

Content analysis of the representation of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova in the media of Kyrgyzstan in 2017



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Bishkek, 2018

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Content analysis of the representation of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova in the media of Kyrgyzstan in 2017

Abstract

This research is a content analysis of the representation of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine, and Moldova in online news agencies and mainstream TV channels of Kyrgyzstan. The material is collected from different sources: websites of the mainstream online news agencies and TV Channels. The selected media outlets represent the different types of online news agencies and TV Channels in Kyrgyzstan. The focus is to conduct a content analysis of the representation of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova among the private media and key civil society and the level of engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus.

Introduction

Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus face similar challenges of democratization after a long era of authoritarian rule, as do many other developing countries. Civic unrest is a problem for many developing countries, which face challenges caused by ethnic conflicts or political disagreement. The media can play a central role in either spreading these conflicts or promoting peaceful solutions (on cases related to Kyrgyzstan, see e.g. Freedman 2009 and Kulikova 2008). This research is aimed at conducting the content analysis of the representation of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova in mainstream media of Kyrgyzstan in 2017.

Thus, the research adds to the existing research literature creating new insights for understanding the role of media in process of social transformation in post-Communist conditions. Inspired by Nabers' (2015) approach to framing global politics in the 'crisis and change' paradigm, we look at the framing of the crisis around cross-border issues in Central Asia and Caucasus and the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 related to the annexation of Crimea as a possible catalyst of social changes in these Central Asian, Caucasus, Ukrainian and Moldovan societies. Nabers' approach is based on the four interrelated and mutually constitutive elements: sedimented practices and dislocation on the one hand, as well as antagonism and the institutionalization within a so-called imaginary on the other. This research also builds up on Nabers' conceptualization of critical discourse analysis as an interrelation between the discourse and linguistics. As Nabers asserts, "language no longer remains a neutral linguistic system but acquires the status of a scheme of socially regulated values of good and bad, strong and weak. The signifier "worker" acquires no meaning as long as it is not linked to another signifier, for example, "wage," "woman," "children,"

“German,” or “British.” It is only via the relationship between different signifiers that mutual integration, and the establishment of a chain of equivalences, becomes possible” (2015, 135).

While the overall historical context of the Central Asia media has been elaborated in a number of studies (e.g. Freedman 2012; Juraev 2002; Junisbai 2011, Junisbai, Junisbai, and Fry 2015; Kulikova and Perlmutter 2007; Mambetaliev 2006; Kulikova and Ibraeva 2002), a number of academicians have pointed out the lack of academic research of the post-Soviet media systems - even though the number of studies on individual ex-Soviet countries and regions is growing (Freedman and Shafer 2014). Academics have, however, drawn a major conclusion that, after a relatively short period of vibrant media development, the process of building independent institutions of the Fourth Estate came to a halt.

This research examines how the partnership among the private media and key civil society and the level of engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus was reported in the mainstream media of Kyrgyzstan in 2017 and if the security perceptions offered in the media outlets depended on the different language or ownership background of the outlet. In Kyrgyzstan, in addition to Kyrgyz-language media, outlets operating in Russian language, e.g. TV, radio stations and newspapers, are widely available and are among nationally important news media. **The main questions addressed are how the major online news agencies wrote on the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus and how they described the reasons behind the cross-border issues in Central Asia and Caucasus, and gave comparisons with other similar situations and prognosis.** The main hypothesis is that the partnership and integration processes are framed in terms of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues, Kyrgyz-Uzbek border issues, Kyrgyz-Tajik border issues, conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ukrainian crisis on annexation of Crimea, Russia’s domination in the region.

The sample includes news articles of online news agencies and news programs published and broadcast in Kyrgyz media from 1 January to 31 December, 2017, which gives us an opportunity to look at how the development of the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus was covered in 2017.

For this research we combine elements of framing analysis and discourse analysis. The discourse analysis helps to track patterns and main storylines in the reporting, as well as differences in reporting of different outlets. We also look at the difference between locally published news articles of online news agencies and news programs of TV Channels.

