemyh-v-ubiystve-sheremeta-518535.html>

⁶⁸<https://strana.ua/news/249120-svjaz-sbu-s-podozrevaemymi-v-ubiystve-pavla-sheremeta-dokazana-herashchenko.html>

⁶⁹<https://strana.ua/news/207545-v-nszhu-schitajut-cto-shansy-na-raskrytie-ubiystva-cherkasskoho-zhurnalista-komarova-nichtozhno-maly.html>

4.3. Kiev's Social Policy as an Element of Pressure on Freedom of Speech

Political Censorship in Ukraine did not just affect journalists, but also the entertainment industry. In 2016, the Verkhovna Rada passed the amendments to Law №3359 On Cinematography (concerning movies by the Aggressor State), banning movies produced in Russia after 1 January 2014⁷⁰. In addition to that, any movies that glorify the Russian army or law enforcement are banned.



Volodymyr Viatrovykh / Photo: umoloda.kiev.ua

In accordance with Ukraine's Minister Cabinet decision №1143, the Ukrainian State Film Agency now has the right to ban movies (including Soviet ones) with actors who are declared to be a Persona Non Grata in Ukraine.

The broadcasting of 76 Russian TV Channels was stopped (as of December 2016). On 16 May 2017, Russian social networks (VKontakte and Odnoklassniki) and services (Yandex, Mail.ru, ABBY and others) were banned for three years. In 2020, Zelensky prolonged to resource blockade for three more years.

Many books published in Russia are now banned in Ukraine, with the ban list constantly growing.

A significant role in promoting such initiatives is handled by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, which was led by Volodymyr Viatrovykh. His work led to laws on decommunisation, a massive campaign of glorifying Ukrainian Nazi collaborationists and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) (both banned in Russia).

The Institute's activity is aimed at reimagining Ukraine's history in the context of the mass hunger of 1932-1933, World War II, abandoning the concept of the Great Patriotic War, criticism and judging the Soviet period.

⁷⁰<https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3659658-rada-zapretyla-vse-novye-rossyiskye-fylmy>

Pressure on Freedom of Speech also shows in Kiev's language policy. 25 April 2019, the Verkhovna Rada passed the law On provision of the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language⁷¹.

Now there is no place for a “regional language” in Ukraine’s legal field (the previous law used it to regulate national minority languages). Use of Ukrainian is now mandatory in all fields aside from private conversations and religious rituals.

A lot of attention was given to media, especially printed media. The publishing of printed media in non-state languages is allowed only if at the same time the same printing run in Ukrainian is available with identical content. So the prospects of a number of Russian-language regional newspapers are quite dire.

Audio-visual media who rely on a Russian-speaking audience are also not in the best position. National TV Channels have a 90% state language quota, regional ones are 80%. Content in other languages must be dubbed.

Ukraine has had language quotas before. In 2016, Verkhovna Rada passed the amendments to the On


Television and Radio Broadcasts law, that Ukrainian songs must make up no less than 35% of the daily air time. The following year, as per Poroshenko's initiative, quotas for national channels were 75% per week, and no less than 60% for the regional channels. In 2019, as mentioned earlier, they were raised to 90% and 80% respectively.

The language issue is further exacerbated by the 2017 law On Education. In particular, this document has been the cause of the extended disagreement between Ukraine and Hungary. Hungary accused Kiev of violating the language rights of the Hungarian national minorities.

⁷¹http://search.ligazakon.ua/l_doc2.nsf/link1/T192704.html

PART 4 | UKRAINE

16 January 2020, the Verkhovna Rada voted for middle school law, which follows the same trend⁷².



The document outlines three models of studying Ukrainian language in schools. The most punishing of the three is for Russians and Russian-speaking citizens: from 5th grade no less than 80% of all education must be in Ukrainian language.

For educational facilities with education in EU languages, the quota is 20% with a later increase to 60% in high school. So, children from Russian-speaking families in Ukraine are more limited in rights than those with official EU languages.

This leads to doubts in some of the experts' suggestions that the new administration realizes the necessity of reviewing the state's language policy. In addition to that, any potential changes seem to be insignificant. Ukrainian media should prepare for work in the new status quo after the interim period.

It must be noted, one could say that Volodymyr Zelensky inherited the language law from Petro Poroshenko, then the middle school law was adopted by the new Verkhovna Rada, where the majority was from the pro-president party.

