
Ukrainian NGOs as Opinion Makers: How Media Organizations Communicate about Progress in New Democracy with Western Donors

Les organitzacions no governamentals d'Ucraïna líders d'opinió: com els mitjans de les organitzacions fan progressar la democràcia amb suport occidental

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In the last 20 years, multiple media NGOs in Ukraine have been actively protecting the freedom of speech in the country with help of many Western donors who supported the development of its independent media system. Through systematic funding efforts and multiple programs, Western donors helped to inspire, encourage, and instill values, qualities, and attributes of the independent media among Ukrainian journalists. Western donors funded the establishment of new independent media outlets and media-related organizations in Ukraine to support freedom of speech in the country and to establish a solid network of media NGOs to monitor, report, and publicly announce any freedom of speech violations. This study investigates whether media or media NGOs in Ukraine became the most effective opinion makers in convincing Western donors to support them throughout the years. This study reports the results of the 38 interviews with re-

En els últims vint anys, molts canals d'informació de les ONG a Ucraïna han actuat activament protegint la llibertat d'expressió amb l'ajut de molts col·laboradors econòmics que han afavorit el desenvolupament del seu sistema de difusió informativa. Per mitjà d'esforços constants financers i molts programes d'ajut, els donants occidentals han permès inspirar, encoratjar i transmetre valors i atributs característics dels mitjans independents entre els periodistes ucraïnesos. Els donants occidentals han finançat l'establiment de nous canals de comunicació i mitjans propis d'organitzacions ucraïneses per tal de consolidar la llibertat d'expressió al país i establir una sòlida xarxa informativa de les ONG que pugui vigilar i publicar qualsevol violació de les llibertats d'expressió. Aquest estudi presenta els resultats de 38 enquestes amb representants dels donants occidentals i dels mitjans de les ONG locals. Els resul-

presentatives of Western donors and local media NGOs. The results demonstrated that Western donor support has been influential in the establishment and the development of the vast majority of media monitoring organizations, media and journalist training organizations, media NGOs and, to a lesser extent, actual independent media outlets in Ukraine. Based on the results of this study, the paper demonstrates that the media NGOs in Ukraine were actual opinion makers in regard to the status of freedom of speech in Ukraine, not the media outlets. The study discusses challenges and opportunities that Ukrainian media NGOs face as they continue to grow their presence in Ukraine. The study discusses which strategies of these NGOs as opinion makers are perceived as most sustainable and most effective by the Western donors. The paper concludes with practical implications and recommendations to media-related NGOs that operate in Ukraine, as well as other young democracies and countries in transition.

Key words: *Ukrainian NGO's, opinion makers, media NGO's, Ukrainian journalist, young democracies.*

tats demostren que els col·laboradors financers han influït en la consolidació i el desenvolupament de la gran majoria dels mitjans d'organitzacions amb supervisió, dels mitjans d'organitzacions amb formació de periodistes, dels mitjans de les ONG i, amb menor influència, en els canals informatius independents d'Ucraïna. Els resultats de l'estudi constaten que els mitjans de les ONG a Ucraïna són formadors d'opinió respecte al manteniment de la llibertat d'expressió, no quant a informació periodística. L'estudi també tracta sobre reptes i oportunitats que tenen els mitjans de les ONG a causa d'un creixement continuat al país. A més a més, analitza quines estratègies d'aquestes ONG, com a formadores d'opinió, es perceben com a més sostenibles i més efectives per part dels donants occidentals. L'article acaba amb implicacions pràctiques i recomanacions als mitjans de les ONG que operen a Ucraïna, extensives a altres incipients joves democràcies.

Paraules clau: *ONG ucraïneses, líders d'opinió, mitjans ONG, periodistes ucraïnesos, democràcies joves.*

Until a few months ago, Ukraine, a new yet fragile democratic state, has been perceived as a country that successfully and peacefully transitioned from a post-Soviet autocratic to a young democratic state. Today, Ukraine is involved in the military conflict and is under increasing pressures from its powerful neighbor Russia. Yet, the Ukrainian media are active, fierce, brave, and remain largely independent despite pressures from the government, the businesses, and the opposition, and freedom of speech is one of the most important topics for discussion among the media professionals. Ukraine is the only non-EU country, formed as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was able

to withstand multiple pressures and progressively pursue freedom of speech in the last 20 years. Recent changes in the media ownership laws and continuous fight for freedom of speech despite the 2013 political changes and the 2014 crisis demonstrated that the media in Ukraine has a strong stand and a clear sense of the importance of freedom of expression.

This paper argues that this outcome in big part happened because many Western donors, such as foundations, NGOs, and Western governments, provided the systematic support and encouragement to multiple independent media outlets and media-related NGOs in Ukraine. Over the last 20 years, Ukrainian NGOs and the media have been actively protecting the freedom of speech in Ukraine with help of many Western donors who supported the development of the independent media system in this country. These Western donors were true opinion makers among media professionals in Ukraine in terms of forming their understanding of freedom of speech. Through systematic funding efforts and multiple programs, Western donors helped to inspire, encourage, and instill values, qualities, and attributes of the independent media among Ukrainian journalists. Western donors funded the establishment of qualitatively new, independent media organizations in Ukraine. Today, these organizations fight for freedom of speech in the country through the established, solid network of media NGOs that monitor, report, and publicly announce any freedom of speech violations.