The research material was gathered by choosing all articles (news items, analysis, etc.) in a selection of online news agencies in the given timeframe of 1 January - 31 December 2017 including words – “Central Asia”, “Caucasus”, “Ukraine”, “Moldova”, in any form. We utilized also a list of keywords (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, civil society, conflict, and cross-border) to see if some topics are of a greater interest. In the analysis, also the main framing function (as described by Entman 1993, 52) was

identified. According to Entman, framing is “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (1993, 52). Frames are constructed through the strategic use or omission of certain words and phrases. Entman (ibid. 52) suggested that frames in news could be examined and identified by ‘the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.’ Thus, in our analysis, **we aim to discuss what are the main topics, or problems raised in the context of the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus, what causes the media stories give for these partnership developments or the lack of it, if there are moral judgements, and if the media stories offer and justify treatments of the partnership and integration processes in the region or predict their likely effects.**

A note on the media landscape in Kyrgyzstan

As part of a larger Central Asian sociocultural and socio-political entity, the Kyrgyzstani press system adapted many traits of the Soviet model imposed during seventy years of communist ideology (Freedman, 2011, p. 2). In the post-Soviet period, significant changes in ownership occurred and part of the media outlets became privately owned. Nowadays public, state-run, private as well as international media coexist in Kyrgyzstan. State sovereignty led not just to the development of independent from the state media outlets but also to the new language policy in the media sphere. Kyrgyzstan as a multi-ethnic country with large Russian and Uzbek minorities adopted a bilingual system of Kyrgyz and Russian. As Russian was the dominating language during the Soviet era, the positions of Kyrgyz language was enhanced through a special law which required transmitting at least 50% of all TV and radio programming in Kyrgyz (Kyrgyz Public Television and Radio Corporation law).¹

Since 2010, there have been fewer legal cases against the press and fewer attacks against journalists than in previous years. However, the government occasionally pressures outlets for coverage of certain issues while most media outlets that are anxious to avoid trouble with the government and political forces order their journalists to frame coverage in certain ways.

Kyrgyzstan in the ranking of the World Press Freedom Index of the international non-governmental organization Reporters without Borders (RSF) for 2018 showed the sharpest deterioration in performance. According to World Press Freedom Index, for the year Kyrgyzstan dropped from 89th (2017) to 98th (2018) place. «Reporters without borders» explained this by the persecution of the media, including «astronomical fines for insulting the head of state.»

¹ It aimed mostly at the regulation of television and radio broadcasting, having left out the internet based media. However, the majority of news agencies and websites take the bilingual approach by default and publish materials both in Kyrgyz and Russian languages.

According to the Freedom House as a result of 2017 the indicator of media freedom in Kyrgyzstan decreased from 6 to 6.25 points due to onerous fines to the media that criticized the president and the closure of the opposition television company.

Kyrgyzstan is named partly free country in the rating «Freedom in the World-2017», not free - in the rating «Freedom of the press-2017», partially free - in the rating «Freedom of the Internet-2017». The level of democracy in the country was estimated at 6 points on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the worst possible indicator in the rating of the transition countries for 2017.

In the post-Soviet period, significant changes in ownership occurred and part of the media outlets became privately owned. Nowadays public, state-run, private as well as international broadcasters coexist in Kyrgyzstan. State sovereignty led not just to the development of independent from the state media outlets but also to the new language policy in the media sphere. Kyrgyzstan as a multi-ethnic country with large Russian and Uzbek minorities adopted a bilingual system of Kyrgyz and Russian. As Russian was the dominating language during the Soviet era, the positions of Kyrgyz language were enhanced through a special law which required transmitting at least 50% of all programming in Kyrgyz (Kyrgyz Public Television and Radio Corporation law).

It aimed mostly at the regulation of television and radio broadcasting, having left out the Internet-based media. Still news agencies and websites in their majority accept the bilingual approach by default and publish materials both in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. According to the 2017 Media uses research conducted by M-Vector in Kyrgyzstan 54% of TV viewers prefer Kyrgyz language TV content while 38% prefer in Russian. 74% of newspaper readers prefer Kyrgyz language newspapers while 24% prefer in Russian. 66% of radio listeners prefer to listen to Kyrgyz content while 28% prefer in Russian (M Vector 2017).

Taking into consideration that 34% of the population (6.08 million citizens) of Kyrgyzstan in 2017 were Internet users (Digital in 2017: Central Asia), we may conclude that news websites or their information reproduced through social networks gain appeal among at least readership of 2 million.

