

Belarus: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels

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April 2023

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Acknowledgements

AidData would like to acknowledge Vera Choo, Samantha Custer, and Rodney Knight for their advice and assistance in the research and compilation of this profile. We additionally want to acknowledge AidData's team of student Research Assistants who collected data for this project, including Diane Frangulea, Maggie Herndon, Daniel Highland, Katherine Hughes, Sonia Kelly, Morgan King, Deb Kornblut, Amelia Larson, Abby Maher, Daniella Marx, Harper Ortlieb, Caroline Prout, Andrew Tanner, Emmeline Walker, Sophia Zaman, and Noa Zielinski.

Introduction

What are the entry points for foreign actors to shape and influence the narrative in the Belarusian media market? This profile seeks to address some of the entry points related to media ownership and Russian state-owned media. AidData recognizes that malign influence may affect narrative creation in other ways, including through the republishing of foreign content in domestic media outlets, interactions on social media, and journalist biases. However, this project focuses solely on direct and indirect ownership of traditional domestic media outlets to identify potential entry points for Russian influence through elites and media owners. By better understanding Belarus' domestic media ownership environment, including what media outlets citizens consume and who the owners of those outlets are, we can anticipate entry points where malign actors may try to influence domestic narratives.

Belarus remains one of the least transparent countries in the Europe and Eurasia region.¹ Outside of the many state-owned media outlets, a complex web of Russian and Belarusian shell companies obscures who owns and de facto controls the domestic media market. Since owners of top media houses have the potential to influence the content and tone of topics covered by journalists in their employ, understanding who owns the media is crucial to identifying avenues for influence and potential bias in reporting. In this profile, we begin to close this gap with an in-depth look at domestic media ownership in Belarus.

This media ownership profile and the supporting data were prepared by AidData, a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute.² The data for this profile was collected manually by AidData staff and student research assistants. We began by conducting web searches to identify a list of media in Belarus, and then identified a list of the top-ranked outlets in terms of overall consumption. We then used this information to gather the ownership data. We

¹ Bak, Mathias. "Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine." Published July 4, 2020.

² This profile is part of a collaboration with the USAID E&E Bureau made possible through a buy-in to a Higher Education Solutions Network cooperative agreement (AID-A-12-00096) in place between USAID/LAB/HESN, AidData, and William & Mary.

used cross-country sources when available (e.g., Zenith, Alexa³), as well as survey data, media watchdog sources, and other open source data.

In the following sections, we provide summary data on the presence of Russian state-owned media, top outlets, and media ownership in Belarus as of 2021 (or the most contemporary data available). This profile focuses on the ownership of traditional broadcast, print, and online media outlets. Social media is not included in this analysis. By mapping out the ownership and influence of traditional forms of media, these profiles lend insights into potential channels for foreign influence in the top consumed outlets.

Russian Media Footprints

The most direct form of Kremlin influence in Belarus' media landscape is via Russian state-owned media (see Table 1). Seven of the eleven Russian state-owned media outlets we tracked have a physical presence in Belarus, which provides the Kremlin with a strong channel to directly communicate with, and ultimately influence, Belarusian citizens. Physical presence includes physical infrastructure, such as cable packages, physical office space or local bureaus, and radio broadcasters, but excludes satellite broadcasting and online or streaming availability. Table 1 provides a footprint of Russian state-owned media presence in Belarus, but does not speak to how well-consumed each outlet is by Belarusian citizens.

³ Zenith is a media intelligence database that provides insights into media, including television viewership and newspaper circulation, in several dozen countries around the world. Alexa is an online analysis tool. AidData Staff used Alexa's API to gauge website traffic. <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo>.

Table 1. Russian state-owned media in Belarus, 2021

Television	
Russia 1	✓
Russia 24	✓
Russia K	✓
RTR-Planeta	✓
TV Centre	✗
Channel One	✗
RT	✗
Print	
Rossiyskaya Gazeta	✓
Radio	
Sputnik	✗
News Agency	
TASS	✓
Sputnik	✓

In this profile, AidData has captured direct Russian channels of influence through state-owned media infrastructure. Other indirect forms of Russian influence are possible, including domestic outlets republishing narratives and pro-Russian journalists in-country. In Belarus, the republishing of Russian state media content is widespread. Most domestic state-run outlets directly retransmit Russian state media content. However, according to a recent survey conducted by Chatham House, trust in these outlets is low, with only 19% of Belarusians stating that they trust domestic state-owned media outlets.⁴ As a result, despite the high availability of Russian state media outlets and content, most Belarusians do not wholly trust these news sources.

