

# Ukraine: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels

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# Introduction

What are the entry points for foreign actors to shape and influence the narrative in the Ukrainian 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 the republishing of foreign content in domestic media outlets, interactions on social media, and through 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 Ukraine's 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.

Media ownership in Ukraine is highly centralized around a few politically connected media houses and owners.<sup>1</sup> 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 Ukraine.

This media ownership profile and the supporting data were prepared by AidData, a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute.<sup>2</sup> 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 Ukraine, 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

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<sup>1</sup> Vitalii Ribak. "Yes, Ukraine's Oligarchs Own the Airwaves, But Their Days are Numbered." Atlantic Council. Published January 29, 2018. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/yes-ukraine-s-oligarchs-own-the-airwaves-but-here-s-why-their-days-are-numbered/>

<sup>2</sup> 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, Alexa<sup>3</sup>), as well as Ukrainian business registries, survey data, media watchdog sources, and other open source data. This profile includes data for the entire country of Ukraine and does not separate out any information that may differ in breakaway regions, such as Crimea, Luhansk, or Donetsk.

In the following sections, we provide summary data on the presence of Russian state-owned media, top outlets, and media ownership in Ukraine 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 Ukraine's media landscape is via Russian state-owned media (see Table 1). Five of the eleven Russian state-owned media outlets we tracked have a physical presence in Ukraine which provides the Kremlin with a few channels to directly communicate with, and ultimately influence, Ukrainian citizens. Notably, the Ukrainian government has consistently sanctioned or banned Russian outlets since the Euromaidan events in 2014, preventing some Russian outlets, including Sputnik and RIA Novosti, from broadcasting in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> 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 Ukraine, but does not speak to how well-consumed each outlet is by Ukrainian citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> 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>.

<sup>4</sup> "Ukraine Extends Ban on Russian News Agencies, Journalists." Committee to Protect Journalists. Published May 24, 2018. <https://cpj.org/2018/05/ukraine-extends-ban-on-russian-news-agencies-journ/>

Table 1. Russian state-owned media with a physical presence in Ukraine, 2021

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

Other indirect forms of Russian influence are possible, including domestic outlets republishing narratives and pro-Russian journalists in-country. In this profile, AidData has captured direct Russian channels of influence through state-owned media infrastructure.

## Top Media Outlets

Table 2 identifies the top five most-consumed media outlets in Ukraine by medium (television, print, radio, and online) based on cross-sectional indicators such as viewership share and circulation. While we cannot know 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. Despite the presence of some Russian state-owned media outlets in Ukraine, none of the tracked Russian state media appears in the top five outlets for any medium.

AidData used a weighted average of media consumption survey rankings from 2017 to present to determine the top media outlets in Ukraine. 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 the 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.<sup>5</sup>

Table 2: Top Ukrainian media outlets ranked by overall consumption

Rank	Television	Print	Radio	Online
1	TV Channel Ukraine	Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine	Hit FM	ukr.net
2	1+1	Vesti	Avtoradio Ukraine	pravda.com.ua
3	ICTV	Bulvar Gordona	Lux FM	obozrevatel.com
4	Inter TV	Segodnya	Radio Pyatnica	korrespondent.net
5	STB (STV)	Fakty i Kommentarii	Radio Shanson	unian.ua

According to findings from an AidData survey of regional and local media experts in 2021, the majority of top Ukrainian outlets mirror the results of open-source data collection by AidData researchers. However, additional outlets excluded from this top outlet list but ranked highly by local experts include television channel UA: Pershyi TV; print outlets Novoye Vremya and Den; radio stations Ukrainian Radio and Hromadske Radio; and online outlet censor.net.

## Media Ownership

Table 3 lists the ownership information of top Ukrainian media outlets by medium (television, newspaper, radio, and online). A series of amendments enacted in October 2015 revamped the legal framework of Ukrainian media ownership, requiring television, radio, and print media to make their ownership

<sup>5</sup> Television, Print, and Radio Sources: Television, print, and radio 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 data came from: the Television Industry Committee’s Television Audience Measurement (2021), IREX’s Media Sustainability Index (2019), the USAID-Internews Media Consumption Survey (2021), and the Center for Media, Data, and Society’s Media Influence Matrix Ukraine (2021).