While according to the 2017 media uses research report conducted by M-Vector in Kyrgyzstan 65.2% of audience prefers to get information from TV and 40.7% from Internet and only 7% from newspapers (M-Vector 2017).

Coverage of the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus in Media of Kyrgyzstan

The media outlets play two major societal roles. First, media have the 'agenda-setting' capacity in their respective societies by informing their audiences and shaping their perceptions of certain issues by framing/interpreting news in a positive or negative fashion. As a generator of discourses, media, as also Nabers (2015) puts it, frames global politics in

the 'crisis and change' paradigm. Second, the media also largely reflect the broader societal stances towards certain issues, by following their audiences' preferences (at least how they perceive them).

The research on foreign news has indicated that trade between countries is the principal predictor of news coverage about foreign countries in most of the countries and that geographic distance and population of a country play a significant role in the developing countries while in developed countries GDP is an exclusive predictor of news coverage (Wu, 2003: 19–20). Pietiläinen (2006, 226) stated that both the foreign news and foreign trade of individual countries depend on geographic, political and cultural proximity, historical connections and many other factors and in many cases these factors result in a similar distribution of both trade and news. Not only the news flow in quantitative terms but also content of news is largely dependent on cultural and political ties between countries, which may also change when political changes happen. Therefore, **the study of the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus in media of Kyrgyzstan is extremely interesting: just few decades ago all the countries were part of the same empire and now the political, economic and societal systems are very different.**

Theoretical Framework

The method we used is a modification of the thematic qualitative text analysis described by Udo Kuckartz (Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 69-88). The basic cycle of thematic analysis offered by Kuckartz presupposes seven phases, which constitute two coding processes (ibid., pp. 70-80). The first process ends at the point when the main categories are developed and the passages assigned to each of the main categories are compiled. Then, an investigator has to determine sub-categories inductively and code all of the data again using the elaborated category system. We modified the research cycle to the effect that we substituted the second coding process by the in-depth interpretation of selected cases, hence we had only one coding process, which was conducted separately from each other. During this phase, we exchanged information about the discovered topics, negotiated them, and recoded the data if it was required. Figure 1 shows the schematic representation of how the study was carried out.

During our first steps of analysis designated as "topic analysis", we focused primarily on reading of the headlines and, if necessary, lead paragraphs of the whole data set to reveal categories for the further analysis. We proceeded based on the traditional insight within Van Dijk's discourse-analytic framework, that the "headline and lead summarize the news text and express the semantic macrostructure" (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 53). In other words, placement in the headline reflects the emphasis on the main topic and this topic functions as the central organizing idea of a news piece.

Topic analysis is primarily a quantitative procedure to measure the frequency of which topics (categories) are presented in headlines. The 87 topical categories that emerged inductively from this process fell within fourteen broad domains: **(1) Regional cooperation and integration in the framework of CIS, EAEU, CSTO (2) Central Asian**

Integration (3) Central Asia and Caucasus Relations (4) Ukraine and Central Asia Relations (5) Moldova and Central Asia Relations, (6) Kyrgyz-Uzbek Relations, (7) Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, (8) Kyrgyz-Tajik Relations (9) Russia as a regional leader, (10) Ukraine and Caucasus relations, (11) Moldova and Caucasus relations, (12) SCO, (13) Ukraine and Moldova and (14) Kyrgyzstan and Caucasus.

On the second stage of analysis the chosen articles were carefully read. Furthermore, we analyzed the texts employing qualitative techniques such as frame analysis. After that, we compared the independently received results.