But despite a large number of donations and extensive monetary support of Ukrainian media and NGOs, donors and media development professionals still lack sufficient information whether these donations and continuous support have contributed to the development of the independent media in Ukraine and whether these efforts paid off. This study, first of its kind, collected qualitative data from representatives of Western donors as well as representatives of the Ukrainian media and media-related NGOs to examine what role, if any, Western donors' support had played in the development of the independent media system in Ukraine in the last 20 years. Specifically, the study seeks to identify whether Ukrainian media outlets of media NGOs are the most effective opinion makers in convincing Western donors to support them throughout the years. In other words, which organizations were able to convince Western donors that they are the most effective freedom of speech fighters in Ukraine and how did they do it? Thus, the study identified examples of most successful donor-funded media interventions in Ukraine. In addition, this research craved to answer a question which Ukrainian independent media and media-related NGOs were most effective in working with Western donors and why?

Western donors were true opinion makers in regard to establishing the institutions of independent media in the country. They financed, encouraged, and monitored the development of the media system in Ukraine and empowered journalists, reports, and media activists by allowing them to establish current media and NGO structures to support the development of alternative media voices and to monitor freedom of speech violations in Ukraine. Yet, equally impressive were the Ukrainian media-related NGOs which have worked with Western donors throughout the years in convincing them and systematically demonstrating

the progress in achieving (or lack of thereof) freedom of speech in Ukraine. As this research showed, these media NGOs turned out to be true opinion makers as they were able to keep Western donors engaged in discussions about the importance of systematic support of freedom of speech in Ukraine and were able to persuade Western donors to support multiple media and freedom of speech monitoring NGOs in Ukraine.

This research is significant because for the first time it provides a detailed account of a complex relationship between representatives of independent media outlets and media NGOs of Ukraine and representatives of Western donors who have supported the media development in the country for over 20 years. Only between 2008 and 2011, Western donors provided more than nine million US dollars to support various independent media projects in Ukraine, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) alone has provided more than 1.7 billion US dollars worth of assistance to Ukraine to support numerous civil society, democratic initiatives, and media development in the country (USAID, 2011). Yet, there have been no systematic studies to comprehensively evaluate the status of the independent media system and multiple Western donors' influence of such development in Ukraine. This study offers a benchmark for evaluating the donor-funded media development interventions in countries of Eastern Europe. Thus, this research has tremendous practical value as it provides answers to important questions of evaluation and measurement of civil society efforts by various governmental agencies of the USA and other Western donors in regard to independent media and civil society development in Ukraine and other Eastern European countries with similar political and cultural background.

In addition, this study's practical contributions extend to providing specific recommendations to Western donors on what kinds of media NGOs are most sustainable and active in today's Ukraine. The research also illustrates what donor-supported projects hold the best value in the eyes of Western donors. As such, recommendations of this study might provide a steady return on investment in the form of continuous contributions to media and civil society development in Ukraine. This study was conducted as part of the larger global media map project, supported by the World Bank and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to understand how and why Western donors donate money to support media outlets and media-related NGOs in countries, such as Ukraine. Involvement of the World Bank and the Gates Foundation, one of the world's largest donors and supporters of independent media development, speaks volumes about the importance of studying donor-funded media development interventions.

In what follows, the paper examines which media NGOs have been most effective in communicating with Western donors. The study first provides an overview of Ukraine and of the media development in the country, discusses known Western donor activities in Ukraine, and formulates research questions. After outlining methodology, the paper presents the results and outlines challenges media outlets and media-related NGOs in Ukraine still face. The paper concludes with practical implications and recommendations to media-related NGOs that operate in young democracies.

BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE

Ukraine is a country in Eastern Europe, where Kiev (or Kyiv) is the capital and the largest city. Much of Ukraine's history is associated with the European empires and powers in the region, including the Kingdom of Poland, Austro-Hungary Empire, and the tsarist and then Soviet Russia. Because Ukraine was a part of the USSR for most of the 20th century, Ukrainians share much in common with others who lived in the Soviet Union, particularly with people from neighboring nations. In the last few years, Ukraine has been active in pursuing a path to European Union integration. Although there are many obstacles to Ukraine's complete integration, the country is a priority partner within the European Neighboring Policy. Much of the contemporary political landscape and decisions in Ukraine are shaped by its closeness to the European Union as well as its continuous strong ties with Russia.

In 1991, Ukraine became independent, and the media needed to create its own national press on short notice (Baysha and Hallahan, 2004). At the beginning of the 1990s, however, many newspapers and magazines vanished as they struggled to become economically and politically independent in the turbulent political and economic times (Gabor, 2006). Between 1995 and 1996, Ukraine experienced a second wave of press development, but the circulation of newspapers in Ukraine increased only after 1999 (Tsetsura and Grynko, 2009). Most of the local and regional newspapers were transformed from Soviet communist publications into newly minted Western-style publications. The 2000-2001 period united Ukrainian journalists across the country and contributed to active resistance of the independent media against the lingering Soviet-style government pressure and censorship. This resistance was a response to the disappearance of a popular opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze, a widely recognized media personality. His decapitated body was found soon after his disappearance. The brutal killing of a famous journalist generated a strong wave of protests in the media across the country.