Online Sources: AidData predominantly used data from Alexa (collected April 2021); however, additional data came from the AidData expert media survey (2021), the USAID-Internews Media Consumption Survey (2021), and the Center for Media, Data, and Society’s Media Influence Matrix Ukraine (2021).

structures and final beneficiaries public.<sup>6</sup> However, the law does not require transparency of online outlets and is unevenly enforced, as some outlets are still able to hide their ownership structures.<sup>7</sup> 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, Ukrainian state-owned media is color-coded blue. In Ukraine, six owners had suspected or known ties to the Russian government, and no outlets had direct Russian ownership. As such, this profile has six red color-coded owners and no designations of state-owned media.

Table 3: Ownership of top Ukrainian 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	TV Channel Ukraine	SCM Holdings Ltd	Rinat Akhmetov	100
	2	1+1	Harley Trading Ltd	Ihor Kolomoisky	67.8
			Bolvik Ventures Ltd	Oksana Marchenko	24.7
			1 + 1 Production	Unknown	7.5
	3	ICTV	StarLight Media Ltd	Viktor and Olena Pinchuk	100
4	Inter TV	PJSC TV channel Inter	Viktor Medvedchuk	80	

<sup>6</sup> "OSCE Representative welcomes law on transparency of media ownership in Ukraine as it comes into force." Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Published October 1, 2015. <https://www.osce.org/fom/187956>.

<sup>7</sup> The Vibrant Information Barometer, "2021 Ukraine Report," <https://storage.googleapis.com/vibe.irex.org/Reports/VIBE%20-%20Ukraine%202021.pdf>.

				Serhiy Lyovochkin	20	
	5	STB	StarLight Media Ltd	Viktor and Olena Pinchuk	100	
Print	1	Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine	UMH Group Ltd	Ihor Kolomoisky	Unknown	
	2	Vesti	Multimedia Invest Group LLC	Yuriy Pishko	100	
	3	Bulvar Gordona	Bulvar Newspaper Editorial Office LLC	Dmitry Gordon	100	
	4	Segodnya	SCM Holdings Ltd	Rinat Akhmetov	100	
	5	Fakty i kommentarii	Fakty i Kommentarii Newspaper Editorial LLC	Oleksandr Shvets	100	
Radio	1	Hit FM	Media Market TV and Radio Company LLC	Nikolay Bagrayev	47.5	
				Viktor and Olena Pinchuk	45.2	
				Yana Kutz	4.8	
				TAVR Media Company	Igor Chernyshov	2.5
	2	Avtoradio	UMH Group Ltd	Ihor Kolomoisky	Unknown	
	3	Lux FM	PJSC TV and Radio Company Lux	Kateryna Kit-Sadova	76.8	
				Roman Andreyko	13.1	
				Oksana Andreyko	10.1	
4	Radio Pyatnica	Investment in Development LLC	Denys Kozlitin	100		

	5	Radio Shanson	Top Radio Broadcasting Company, LLC	Anatoly Evtuhov	51
				Larisa Evtuhov	49
Online	1	ukr.net	Ukrnet LLC	Borys Komissaruk	41
				Mikhail Komissaruk	20
				Alexei Komissaruk	20
				Olha Grach	10
				Vitachi Kushnir	9
	2	pravda.com.ua	Dragon Capital Group	Tomas Fiala	Majority
				George Soros	Minority
				Unknown	Minority
	3	obozrevatel.com	Zolota Seredyna LLC	Yuriy Brodsky	55
				Svitlana Brodska	34.9
				Rostyslav Brodsky	10.1
	4	korrespondent.net	UMH Group Ltd	Ihor Kolomoisky	Unknown
	5	unian.ua	1+1 Media Group	Ihor Kolomoisky	98
				Gennadiy Bogolyubov	2



# Results

## Television

Media ownership in Ukraine is highly concentrated amongst Ukraine's oligarchs and the top television outlets are no exception. Political elites own all five of the top television outlets in Ukraine, and in many cases are involved in more than one outlet. The top television station is TV Channel Ukraine (TRK Ukraine), owned by Rinat Akhmetov, a Ukrainian billionaire and oligarch from Donetsk. Akhmetov, like many Ukrainian oligarchs, had many of his assets seized following the Euromaidan events for his connections to the pro-Russian Yanukovich regime.<sup>8</sup> However, Akhmetov still remains one of the richest men in Ukraine and the sole owner of SCM Holdings, the parent company of TRK Ukraine. Akhmetov is also the founder of the "Opposition Bloc," a former pro-Russian opposition party in the Verkhovna Rada.