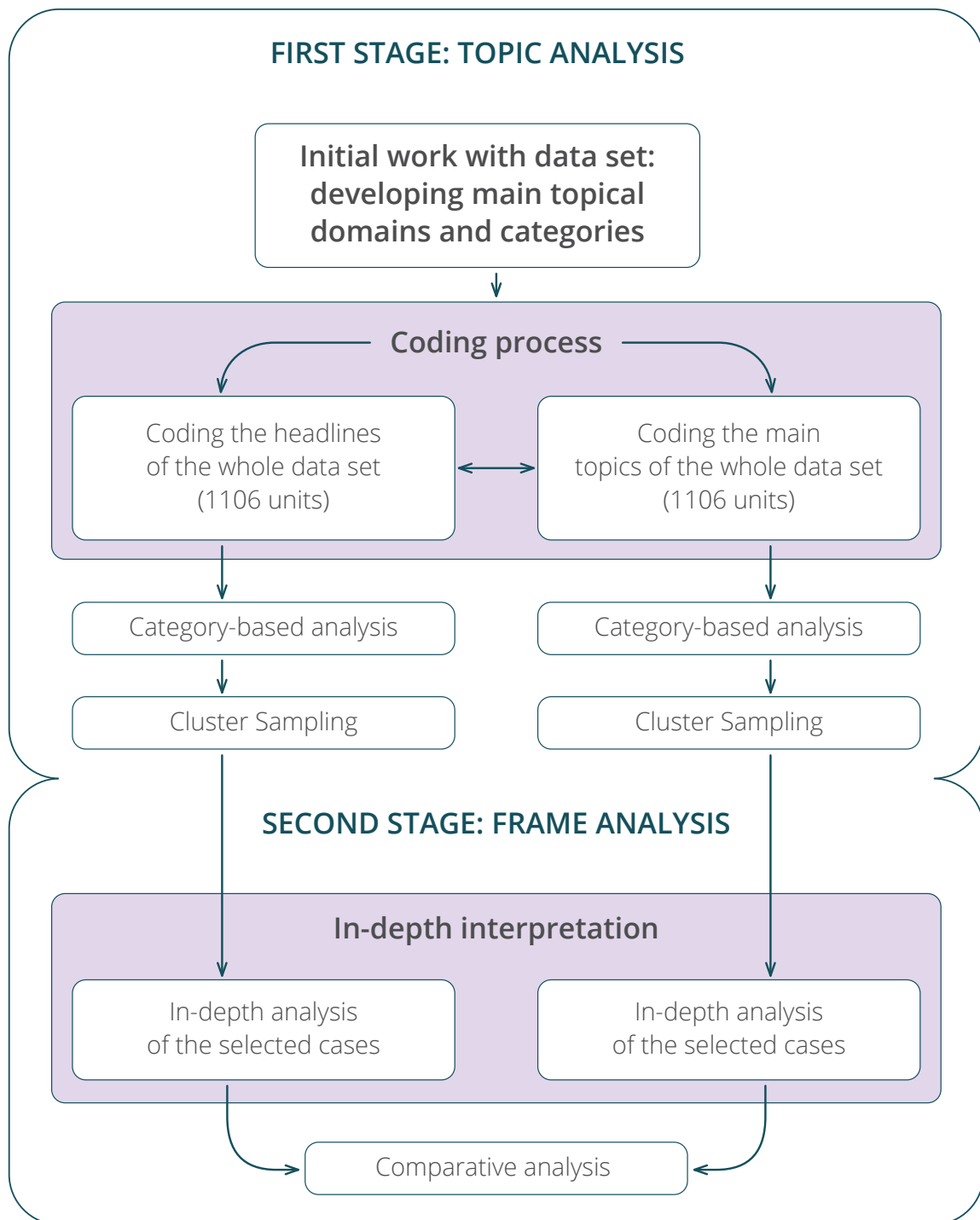


Figure 1. Research process

Research Methodology

In conceptualizing this study, we decided to analyze the popular online news media, whose pages are both in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. The rationale for the analysis of online media was two-fold: the data are available electronically and can be investigated more easily, and some of the online media in Kyrgyzstan have considerably wider readership than their printed counterparts. However, the main motivation to use online media in our analysis was that almost every online news outlet shows the number of views per article and comments on the news. That was helpful during the sampling stage. Realizing that the number of people subscribed to the pages in social networks may not reflect the real number of readers we nevertheless considered it as one of the most reliable instruments that measures readership and popularity of online media. This is supported by a growing body of scholarly works on the measurement of social popularity of news on social media (i.e. Bandari, Asur & Huberman 2012; Lerman & Gosh 2010).

For the purpose of the study we chose 14 Kyrgyzstan's nationwide media outlets based on: (1) their audience size; 2) their supposedly different political stances: 4 mainstream TV Channels and 10 online news agencies.

Each online resource has an own target audience direct, however some of them convey more or less the same information. However, they may display different ideological emphases due to the history of their development and the financial support provided by internal and external actors.