Ukrainian media covered the protests that became major news at the time. Protests became possible because journalists wanted the truth and were able to say it (Kucheriv and Odarich, 1993; Pikhovshek, 1997). Gongadze's murder united journalists of different mass media, in spite of their different political and business views. But at the end of 2001, the state started to use administrative means to influence the media and to re-introduce censorship (or *temnyky*) (Ligachova and Ganzha, 2005). These political pressures on the media and direct attempts to censor and influence content existed until 2004.

The next important phase in the development of the independent media in Ukraine was the journalists' revolution, which started in October 2004 and was directly connected with the 2005 Orange revolution in Ukraine (Baysha and Hallahan, 2004). On October 29, 2004, 19 Ukrainian TV companies supported anti-censorship protests (Kucheriv and Odarich, 1993; Ligachova and Ganzha, 2005). The success of the Orange revolution brought many changes to the country and to the Ukrainian media landscape. The Orange revolution has been widely celebrated as a victory of civil democratic society in Ukraine and a

victory for the Ukrainian people. Many foreign donors saw the Orange revolution as a logical outcome of their investments in the development of civil society in Ukraine. As a new president and government came to power, many donors withdrew from Ukraine. As a result, many NGOs practically disappeared from the NGO scene by the late 2000s (Laba, 2012).

CURRENT CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN UKRAINE THAT IMPACT MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

It is impossible to discuss the independent media development in any country without understanding current challenges the country faces in the realm of civil society development. Today, one of the key development challenges for Ukraine is a lack of continuous political and financial support for the third sector and the civil society development initiatives that have been happening in the country during the last 20 years. Since the election of a new president, Victor Yanukovich, Ukrainian NGOs have noticed a slow but steady change to a more centralized and controlled form of government, which had not been effectively eliminated after the Orange revolution in 2005. Many experts agreed that the rate with which the centralization of power was happening in Ukraine in 2013 was alarming. For instance, the central government is increasingly involved in the everyday activities of the regional governments in Crimea and Lviv, as well as exercising more control over regional and local decision-making processes (Kudelia, 2011). However, the protests in late 2013 and the crisis and military conflict with Russia in 2014 changed the situation drastically. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, Ukraine has concentrated its efforts in protecting the unity of the country, and the new government in Kyiv actively involved media in the conversations about the importance of unity.

ACTIVE DONORS IN UKRAINE

Several foreign organizations have been notable donors in Ukraine since the country claimed independence in 1991. The most important are the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (a nonprofit that receives funding from the U.S. Congress; the largest contributions to Ukraine were before the Orange revolution in 2005), U.S.-Ukraine Foundation (with programs that concentrate on promoting public policy, economic development, and education), Open Society Foundation, which has its own operation in Ukraine under the name of the Renaissance Foundation [Міжнародний фонд "Відродження"], the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine (which for many years, has had its own separate grant-giving program to support the development of independent media in Ukraine), the U.K. Embassy and the British Council, the Netherlands Embassy, the German Embassy, and the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation (Germany). Open Society Foundation (Renaissance Foundation) has spent more than U.S. \$976million on democratic development in the countries of Eastern Europe

and the former Soviet Union over the last 30 years (OSF website, 2011). The Renaissance Foundation is a large donor and is one of the most recognized donors among the Ukrainian NGOs.

Because Ukraine has long been one of the highly developed republics of the former Soviet Union and has had very solid infrastructure, high levels of education, and basic social services but lacked a strong system of NGOs free from the governmental pressures, the development priority for the country since its independence has been the development of political education and democratic initiatives, civil society, and the third sector. Early on, freedom of expression became a priority for Western donors who sought to help Ukraine become a newly independent state with a sustainable civil society. Past experiences and pressures from the Soviet government had created a situation in which Ukrainian citizens did not have a voice and were not able to effectively resist and question government policies and actions. Thus, democratic initiatives, civil society education, and independent media have been a development priority from the very start.

The change of 2005 did not automatically guarantee a rebirth of Ukrainian journalism. Problems have persisted with the ethics of Ukrainian journalists, poorly developed systems of professional journalistic education and practice, and with the interactions between journalists and editors and the media owners, who have become increasingly influential. Many of the Ukrainian media, particularly local and regional media, as well as so-called “legacy” media (that existed before the Ukrainian independence, during the Soviet period), still do not have editorial agreements with owners that protect independence and freedom of speech. As a result, these media continue to serve the political or business interests of the owners (Pikhovshek, 1997; Tsetsura, 2012). The ongoing threats to freedom of the press and information in Ukraine have created a number of concerns among NGOs and the media and have also been noticed by Western donors. The donors who are actively present in the country (e.g., USAID, U.S. Embassy, the Dutch Embassy, OSF-Renaissance Foundation, and the British Council) have had a number of meetings to discuss new challenges that the media in Ukraine face and to try to find ways to help independent media to resist government pressures on freedom. A number of grants were put forward by these organizations to support public forums, open discussions, offer journalist and media training programs, and provide legal coaching and training for journalists so that they know and understand their media rights and can use their skills effectively (Rozvadovskyy, 2010; USAID, 2011).