Ihor Kolomoisky, a Ukrainian oligarch and billionaire, owns the controlling stake in 1+1 Media Group, a media conglomerate that owns and operates eight television stations and two major online outlets, UNIAN and TSN.ua. In addition, Kolomoisky reportedly has ties to current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and bankrolled his presidential campaign.<sup>9</sup> Unlike most Ukrainian oligarchs, Kolomoisky is not actively pro-Russian, and financed the "Dnipro Battalion," a local militia defending parts of Eastern Ukraine from Russian aggression and separatism.<sup>10</sup> However, there are corruption concerns, as Kolomoisky was accused of embezzling \$5 billion from PrivatBank, the largest bank in Ukraine, before the Ukrainian government nationalized it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Krasnikov, Denys. "Court Suspends Renationalization of Ukrtelecom, Still in the Hands of Akhmetov." Kyiv Post. Published June 6, 2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/technology/court-suspends-renationalization-of-ukrtelecom-still-in-hands-of-akhmetov.html>

<sup>9</sup> Maheshwari, Vijai. "The Comedian and the Oligarch." Politico. Published April 17, 2019. <https://www.politico.eu/article/volodomyr-zelenskiy-ihor-kolomoisky-the-comedian-and-the-oligarch-ukraine-presidential-election/>

<sup>10</sup> Cullison, Alan. "Ukraine's Secret Weapon: Feisty Oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky." Wall Street Journal. Published June 27, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-secret-weapon-feisty-oligarch-ihor-kolomoisky-1403886665>

<sup>11</sup> Maheshwari, Vijai. "The Comedian and the Oligarch." April 17, 2019.

However, Kolomoisky does not have sole ownership of 1+1 Media. Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Surkis formerly owned a sizable minority stake in the conglomerate, reportedly selling his stake to Oksana Marchenko, the wife of pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk. This is not Medvedchuk's only television station ownership either, as pro-Russian exiled oligarch Dmytro Firtash offloaded his shares in Inter TV to Medvedchuk prior to his departure from Ukraine and subsequent arrest.<sup>12</sup> Medvedchuk is reportedly tied to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is the godfather to his daughter.<sup>13</sup> In May 2021, the Ukrainian government charged Medvedchuk with treason, froze his assets, and placed him under house arrest.<sup>14</sup> While Medvedchuk is technically still the owner of Surkis' stake in 1+1 Media and Firtash's stake in Inter TV, his arrest puts a question mark on who actually controls two of the top television outlets in Ukraine.

Serhiy Lyovochkin, a member of parliament and long-time associate of Firtash and Medvedchuk, also owns a minority stake in Inter TV. Lyovochkin, Firtash, and Medvedchuk were all founding members of the Opposition Platform - For Life, the largest pro-Russian political party in the Verkhovna Rada.

Viktor Pinchuk and his wife Olena own the final top two outlets in Ukrainian television— ICTV and STB. While the official ownership breakdown of media conglomerate StarLight Media Ltd is unknown, Viktor Pinchuk unofficially controls the company as the final Ukrainian oligarch on the list of top television owners. Olena Pinchuk is the daughter of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, and Viktor Pinchuk has benefited from her connections with the Kuchma regime, earning exclusive business deals during the former president's tenure.<sup>15</sup> However, Pinchuk has remained mostly out of politics recently,

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<sup>12</sup> "Medvedchuk reportedly buys 80% of TV Channel Inter from fugitive oligarch Firtash – media." UNIAN. Published June 30, 2019. <https://www.unian.info/politics/amp-10601421-medvedchuk-reportedly-buys-80-of-tv-channel-inter-from-fugitive-oligarch-firtash-media.html>

<sup>13</sup> Kamenev, Maxim. "Viktor Medvedchuk: Politychna Lehalizatsiia." Published August 7, 2018. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/viktor-medvedchuk-politychna-lehalizatsiia>; "Kyiv Would 'Gladly' Swap Medvedchuk For Ukrainian Prisoners In Russia, Says Top Official." RFE/RL. Published May 15, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-medvedchuk-russia-prisoner-swap-treason/31256736.html>

<sup>14</sup> "Суд дав дозвіл на затримання Козака." Ukrainian Pravda. Published May 20, 2021. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/05/20/7294233/>

<sup>15</sup> Hess, Maximilian. "Wooing the West: Who is Ukraine's Viktor Pinchuk?" Eurasianet. Published February 26, 2020. <https://eurasianet.org/wooing-the-west-who-is-ukraines-viktor-pinchuk>

avoiding pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian conflict and focusing on business dealings, rather than political power.