⁴ Astapenia, Ryhor. "Belarusians' views on the political crisis - Nov 2021." Chatham House. January 20, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/01/belarusians-views-political-crisis>.

Top Media Outlets

Table 2 identifies the top five most-consumed media outlets in Belarus by medium (television, print, radio, and online) based on cross-sectional indicators such as viewership share and circulation. Television is the most consumed medium in Belarus, though online media is consumed by 74% of Belarusians under age 35.⁵ While we make no claims about the exact influence of each individual outlet, we can assume that outlets that reach higher numbers of consumers have greater potential to influence more citizens. While the Russian state-owned media that we tracked do not appear in the top outlets for Belarus, a number of top Belarusian media outlets repurpose Russian state media content. Other Russian state and privately owned media outlets dominate the Belarusian media market, including Komsomolskaya Pravda, Gazprom-Media's Humor FM, Russkoe Radio, and Russian Planet (Rusplt.ru).

AidData used a weighted average of media consumption survey rankings from 2017 to 2021 to determine the top media outlets in Belarus. This strategy offers a more long-term perspective of top media outlets, rather than a snapshot of the top media outlets right now. As such, the top outlets may not exactly reflect the current order of most consumed outlets, but do show a solid picture of the media landscape over the past five years. Recent rankings are weighted more heavily to adjust for new changes.⁶ Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus and Tut.by have both been included in these rankings, despite their forced shutdowns by the government of Belarus.⁷ These outlets will be further discussed in the analysis section.

⁵ "Annual Survey Report: Belarus." European Union Neighbors - East. Published March 2020. <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/opinion-polls/opinion-survey-2020-belarus/>.

⁶ Television, Print and Radio: Television, radio and print rankings were calculated using multiple publicly available surveys and circulation data, including an AidData survey of country and regional experts conducted in summer 2021. Additional survey data came from: Zenith's Market & Media Intelligence database: Share of viewing - individuals (%) 2018, Zenith's Market & Media Intelligence database: Circulation (000s) 2018, Zenith's Market & Media Intelligence database: Peak time adult audience (000s) 2018, and IREX's Media Sustainability Index (2019).

Online: Alexa, April 2021

⁷ "News website of Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus blocked." BelSat TV. Published September 29, 2021. <https://belsat.eu/en/news/29-09-2021-news-website-of-komsomolskaya-pravda-in-belarus-blocked/>.

Table 2: Top Belarusian media outlets ranked by overall consumption

Rank	Television	Print	Radio	Online
1	NTV-Belarus	Sovetskaya Belorussiya - Belarus Segodnya	Autoradio	Tut.by
2	ONT	Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus	Radio Roks	Onliner.by
3	Belarus 1	Argumenti i Fakty v Belorussii	Humor FM	Kp.by
4	RTR Belarus	Narodnaya Volya	Unistar Radio	Kp.ru
5	STV	BelGazeta	Russkoe Radio	Rusplt.ru

According to findings from an AidData survey of regional and local media experts in 2021, the majority of top Belarus outlets mirror the results of open-source data collection by AidData researchers. However, additional outlets excluded from this top outlets list but ranked highly by local experts include the radio stations Radio BA and Hit FM, and the online outlets Belapan.com and Charter97.org.

Media Ownership

Table 3 lists the ownership information of top Belarus media outlets by medium (television, newspaper, radio, and online). Media ownership in Belarus is highly centralized between the government and government-affiliated elites, and true media owners are often obscured through a complex web of shell companies. According to a European Parliament report, over 80% of radio stations and 45% of television stations in Belarus are directly owned by the government.⁸ Further examples of ownership ties and relationships are discussed in the following section.

In order to highlight which outlets may be more susceptible to Russian influence, AidData staff have devised a four-point scale to indicate levels of Russian ownership. This scale is color-coded shades of red in the table below to indicate 1) Direct Russian ownership, 2) Known Russian ties, 3) Suspected Russian ties, and 4) No Russian ties. Additionally, Belarusian state-owned media is color-coded blue. In Belarus, 16 owners had suspected or known ties to the Russian government, and 6 outlets had direct Russian ownership. As such, this profile has 34 red color-codes and 7 designations of state-owned media.