TV Channels (4)

OTRK is a nationwide public broadcast TV Channel, which usually expresses the officially sanctioned views on political and social issues in Kyrgyzstan. It was created in the early 1950s, in the post-independence period and remained being the government TV channel; albeit having adjusted its practice in order to appear as genuine TV channel and not ideological messenger. It also possesses largest viewership figures in Kyrgyzstan – OTRK is a number one TV Channel according to the TV ratings research conducted by M-Vector in 2017 in Kyrgyzstan (M-Vector, 2017).

NTS (New Television Network) is a privately owned TV company (NTS owned by politician Omurbek Babanov, the runner-up in October's Kyrgyz presidential election in 2017). It possess a greater degree of freedom when it comes to voice societal concerns vis-a-vis certain issues. NTS is in TOP5 being on the 5th place according to TV ratings research of M-Vector in 2017.

5th Channel was established in 2006 and was one of the leading TV companies in Kyrgyzstan producing local content. One year after the toppling of the Bakiev's regime in 2011 the TV Channel has been nationalized. On 28th of December 2017, the most of team of 5th Channel have jointed the new created April TV Channel. 5th Channel was in TOP 10 being on the 10th place according to the research of M-Vector in 2017.

Yntymak Public Regional TV and Radio Company is established by decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, as regional multilingual TV and radio broadcaster. Radio

“Yntymak” broadcasts on FM 106.1. Its content is news, talk-shows and music in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek languages. It is on the 12th place among the TVs in M-Vector research.

Mir TV 24 is a CIS TV Channel, which reports on CIS integration, relations between CIS, EAEU, CSTO member countries. This TV Channel is financed by Russian government and reflects Russian government’s policy in post-Soviet countries. Mir TV is broadcast by an interstate broadcasting company involving CIS member countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Georgia, Armenia and Uzbekistan. Other countries in which the channel is available are Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Bulgaria. The TV channel, being available to more than 50 millions viewers. In Kyrgyzstan according to M-Vector 2017 research it is on 16th place.

Online news agencies (10)

Kabar.kg (Kyrgyz national informational agency Kabar) is the state-run nationwide on-line news agency, which usually expresses the officially sanctioned views on political and social issues in Kyrgyzstan. Kabar has over 185 000 visitors per month.

Akipress.org is one of the biggest news agencies in Kyrgyzstan with a monthly audience of 2 million people. Akipress.org has several affiliated news websites and publishes from 500-700 news daily about the latest events in politics, economy, society, culture and sport. The agency has a full version of website in English.

Tazabek.kg is the biggest online edition in Kyrgyzstan that covers the news of business and economics. Tazabek belongs of Akipress.org. The monthly audience is over 200 000 people in Kyrgyzstan and abroad.

24.kg is the privately owned news agency with the audience of 3.9 million viewers per month. Media experts noted that before the parliamentary elections, the news agency 24.kg changed its editorial policy and became pro-government, thus producing less critics towards the authorities.

Kabarlar.org privately owned news agency that has more than 500 000 visitors monthly.

Kaktus.media privately owned news agency, has more than 573 458 visitors monthly. The Kaktus.media is prelaunch of the Zanoza website that was forced to close as a result of a court decision, the articles on Zanoza deemed to be defamatory of President Atambayev. Courts have ruled in favour of all these lawsuits, ordering the defendants to pay a total of several hundred thousand EUR as compensation for alleged moral damages to the president.

Kloop.kg is the online news website run by the contributors students of Kloop Journalism School. Most of them are young people aged 14 to 25, but despite their age they cover the most important events and trends of Kyrgyzstan, including national and international politics, human rights, sports and culture. Kloop has over 300 000 visitors per month.

Azattyk.org is the online medium of the radio station of the same name, which belongs to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty group, funded by the United States congress.

Azattyk.kg leans towards the stances of the Kyrgyz-speaking intelligentsia, including those with rather nationalist views; and its audience size is estimated at more than 1 million per month.