Television ownership in Ukraine is dominated by Ukrainian oligarchs with ties to political regimes, both internal and external. Internally, top television owners have strong ties to former Ukrainian Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich and current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Many owners are themselves politicians in Ukraine as well, operating or founding political parties. Externally, Rinat Akhmetov, Viktor Medvedchuk, and Serhiy Lyovochkin are all pro-Russian oligarchs and have ties in the highest echelons of Russian government. As such, those sympathetic to Russian influence dominate the Ukrainian television industry, which provides many channels for Kremlin involvement. In addition, despite moves from the Ukrainian government to ban Russian TV channels and Ukrainian channels with Russian state content, Russian entertainment still plays a major role in many Ukrainian television channels.<sup>16</sup> In sum, through pro-Russian oligarchs, the Russian government has many channels of influence in Ukrainian television.

## Print

Like television, Ukrainian oligarchs dominate print media ownership in Ukraine. Many of the same names appear in print media: Ihor Kolomoisky acquired UMH Group in 2020, which owns *Argumenty i Fakty*, the most-circulated newspaper, and Rinat Akhmetov's SCM Holdings owns *Segodnya*, the fourth most-circulated newspaper in Ukraine.

Kolomoisky's acquisition of UMH Group highlights the relationship between the Ukrainian government and top media owners. UMH Group was formerly owned by pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch Serhiy Kurchenko. Kurchenko has been a fugitive since 2014; however, the Ukrainian government seized his assets in 2017, including UMH Group. In 2020, Kolomoisky's 1+1 Internet won the bid for

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<sup>16</sup> Polman, Mitchell. "Russian-language media: Can Ukraine compete with the Kremlin?" Atlantic Council. Published April 15, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russian-language-media-can-ukraine-compete-with-the-kremlin/>

ownership over UMH Group and holdings.<sup>17</sup> Due to Kolomoisky's ties with President Zelensky, some oligarchs accused Zelensky of favoring Kolomoisky in this massive acquisition from the government. Now with Argumenti i Fakty in tow, Kolomoisky has an even more dominant position in Ukrainian media than before, and owns a major Russian-language newspaper in addition to the eight television stations mentioned above.

Another oligarch, Alexander Klimenko, owns Vesti, the second most-circulated newspaper in Ukraine. The ownership structure of Vesti is highly opaque, as a number of proxy companies have been established as owners of Vesti. Multimedia Invest Group LLC is the owner of Vesti, which was formerly owned by Ilya Guzhva, former editor-in-chief of Vesti. However, Guzhva left his position in 2017, ultimately revealing that fugitive oligarch-in-exile Alexander Klimenko was the full beneficiary of Vesti. According to the Ukrainian business registry, an unknown individual named Yuri Pishko is the current owner of Multimedia Invest Group LLC;<sup>18</sup> however, this individual acts as a proxy for Alexander Klimenko. Klimenko's wife Olga Semchenko is the head of Vesti's Board of Directors, and the newspaper consistently promotes pro-Klimenko content.<sup>19</sup> Klimenko was the former Minister of Revenue and Duties under President Viktor Yanukovich; following Yanukovich's departure, Klimenko fled to Russia, while the Ukrainian government charged him with corruption and high treason in absentia. In spring 2021, the Ukrainian government dropped the charges against Klimenko and unfroze his assets; however, Klimenko appears to continue to reside in Russia.<sup>20</sup>

The third most-circulated newspaper in Ukraine, Bulvar Gordona, is owned by Dmitry Gordon, a longtime Ukrainian journalist. The first non-oligarch on this list, Gordon worked as a journalist for top newspapers since 1983, before founding Bulvar Gordona (then just "Bulvar") in 1995. Gordon is also known for holding

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<sup>17</sup> "Компанія Коломойського управлятиме УМХ" Detector Media. Published September 11, 2020. <https://detector.media/rinok/article/180529/2020-09-11-kompaniya-kolomoyskogo-upravlyatym-e-umkh/>

<sup>18</sup> "Пішко Юрій Ростиславович." OpenData. Last updated February 11, 2020. <https://opendatabot.ua/p/1DVU907>.