Table 3: Ownership of top Belarusian media outlets by share

 No Russian ties
 Suspected Russian ties
 Known Russian ties
 Direct Russian ownership
 Local state-owned media

Medium	Rank	Outlet	Owner, Company	Owner, Individuals	Owner (%)
Television	1	NTV-Belarus	National State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the Republic of Belarus		100
	2	ONT	Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus		100
	3	Belarus 1	National State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the Republic of Belarus		100
	4	RTR-Belarus	Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus		100
	5	STV	Government of the Republic of Belarus		100

⁸ Przetacznik, Jakub and Linda Tothova. "Media environment in Belarus." European Parliamentary Research Service. Published February 2022.

Print	1	Sovetskaya Belorussiya - Belarus Segodnya	Government of the Republic of Belarus		100
	2	Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus	Komsomolskaya Pravda Publishing House JSC	Sergei Rudnov	Majority
				Vladimir Sungorkin	
				Vitaly Krivenko	
				Sergei Orlov	
				Grigory Berezkin	
				Arkady Evstafiev	
				Elena Ovcharenko	
			CJSC BelKP-Press	Vladimir Mamontov	
				Marina Statsenko	Minority
	3	Argumenty i Fakty v Belorussii	Municipal Government of Moscow		100
	4	Narodnaya Volya	Narodnaya Volya LLC	Iosif Syaredzich	100
	5	BelGazeta	BelGazeta LLC	Kirill Zhivolevich	Majority
				Yury Karetnikov	Minority
Radio	1	Autoradio	"Vashe Televidenie" LLC	Valery Kravchuk	Unknown
	2	Radio Roks	Editorial Office of the Radio Station Radio Roks-M LLC	Unknown	Unknown
	3	Humor FM	"Vashe Televidenie" LLC	Valery Kravchuk	Unknown
	4	Unistar Radio	Belarusian State University		Unknown
			Media Invest GmbH	Harald Albrecht	Unknown
				Georg Bogner	Unknown
	5	Russkoe Radio	Federal State Unitary Enterprise Gosconcert		100
Online	1	Tut.by	Tut by Media LLC	Evgenia Chernyavskaya	Majority
				Kirill Voloshin	Minority
				Lyudmila Chekina	Minority
				Marina Zolotova	Minority
				Ksenia Ivanova	Minority
	2	Onliner.by	Onliner LLC	Ksenia Shuravko	51
				Vitaly Shuravko	49
	3	Kp.by	Komsomolskaya Pravda Publishing House JSC	Sergei Rudnov	Majority
				Vladimir Sungorkin	
				Vitaly Krivenko	
				Sergei Orlov	
				Grigory Berezkin	
				Arkady Evstafiev	

				Elena Ovcharenko	
				Vladimir Mamontov	
	4	Kp.ru	Komsomolskaya Pravda Publishing House JSC	CJSC BelKP-Press	Minority
				Sergei Rudnov	45.2
				Vladimir Sungorkin	4
				Vitaly Krivenko	Unknown
				Sergei Orlov	Unknown
				Grigory Berezkin	Unknown
				Arkady Evstafiev	Unknown
				Elena Ovcharenko	Unknown
				Vladimir Mamontov	Unknown
	5	Rusplt.ru	PIK Group	Sergei Gordeev	59.4
				VTB Bank	15.5
				Kirill Pisarev	9.3
				PJSC PIK (Public)	9.03
				Promsvyaz Capital BV	6.77

Results

Television

Television is the most consumed outlet in Belarus.⁹ All of the top five television outlets in Belarus are owned and operated by the Government of Belarus. The National State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of Belarus operates NTV-Belarus and Belarus-1, while the Ministry of Information operates STV, ONT and RTR-Belarus. All five channels utilize some Russian state media content. For example, ONT rebroadcasts a doctored version of Russia's Channel 1, as well as some content from other Russian federal channels, including NTV, TNT, and RTR-Planeta. According to the Republic of Belarus' official website, Belarus.by, ONT only produces 46% of its own content, with the remaining 54% aired from Russia's Channel 1.¹⁰ NTV-Belarus also rebroadcasts Russia's NTV, while RTR-Belarus repurposes broadcasts from RTR-Planeta in Russia.¹¹

⁹ "Annual Survey Report: Belarus." European Union Neighbors - East. Published March 2020.

¹⁰ "Belarusian TV channels encouraged to rely on national platform." Belarus.by. Published April 10, 2018. https://www.belarus.by/en/press-center/press-release/belarusian-tv-channels-encouraged-to-rely-on-national-platform_i_0000077617.html

¹¹ Szostek, Joanna. "Russian influence on news media in Belarus." Communist and Post-Communist Studies: Volume 48, Issues 2–3, June–September 2015, Pages 123-135 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/296209831.pdf>.

