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# Ukrainian media after the EuroMaidan: in search of independence and professional identity

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**Abstract** The EuroMaidan protests that shook Ukraine in late 2013 to early 2014 triggered a chain of events that brought numerous changes and challenges for the Ukrainian society. The Ukrainian media landscape has also been affected by the new challenges and impetus for democratization. The post-Maidan period saw both, improvements in the media environment and setbacks. While Ukrainian journalists can benefit from increased media freedom, new progressive legislation and reinvigoration of the democratic debate, many problems still shape the development of the media. Editorial dependence on owners, concentration of mainstream media in the hands of oligarchs, deteriorating quality of content and crisis of professional identity are distinctive features of the post-Maidan media landscape in Ukraine. This paper provides an overview of developments in the Ukrainian media system since the declaration of independence with a special focus on the situation after the EuroMaidan and discusses four major challenges that will impact the transformation of the Ukrainian journalism and media sphere.

**Keywords** Ukraine · Media · Journalism · Freedom of speech · Journalism culture

## 1 Introduction

The EuroMaidan protests and a subsequent chain of dramatic events, including Russia's annexation of Crimea, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the painful movement towards democratization and reforms, affected Ukraine's political elites and citizens alike. Ukrainian media and journalists have also faced crucial challenges

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in their daily work, given exceptionally complicated and tense environment in the country.

The tensions on Maidan drove many Ukrainian journalists into activism, resulting in blurred boundaries between journalism and activism (Ligachova 2015; Szostek 2014). The war in Eastern Ukraine put additional pressure on the media and induced many more journalists to engage in various forms of activism. In addition, the conflict in Donbas put forward numerous ethical dilemmas for Ukrainian journalists. Media performance in response to the conflict has attracted a lot of criticism of observers and the public and contributed to the significant decline of trust to the media among Ukrainian citizens. Some old problems, like a lack of editorial independence and instrumentalization of the mainstream media by big oligarchs who own major outlets remained acute in the post-Maidan Ukraine. On top of that, economic crisis has further aggravated the situation for the independent media.

At the same time, the processes of democratization and reformation launched after the EuroMaidan brought some positive changes for the media and journalists in Ukraine, namely, increased media freedom, new legislation, establishment of public broadcasting and overall more vibrant environment compared to the previous years of democratic decline. In such a situation, the response of media and journalists to the current challenges will shape further transformation of the Ukrainian media system. There are numerous signals suggesting that Ukrainian journalists are on the one hand renegotiating professional identity and seek more independence on the other. However, the outcome of these attempts is by far not determined and remains to be seen.

This article explores new challenges for the Ukrainian media after the Euro-Maidan placing them into a broader context of Ukraine's media landscape transformation since the declaration of independence in 1991.

The first part of the article provides an overview of the developments in the media system of Ukraine prior to the EuroMaidan and discusses emergence of a hybrid media system in post-Soviet Ukraine. The second part focuses on the situation in the media after the EuroMaidan and tracks recent developments and changes. Finally, the third section addresses post-Maidan challenges for the media and for journalism in more detail and discusses their implications for the transformation and democratization of Ukraine's media environment.

## 2 Transformation path of the Ukrainian media system throughout the 1990s–2010s

The Ukrainian media system is a product of broader post-Soviet transformations in Ukraine and therefore, the analysis of the Ukrainian media landscape requires a comprehensive overview of political, economic and social developments that have been shaping the evolution of the Ukrainian media since the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991.

While the Ukrainian media landscape has undergone a number of crucial changes during the last 25 years, which are highlighted later in this section, the impact of the Soviet legacies on the development of the Ukrainian media has remained very

strong during all those years. Some scholars even called post-Sovietness a key feature of the media system of independent Ukraine, noting that it implies both, a radical change of the social role performed by the media and the maintenance of many Soviet attributes molding the very media (Kulyk 2010, p. 177).

In particular, three features inherited from the Soviet times have been influencing the Ukrainian media environment since the independence, namely tradition of state ownership and state control, loyalty to censorship and lack of business management experience among media outlets.

Following the declaration of independence, Ukraine's new leadership took steps to end the monopoly of state ownership of the media and adopted new legislation on media development (Dyczok 2009, p. 20; Richter 2002, p. 133). The new legislation allowed private ownership of media, proclaimed freedom of expression, banned censorship and established regulatory bodies. At the same time, the state retained control over a set of media assets, thus remaining a powerful player on the media market and failing to complete the transition process.

The state kept control over the former republican TV broadcaster, UT-1 (UT standing for "Ukrainian television"), which incorporated 27 regional TV channels, several national radio stations, Ukrinform news agency and dozens of printed outlets funded by numerous state agencies. Hundreds of local newspapers across the country, which were established and funded by the local organizations of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, became a municipal property of local self-government in the early 1990s (Horobets and Bukhtatyy 2016). In addition, many media outlets remained technically dependent on state facilities, such as printing houses and the postal distribution system (Krasnoboka and Semetko 2006, p. 168).

Retention of the state ownership has had a negative impact on the Ukrainian media market, as it hindered fair market competition, both media scholars and experts pointed out (MSI 2011; Ryabinska 2011, p. 6). In addition, it impeded the development of freedom of speech in the country. Throughout the 1990s–2000s, Ukrainian political elites, comprising various political forces, tried to exert control over state-owned media, which revealed Soviet attitudes of the political establishment to mass media as instruments of power (Dyczok 2006, p. 222). By and large, state-owned media tended to perform a role of governmental mouthpiece during all those years. In a similar vein, municipal media outlets were dependent on local authorities and lacked editorial autonomy. Content of state-owned and municipal media commonly revealed loyalty to the establishment-in-power and lacked any criticism of the government or local authorities (MSI 2015).