Conclusion

Before Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined the EU, the European officials shared the impression that European integration would lead to a loosening of the screws in the Baltic countries, would facilitate the respect of local governments to rights and freedoms, including the Freedom of Speech. This was based on the Copenhagen criteria of EU Membership – the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 decided on the EU requirements for

Pressure on the media, persecution of journalists, attempts to set up an ideological monopoly in the Baltics and Ukraine, all of this ultimately discredits all of Europe.

The EU and its leaders have a direct responsibility for the anti-European practices on their Eastern edge. Obviously, without their interference the trends outlined in this report will remain unchanged in the best case scenario. But it is not out of the realm of possibility that

channels within the country have not gained support from the other political parties, but the situation may change. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has no social policy of his own, it is handled by the nationalists who are not changing the anti-Russian course. Even the pro-presidential party has many supporters of this line.

Clearly the issues with Freedom of Speech and human rights in Eastern Europe demand special attention in the crisis period of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. In order to fight the spread of the virus and overcoming its economic consequences, many governments are already using extreme measures. Democratic ideals are taking a back seat to saving human lives. Nonetheless, the excuse of a lethal pandemic can be used by the state to increase control of the media field even further. There is a colossal range of opportunities to finish off the opposition media outlets. For instance, Latvian president Levits has already backed the idea of state support for media during this extraordinary emergency. But who will receive this state support? It is clear that the support will only be given to the media loyal to the incumbent government, so they can continue their work in these economically strained conditions. And the opposition media won't be able to compete and will have close down.

International rights organizations must keep a keen eye on the development of this situation. Their silence and lack of effort in reacting to the situation in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine is a catalyst for these violations of democratic norms going up to the next level.

In actuality, the Baltic countries ignored these obligations when joining the EU and the current amount of international scrutiny is clearly not enough to impact the course of events.

candidate countries, which the Baltics agreed to follow. The political part of the Copenhagen criteria demands adhering to the European Convention on Human Rights, article #10 of which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and hold opinions as well as sharing information and ideas without interference by public authority⁷³.

For Lithuania and Latvia, this scrutiny is unpleasant, but not critical. In Estonia, the situation is better, but the unprecedented level of pressure on Sputnik Estonia ruins the big picture. And the situation with Freedom of Speech and human rights is even worse in Ukraine. Scrutiny of Kiev from international rights organizations is louder with each year.

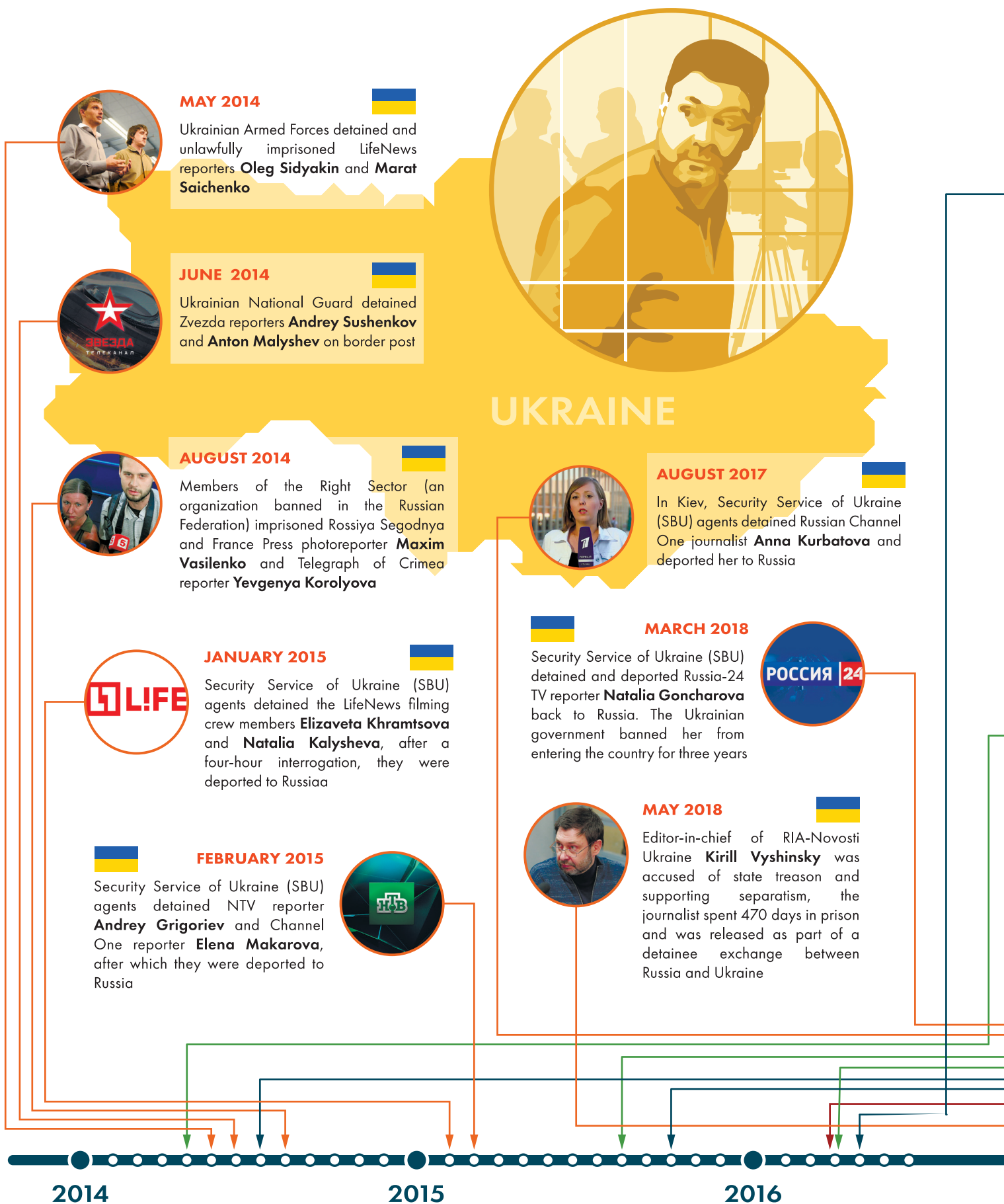
the pressure on Freedom of Speech and violations of Human Rights in the Baltic and Ukraine will only grow to a much more threatening scale. This is the direction the ruling elites of these four countries are heading in.