While Russian state media are present both in a direct and rebroadcast format, they are not broadcast live in Belarus, to allow the Belarusian government to censor unwanted content.¹² Additionally, while Belarusian state-owned media often rely on Russian content, a significant portion of content in Belarus is still produced domestically, allowing the Belarusian government to directly influence the population.¹³

Print

Print media remains widely used in Belarus, with 61% of Belarusians consuming print media.¹⁴ The high use of newspapers may be a result of the high private ownership of print media in Belarus, which according to a European Parliament report is over 70% privately owned.¹⁵ However, the most-consumed print outlet in Belarus is the state-owned outlet Belarus Segodnya.

The second most-consumed outlet during our study period is Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus. A partial subsidiary of the Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP),¹⁶ in August 2020, the Belarusian government forced domestic publishing houses to cease printing the newspaper version. In September 2021, the Belarusian government blocked the website domestically as well, effectively eliminating KP in Belarus from the Belarusian audience.¹⁷ KP in Belarus has been included on our list despite its effective closure, as multiple surveys ranked the newspaper among the top most-consumed outlets in the country, even after the Belarusian government blocked its print version. The third most-consumed print outlet is Argumenty i Fakty v Belorussii. Like KP, Argumenty i Fakty is an owned subsidiary of the Russian Argumenty i Fakty, though the Belarusian editor-in-chief Igor Nikolaevich Sokolov and his team produce the majority of content locally.¹⁸ In 2014, the Municipal Government of Moscow became the

¹² "Belarus Profile - Media." BBC. Published June 8, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17941331>

¹³ Przetacznik, Jakub and Linda Tothova. "Media environment in Belarus." European Parliamentary Research Service. Published February 2022.

¹⁴ "Annual Survey Report: Belarus." European Union Neighbors - East. Published March 2020.

¹⁵ Przetacznik, Jakub and Linda Tothova. "Media environment in Belarus." European Parliamentary Research Service. Published February 2022.

¹⁶ Szostek, Joanna. "The Mass Media and Russia's 'Sphere of Interests': Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Belarus and Ukraine." *Geopolitics* (2018), 23:2, 307-329, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1402298.

¹⁷ "News website of Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus blocked." BelSat TV. Published September 29, 2021.

¹⁸ Szostek, Joanna. "The Mass Media and Russia's 'Sphere of Interests': Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Belarus and Ukraine." *Geopolitics* (2018), 23:2, 307-329, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1402298.

sole owner and operator of Argumenty i Fakty, highlighting a Russian government-owned media in the top consumed print outlets of Belarus.¹⁹

Two opposition newspapers round out the top five print outlets in Belarus. Narodnaya Volya is the fourth most-consumed newspaper, followed by BelGazeta. Narodnaya Volya was founded by journalist and editor-in-chief Iosif Syaredzich in 1995. BelGazeta is currently majority owned by long-time journalist and editor-in-chief Kirill Zhivolevich, with Director of BelGazeta Yury Karetnikov owning a minority stake. Like many opposition newspapers and journalists, Narodnaya Volya and BelGazeta have been harassed by the Belarusian government through a number of different methods. Most recently, along with KP in Belarus in August 2020, the Belarusian government blocked the print of Narodnaya Volya and BelGazeta, forcing the newspapers to release their copies solely online.²⁰

In sum, top print outlets in Belarus have more diverse content and ownership than top television outlets. However, as noted by the forced government closure of KP in Belarus, as well as the forced print stoppages of Narodnaya Volya and BelGazeta, the Belarusian government is willing and able to censor content that it does not like in print outlets.

Radio

The ownership structures of top radio outlets in Belarus is highly opaque compared to print media. According to a European Parliament report, radio in Belarus is heavily state-controlled, with over 80% of radio stations owned by the government of Belarus.²¹ Nearly all of the top radio stations in Belarus are spin-offs of radio stations in Russia, which may or may not be affiliated with the Belarusian versions.

Autoradio, the most-consumed radio station, and Humor FM, the third most-consumed station, are both owned by Vashe Televidenie LLC, a company

¹⁹ Szostek, Joanna. "The Mass Media and Russia's 'Sphere of Interests': Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Belarus and Ukraine." *Geopolitics* (2018), 23:2, 307-329, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1402298.