<sup>19</sup> Milakovsky, Brian. "Vesti: Weapon or casualty in the information war?" Open Democracy. Published October 19, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> "Помилка' прокурора: як біглий ексміністр доходів Олександр Клименко перестав бути підозрюваним і повернув елітне майно." Bihus.info. Published August 17, 2021. <https://bihus.info/pomylka-prokurora-yak-biglyj-eksministr-dohodiv-oleksandr-klymenko-perestav-but-y-pidozryvanym-i-povernuv-elitne-majno/>.

truth to power through his interview series “Visiting Dmitry Gordon,” where he interviews famous politicians, athletes, and other public figures.<sup>21</sup> In 2019, Gordon had his first foray into politics, working as the head of the election headquarters for Ihor Smeshko’s Strength and Honor party. However, despite his support for Smeshko, Gordon remains predominantly a journalist.

Like Bulvar Gordona, Fakty i Kommentarii, the fifth most-circulated newspaper in Ukraine, is not owned by an oligarch. Formerly the property of oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, the newspaper was sold to long-time General Director and Editor-in-chief Oleksandr Shvets. Shvets has been a major journalist in Ukraine since 1992 and is known for his independence; however, he also has loyalties to former President Leonid Kuchma.<sup>22</sup> Bulvar Gordona and Fakty i Kommentarii mark the only top media outlets in either television or print to have non-oligarchic ownership.

## Radio

Ukrainian oligarchs continue to dominate the top radio outlets. The Tavr Media Group, a media conglomerate controlled by the Pinchuk and Bagrayev families, is the parent company of the top radio station Hit FM. Viktor and Olena Pinchuk own a controlling stake in Tavr Media and their other media holdings are discussed in prior sections. The key players in the Bagrayev family are Nikolay Bagrayev, founder of Tavr Media in 2003 and a member of the Verkhovna Rada from 2002-2014, his wife Svitlana, and his son, Ruslan. While Viktor Pinchuk is considered an oligarch, Nikolay Bagrayev is a former politician with media ownership and political connections.

The second and fourth most-listened to radio stations are Radio Pyatnica and Avtoradio, both former holdings of Kurchenko’s UMH Group before the Ukrainian government seized control of the company. Radio Pyatnica was sold off to Investment in Development LLC, formerly owned by lawyer Maxim

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<sup>21</sup> Romanyuk, Roman and Eldar Sarakhman. “‘I told Smeshka: If you don't go, I'll go...’ - Dmitry Gordon.” Ukrayinskaya Pravda. Published June 13, 2019.

<https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/06/13/7217949/>

<sup>22</sup> “АЛЕКСАНДР ШВЕЦ О ЖЕЛТИЗНЕ И РЕСПЕКТАБЕЛЬНОСТИ, СВОЁМ ДВОЙНИКЕ И БЛАГОДАРНОСТИ КУЧМЕ.” Detector Media. Published August 4, 2021.

<https://video.detector.media/special-projects/aleksandr-shvec-o-zheltyzne-y-respektabelnosty-svojom-dvoynike-y-blagodarnosti-kuchme-i76>

Varlamov and now owned by Denys Kozlitin. According to media reports, Investment in Development LLC was implicated in a money-laundering scheme with Alexander Yanukovych, the son of former pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych in 2013.<sup>23</sup> However, no clear ties between Yanukovych and Kozlitin currently exist, as the company only reformed in 2018. The Ukrainian government appears to have sold Avtoradio as part of the UMH Group package to Ihor Kolomoisky and not sold separately like Radio Pyatnica.<sup>24</sup>

Another politician involved in radio, Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi is the co-founder of Lux Radio, the third most-listened outlet in Ukraine. Sadovyi's wife, Kateryna Kit-Sadova, is the majority shareholder of Lux Radio today, splitting ownership with co-founder Roman Andreyko and his wife Oksana. As Mayor of Lviv, Sadovyi became leader of the pro-European Self-Reliance Party, and actively opposed Russian involvement in Ukraine. Co-founder Andreyko is also politically active and a close friend of Sadovyi as a former Lviv city council member.