Western donors and grant administrators that are currently active in Ukraine in the area of media development include: European Union, Council of Europe, USAID, Open Society Foundations – International Renaissance Foundation, Media Development Fund – U.S. Embassy, the Netherlands Embassy (MATTERA), Internews Network, IMS, NED, and IREX. Indirectly, other organizations such as PACT also contribute to the development of the independent media landscape in Ukraine.

The USA has been the largest and the most consistent donor for enhancing media development and supporting the independent media in Ukraine. Since

1992, USAID has provided \$1.7 billion worth of technical and humanitarian assistance and supported numerous civil society, democratic initiatives, and media development projects in the country (USAID: Ukraine, 2011). In the early 1990s, USAID focused its support on democratic initiatives and civil society development. At that time, the development of independent media channels (meaning, independent from the government and oligarchs) was crucial. Gradually, in the mid-to late-1990s and early 2000s, donor support extended to media development NGOs that united the media and were able to resist government pressures for media censorship and control. At the same time, USAID support has always been available for media monitoring and analysis of political coverage, especially coverage of political opposition candidates during elections at the local, regional, and national levels. The culmination of such support came in 2004 when USAID sponsored a number of projects that later contributed to the media protests during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, including the live TV coverage of the protests in Maidan square in Kiev by the independent TV channels which were established with support from USAID. Even after the Orange Revolution, it was clear that the support for new independent media in the country was still needed so in 2008 USAID extended the U-Media program (which had begun in 2003) for another three years. In 2011, USAID continued the U-Media (Ukraine Media) Project to focus on institutional capacity building and sustainability.

Over the years, USAID has worked closely with several international NGOs. IREX, an American NGO that has worked in Ukraine media development since 1996, implemented USAID's ProMedia program from 1995-2006, and the U-Media program from 2002-2007. The ProMedia program worked "primarily with regional newspapers – to improve journalistic quality of independent newspapers, improve the financial viability of those papers, promote and defend freedom of the press, and encourage development of professional associations" (IREX, 2003). Under U-Media, over 1,600 journalists were trained in professional standards, investigative journalism, new media tools, and media sector legislation.

Another notable international partner of USAID is Internews Network, which since 2008 has implemented the U-Media program in Ukraine. In 2009-2010, USAID significantly expanded the U-Media program in Crimea in order to increase access to information for Crimean residents and their participation in local decision-making. During 2010, U-Media grantees trained more than 70 young journalists in Crimea who produced more than 640 feature stories and news spots published in local newspapers and broadcasted on radio and TV.

The National Endowment for Democracy, or NED, is also one of the largest and most consistent supporters of media development in Ukraine. According to the 2010 NED annual report, last year NED awarded 12 grants to support independent media and media development projects for the total sum of almost \$528,000. For many years, the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine has had its own separate grant-giving program to support the development of independent media in Ukraine.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the last 20 years, multiple media NGOs in Ukraine have been actively protecting the freedom of speech in the country with help of many Western donors who supported the development of its independent media system. What is not yet known is which media NGOs were most effective in working with Western donors and why? Thus, this study formulated the following questions:

- RQ1: What role has Western donor support played in the development of independent media in Ukraine in the last 20 years?
- RQ2: What Ukrainian media and media NGOs became influential opinion makers in the eyes of Western donors and why?

METHODOLOGY

To answer research questions, 38 interviews with representatives of major media outlets, media development NGOs, civil society NGOs, and Western donors in Ukraine were collected in the spring 2011 to describe and understand the changes and challenges in the media development in the country. Each interview lasted between 45 and 120 minutes and was audio-recorded. The interviews were conducted in English, Russian, or Ukrainian, according to each interviewee's preference. The place for an interview was chosen by each interviewee (café, restaurant, or interviewee's work office). Interview data were partially transcribed, partially translated in English, and later back-translated for accuracy. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis technique to identify recurring themes within the data and scrutinize them against the participants' explanations. A selective approach to partial translations allowed a researcher to listen to and read interviews several times to identify statements and/or phrases that seemed to be relevant, essential, and illustrative or which discussed experiences and emerged as definitive and helpful to answer research questions. Interviews were scrutinized several times to identify the overarching themes. All relevant statements were identified, underlined, translated, and used for analysis. A three-step qualitative data analysis of finding reduction, identifying explanation, and approaching grounded theory, was applied (Lindlof, 1995). Finally, after the first round of interpretation and analysis, the member check was conducted with two volunteers from the group of interviewees who agreed to look at the first partial results. The input from the cultural liaison person who was present during interviews was also incorporated into the second round of analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: EVALUATING DONOR SUPPORT