While the issue of privatization of such media was raised and debated many times during the last two decades, it is only after the EuroMaidan revolution that a respective reform has been launched. In November 2015, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law "On reforming state and communal print mass media", which envisages privatization of state and municipal media starting from 1 January 2016, a move widely supported by the local media NGOs and international organizations (OSCE 2015a). A total of 518 printed outlets are expected to be privatized in several stages.

Another crucial reform, that is, transformation of the state-owned national TV broadcaster into a public one has also been set, which is designed to reform a state-

owned media giant and remove governmental control over it. Both reforms are discussed in more detail in the next section.

The second feature inherited from the Soviet period and also related to the issue of state ownership and control has been the widespread culture of loyalty to censorship among the media professionals. Of course, the scale of censorship in the darkest periods of Ukraine's history after gaining independence could not be compared to the state-authorized, well-institutionalized and all-embracing censorship in the Soviet Union, where literally all mass media functioned as ideological voices of the communist regime (Dyczok 2009; Kulyk 2010). Besides, liberalization reforms of *perestroika* laid substantial foundations for media emancipation and editorial independence from state control (Dyczok 2009; Krasnoboka and Brants 2006; Kulyk 2010). Yet, embeddedness of thousands of Ukrainian media practitioners into the well-organized hierarchical structure of the Soviet media left a heavy legacy for the professional community of journalists. The deficit of professional resistance to attempts to control and censor exercised by the political establishment especially surfaced in the late 1990s during the second term of Leonid Kuchma's presidency (Dyczok 2006).

While the first years of Ukraine's independence saw a remarkable increase of the number of new media outlets, their thematic and ideological diversity, as well as the dynamic development of journalism and significant public interest in the new independent media, the turn of events brought a backslide of recently gained media freedom.

The first signals of the government's attempts to censor media were observed as early as 1994 when then President Leonid Kravchuk tried to take one of the TV stations off the air in order to silence the opponents (Dyczok 2006, p. 221).

The next ten years of Leonid Kuchma's presidency marked a gradual but steady deterioration of media freedom and increased efforts of the establishment to control and instrumentalize the mass media. Those efforts were an integral part of the overall political regime advanced by Kuchma, defined by political scholars as a "competitive authoritarianism" (Way 2005, pp. 133–134). Such a type of authoritarianism implied reliance on "an extensive set of largely informal institutions and processes that served to harass oppositions and to falsify election results" as well as a coalition of oligarchic forces in the parliament and the presidential administration (Way 2005, pp. 133–134). In line with his general political strategy, Kuchma exerted ever increasing pressure on the media, especially on those state-owned. Control over the major media was particularly obvious during the election campaigns of 1998 and 1999, with mainstream media largely providing a straightforwardly biased pro-Kuchma coverage of events and actors involved (Freedom House 1999; Krasnoboka and Brants 2006, p. 97; Parliamentary Assembly 1999). When direct control over the editorial was not possible, other kinds of pressure were exerted over the independent media, starting from politically-driven distribution of media licenses, pressure from various state inspections and ending in threats and physical violence against journalists. The most notorious case, the murder of an editor of the independent online news website Ukrayinska Pravda, Georgiy Gongadze, in 2000 prompted the OSCE to denote it as an example of "censorship by killing" (OSCE 2001).

The policy of tight control over the mainstream media reached its pinnacle in 2002 in the run-up to the parliamentary election when the presidential administration began distributing the so-called *'temnyky'* – informal yet obligatory instructions outlining which topics should be covered by the media and how they should be reported and explained (Ligachova and Ganzha 2005, p. 10).

The *temnyky* epitomized informal mechanisms of media harassment that went in line with other informal practices of political control over opponents like blackmail (Darden 2001) employed by Kuchma and his administration.

The implementation of 'recommendations' contained in the temnyky was thoroughly controlled by presidential administration. Violations of such instructions led to pressure on media owners and managers. Although the existence of the temnyky and their content was eventually made public through the Internet, Kuchma's administration continued their circulation for nearly two years (Kulyk 2010, p. 209). The extent of control exerted over the media in this period was vividly illustrated by the coverage of the 2002 parliamentary election campaign. The mainstream media were undeniably biased in favor of the pro-presidential bloc "For a United Ukraine" ("Za Yedynu Ukrayinu"), whereas opposition parties had been either excluded from the media discourse or depicted in a negative light (Dyczok 2009).

The censorship of media authorized by the ruling elite through the mechanisms of state control was also aggravated by the pressure from the oligarchs, big media owners with political interests who emerged as important political actors in independent Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR.

Although the first years of Ukraine's independence saw establishment of the new legal framework and liberalization of economy, which created conditions for establishing private media, the process of economic liberalization went hand in hand with increasing corruption and the emergence of the so-called financial-industrial groups that raised enormous capital in the shady privatization of the 1990s and were closely connected with the political establishment. In such conditions, the media surfaced as attractive assets for the discussed groups in the mid-1990s when the latter started accumulating media resources. Gradually, Ukrainian oligarchic clans concentrated enormous media assets and control over the media sector in their hands (Ryabinska 2011, p. 9) in a process eventually labeled as "clanization" of the media (Dutsyk 2005). The accumulation of media assets by financial-industrial groups intensified after the global financial crisis of 1998. A lot of broadcasting companies and print media outlets that functioned as middle-sized business companies could not survive and were forced to sell their shares to oligarchic clans (Ryabinska 2011, p. 9).