²⁰ "The printed version of Brestskaya Gazeta suffered the fate of Narodnaya Volya, BelGazeta, Svobodnye Novosti Plus." *Brestskaya Gazeta*. Published January 19, 2021. <https://www.b-g.by/society/pechatnuyu-versiyu-brestskoy-gazetyi-postigla-uchast-narodnoy-voli-belgazetyi-svobodnyih-novostey-plyus/>.

²¹ Przetacznik, Jakub and Linda Tothova. "Media environment in Belarus." European Parliamentary Research Service. Published February 2022.

that is ultimately 50% owned by Trio Media LLC. Trio Media LLC runs all advertising for all Vashe Televidenie subsidiaries and is owned by Sergei Teterin, Olga Minets, and AMG Inform LLC.²² Sergei Teterin has ties to President Alexander Lukashenko, and is the former Assistant to the President and Director of Belarus' National Olympic Committee. Olga Minets, a popular singer in Belarus known as Alesya, is married to Leonid Minets, the owner of BelMuz TV and AMG Inform LLC.²³ The director of Vashe Televidenie LLC is Valery Kravchuk, for whom only some information can be found. While the complete ownership structure of Vashe Televidenie LLC is unclear, powerful elites connected to the Lukashenko government benefit from ownership of the top radio outlets.

The second most-consumed radio station is Radio Roks, a rock music station. The ownership structure of Radio Roks is unclear. Some sources claim that Radio Roks is owned by a private Belarusian company, while others claim that Russian organizations own the outlet.²⁴ Both Russia and Ukraine have their own radio stations that are also called Radio Roks, although they do not appear to be openly affiliated. Ultimately, no reliable ownership data was available for Radio Roks in Belarus.

The remaining outlets have foreign ownership. The fourth most-consumed station, Radio Unistar, was created in 2000 as a joint venture between Belarusian State University and Media Invest GmbH, a German company. While BSU is a public university, little government influence seems to penetrate the content of Radio Unistar, which airs mostly pop music and pop culture news. Russkoe Radio, the fifth most-consumed radio station, rebroadcasts content from Russkoe Radio in Russia owned by a Russian state organization, FSUE Gosconcert. The Belarus version is registered to the same private company address as Radio Roks;²⁵ However, the Belarusian Russkoe Radio website claims

²² "Sergey Teterin and singer Alesya are co-owners of TNT-International." Nasha Niva. Published March 15, 2019. <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=227050&lang=ru>.

²³ "How members of the Yarmolenko family became shadow media tycoons in Belarus." Nasha Niva. Published July 26, 2019. <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=234472&lang=ru>.

²⁴ "Who owns the popular FM stations in Belarus?" Svaboda. Published January 18, 2019. <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29717321.html>

²⁵ "Who owns the popular FM stations in Belarus?" Svaboda. Published January 18, 2019. <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29717321.html>

it is owned by Russian Media Group, a media conglomerate in Russia acquired by Russian state-owned FSUE Gosconcert.²⁶

Like television, both the Russian and Belarusian governments own shares in the top radio outlets in Belarus. Radio is highly opaque, likely due to the complexity of hidden ownership of top outlets by political elites connected to the Lukashenko government and/or Russia.

Online

Across the Europe and Eurasia region, top-viewed online media sites tend to be independently owned more often than traditional media. For the top two online outlets in Belarus, that trend remains true. Tut.by, the most viewed online news site in Belarus, gained popularity for its coverage of the 2020 anti-government protests. However, following the protests in late 2020, Lukashenko's government arrested or exiled the owners of Tut.by and banned the site, which is no longer accessible in Belarus.²⁷ Currently, Evgenia Chernyavskaya, the daughter of Tut.by founder Yuri Zisser and current majority stakeholder, lives in Tel Aviv, though the Lukashenko regime has arrested her mother, Yulia, and a number of journalists.²⁸ Minority owners Kirill Voloshin and Ksenia Ivanova both remain abroad as well. The two other minority shareholders, Lyudmila Chekina and Marina Zolotova have been arrested by Belarusian authorities. As such, the status of Tut.by as a top independent news source in Belarus is in jeopardy. Tut.by has remained among top outlets on surveys conducted after the government shutdown of the website, meaning that Belarusians continue to access Tut.by or at least still view the outlet as highly influential. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is that virtual private networks (VPNs) are often used in Belarus to avoid blocked websites and government censorship, though these routing websites have started to be attacked by the government as well.²⁹

²⁶ "Сергея Кожевникова уволили с поста гендиректора Русской медиагруппы." RBC.ru. Published August 10, 2015. https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/10/08/2015/55c899b49a7947624ab886c5.