The results of the study showed that donor support was influential in the establishment and the development of the vast majority of independent media outlets in Ukraine. Donor support was also instrumental in establishing and

supporting a number of media freedom watchdog NGOs and media monitoring NGOs that have functioned with various degrees of success. The biggest problem with media NGOs in Ukraine is their weak organizational structure and limited interest in investing time and resources in organizational development. Many established media NGOs in Ukraine, although widely popular and active, have evolved little because of the lack of clear organizational structure. Some still operate as one- or two-people organizations, much like they were in 1990s. Although some NGO representatives understand the importance of building capacity and developing a structure, many find it unnecessary, as they concentrate on getting grants from Western donors to complete specific projects and then have little time and energy left to work on the development of their organization. Multiple attempts by Western donors to encourage capacity building within these organizations and to push these NGOs to cooperate with one another on grant projects have failed as many NGOs see themselves as unique and see other NGOs as direct competitors for grant funds. In interviews, some donors suggested limiting or eliminating grants paid toward salaries of NGO implementers, to avoid the escalation of the fight for limited grant resources in the future, and to encourage organizations to think beyond just one source of income. Most independent media and media NGOs in Ukraine have all enjoyed generous Western donor support in the years 1990 to 2005. Between 2005 and 2011, a lesser degree of this support continued, shifting focus to target multiple project-specific programs, such as media and journalism training programs, media education programs, and regional media development instead of organizational structure support.

In the next sections, we analyzed the results and provide detail on donor-related media interventions in Ukraine in the last 20 years, following the posed research questions.

RQ1: WHAT ROLE HAS WESTERN DONOR SUPPORT PLAYED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE IN THE LAST 20 YEARS?

The role of donors in media development in Ukraine can be assessed on two levels: from a historical perspective starting from support begun in the early 1990s and from a contemporary perspective—analyzing how donors can contribute to Ukrainian media development under the current political and economic conditions of the country. When viewed in retrospect, many interviewees emphasized the historical role of foreign donors in the development of a democratic media in Ukraine. “Ukraine significantly differs from other former Soviet states because it has a pretty strong civil society,” said a representative of International Media Support in Ukraine. “Thanks to donors’ support we now have a strong pool of professional media organizations that help media development.” After obtaining its independence, Ukraine started building a new country. During this time donors brought innovations, technology and knowledge to the freshly established free media. Contributions of money, education and training, and Western expertise allowed for establishing new standards of journalism, openness and legal initiatives. It has also allowed for building a strong foundation for democratic

development and has sown the seeds of Western democratic ideals in the minds of a new generation for years to come. Openness to new knowledge (sponsored by foreign donors) and democratic transformations of the country made its development significantly different from other ex-Soviet countries like Belarus, Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan.

From a contemporary perspective, donors and nongovernmental organizations play an important role as international advocates for the development of civil society and media in Ukraine. According to respondents, there is an international pressure to support media development in Ukraine and it is partially influenced by donors. For example, The Law on Access to Public Information has been under consideration in the parliament for many years. When donors and NGOs, including IMS, Internews, Article 19, and Council of Europe, joined their forces on the issue, creating a consolidation of opinions and power, the Ukrainian parliament decided that it would be easier and more beneficial to pass the law rather than create an international stir. This illustrates that donors play an important role in advocacy in Ukraine.

How Donor Support Has Helped or Hurt Media Development in Ukraine

Participants in this study, as well as various actors and organizations involved in media development in the last 20 years, agreed overall that interventions by Western donors in media development and journalism training in Ukraine have largely had a positive, significant impact. There was a clear difference, however, in responses regarding the current challenges and strategies different media and NGOs propose to donors in terms of grant projects. The difference was between those media and NGOs that have invested in structural development and those who have not. Interviews and limited participant observation revealed that those organizations that donors identified as having strong or relatively strong organizational structures still pinpointed the lack of well-prepared business media managers and business personnel as their main challenge. Representatives of these organizations emphasized the importance of training in the area of media business and fundraising as well as in the area of organizational management. They viewed training of journalists as important but not as critical, as there have been plenty of quality training programs offered to journalists in the last 20 years. Instead, they recommended that donors concentrate on journalism training focused on writing about specific issues (such as economics).

On the other hand, the lack of funding for organizations themselves, and the need for grants that support organizational structures, leaders and a small number of personnel were the major themes and needs identified by the organizations that were defined as having weak organizational structures. Clearly, these organizations still rely on donors to support their organizational structure and as a result have limited or non-existent sustainability strategies. However, all organizations interviewed were quite supportive of one another and were very protective of their organizational structure and sustainability efforts. In fact, every organization interviewed defined itself as having a strong organizational structure. Only Western (particularly, U.S.-based) donors made a distinc-

tion between weak and strong media organizations, as follows: from very weak (e.g., IMI, Suspilnist, Investigative Bureau “Svidomo”), to weak (e.g., Academy of Ukrainian Press), to relatively weak (National Media Lawyers), to relatively strong (e.g., Media Law Institute, Regional Press Development Institute), and finally to strong (Telekritika and Independent Association of Broadcasters, or IAB). IAB is a membership-based, fee-paid association that protects the interest of the industry rather than a media NGO. However, they are worth mentioning here as an example of a strong structure. Western donors consider IAB to be one of the few organizations that seriously focuses on development, sustainability, and organizational structure. At the same time, both donors and other NGO representatives argued that IAB is able to do that because it has financial resources and ability to establish such position.