Thus, by the early 2000s Ukrainian mainstream media had been largely concentrated in the hands of powerful financial-industrial groups with very close links to political elites. For example, the most popular TV channels INTER and 1 + 1 were reportedly controlled by Viktor Medvedchuk, Head of Presidential Administration in 2002–2005 (Dyczok 2006, p. 222). Viktor Pinchuk, Kuchma's son-in-law, was the owner of a big group of media, including STB, ICTV, and Novy Kanal (New Channel) television channels and some print outlets (Dyczok 2006; Way 2005).

Apart from the negative impact on the media freedom and editorial independence, the accumulation of media assets in the hands of oligarchs impeded the development

of the free and professional media market in Ukraine. Since the majority of big media owners viewed mass media as a useful supplement for their major businesses and an instrument of political influence rather than self-sufficient business itself, such media recieved generous investments from their owners irrespectively of business performance. This, along with state support of numerous state and municipal media, created uneven market conditions for media organizations. In such conditions, media professionals lacked impetus for improvement of management skills. As a result, a deficit of business management experience among media outlets inherited from the Soviet times has remained a crucial problem and a distinctive feature of Ukraine's post-Soviet media landscape.

Scholars and media experts agree that under conditions of backsliding democracy, Ukrainian political and business elites quite effectively manipulated the mainstream media turning them into instruments of political pressure.

The oligarchs remained key actors on the Ukrainian media market even after the Orange Revolution of 2004, which brought to power a pro-Western leader Viktor Yushchenko who had been in opposition to Leonid Kuchma since 2001. While the Orange Revolution did bring changes for the Ukrainian media, namely termination of state censorship, increased media freedom, as well as transformation of relations between political elites, media owners, media managers and journalists (Dovzhenko 2010; Dyczok 2009; Kulyk 2010), some negative trends remained. In particular, media managers and editors of mainstream media largely failed to reclaim editorial freedom from the owners.

Furthermore, the post-Orange period saw an increase of purposeful bias in political coverage (Dovzhenko 2010). The nature of the bias, however, differed from the Kuchma period. Whereas the bias of the Kuchma times was essentially guided by the more or less direct censorship from the presidential administration, the bias in the post-Orange media was money-driven. Media observers pointed to changing patterns – "censorship induced by authorities" was replaced by "money censorship" (Belyakov 2009). Practices of paid-for coverage emerged as one of the major sources of income for the mainstream media, especially TV channels. By providing a positive coverage of politicians or criticism of their opponents for money, the media virtually surrendered their essential role of "watchdogs" and reduced themselves to the "factories providing paid PR services", citing media expert Dovzhenko (2008). The parliamentary election campaigns of 2006 and 2007 were particularly accompanied by thriving hidden advertising (Dovzhenko 2010; Dovzhenko and Ligachova 2006).

The election campaign for Presidency of late 2009 to early 2010 demonstrated durability of the paid-for coverage practices: The media, primarily television channels, continued providing paid-for "services" to various political camps (Gromadzki et al. 2010). While pluralism of opinion represented in the media was secured to some extent, it was achieved through competition of political "customers", since the majority or even all key actors resorted to paid-for coverage to assure their presence in the media.

Crucially, the achievements brought by the Orange Revolution turned out to be fragile and not sustainable. Editorial independence from owners was not gained. There was a lack of institutionalization efforts to strengthen press freedom and

a deficit of media reforms as the Orange elite did not venture to complete privatization of state-owned and municipal media and establish public broadcasting in Ukraine.

The fragility of media achievements of the Orange period found evidence in the eventual development of events following Viktor Yanukovych's victory in the presidential elections of 2010 and in the change of the ruling elite. Soon after the beginning of Yanukovych's presidency, Ukrainian journalists, as well as international media organizations, started voicing alarm about deterioration of media freedom in Ukraine. Concerns about intensified autocratic tendencies in Ukraine were widely raised (Gromadzki et al. 2010). Reporters without Borders, an international NGO advocating freedom of the press, noted an increase of press freedom violations in Ukraine since Yanukovych's election as president, mentioning cases of physical attacks on journalists as well as acts of censorship of various kinds (Reporters without Borders 2010). Freedom House downgraded Ukraine's status from "free" to "partly free", noting deteriorating media freedom as one of the major reasons for such a decline (Freedom House 2011).

Experts acknowledged that Yanukovych's leadership brought old methods of "managing" media reminiscent of the Kuchma period (MSI 2011). Media observers suspected that the centralized information policy authorized by the new administration had been in place, although its employment had been more sophisticated compared to Kuchma times. While there was no direct evidence like the *temnyky* that would prove the centralized policy of censorship had been established, monitoring reports of major TV news programs suggested reproduction of media coverage patterns typical for the Kuchma regime.

Most of the oligarchs who maintained control over the major media aligned themselves with the new political leadership and demonstrated loyalty to the new regime through favorable coverage of the then President and his party in the media (Szostek 2014).