²⁷ "Belarus Slaps 'Extremist' Label On Popular News Sites." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published August 13, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-tutby-zerkalo-banned/31409535.html>

²⁸ "'Nobody is safe' in Belarus, says independent media heiress behind Tut.by." France 24. Published May 27, 2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210527-nobody-is-safe-in-belarus-says-independent-media-heiress-behind-tut-by>

²⁹ Przetacznik, Jakub and Linda Tothova. "Media environment in Belarus." European Parliamentary Research Service. Published February 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698922/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698922_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698922/EPRS_BRI(2022)698922_EN.pdf).

Onliner.by, the second-most visited online news site in Belarus, is also independently owned. Now-divorced couple Vitaly and Ksenia Shuravko own the full enterprise, which focuses on lifestyle, fashion, and technology news rather than politics. According to a Bolshoi article, Onliner.by models itself after a Silicon Valley start-up and seems to use journalism to build an “onliner” lifestyle.³⁰

The Russian and Belarusian versions of Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP) are both in the top visited news sites in Belarus, though Kp.by was blocked by Belarusian authorities in September 2021.³¹ The sole difference between Kp.by and Kp.ru is that CJSC BelKP-Press, a partial subsidiary of Komsomolskaya Pravda Publishing House, publishes Kp.by, whereas KPPH publishes Kp.ru directly. The ownership of Komsomolskaya Pravda is complex and highly opaque, making it difficult to confirm exact names of owners or their share holdings. KP in Belarus is mostly owned by KPPH, but it also has minority shareholders in Belarus, including longtime director Marina Statsenko.

The final top online outlet is Rusplt.ru, or Russian Planet, a Russian media site owned by Morton Construction Company. A major construction contractor in Russia, Morton was purchased by PIK Group, one of the largest real estate conglomerates in Russia. As a result, PIK Group is the parent company of Russian Planet. PIK Group held an IPO in 2007, leading to partial public ownership of the company. Former Russian senator, Sergei Gordeev, remains the majority shareholder, with Russian state-owned VTB Bank owning the next highest percentage. Founder of PIK Group, Kirill Pisarev owns a minority stake, and the rest of the shares were purchased publicly.

In sum, online outlets are susceptible to Russian and Belarusian government influences. The Belarusian government shut down both Tut.by and Kp.by as a result of their reporting on the 2020-2021 Belarus protests. Affiliates of the Russian government control both Kp.ru and Rusplt.ru. As a result, while some online outlets still remain independent, state control of online media in Belarus remains a fundamental issue.

³⁰ “Vitaliy Shuravko, owner of onliner.by: ‘Do real things.’” Bolshoi.by. Published 2013. <https://bolshoi.by/persona/onliner-vitalij-shuravko/>.

³¹ “News website of Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus blocked.” BelSat TV. Published September 29, 2021.

Conclusion

In this brief, we have presented an overview of the domestic media ownership environment of Belarus. The collected data highlight two trends in Belarusian media. First, Russian state-owned media dominates the media market in Belarus. Second, Belarus' domestic media ownership is top-heavy, government-influenced, and very opaque, which may create further opportunities for malign influence, be it foreign or domestic.

Many Russian state-owned outlets operate directly within Belarus; however, most Belarusians consume Russian state media through Belarusian intermediaries, which are able to tailor Russian broadcasts that better fit the Belarusian narrative. All five of the top television outlets in Belarus rebroadcast Russian state-owned television. Similarly, Russian state-owned media constitute two of the five top radio stations in Belarus. Outside of the Russian government, major Russian media outlets, such as Komsomolskaya Pravda and Russian Planet, make up a large share of the Belarusian media market. As a result, Russia has many strong channels for influence in Belarus.

The remaining outlets that do not rebroadcast Russian content or are not Russian-owned are mostly government owned or influenced. The state-run Belarus Segodnya is the most circulated newspaper in Belarus and Radio Unistar could be influenced through the public Belarusian State University. In addition, independent outlets that cross the government have been targeted, as the most read news site, Tut.by, was shut down for its coverage of the Belarusian protests. As such, the Belarusian government extends considerable influence over independent media as well.

In sum, the Russian government has a number of strong channels for influencing Belarus' media. Centralized media ownership, heavy state control, and the presence of Russian state media outlets and media content provide a clear picture of heavy Russian influence in the Belarusian media space.