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## **Television and The Public Sphere in Russia**

To explore the correlation between television and the public sphere, we have to turn to the concept of public sphere itself.

According to the classical definition, offered by a German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, the public sphere is “a realm of social life where the energy of public opinion is generated to be consequently transformed into an effective political force able to keep state bureaucracies accountable to their citizens. To reach its full potential, the public sphere has to possess two basic characteristics: the discussion of public matters should be rational, and all citizens should have free access to it. Mass media should be accessible to the general public and contain rational discussions of legitimate public concerns” (Habermas, 1962/1989, cited in Baysha, 2010).

The public sphere can be divided into 2 parts – official (or mainstream) and parallel (or alternative) ones.

In terms of media, the official public sphere is represented by the large, widespread media (mostly government itself or state-owned companies) are subordinate to censorship and filtering of their content (Koltsova, 2006 cited in Kiriya, 2012). The parallel public sphere has its institutionalized form (opposition tv-channels and media outlets), as well as in a non-institutionalized one (blogs and social networks) (Kiriya, 2012).

Talking about mass media, we touch mostly the mainstream public sphere, and I would like to focus on the role of mass media in its construction.

Let's focus on Russian television, which is owned by state or state-owned companies. Despite of the spread of new media and the technological development, television keeps being media #1 in Russia (television industry report, 2012), that open the access to the large audience.

Why does it important? It can't be denied that media reproduce and construct discourses that have an ideological effect (van Dijk, 2013, Fairclough,2003).

As Norman Fairclough writes:

*“One of the causal effects of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysis is ideological effects ... ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (Fairclough, 2003).*

Have defining the connection among media, discourse and power, I can conclude that access to discourse creates opportunities for constructing audience's opinion.

When we are talking about state owned television in Russia, we are talking about state-centric discourse, which reproduce social and political stability.

I would say that this stability has 2 correlated dimensions.

Setting national government-centric agenda and constructing corresponding discourse, television marginalizes and isolates opposition and politically active people from the official public sphere and, in particular, from political debates. Because of that, the mainstream public sphere becomes narrowed.

The second aspect is that the constructed stability shows a kind of social and political consensus. In terms of politics, media and reproduction of the consensus are a result of some negotiations, I would like to turn to work “On the political” by Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe. She writes: “properly political questions always involve decisions, which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives.” (Mouffe, cited in Engel, 2006, pp 2). Hereby hegemony can be considered as a “sedimentation of power relation, which results from these decisions” (2007, pp 2). Nevertheless, there is a possibility to create contra-

discourse, or contra-hegemonic actions. The clash of mainstream hegemonic and contra- discourses leads to state of “antagonism”.

Talking about political community and contestation within this field, Mouffe suggest two terms characterizing the division within political space – “antagonism” and “agonism”. She explains: “Antagonism is relationship between enemies; they want to destroy each other. Agonism is relationship among adversaries”. The core difference of this distinction is that “you respect the right of the opponent to defense his or her point of view” (Mouffe, 2007). So, the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism into agonism. It can be done by providing channels through which “collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues, which won’t construct the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary” (Mouffe, 2007).

In the context of Mouffe’s concept, we can conclude, that television can be consider as this kind of channel.

As a real opposition is excluded from politically debate on Russian television, the public space, constructed by television, is artificially agonistic.

Television is also trying to constructs consensus among these political forces. In my opinion the image of this consensus looks like not as a kind of gold middle between confronting ideas, but something, that everyone supports, e.g. about attitude to the annexation of Crimea or critics of homosexuality.

Maybe, this kind of consensus is created for transformation political antagonism into agonism, but in my opinion, that leads to further isolation of opposition and intensification of antagonism.

In this paper I tried to show the television influence on public sphere in Russia. Isolating and marginalizing opposition, tv-channels leave it beyond the political debate that leads to narrowing public sphere.

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