The provided overview of developments in the Ukrainian media landscape over the two decades after the declaration of independence reveals numerous difficulties on the transition path from the Soviet media system. As argued earlier, several crucial relics of the Soviet times have been shaping the development of the Ukrainian media system, namely tradition of state control, acceptance of pressure and widely spread culture of partisanship in the journalistic community, and lack of business management experience and skills among media outlets. The independence and economic liberalization brought new opportunities and challenges. While a cohort of independent media emerged, the majority of the mainstream media were owned by oligarchs and turned into instruments of political leverage. Although progressive media legislation was adopted, its enforcement was questionable. Economic difficulties and widespread corruption also hindered the development of independent media and responsible professional culture.

However, twenty years of transformations brought positive changes as well. First and foremost, an increasing number of Ukrainian journalists have become actively resisting censorship attempts and other forms of pressure. Many journalists were active forces behind both, Orange Revolution and EuroMaidan. Back in 2004, a number of individual protests and collective actions of journalists against censor-

ship instigated a chain reaction all over the country, ultimately bringing freedom of expression into newsrooms, which made observers employ the term "journalists' revolution" (Ligachova and Ganzha 2005). The effect of the journalists' efforts became apparent within a week after the beginning of the Orange Revolution: none of the TV channels relied on instructions from the Presidential Administration anymore (Kulyk 2010, p. 211).

Later, in response to the growing pressure from Yanukovych's administration, a number of prominent journalists and media activists united and founded a Stop Censorship movement, which gathered about 570 signatories (MSI 2011). Activists of the movement conducted a number of public actions to attract attention to the censorship problem in Ukraine. The role of the journalists in the EuroMaidan movement is addressed in the next section in more detail.

Another positive development concerns the emergence of the Internet as a crucial platform for independent journalism in Ukraine. Ukrayinska Pravda, an online news website founded by Georgiy Gongadze in 2000, paved the way for other media outlets, the popularity and importance of which have been growing exponentially. Online media have been a primary space for serious investigative reports that unveiled corruption among Ukrainian political establishment and a platform for critical opinions.

Finally, the existence of competing business-political groups with accumulated media assets, despite its obvious harmfulness for media independence, has secured some level of pluralism of information available to the citizens due to competition between the groups. Media freedom has always been in a shaky condition in Ukraine, yet some level of media pluralism and freedom of speech beyond mainstream media were observed even during the worst times.

All things considered, Ukraine's media system has combined features inherited from the Soviet era and some new ones common in democratic societies, which is why some media scholars defined it as a hybrid model (Dyczok 2006, p. 220).


## 3 EuroMaidan, post-Maidan developments and changes in Ukraine's media landscape

The EuroMaidan protests that shook Ukraine in November 2013 to February 2014 marked a momentum for the entire nation. It is striking, however, how big the engagement of journalists was in the protests, on the one hand, and how serious the impact of protests and subsequent events on the entire media environment, on the other hand.

To begin with, a number of independent journalists and bloggers were a driving force of the protests at the initial stage of the movement (Ligachova 2015; MSI 2015; Szostek 2014). In fact, the first spontaneous gathering of those outraged by the Ukrainian government's last-minute decision to suspend the signature of an Association Agreement with the EU was a result of a single Facebook post of one of the leading Ukrainian journalists, Mustafa Nayyem. On 21 November 2013, he called on his Facebook friends and followers to gather near the Monument of Independence in a sign of protest against the government's decision. Later on, many

reporters joined rallies and even addressed the crowds of protesters from the stage (Chornokondratenko and Orlova 2013; Szostek 2014). In response to violence of riot police against protestors, many more journalists openly supported the protest movement. For instance, two business publications, Delo and Investgazeta issued statements declaring support for the protestors. "We are writing about economy, not politics. But what has happened in Ukraine is far beyond political issues. The situation concerns each of us (...) We won't keep silent. Editorial board of the Investgazeta is going to Maidan", one of the statements read (Facebook 2013).

From the very beginning, many Ukrainian journalists sympathized with the protestors' pro-European and pro-democratic agenda, especially those active journalists who faced pressure during Yanukovych's presidency. Yet, tensions on Maidan and before unseen violence of governmental forces against protestors made many more journalists find themselves among activists. As argued by Szostek (2014, p. 6), the EuroMaidan saw a striking blurring of boundaries between journalism and activism.

Activism of journalists was largely driven by the quest for democratic changes, which were expected to transform the country and the media environment as well. While protestors succeeded in ousting the President and the new government was formed, eventual developments brought new challenges in addition to the expected challenges of the transition period. With Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the eruption of an armed conflict in Donbas region, Ukraine's state sovereignty had been directly violated. Threats to national sovereignty, fragile legitimacy of the new government, and the general atmosphere of fear and anxiety across Ukrainian society – those were conditions in which Ukrainian journalists had to work almost immediately after the three tense months of the EuroMaidan.

Similarly to the Ukrainian government and army that had been unprepared for the armed conflict, Ukrainian journalists had also been baffled by the need to report on the conflict taking place in their own country. Given the lack of experience and set editorial practices on conflict reporting, as well as overall confusion, it took some time for the Ukrainian media to develop their approaches towards coverage of the conflict as they had to encounter numerous challenges.

Firstly, media outlets and journalists had to deal with an issue of personal security against the backdrop of life danger and very high levels of violence against journalists in the rebel-occupied territories. According to the Ukrainian media watchdog Telekrytyka, the year of 2014 was the harshest year for journalists' work in Ukraine with 7 dead journalists, 33 kidnapped and 47 arrested (KAS 2015, p. 6). Secondly, journalists were confronted with the dilemma on how to balance professional standards with a sense of citizenship/patriotism. Finally, the mode of conduct of the Ukrainian media was significantly influenced by the Russian propaganda and pressures of information warfare surrounding the conflict.