Results

To compile data for this project, we implemented keyword searches on the selected websites. The related terms were “Central Asia”, “Caucasus”, “Moldova”, “Ukraine”, “EAEU”, “SOC”, “CSTO”, “Georgia”, “Armenia”, “Azerbaijan”, “Uzbekistan”, “Tajikistan”, “Kazakhstan”, “Turkmenistan”, “Regional Partnership”, “Regional Integration” and “Regional Cooperation” in the both Kyrgyz and Russian. After that, we scanned the news items for general content and filtered out those that had no connection to our topic. We pooled 2886 news articles for analysis.

No	Name of media	Number of news articles
1	Tazabek	807
2	24.kg	651
3	Kaktus	469
4	Mir TV	200
5	Azattyk	193
6	Kloop	142
7	Kabar	131
8	Knews	97
9	OTRK	67
10	Akipress	37
11	5th Channel	35
12	Yntymak	30
13	NTS	14
14	Kabarlar	13
	Total	2886

Table 1. Number of selected news articles for analysis

Preliminary analysis revealed that the range of topics on the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus published from January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017 in media of Kyrgyzstan displayed significant differences.

TV channels and online news agencies such as **Tazabek, 24.kg, Kaktus.media, MirTV, Azattyk, Kloop, Kabar** covered almost all topics that were elaborated during the coding process (over 100 articles).

Knews, OTRK, Akipress, 5th TV Channel, Yntymank, NTS, Kabarlar on the contrary, have the most modest scope of topics in our sample. From this finding, we can conclude that mainstream TV channels state and private-run and in Kyrgyzstan do not cover the partnership and engagement in issues across the border in Central Asia, Moldova, Ukraine and Caucasus and do not prioritize this topic.

Topics	5th channel	NTS	OTRK	Knews	24.kg	Kabar.kg	Kabarlar.org	Yntymak	Kaktus	Akipress	Tazabek	Kloop	Mir TV	Azattyk	Total
Kyrgyz-Kazakh Relations	8	5	16	29	338	22	3	5	260		218	92	6	41	1043
CIS, CSTO, EAEU	4	5	2	35	82	43	2	1	80	23	390		60	8	735
Kyrgyz-Uzbek Relations	20	4	41	17	166	31	6	18	93		120	37	9	86	648
Kyrgyz-Tajik Relations	3		5	9	36	16		4	11		50			13	147
Kyrgyzstan and Caucasus			3	7	8	10	1		9	3	11		22	7	81
Ukraine and Central Asia					13				12	4	1	13		11	54
Central Asia						9	1	2	1				13	17	43
Central Asia and Caucasus											11		22	7	40
Russia as regional power					6				2				30		38
Ukraine and Moldova													20	2	22
Moldova and Central Asia									1	7	6			1	15
SCO					2								6		8
Ukraine and Caucasus													7		7
Moldova and Caucasus													5		5
Total	35	14	67	97	651	131	13	30	469	37	807	142	200	193	2886

Table 2. Distribution of topics

As for the variety of topics across all media, as it is shown in Table 1, 14 topics were revealed as a result of topical analysis of selected news articles. More than one third (36%) of all news articles were devoted to Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, more than quarter (26%) of all topics covered by media were about regional unions, regional cooperation organizations such as CIS, CSTO and EAEU, almost quarter of all news articles (22%) were devoted to Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations.