In their interviews, donors emphasized their increasingly strong interest in supporting those organizations that have demonstrated the desire and ability to support and develop their own organizational structures. Donors acknowledged that organizational growth and development might not deliver immediate results. They also recognized that most of these media NGOs are central to media development and to monitoring of freedom of speech in today’s Ukraine as concerns over censorship have risen dramatically in the last two years, after the new president of Ukraine came to power as his administration seems to be warming up to the idea of selective censoring. At the same time, donors emphasized that their decision to sponsor specific projects instead of organizations at large was in part due to encourage infrastructural development and sustainability. Donors pointed out that infrastructural development, including, but not limited to, financial sustainability of an organization (its ability to pay salaries, rent, and utilities with its own money and not money that come from grants) and its infrastructural growth (or instance, strategic planning, addition of new employee lines, such as Director of Fundraising and/or Development, etc.) At the same time, media representatives and NGOs have said that these topic-specific projects, such as training journalists to effectively use online distribution and social media or sponsoring research and evaluation studies on media monitoring of opposition coverage, have forced them to abandon some of their interests and adjust their organizational missions to be able to successfully compete for grant money. In short, the project-specific grants have been successful in the short-term, but it remains to be seen whether there could be a successful long-term model to motivate Ukrainian NGOs to move toward sustainability.

The interviewed donors characterized most of the successful organizations that consistently get grants and deliver results as having “weak structures,” as they question whether some of these organizations are sustainable beyond grant-specific projects. Some donors recalled a conversation they had with one leader of a very active media NGO that consistently receives grants—yet fails to develop its structure—about the importance of sustainability and organizational development. When the donor representative asked a leader of this NGO what would happen to the organization if its leader were to meet with an accident and could no longer perform the duties, the leader answered, “Well, then the organization will die with me”. This passionate response from the leader who, while deeply

caring about the NGO, fails to see the benefits of sustainable growth is a typical example of the problems many successful Ukrainian NGOs face.

There might be several reasons as to why NGOs in Ukraine face these challenges. First, NGOs, despite the number of active donors and multiple projects, still see each other as competitors and rarely share information or try to organize in clusters to achieve the goals. They often unite for a cause to protect freedom of speech (as it is the case with the recent movement Stop Censorship! which aims to attract national and global attention to the latest censorship-like developments in Ukraine; see the organizational profile of Stop Censorship! for more information).

At the same time, the same organizations rarely, if ever, unite to bid on grants or to implement the projects together. Each claims to have the wide, strong network of supporters and followers along with the large database of journalists. None of these databases or media contacts that NGOs have developed through the years are publicly available (online or otherwise). Despite multiple attempts by the donors, including USAID, U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, and Internews Network to offer incentives to these NGOs to unite and create interest and topic clusters (some even offered grants that could only be given to organizations that have multiple partners), forced collaboration was never a success.

Ukrainian NGO leaders failed to find a way to unite, as each NGO was concerned that a different NGO would ultimately become a grant-distributor and thus would not assign project implementation (and would not give enough money) to representatives of another NGO. Small or regional NGOs that have not had a long history of getting media development grants are now in a tough position, as the number of grants and caps get smaller. Donors do not have an established, trusted relationship with them and thus feel reluctant to sponsor their projects, even if they are presented as important and relevant. That is why the strategy of unification of NGOs works much better at the regional level than it does at the national level or with Kiev-based NGOs.

According to representatives of small and regional media development NGOs, the staff members of the few Kiev offices are closely connected with managers of the grant-giving organizations and with the leaders of major media NGOs in Ukraine. They often speak in support of each other's projects. In addition, some interviewees expressed concerns, believing that leaders of these major NGOs located in Kiev often have an unfair advantage in grant competitions because they know the donor representatives (or managers of grant-giving organizations) personally and over the years have developed strong ties and personal and professional connections with them. By contrast, representatives of major donor organizations felt strongly that the competition is fair and accurate, emphasizing that they pay particular attention to regional NGOs to make sure that there is an equal opportunity for all to apply for grants.

RQ2: WHAT UKRAINIAN MEDIA AND MEDIA NGOS BECAME INFLUENTIAL OPINION MAKERS IN THE EYES OF WESTERN DONORS AND WHY?

Results demonstrated that the most successful donor programs were those that have supported media watch organizations and freedom of speech movements. The following media watch organizations, which were established in the early to

mid-1990s and which received continuous support from donors, and still exist today are the most recognized and widely respected by the vast majority of interviewees: 1) *Telekritika*, founder: Natalia Ligachova [Наталія Лигачова «Телекритика»] (by far the most cited and most respected organization); 2) Bureau of investigative journalism *Svidomo* [Бюро журналістських розслідувань «Свідомо»; founder: Єгор Соколов]; and 3) Institute of Media Law, and Institute of Mass Information, or IMI (also known as Kiev Mass Media Institute) [Founder: Вікторія Сюмар, Інститут масової інформації]. Among the media, the most notable and recognized outlets founded with the help of donors are: 1) *Mirror of the Week* (“Дзеркало Тижня”) magazine; 2) *Ukrainian Truth* newspaper («Українська правда»); 3) The news studio of Hromadske TV; 4) STB TV; 5) Multiple regional newspapers and TV studios. In addition, the majority of interviewees also named the following local organizations as being consistently the most influential media organizations in Ukraine in the last decade: 1) Internews Ukraine; 2) Regional Press Development Institute (Institut Regionalnoj Pressy); 3) Association of Ukrainian Press. Other, less prominent non-government media organizations included Kiev Independent Media Professional Union with leader Yuriy Lukanov (Юрій Луканов, Київська незалежна медіа-профспілка) and the Foundationa Suspilnist (or Sospilnist) with its leader Taras Petriv (Тарас Петрів, фундація «Суспільність»).