Under the conditions of such a complex and challenging environment, different Ukrainian media performed unevenly, with a few outlets trying to establish themselves as unbiased news providers and the majority of the media compromising standards of professional reporting. In particular, media observers criticized Ukrainian outlets for frequent failures to verify information, provide balanced coverage and for commonplace silencing of some issues (Dorosh 2014a, 2014b; Dovzhenko 2014a).

As some studies have shown, flaws in reporting by Ukrainian media and journalists were caused by a combination of factors at play, namely lack of experience and established editorial practices of information verification under the circumstances of violent conflict, insufficient institutionalization of professional standards in newsrooms, self-censorship driven by the fear to harm the 'Ukrainian side' and to play into the hands of Russian propaganda, as well as overall confusion about the correct model of reporting in times of direct threats to your country (MediaSapiens 2016). As a result, media experts noted a significant deterioration of professionalism and quality of reporting amongst Ukrainian media (Dovzhenko 2015a; KAS 2015), which in its turn also contributed to the sharp decline of public trust in the mass media over the last two years (MediaSapiens 2015a).

Despite social turbulence and harsh conditions for journalists after the Euro-Maidan, Ukraine's media landscape has seen a number of improvements.

First of all, the media environment has been benefiting from increased freedom of speech, as documented by the international watchdog NGOs like Freedom House (Freedom House 2015) and local observers (Lyachinskaya 2016; MyMedia.org.ua 2015), which contrasts the period of Yanukovych's presidency preceding the Maidan. There has been much less pressure from the state although some steps of the new government caused criticism of the Ukrainian media community and foreign observers. In particular, Ukrainian media professionals heavily criticized the establishment of the Ministry of Information, which although assigned to develop an information strategy and counteract propaganda from the Russian Federation was regarded as a potential instrument of pressure or censorship of journalists (MSI 2015). Foreign observers raised concerns about the shutdown of the broadcasting of Russian TV channels in Ukraine, pressure on media outlets allegedly following the pro-Russian line, banning of Russian journalists from entering Ukraine in response to Russian propaganda – all measures declared to protect Ukraine's national security by the government but seen as actions undermining media freedom by international watchdog organizations (CPJ 2015; OSCE 2014a, 2014b, 2015b).

The second important achievement concerns the adoption of several media-related bills that are called to introduce reforms into the media landscape, namely establishment of public broadcasting, privatization of state and communal media and law on transparency of media ownership. While there had long been a discussion on the need to establish public broadcasting in Ukraine and several bills had been developed, it was only in 2014 that a full-fledged robust reform was given a start with a new bill on "Public Television and Radio Broadcasting". The law foresees gradual transformation of state-owned national TV and radio channels as well as regional state TV and radio channels into a public broadcasting network. Altogether, over 30 TV and radio companies across the country, including First National TV channel rebranded into UA:First, several channels of the Ukrainian radio, regional state TV and radio channels that used to be state-owned are to be completely transformed and united into a network of stations within a public joint stock company "National public TV and Radio company of Ukraine", with 100 % of shares belonging to the state. The new law guarantees independence from the state in terms of editorial control, although the state will continue funding the public broadcasting by the state budget.

The process of transformation has already been launched, the new procedures set and the supervisory board elected, but the full transition requires further steps and a lot of efforts (Ostapa 2015a). As of the time of writing this article, the transition is still ongoing with its ups and downs. The major problems on the way towards full transformation include bureaucratic obstacles, reluctance of many mid-level managers across the country to implement a reform plan, as well as financial hardships (Ostapa 2016b). In addition, a lot of employees of the former state-owned TV and radio channels oppose the reforms as they lose the status of state employee granted to them when the media were state-owned. They might also lose their jobs because of potential layoffs (KAS 2015).

Another crucial media law passed in 2015 embarks on privatization of state-owned and municipal print media. The law envisages a two-step reform that is supposed to result in elimination of state and municipal ownership of the press and gives priority to editorial teams to take over the ownership of the outlets (MediaSapiens 2015b). The law, which came into force on 1 January 2016, sets a framework for privatization of 518 print outlets that account for about a third of the local press market (Shvadchak 2015). At the first stage, a selected number of outlets will undergo a reform as a pilot project by the end of 2016, with the rest of the publications expected to be reformed during the following two years. While the law has been positively received both in Ukraine and abroad due to its high potential to foster media pluralism and editorial independence (OSCE 2015b; Telekrytyka 2015), it remains to be seen whether the reform succeeds.

The third law, "On Amendments to Several Laws of Ukraine on Ensuring the Transparency of Media Ownership and Implementing the Principles of State Policy in the Sphere of Television and Radio Broadcasting", has also been broadly praised for setting the legal framework to prevent media ownership concentration (OSCE 2015c). The amendments oblige broadcasting companies and program service providers to disclose detailed information about their ownership structure and end beneficiaries. At the time of writing, several major TV channels have already revealed their ownership structure according to the requirements of the law that came into force on April 1, 2016 (Detector Media 2016a, 2016b; Ekonomichna Pravda 2016), which was positively received by the media community. However, experts stressed that the implementation of the law is very much contingent on the efficiency of the national broadcasting regulator, the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting, as well as civil society's thorough control over the actual implementation (Ostapa, 2015b).