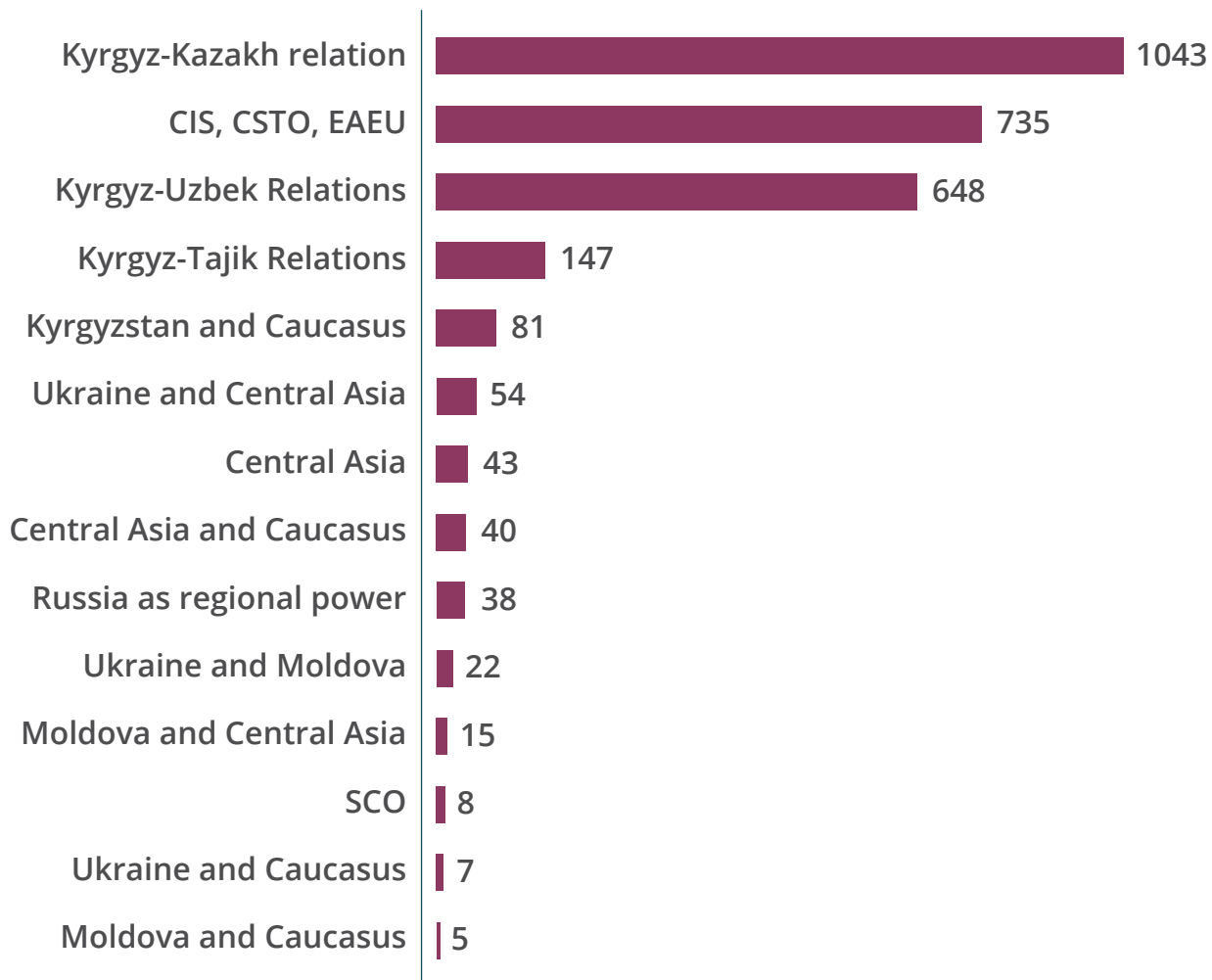


Chart 1. Distribution of topics

Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues in October, 2017

In September 2017, one of the former candidates for the presidency of Kyrgyzstan, Omurbek Babanov, met with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Atambayev, then the president of Kyrgyzstan, criticized the Kazakh authorities and accused them in “stealing the wealth” of the country. After Atambayev’s sharp criticism in his speech from October 7, Kazakhstan sent a note of protest to Kyrgyzstan, after which the Kazakh border guards moved to a strengthened mode of operation. The Kazakh authorities explained the enhanced regime of work on the border by a «planned operation» to capture terrorists and criminals. Also, Kazakh authorities announced strengthening of veterinary control at the border to reduce the amount of «gray imports». Five milk processing companies from Kyrgyzstan have already been banned from importing products to Kazakhstan. Drivers of wagons could not pass border control for three weeks, and businessmen bore losses. The deterioration of the situation on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border began on October 10 amid a diplomatic scandal.

Prime Minister Sapar Isakov said that the Kyrgyz economy felt a «negative effect» from the strengthening of border control by Kazakh border guards.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan stated that Kazakhstan’s actions at the border «do not correspond to the level of allied relations» between the countries. The Office accused the Kazakh authorities of «incorrectly» informing the public of the two countries about the situation at the border. Car jams, queues and detentions of goods continued on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border for more than a week.

