

The Centre for Media Studies at SSE Riga

Report 2014/2015

Background

The recent developments in the Baltic region and further eastward have resulted in a situation where Riga has become the hub in the 'information war' between Russia and the West. This can be seen in a number of activities, for example:

- Open and hidden propaganda, e.g. Russia is establishing large news agencies in the former Soviet Republics that are now independent nations. Russian television dominates what the Russian-speaking population view outside Russia.
- New players in the fields of information, e.g. Russian language independent news-providers are growing.
- Latvian and Estonian public services realize that too little has been done to keep their Russian population informed in Russian and try to change that.
- Awareness within the EU, EU Member States and the Nordic Council of Ministers to meet the propaganda. The strategy for this is under discussion. Some advocates anti/counter-propaganda whereas others suggest independent journalism.

As the Centre for Media Studies continues being an active agent for change and improvement in the region, these developments naturally have affected the Centres activities. With a focus on independent journalism, a number of educational activities have been (and will be) organized in order promote ethical values and quality journalism.

In doing so, the Centre has during 2014/2015 cooperated with Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP – based in Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina), the Foreign Ministry of Latvia, the Government in Estonia, The Nordic Council of Ministers, Latvian Public Service Television and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as with the Latvian investigative reporting project Re:baltica.

Activities 2014/2015

Overall comments

The support from Anne-Marie och Gustaf Anders Stiftelse för Medieforskning (the Ander Foundation) being pivotal for the establishment of the Centre still plays the pivotal role and serves as the basis or core for the Centre and its activities.

Among the highlights during 2014/2015 were:

- The main educational programme has been and will continue to be the Summer School. In August of 2014 it was held for the third time. Its overarching theme has since the launch been organized crime and corruption. In addition to this theme the 2014 Summer School provided training in how to conduct research. A fourth Summer School will take place in August of 2015.
- When sanctions were imposed on Russia in autumn 2014 professor Morten Hansen at SSE Riga gave a seminar for 50 journalists about the effects on the Baltic countries.
- When the Russian Rouble fell dramatically 2015 professor Hansen once again held a seminar for 55 journalists. Following this presentation, he and the Centre were quoted 35 times in Latvian Media.
- When UNESCO Press Freedom Day was held in Riga The Media Centre was invited to present a pre-seminar since the main seminars did not include Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan in any critical manner. Among the activities included in the programme organized by the Centre were:
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 - Roman Anin, news editor at Novaya Gazeta, and Mikhail Zygar, head of Dozhd TV (also known as TV Rain), each gave a talk on the present situation in Russia.
 - Galina Timchenko and Ivan Kolpakov, presented the media project Meduza.
 - Drew Sullivan, Pavla Holove and Tamás Bodoky presented a recent study by Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) showing that political interests and even organized crime own many of the region's largest media outlets. In the light of what policy strategists identify as 'weaponization' of information and the growth of propaganda, how we ensure that the people will find unbiased information?

- The Media Centre initiated a course for the Bachelor students at SSE Riga – Introduction to Media (five seminars) – three years ago. These classes are delivered by Sanita Jemberga and Inga Springe from Re:baltica.

As the Media Centre now has become a well-known and respected factor in The Baltic States, in Sweden and has a growing position in the EU Partnership countries we are approached by different interests and in some cases we agree to assist and support.

- The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNESCO through the Press Freedom Day as mentioned above.
- The Government of Estonia has invited the Centre to do develop and deliver two-day seminars in Tallinn and Narva about verification of news.
 - In 2014 the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs approached the Centre with a request to organize 16 days of classes dealing with qualified education in investigate reporting in general and how to scrutinize organized crime and corruption in particular. The request resulted in the programme “Journalism for Future Challenges” offered to journalists from the Eastern Partnership countries. In total the group spent three times one week in Riga for the training. This program continues with a new group of journalists and now with funding from the Swedish Institute,
 - At the request from Latvian Public Service television the Centre organized a five-day seminar on the subject “Journalism in hostile environments”.
 - After a request from the Nordic Council of Ministers the Centre to delivered a programme for Russian speaking journalists in Daugavpils in Latvia and Narva in Estonia.

Other noteworthy activities:

- Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe, gave a talk to the participants in the Eastern Partnership Programme.

Organization

The Centre does not have any full time staff. The resources at SSE Riga are mainly used on a project basis. Responsible for the overall administration is Anders Alexanderson, for content Hans Månson with Elga Praulina at SSE Riga Executive Education and Sabine Sile (on project basis) responsible for coordination and delivery of programmes and projects. The organisation is overall project based which makes it possible to expand the activities based on needs.

List of Activities

2014 (autumn)

- Summer school 2014
- How normal is the Latvian political system? Evening school in politics for journalists with professor Daunis Auers. (Every Wednesday during five weeks)
- Research “Is there live after the crisis?” Analysis of the Baltic media’s Finances and Audiences. In cooperation with Re:Baltica.
- Seminar with Hans Luik from Tallinn on the occasion of the report “Is there live after the crisis?”
- Seminar in cooperation with Magazine IR on entrepreneurship.
- Seminar about ethics with the Latvian Journalist Federation
- “How to finance quality media”, workshop for publishers with Kevin Davis.
- “Journalism for Future Challenges”, modules II and III of the 2014 programme.
- “Winners & Losers – the Impact of the Russian Sanctions”, journalist seminar with Morten Hansen.
- Three days study trip to the Baltic Region for Svenska Nyhetsbyrån. The Centre organized the programme, which took place in Riga and Vilnius.

2015 (spring)

- Programme (module I) for journalists from the 2015 Eastern Partnership countries “Journalism for Future Challenges”
- “Introduction to the Media Literacy”, (7 weeks.) offered within the SSE Riga B.Sc. Programme in cooperation with Re:baltica. The course provided an introduction to independent quality journalism and its role and impact in a democratic society and market economy. This year’s format was different and more hands on. The students had to undertake research and develop a story based on the research. The story was on short-term loans, sms-credits. The story got wide media attention in Latvia and was followed by parliament decision to regulate the industry.
- Internship to the two best students in the elective course at Re:Baltica.
- Debate in collaboration with Debate Club QuoTuDomā following the article on sms-credits.
- “Down, down, down... Implication for the Russian Economy of Lower Oil Prices and Weaker rouble”, journalist seminar with Morten Hansen.
- Training programme for Latvian journalists on refugee issues

- Co-organizer with the Latvian Government and UNESCO on the World Press Freedom Day that was held in Riga in connection with the Latvian EU Presidency.
- Side event World Press Freed Day: “The media situation in Eastern Partnership and Russia” Participants among others: Drew Sullivan, Mikhail Zygar, Roman Anin, and Galina Timchenko.
- Mapping Estonian Media landscape preparation for program in News Verification to given in Estonia in 2015/2016.
- Throughout the activity year the Centre supported the publication of the Baltic Journal of Economics.