Along with the lifted pressure from the state and the adoption of the new progressive media legislation, the media environment in post-Maidan Ukraine saw another crucial development, that is the strengthening of independent online news media and the reinforcement of online and social media as an alternative public space. While online media have long been important independent news providers for Ukrainians, their significance particularly surfaced during the EuroMaidan. As tensions increased, millions of Ukrainians turned to the Internet seeking credible information (Szostek 2014), which is why websites of established online outlets like Ukrayinska Pravda, Livyi Bereh, Radio Svoboda saw a huge influx of users. Most importantly, the EuroMaidan also gave a substantial push towards the development of new me-

dia, like Hromadske TV, Hromadske Radio, Espreso.tv and some others. Most of those new media projects were created by independent professionals who used instruments of crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. Later on, some of those media, primarily Hromadske TV and Hromadske Radio, received financial support from the foreign donors to keep their activities on and to expand. The emergence of new independent media that have been strengthened as agenda-setters has had a positive impact on the overall media pluralism in Ukraine after the EuroMaidan and has also contributed to changing patterns of news consumption among Ukrainians with more and more citizens turning to the news websites for information (Table 1).

Investigative journalism also received a substantial boost in Ukraine following the fall of Yanukovych. Yanukovych's escape directly caused one of the bold investigative initiatives, the "Yanukovychleaks" project. Immediately after Yanukovych's runoff from his residence in Mezhyhirya, activists found nearly 200 folders of documents at the lake near the mansion. Dozens of journalists and activists put in joint efforts to rescue the documents, systematize them, digitize and investigate information included in the documents (Collins 2014). A great deal of the rescued documents were put online on yanukovychleaks.org website, along with selected investigations.

Many more investigative reporting initiatives were spurred in the post-Maidan Ukraine, including the popular video programs "Slidstvo:info" (translated as "Investigation:Info") and "Skhemy" ("Schemes"), all spotlighting cases of corruption.

While Ukraine's media landscape has benefited from the new opportunities, some crucial and structural problems remained and continue hindering the development of the free and independent media. First and foremost, the majority of the mainstream media remain under control of the oligarchs (Table 2). Over three quarters of the television market is divided between four media groups owned by the oligarchs (KAS 2015), a striking figure given that television remains a No 1 medium for the majority of the Ukrainians. Although the ownership structure of the majority of the Ukrainian media has been non-transparent as offshore jurisdictions extensively used (MOP 2015), a lot of information regarding the stakes of oligarchs in the media has become available due to journalists' investigations and reports (e. g., Korol et al. 2015; Lyachinskaya 2016).

Thus, according to available information, Inter Media Group, which comprises a popular INTER TV channel and a set of smaller TV stations, including NTN, Mega, K1, K2 and some other media outlets, is controlled by oligarch Dmytro Firtash and the former head of Yanukoyvch's presidential administration, Serhiy Lyovochkin. Another popular TV channel, 1 + 1, is owned by oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky, whose media assets also consist of smaller TV channels like 2 + 2, TET, UNIAN news agency and a few online media. Viktor Pinchuk, a businessman and son-in-law of Ex-President Leonid Kuchma also owns a bunch of TV channels (STB, ICTV and Novyi) united under the StarLightMedia company. Finally, Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest oligarch and a close ally of Ex-President Yanukovych owns a cluster of national and regional media, including the popular TRK Ukrayina TV Channel, a few smaller TV stations broadcasting nationwide like Football 1 and Football 2, the national daily Segodnya and several regional media outlets (Korol et al. 2015). It is noteworthy that current President Petro Poroshenko has also been

**Table 1** Major sources of news consumption

|  | 2014 (in %) | 2015 (in %) |
|---|---|---|
| Ukrainian television | 84 | 79 |
| Ukrainian websites | 42 | 47 |
| Ukrainian radio | 28 | 27 |
| Ukrainian press | 24 | 22 |
| Russian television | 27 | 8 |
| Russian websites | 21 | 15 |
| Russian radio | 3 | 2 |
| Russian press | 2 | 2 |

U-Media (2015) (representative survey in 10 regions; respondents were asked which media they use for receiving news at least once a week)

owning a TV channel, Channel 5, since 2004. Despite promises and public expectations, Poroshenko has not sold his media asset, which aroused a lot of criticism (Dovzhenko 2015a).

The influence of oligarchs is by far not limited to television, as their media portfolios can boast diversity. While a group of 'old' oligarchs have long been dominating the media market in Ukraine, especially television, the 'new' tycoons have also tried to establish control over the existing outlets or to create new ones. For example, Serhiy Kurchenko, a young businessman from Kharkiv whose business emerged as astonishingly fastest-growing during Yanukovych's presidency, acquired a well-established UMH media group comprising a significant number of print outlets, radio stations and online media back in 2013. The purchase was widely regarded as an attempt to establish control over an important share of the market that had previously been independent from oligarchs, with eventual evidence from journalists confirming attempts of censorship by the new management (Telekrytyka 2014a).

After the EuroMaidan, all oligarchs managed to retain control over their media outlets, even the above-mentioned Kurchenko who had to flee the country just like Yanukovych (Leshchenko 2015, p. 101). Crucially, they all have kept utilizing their outlets for their own political purposes in the post-Maidan turmoil and ongoing struggle for power.