Finally, the fifth most-listened to radio station is Radio Shanson, a traditional music radio station. Owned by Anatoliy Evtuhov and his wife Larisa, Radio Shanson falls under Business Radio Group's holdings, along with DJ FM, Business FM, and Power FM. Evtuhov founded Business Radio Group and formerly owned Fokus Group as well, before selling it to Alexander Borshchevich.<sup>25</sup> He reportedly got his start as a Radio DJ, and has remained an influential media businessman in the radio industry, though he has largely stayed out of the public eye. His son, Evgeny Evtuhov, is also a radio DJ and the head of DJ FM, and reportedly a former candidate for the pro-Russian Shariy Party.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Кандидат у мультиплекс Зеленського. Колишній CEO Парковий про купівлю телеканалу у сім'ї засновника АТБ і ТВ-бізнес в Україні — інтерв'ю." NV Business. Published July 28, 2021. <https://biz.nv.ua/ukr/tech/radio-p-yatnicya-era-prodakshn-kanal-centralniy-vintazh-tb-i-plani-na-multipleks-mh-7-interv-yu-50173719.html>

<sup>24</sup> The details surrounding UMH Group's bidding process have made ownership somewhat unclear. While AidData Staff have confirmed that Ihor Kolomoisky's 1+1 Internet won the bid for UMH Group, it is unknown exactly what pieces of UMH Group the Ukrainian government left intact. Kozlitin's ownership of Radio Pyatnica is based on official Ukrainian government ownership records updated in 2021; however, it is possible that this is temporary until UMH Group is fully transferred under Kolomoisky's ownership.

<sup>25</sup> "СОБСТВЕННИКОМ ООО «ФОКУС МЕДИА» СТАЛ АЛЕКСАНДР БОРЩЕВИЧ, ИЗДАНИЕ ФОКУС ВОЗГЛАВИЛ АЛЕКСЕЙ ГАЗУБЕЙ." ICTV.ua. Published May 2020. <https://ictv.ua/ru/media-news/fokus-otrymav-novoho-vlasnyka/>.

<sup>26</sup> "The CEC registered the son of the owner of "Radio Chanson" Yevtukhov as a candidate for deputy: what is known." 24 Kanal. Published July 2, 2019. [https://24tv.ua/ru/cik\\_zaregistrirovala\\_syna\\_vladelca\\_radio\\_shanson\\_evtuhova\\_kandidatom\\_v\\_deputaty\\_chno\\_izvestno\\_n1173910](https://24tv.ua/ru/cik_zaregistrirovala_syna_vladelca_radio_shanson_evtuhova_kandidatom_v_deputaty_chno_izvestno_n1173910).

Ultimately, Anatoliy Evtuhov is an elusive media owner, and his ties are largely unclear.

Despite the presence of oligarchs Viktor Pinchuk and Ihor Kolomoisky, top Ukrainian radio outlets include some non-oligarchic ownership by politicians, such as former Verkhovna Rada member Nikolay Bagrayev and Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi. In addition, despite the allegations that Kozlitin is tied to the Yanukovich regime, AidData staff uncovered no visible ties between the current owners of Radio Pyatnica and oligarchs.

## Online

Top online media outlets in Ukraine have slightly more diverse ownership than traditional media outlets, though many of the same oligarchs are players online as well. Ukr.net, a news aggregation website drawing headlines from across the internet, is the most visited online media website in Ukraine. Borys Komissaruk, Olha Grach, and Vitachi Kushnir founded Ukr.net in 1998, and all three founders are also owners of the website, along with Borys' son Mikhail and Alexei, a relative in Venezuela. In addition to owning one-fifth of Ukr.net's shares, Mikhail Komissaruk is the company's CEO, taking over the position from his father.

While news aggregation sites are among the most popular online media outlets in Ukraine, online media outlets that create their own content round out the top five. In May 2021, long-time owner of Ukrayinska Pravda, Olena Prytula, announced that she had sold 100% of the outlet to Tomas Fiala's Dragon Capital Group. Fiala, who also acquired popular outlet Novoye Vremya, runs one of the largest Ukrainian investment groups. Dragon Capital Group is known for their pro-Western stance, as billionaire George Soros is a current partner, and Goldman Sachs Group formerly owned a minority stake in the investment group.

Obozrevatel.com is the third most-visited news site in Ukraine. Founded by Mykhailo Brodsky, his sons Yuriy and Rotyslav and his wife Svitlana now own the website. Like many Ukrainian media owners, Brodsky is actively involved in politics, serving as a member of the Verkhovna Rada, as well as Chairman of the

State Committee for Regulatory Policy and Entrepreneurship before its liquidation in 2014.<sup>27</sup>

While online outlets in Ukraine have slightly more diverse ownership than traditional sources in Ukraine, there is a continued oligarchic presence online. Ihor Kolomoisky owns both the fourth and fifth most-visited online outlets, Korrespondent.net and UNIAN.ua. Kolomoisky acquired Korrespondent through his aforementioned controversial acquisition of UMH Group, and previously acquired UNIAN with his long-time business partner Gennadiy Bogolyubov through his 1+1 Media Group. Kolomoisky owns at least one top five outlet in every medium, highlighting the concern regarding media concentration in the hands of Ukraine's oligarchs.

