Role of Russian Media in the Baltics and Moldova

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RUSSIAN SPEAKERS
The prevalence of Russian-language media in the Baltics and Moldova is not surprising given the large Russian-speaking populations of these countries. Latvia has the most Russian-speakers, with 85% saying they would understand all or most of a TV or radio broadcast in Russian, followed by Moldova at 81%. Estonia and Lithuania have fewer fluent Russian speakers – 65% and 59%, respectively. The majority of Russian speakers in each country is 45 years of age or older and much smaller percentages between the ages of 15 and 29. The biggest exception is Moldova, where half of Russian speakers are under 45 and 22% are 15-29. Russian speakers tend to be concentrated in urban areas, with vast majorities living in cities (81% in Estonia, 73% in Latvia, and 70% in Lithuania). Again, this is excepting Moldova, where only a slight majority (55%) are in urban areas.

USE OF RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA FOR NEWS
Use of Russian-language media for news is by far the most popular in Moldova, where 69% of the general population (and 85% of Russian speakers) report its use. Numbers are somewhat lower in Estonia and Latvia (76% and 69% among Russian speakers, respectively).

In contrast, Lithuania, with the smallest percentage of Russian speakers overall, use is lowest at only 21% among the general population. Even among Russian speakers, however, only about a third (36%) say they turn to Russian-language media for news. In Estonia and Latvia, ethnic Russians make up a larger portion of the population (28% and 31%) and also of those using Russian-language media for news (53% and 44%). Moldova differs somewhat from the Baltics in this regard; although the share of ethnic Russians in the general population is only 4%, they have the highest level of Russian-language media use.

TV is the most often used media platform to get Russian-language news in all four countries. This is followed by internet and radio, which garner similar rates of usage. Social networks, SMS, and apps lag somewhat behind. However, rates of new media usage to follow Russian-language news is much higher among youth.

USE OF MEDIA AND SUPPORT OF RUSSIA AND ITS POLICIES
In the Baltics, there appears to be no connection between watching Russian media and supporting Putin's policies. However, there is a connection between trusting what is broadcast on Russian media and support. Those who use and trust the information they get on Russian media are much more likely to support Russia's actions in Ukraine, Putin's domestic policies and Putin's international policies than those who use Russian Federation media but do not trust it. Those who use Russian Federation media but do not trust it have much more similar levels of support to those who do not use Russian Federation media at all. While support is slightly higher among non-trusting users than non-users, in most cases it is only between two and eight percentage points higher.

The trend in the Baltics is similar when respondents were asked their agreement with a number of statements, including whether the Russian Federation has the right to defend ethnic Russians outside Russia, whether Putin's leadership has strengthened Russia's standing in the world, whether Western countries are trying to weaken Russia, and whether it is a great misfortune that the Soviet Union collapsed. However, in most cases there tends to be a slightly larger gap in level of agreement between those who use Russian media and do not trust it and those who do not use Russian media at all.

Moldova is a different case altogether. There is a significant difference between those who use and trust Russian media and those who use it but do not trust it, with those who do not trust Russian media voicing a much lower level of support for Russia's policies. However, those that do not use Russian media at all have levels of support that are nearly identical to those who use and trust Russian media. It is likely that those who do not use Russian media are relying mostly on (and trusting) domestic Moldovan media, which tends to be pro-Russian Federation and has similar editorial biases.
Since the fall of the Yanukovych government in Ukraine in February 2014 and ensuing Russian aggression in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, BBG language services at Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) have added or expanded more than 35 new programs on multiple media platforms in Russian, Ukrainian, and other languages to reach new audiences in Ukraine, Russia, elsewhere in the former Soviet space, and around the world.

The new and expanded BBG programs represent five broad lines of effort:

- Focusing programming to impact strategic audiences
- Expanding partnerships to reach audiences in local markets and inform the news agenda
- Moving resources to digital platforms to directly engage audiences
- Increasing research on the ground to better understand audiences and impact
- Utilizing BBG capabilities and expertise to meet unfilled strategic needs and opportunities

Current Time
BBG’s daily 30-minute Russian-language television news program, “Current Time,” launched in October 2014 and is a joint production between RFE/RL and VOA. It now is on the air in nine countries via 25 media outlets, and is available to digital audiences worldwide. The European version airs in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Lithuania, and Latvia, with segments of the program airing in Israel. A Central Asia version airs in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Weekend Current Time programs – “Itogi” by VOA and “Nedelya” by RFE/RL – are on the air as well.

In Russia, where placement on domestic stations is not possible, Current Time is available on NewsTube.ru, Russia’s largest news site. “Current Time” also reaches Russian-speaking news seekers worldwide via digital platforms, including a website and YouTube channel, as well as web portals in the Baltic countries, Belarus, and in Azerbaijan.

Prime Time with Myroslava Gongadze
In September 2015, VOA and its partner, First National TV in Ukraine launched “Prime Time with Myroslava Gongadze,” a 26-minute weekly TV program featuring hard-hitting interviews with Ukrainian and American newsmakers. The program is designed to provide an increased understanding of U.S. foreign policy, particularly regarding Ukraine and Russia, and of Western perspectives on events and developments related to democratic reforms in Ukraine. The opening show featuring a wide-ranging interview with Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko and topped national TV ratings in Ukraine, while generating significant media buzz and driving the news agenda in both Ukrainian and Russian-language media markets.

Radio Crimea Realities
In September 2015 RFE/RL Ukrainian, in partnership with the First Radio Channel of the National Radio Company of Ukraine, launched “Radio Crimea.Realities,” Russian-language radio programming that is broadcast by medium wave transmitters (549 kHz) in Ukraine to Crimea. RFE/RL programs air daily at 0835 and 1835 Kyiv time, and on Saturdays as well. Initial anecdotal reports confirm that the signal is strong in Crimea and that it also reaches portions of southern Russia, including the Krasnodar and Rostov regions.