Donor support in the 1990s and early 2000s has helped to establish several strong media outlets that are successful today. For example, the STB TV channel was founded with USAID funds. Even though STB came under fire later from USAID for the process of privatization of the equipment (now the channel belongs to Victor Pinchuk, one of the richest people in Ukraine), which was originally bought with grant money to support the establishment of this independent TV news channel, it is widely recognized as one of the most balanced and objective TV channels in the country. Specifically, the media monitoring conducted under the project of the non-governmental organization Telekritika (Mediasapiens, 2010) shows that the STB channel had the most objective and balanced news coverage during the 2009-2010 election campaign out of all TV channels in the country. STB TV is a good example of projects founded by donors that have managed to build enough capacity to later become a separate business-owned project and yet have kept their high quality and independence. The reason that the STB channel succeeded is that from the very beginning the channel employed the best talent: well-qualified and professional editors and journalists.

“Ukrainianska Pravda” (“Ukrainian Truth”) is another solid example of a donor-funded project. It still works well and is perceived as a leading and independent online media in Ukraine. According to those who were interviewed for this study (representatives of Ukrainianska Pravda declined to be interviewed), “Ukrainska Pravda” still receives donor support. However, it has also become successful in securing advertising dollars. Interviewees for this study agreed it is the most objective and high-quality source of news and investigation in the country.

Finally, Telekritika, a media NGO, has been an exemplar of an opinion-making organization. Telekritika is the most respected media-related news online portal and media watchdog in the country. It grew from a small donor-supported

organization into a strong independent entity that unites non-profit and for-profit elements. Telekritika, seen as a high-quality source of information about all things media and freedom of speech, is widely recognized as a specialized outlet for journalists, communication professionals, and all people interested in the media. According to several media professionals and NGO representatives interviewed for this study, Telekritika is also widely read by government officials at all levels as this online portal establishes the active media agenda and influences opinions of not only Western donors, but also Ukrainian government and other media NGOs.

Most donor activity before 2005 concentrated on providing opportunities to media NGOs such as Telekritika to monitor freedom of speech and information, particularly in light of elections and uprisings in Ukraine. Another clear focus before 2005 was to support the establishment and creation of independent media outlets in Ukraine, by giving grants to establish the infrastructure of the independent media (e.g., buying equipment, paying for rent, and covering journalists' salaries).

Donor interventions changed the landscape of media freedom in Ukraine. In particular, the independence, readiness, and articulate voices of Ukrainian media NGOs have greatly contributed to the development of independent media in Ukraine and have helped to support many independent journalists and editors. These NGOs were opinion makers who provided media representatives a discursive platform and united them over a common cause of protecting freedom of speech and information. After obtaining grants from Western donors to monitor and support freedom of speech in newly independent Ukraine, many media watch organizations (e.g., Telekritika, IMI, Academy of Ukrainian Press, Institute of Media law, Regional press Development Institute, Sospilnist) conducted a series of studies on media monitoring, particularly in relation to political news and fair and balanced coverage of elections.

However, the vast majority of these studies, conducted between 1991 and 2004, were available only in print versions, with a limited number of published copies. After extensive search and multiple visits to these organizations, we were able to locate only a few prints of these media monitoring studies. There is no one central location or organization that has and/or provides access to the variety of media monitoring materials, largely produced under the Western donor grants in the last 20 years. According to the NGO members of these organizations, the electronic files of the documents have been lost and had never been available online. Nonetheless, at the time these monitoring reports were published, representatives of these NGOs presented the results of their research at regional, national, and international conferences and, of course, to Western donors who sponsored the projects. These NGOs were able to attract attention of the global community, particularly of the media and governing bodies in Europe, to the mismatch between the talk and actions of the government regarding the freedom of speech and the media in Ukraine in the mid-1990s and early 2000s and thus have helped to keep the momentum going for newly independent media in Ukraine. In that sense, they yet again acted as opinion makers on the global public arena.

In short, many media NGOs were able to engage in a variety of freedom of speech and information monitoring activities and were able to fulfill watchdog roles for two reasons: the continuous financial support for their organization from a variety of Western donors for whom they were true opinion makers about freedom of speech in the country, and the somewhat relaxed political environment of Ukraine. For years, these NGOs have enjoyed financial independence from the government thanks to the Western donor grants. Most importantly, the overall donor support of the civil society development, including support of multiple organizations that strived for political and economical change in Ukraine, allowed the media to be in the front of the action and to some extent unite activists via extensive independent coverage of the events during the multiple uprisings in Ukraine.

Current Challenges for Media NGOs in Ukraine

During the last few years, donor support for media development in Ukraine has significantly decreased. The respondents outline several major changes in donor-funded media development. First, the format of donor support has drastically changed, moving from grant support to contracts. The goals and tasks of donors in Ukraine have changed and donors sponsor only those programs and projects that help them achieve their goals. Furthermore, such format for media support is much cheaper as it eliminates any organizational infrastructural support and allows certain tasks, such as organization of training seminars and professional conferences, to be outsourced to local NGOs.