## 4 Challenges for media and journalism in post-Maidan Ukraine

The status quo of oligarchs in terms of media ownership, that is their decisive role in the Ukrainian media market, is considered to be a No 1 pressing issue for contemporary Ukraine by media professionals and experts (Dovzhenko 2015a; Ligachova 2015). Not only the very fact of the accumulation of mainstream media in the hands of several business groups is disturbing; evidence of editorial dependence on their owners' stance has been multiple and recurrent (Dovzhenko 2015a; Lyachinskaya 2016).

**Table 2** Top 6 Ukrainian TV channels, owners, audience share

| TV Channel | Major Owner(s) | Audience Share (in %) |
|---|---|---|
| Inter | Dmytro Firtash (beneficiary owner)<br>Valeriy Khoroshkovsky (majority shareholder)<br>Serhiy Lyovochkin (majority shareholder)<br>Svitlana Pluzhnikova (majority shareholder) | 13,36 |
| 1 + 1 | Ihor Kolomoysky (beneficiary owner)<br>Ihor Surkis (majority shareholder) | 11,38 |
| Ukrayina | Rinat Akhmetov | 9,53 |
| STB | Viktor Pinchuk and Olena Pinchuk | 7,51 |
| ICTV | Viktor Pinchuk and Olena Pinchuk | 7,25 |
| Novy Kanal | Viktor Pinchuk and Olena Pinchuk | 4,83 |

Media ownership – Detector Media (2016b); audience shares – KAS (2015) (data from January to May 2015; all Ukraine; audience 4+)

Despite the overall increased media freedom, the Ukrainian mainstream media largely remain instruments for their owners who use them to achieve political or business-related goals, discredit opponents and promote themselves (Dovzhenko 2015a; Ligachova 2015). In the words of Ligachova (2015): "Maidan dismantled total dependence of the mass media on the authorities, but dependence on oligarchs remained."

Instrumentalization of the media became even more evident in post-Maidan Ukraine with the revitalization of the political struggle after a period of tight control and dominance of one political force during Yanukovych's presidency. The oligarchs' battles through their media have infused the Ukrainian media discourse (Orlova and Sydorenko 2015). Instead of unbiased and balanced reporting, mainstream TV channels have been taking sides, silencing important issues, promoting their owners or allies and demonizing their political rivals (Dovzhenko 2015a). Election campaigns in post-Maidan Ukraine saw particularly fierce media wars and violation of professional standards by the major media, according to monitoring reports by the watchdog organization Telekrytyka (Andreitsiv 2015a, 2015b; MediaSapiens 2015c).

The fight for the editorial autonomy is thus widely seen as the biggest challenge for Ukraine's mainstream media owned by oligarchs. In this context, coordinated resistance of editors and journalists to attempts of pressure can change the established practices of control and conformity between media owners, managers and journalists and transform the media environment at large. Yet, there has been a lack of effective self-regulation efforts among the media community so far (Ligachova 2015), and only episodic cases of resistance.

The quest for independence is further complicated and aggravated by the ongoing economic crisis in Ukraine and a substantial decline in the advertising market (Dovzhenko 2015a; KAS 2015). While exact estimations of the advertising market decline vary, with some figures suggesting a drop from 1.4 billion USD to 685 million USD of the entire market (KAS 2015), it is clear that the Ukrainian advertising pie is very modest compared to other European countries and is by far not sufficient for a large number of existing media outlets in Ukraine. The advertising market

decline hit print media worst, some estimations suggesting a 40–45% fall in 2014 compared to the previous year (Telekrytyka 2014b). In response to the crisis, some outlets closed their print operations and focused on the development of their online versions, like Investgazeta (KAS 2015). Some of the very few remaining foreign media investors left the Ukrainian market, like Sanoma Media in 2014 (Kovalchuk 2014). Political and economic instability, decline of the purchasing capacity and the advertising market – all this makes launching a media company quite a challenging enterprise in Ukraine. On top of that, the dominance of the oligarchs who can inject cash into their media from other assets without bothering about profitability of the media business has undermined a level playing field.

Under such conditions, the independent Ukrainian media have been struggling hard to find a viable business model, but very few have succeeded so far. Some of the online news media, like the popular Ukrayinska Pravda, can rely on revenues from online advertising. Several new media have been experimenting with crowd-funding, with Hromadske TV managing to collect a record 1.2 million UAH after the outlet's successful onset during the EuroMaidan (Verstiuk 2016). Yet, grants from international foundations and agencies remain a crucial instrument of funding for independent journalism projects in Ukraine. Thus, both Hromadske TV and Hromadske Radio get substantial financial assistance from foreign donors (Ostapa 2016a). International agencies are also a major source of funding for investigative projects and local media initiatives. All in all, alternative Ukrainian media largely lack financial self-sustainability, with very few exceptions.

The search for business models that would secure both profit and independence for media organizations in the environment dominated by big media owners with political interests is the second pivotal challenge for the post-Maidan media in Ukraine.