Online outlets in Ukraine follow a regional trend of more open media outlets. Although there is less regulation of online outlets, which provides a potential channel for hidden malign influence, journalists have a space to turn a critical eye on the government without relying on oligarch-owned traditional media. Online outlets also provide a space for new figures to enter the Ukrainian media market, such as Tomas Fiala, preventing oligarchic influence from dominating every medium. But as noted, oligarchs are not absent from the media space, since Ihor Kolomoisky now owns the fourth and fifth most-visited online outlets in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

In this brief, we have presented an overview of the domestic media environment of Ukraine. The collected data highlight three major trends in Ukrainian media. First, Ukrainian media is dominated by a centralized political elite. Second, the majority of Ukrainian media owners have ties to the Russian government. Third, the Ukrainian government is attempting to curb media centralization and Russian influence, despite the political power of Ukrainian oligarchs.

To address the first trend, Ukrainian oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky, Rinat Akhmetov, Viktor Pinchuk, Viktor Medvedchuk, and Alexander Klimenko own shares in 12 of

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<sup>27</sup> "Brodsky will sit in Kuzhel's chair?" Ukrayinska Pravda. Published March 23, 2010. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2010/03/23/4884480/>



the 20 outlets that AidData staff investigated. Five individuals dominate the media space in Ukraine and their ownership of these media outlets arguably allow them to shape the narrative around corruption ties, the government, and Ukraine's War in Donbass, giving them significant power. In addition, Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi and former-Verkhovna Rada member Mykhailo Brodsky control two of the eight outlets without ties to an oligarch, with only six total outlets owned by individuals that are not former Ukrainian politicians. This centralization of ownership provides a channel for political influence, both overt and hidden.

Second, the deep connections between the Russian government and many of these powerful oligarchs create an accessible indirect channel for Kremlin influence. While the Ukrainian government has blocked or censored many Russian media outlets, the high number of Russian speakers in Ukraine and the ties between Ukrainian media owners and the Russian government prevent Ukraine's leaders from effectively blocking Kremlin influence. Some of these oligarchs actively support Russian influence in Ukraine, as former media owners Serhiy Kurchenko and Dmytro Firtash and current media owners Viktor Medvedchuk, Serhiy Lyovochkin, and Rinat Akhmetov all have been members of pro-Russian political parties in Ukraine. Medvedchuk is known to be particularly close with Russian President Vladimir Putin. These close ties between Russia and Ukrainian media owners provide a space for Russian influence in Ukrainian media.

Third, despite Russia's many channels of influence in Ukraine, Ukrainian officials are making moves to strengthen media vulnerabilities. The arrest and exile of pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarchs Dmytro Firtash, Serhiy Kurchenko, and Viktor Medvedchuk, as well as the government-forced shutdown of pro-Russian channels 112, ZIK, and NewsOne in February 2021 highlight a desire to combat foreign influence in the media space.<sup>28</sup> Ukrainian oligarchs continue to dominate the media landscape; however, there are some exceptions. Online outlets have relatively less oligarchic control, meaning that the Kremlin has to find other channels to influence the online media space. Additionally, oligarch Viktor Pinchuk sold Fakty i Kommentarii to Oleksandr Shvets and Serhiy Kurchenko's

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<sup>28</sup> Dickinson, Peter. "Analysis: Ukraine bans Kremlin-linked TV channels." Atlantic Council. Published February 5, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/analysis-ukraine-bans-kremlin-linked-tv-channels/>

UMH Group lost Radio Pyatnica to Denys Kozlitsin, adding new owners to the media market.

In sum, the Russian government has significant channels to influence Ukrainian citizens through the media. With some Russian state-owned media outlets still operating in the country, as well as Russian-affiliated Ukrainian oligarchs dominating the media market, the potential for Kremlin influence is abundant in Ukraine. However, recent steps by the Ukrainian government have moved towards a more diverse media landscape and away from the pro-Russian centralized landscape of the past.