Many donor organizations now have open calls for submissions and Ukrainian NGOs must compete and show they can implement the task for the smallest amount of money. This situation creates financial hardship for many civil society actors and media NGOs in Ukraine. The problem with such donor-driven media development or civil society development is that NGOs in Ukraine are not simply non-profit; they are also non-income. That means that they cannot be self-sustained as according to the law they cannot sell their seminars, trainings, expertise, or their books. Therefore, donor support is the main source of income for these organizations. Furthermore, during the last few years, donors have been significantly reducing institutional support for projects, including staff salaries and money for office supplies. Because donors mostly sponsor specific projects rather than organizations, problems tend to arise, especially for those staff members who need to feed their families.

In the 2000s, the widely discussed proposal to create public broadcasting in Ukraine was supported actively by the British Council and British Embassy donors for more than six years, but nothing has happened. A new wave of discussions came around early 2011, in light of the latest media freedom concerns, and the British Council once again awarded several project-specific grants to media NGOs that were instrumental in moving the conversation forward. There are two main reasons why sustainability is impossible for local NGOs in Ukraine at the moment. First, the law does not allow NGOs to earn money in any other way. There is an effort to change the law, and if this happens there will be a transition

period for NGOs during which they will need training in how to be sustainable. Second, Ukrainian society is not ready yet. It requires time to make people believe that the right to freedom of speech and free media is as important a civil liberty as the right to independence, health care, and education.

Although today civil society of Ukraine remains fragile, donor support has been influential in establishing and developing the vast majority of media freedom watchdog NGOs, media monitoring NGOs, and the independent media because the most influential of these all enjoyed generous Western donor support between 1990 and 2005. Between 2005 and 2011, this support has continued targeting multiple project-specific programs, such as media and journalism training programs, media education programs, and regional media development rather than capacity building in organizational structure. Although some NGO and media representatives said that they would like to see the donor money invested “in NGO structure,” the vast majority agreed that, at this stage in Ukraine, the money should be invested “in people.”

The problem of sustainability is particularly prominent for many donor-sponsored projects. Once these projects are completed, nothing or very little has been done to support the sustainability of the achieved results and to disseminate information. Public, readily available research results in forms of widely available electronic books, articles, brochures, or other materials simply do not exist. Generally, weak capacity of NGOs (lack of human resources, time, experience, and sometimes poor understanding of the concept of sustainability) also includes the lack of good skills and understanding how to best work with information, how to effectively pursue knowledge management, publicize results, and engage in systematic public outreach. Once one project is finished, NGOs often look for new projects or do nothing to promote its previous activities. It often looks like the race for getting grant money for specific projects overshadows continuing work for long-term results.

On the whole, media NGOs have either poorly developed or outdated websites; almost no information that they produced as a result of multiple grant projects (including media monitoring, resources) is publicly and readily available online. Media outlets and media-related organizations in Ukraine and other countries should regularly update their websites and ensure that all training materials as well as the results of studies, monitoring, and surveys should be publically available online. Donors see such transparency as a sign of clear and successful communication.

According to interviewees, Ukrainian independent media have lacked strong business models. Many agreed that future donor interventions should include programs for educating media managers and independent media business owners on how to run a sustainable, profitable media business. Unfortunately, answers to this question are not readily available in Ukraine or elsewhere in the world today as many media outlets around the world are struggling to find new business models. Many in Ukraine agree that the future lies in digital and online media and journalism. What is essential for success is not only a solid plan and a good communication strategy that reflect donors' interest, but, first and foremost, the ability to demonstrate sustainability of the

project and the continuous structural growth of media outlets and NGOs that ensure NGOs' capacity to endure.

CONCLUSION

This study has drawn a picture of opinion making by media NGOs in Ukraine based on in-depth interviews with representatives of Western donor organizations, civil society NGOs, media NGOs, and media professionals. Findings of this study provide better understanding how Western donors make decisions about funding media interventions in this and other countries with young democracies and can shed light into the independent media system development in countries in transition.

The results show that the achievements in the area of freedom of speech and media, as well as the active development of independent media in Ukraine in the last 20 years, were possible because of several factors. First, continuous generous donations from multiple Western donors helped to support the development of civil society in Ukraine and the development of the independent media system. Second, the political landscape encouraged such development. Between 2005 and 2010, the Ukrainian government did not interfere with the independent media development and journalists and editors enjoyed relative freedom, which encouraged further development of the independent media system.

Most importantly, because of the Ukrainian pro-democratic leadership and indirect political pressures from the European Union, and with the help from Western donors, Ukrainian media NGOs were able to develop, strengthen, and flourish over the last six years, having a clear, visible impact as government watchdogs and fulfilling their function as a barometer for civil society development in Ukraine. In turn, outcome-driven donor-supported NGOs in Ukraine were able to succeed as opinion makers among Western donors and thus enjoyed new freedom of information and financial freedom as they were able to play a central role in engaging citizens and media in building civil society and in establishing themselves as central media and freedom of press watchdog organizations in Ukraine.

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