Given the tense conditions for the development of independent media at present-day Ukraine, the successful establishment of a professional and trustworthy public broadcasting, the process already launched, could potentially turn into a key game changer for Ukrainian media landscape. Although state television and radio services that have been transformed into a network of public broadcasting had been backward and not very popular among the Ukrainian audience, they enjoyed a broad accessibility across the country (UA:First TV channel is the only channel covering 97 % of the territory) and many resources, including communication networks, equipment and people engaged into the production process. While the existing facilities are largely out-of-date, they do allow reaching the national audience even in the most remote areas of the country. Thus, unlike alternative online media, a new public broadcaster has the capacity to compete with oligarch-owned commercial TV channels by promoting an independent agenda and producing professional content. Media experts have already noted an increased quality of the channel's news content in terms of adherence to professional standards and a promising approach of the new management (KAS 2015; MediaSapiens 2014); yet, the popularity of UA:First remains very low. In addition, transition from state to public broadcasting has been complicated by a lot of bureaucratic obstacles, reluctance of employees to implement reforms and lack of funding. Given such a complex interplay of factors, it is only through institutionalization of editorial independence and growing profes-

sionalism of the public broadcasting that achievements of the post-Maidan period can yield results and have a sustainable positive impact on the media environment at large. Successful full-fledged implementation of the public broadcasting reform is a third major challenge for the Ukrainian media community.

Finally, the fourth challenge – no less crucial or less complicated than the three discussed – concerns renegotiation of professional ethics and identity in the post-Maidan Ukraine. A complex combination of challenges discussed earlier in this article paper threw Ukrainian journalism and media in confusion and brought a serious crisis of professional identity.

The participation of many Ukrainian journalists in the EuroMaidan protests and their activist stance stirred up the discussion on the boundaries between journalism and activism, the issue further complicated by unequalled tense conditions in which journalists and activists have been working in Ukraine since EuroMaidan (Dovzhenko 2014b; Stelmakh 2015).

"In Ukraine, a journalist is more than just a journalist. In any society due to various reasons journalists have more information than common citizens, but in Ukraine journalists have become a driving force of changes: they push for passing laws, for investigations to be held. We recognize that we sometimes do more than we would have to do in a society that lives according to the principles of rule of law. But there is a borderline to it as well".

This is a quote from the Ukrainian journalist Angelina Kariakina from Hromadske TV who discussed the problems of media activism with other journalists at the round table at Ukrainian Catholic University (Dovzhenko 2015b). It illustrates one dimension of ethical dilemmas Ukrainian journalists have been facing in contemporary Ukraine, namely tension between professional and civic identity.

Pressure of ethical dilemmas exacerbated following the eruption of an armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine. Reporting on the war in your country proved to be a crucial test for Ukrainian journalists caught between the need to provide a professional coverage of the conflict and the feeling of patriotism and loyalty to 'our side'.

Numerous debates on the professional standards in times of war among Ukrainian journalists revealed a striking lack of consensus among media professionals regarding 'appropriate' practices and standards (Dovzhenko 2016). The hottest debates concerned the language used to denote the sides of the conflict and the very conflict, the representation of all sides' opinions, the potential dialogue with 'the other side' etc. (Budivska 2015; Dorosh 2014; Tolokolnikova 2015). The debates demonstrated a high level of disagreement between different media professionals, with some journalists advocating for a neutral approach and others arguing that professional standards should not outweigh national interests. While the situation in the conflict area has been more or less stabilized as of the time of writing, polarization among media practitioners regarding attitudes towards the role of journalists in terms of the conflict coverage has remained very strong. 'Patriotic approach' has gained significant popularity among a lot of Ukrainian journalists; yet a group of some opinion-leading journalists and media NGOs lead their struggle to advocate for independent and unbiased journalism that is centered around professional values rather than patriotic ones.

It is also crucial that debates revealed not only disagreement but substantial confusion and uncertainty among many journalists. The study of the journalists' attitudes and editorial practices with regard to the conflict coverage conducted by the Telekrytyka also found that Ukrainian journalists and media largely lacked a coherent vision on how they should respond to the conflict; instead, a variety of approaches was identified, in which individual experience of journalists mattered more than established editorial practices (MediaSapiens 2016).

While the quality of the media content deteriorated as many standards have been compromised, Ukraine's media landscape has seen a significant reinvigoration of the professional discussion among journalists after the EuroMaidan. Moreover, the debates about the media performance spread beyond the professional circles thus turning journalism-related issues into topics for discussion in the public sphere. The content of discussions suggests that Ukrainian journalists have been renegotiating professional identity, ethics and standards. It is through such discussions that journalists establish which practices are going to be acceptable by the professional community, and which are not. The significance of the ongoing renegotiation of professional identity is hard to overemphasize since it will also impact journalists' attitude towards editorial independence. The response to numerous challenges produced through journalists' discussions and accepted by the professional community, the new journalism culture, will guide the future development of the media landscape.

## 5 Conclusions

The provided overview of the media landscape in post-Maidan Ukraine suggests that developments following EuroMaidan marked another stage of transition for Ukrainian media from a post-Soviet or hybrid model towards a democratic model. Some crucial reforms recently launched like the establishment of public broadcasting and privatization of state and communal media have a substantial potential for democratization of the Ukrainian media system, although their success can only be assessed in several years from now on. Other positive developments discussed in the article also indicate the media and journalists' quest for independence. However, setbacks are not unknown to Ukraine's recent history, especially given the complex challenges that the Ukrainian media are faced with at present. Taking into account both the oligarchs' control over the major media and the harsh economic crisis, the fight for editorial autonomy has not been won yet. New business models that would secure profit and independence remain to be found and implemented by the independent media. Finally, Ukrainian journalists have to come to terms regarding professional standards that would be accepted and practiced by the majority of media.

The response of the Ukrainian media and journalists to the discussed challenges will determine whether the post-Maidan period of transition is going to bring the Ukrainian media closer to the democratic media systems, although much will also depend on the general trajectory of the development of Ukraine in the coming years.

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