In Latvia, the president decided to personally lead the process of containing Russian-language content to the internet. His Lithuanian counterpart is calling for more power to the secret services, which could lead to a lot more pressure on the media, journalists, rights activists and opposition politicians. In Estonia, the ruling coalition party EKRE is calling for radical measures in combating "Russian propaganda." The proposals to stop the broadcast of Russian

⁷³https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_RUS.pdf

PERSONA NON GRATA

A timeline of the persecution of Russian journalists in the Baltics and Ukraine after 2014





JULY 2014

Zvezda TV Channel reporters **Maxim Gritsenko** and **Vyacheslav Amelyutin**, along with Komsomolskaya Pravda writer **Galina Sapozhnikova** were not allowed entry to Estonia to cover the Waffen-SS Veteran meeting



OCTOBER 2015

Estonian officials detained VGTRK correspondent **Nikolay Vasiliev** at the Koidula border pass



APRIL 2016

Estonian border guards denied a VGTRK filming crew entry into the country, who were there to cover the events at the Vösu village



OCTOBER 2016

Estonian border guards denied entry to NTV and Life78 journalists who were heading in for a four-day press tour



APRIL 2017

Estonian border guards refused entry to REN TV cameraman **Ilya Omelchenko**, who was heading there on an editorial assignment from the Open Russia Forum



MARCH 2016

A VGTRK filming crew were added to a list of "undesirables" and forced to leave Latvia



JANUARY 2018

Latvian officials deported VGTRK journalist **Olga Kurlaeva**, accusing her of being a threat to national security



JULY 2018

Editor-in-chief of Sputnik Latvia **Valentin Rozhentsov** was detained at the airport upon arriving in Riga, he spent 12 hours in Police offices



OCTOBER 2016

In Jūrmala, the police detained and later deported Rossiya Segodnya reporter **Ella Taranova**



OCTOBER 2018

Kaliningrad journalist, editor-in-chief of the NewsBalt site **Andrey Vypolzov** was denied entry into Latvia



APRIL 2014

Lithuanian MFA, with no reason given, suspended the accreditation of RIA-Novosti special correspondent **Irina Pavlova**



MARCH 2016

VGTRK journalists were not allowed in the Russian Forum organized by the Lithuanian MFA



MARCH 2019

Russian journalists couldn't enter the hall of the Vilnius District Court, to hear the sentencing of the 13 January 1991 Vilnius Events case



AUGUST 2015

Komsomolskaya Pravda reporter **Galina Sapozhnikova** was declared to be an "undesirable person" in Lithuania



MAY 2019

Sputnik Lithuania editor-in-chief **Marat Kasem** was detained in Vilnius airport and denied entry into the country for 5 years

2017

2018

2019

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