President Almazbek Atambayev described the strengthening of control by the Kazakh border guards as a «blockade.» Atambayev’s speech became a reaction to the complication of the situation on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. The Kyrgyz delegation at the meeting stated that the Kazakh authorities create «artificial barriers» to the cargo carriers and «violate» the fundamental principles of the WTO. The Kazakh side replied that the reason for the tightening of inspections and control is «the fight against smuggling and counterfeit goods. The government of Kyrgyzstan considered that Kazakhstan violated the «key» norms of the agreement on tariffs and trade.

Informational website Tazabek.kg

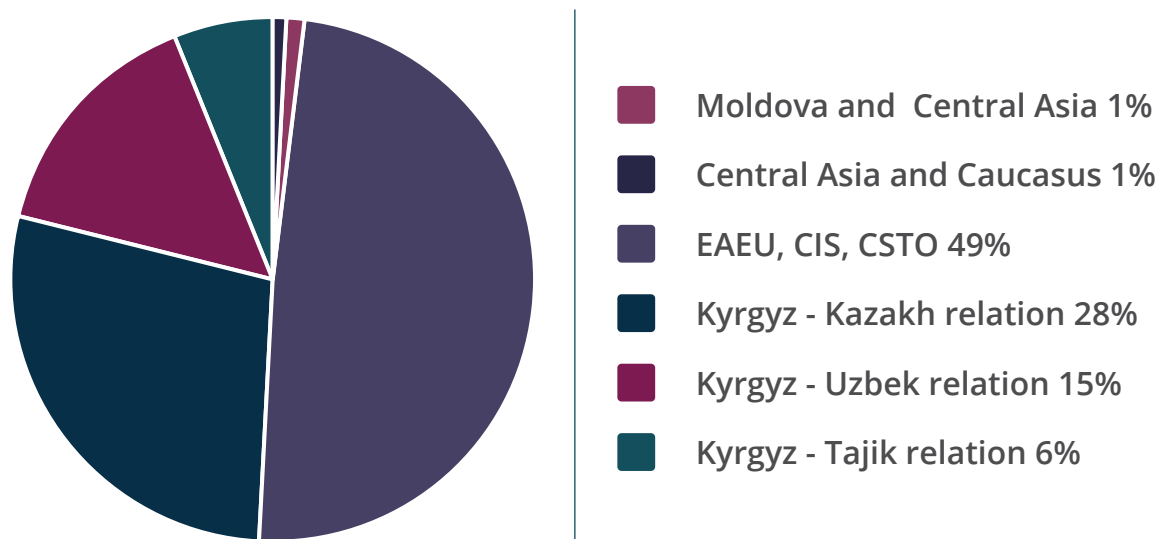


Chart 2. Topical Analysis of Tazabek.kg

Tazabek covered the topic in 6 different subtopics. Almost half of the topics (49%) were about EAEU, CIS, CSTO, more than quarter (28%) were on Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations and 15% were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (See Chart 8).

EAEU, CIS, CSTO were covered by Tazabek positively by focusing on a meeting of the Council for Youth Affairs of the CIS countries in Cholpon-Ata, meeting of the Council of CIS Interior Ministers in Dushanbe, meeting of heads of governments of CIS countries in Tashkent, Coordination Council of CIS Prosecutors to discuss cooperation in combating terrorism, the law on Armenia's accession to the EAEU for the circulation of medicinal products within the framework of the EAEU, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Iran and Armenia signed a memorandum on the establishment of the Eurasian alliance of ombudsmen, CIS countries to discuss activities of Youth Council in Minsk, the meeting of the Council for Cooperation in Health Care of the CIS countries in Bishkek, signing documents on cooperation in the topographic sphere the heads of defense departments of the CIS countries in Dushanbe and the growth of Kyrgyzstan's exports to the EAEU countries. The news article about introduction of a single currency in EAEU member countries states that Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan most of all among the countries of the Unified Energy System support the introduction of a single currency. Another news article regarding trust among CIS member countries writes, "The greatest trust in neighbors in the CIS region for the sixth year in a row expresses the population of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan".

Tazabek also published some critical articles on EAEU, CIS, CSTO. One of them was titled "They forcibly make us their consumers", - the deputy about the provisions of the Customs Code of the EAEU". Another critical news article states "Kyrgyzstan was not fully ready to enter the EEA, - national consultant K.Tilekeev". Two more articles criticized Kyrgyzstan's accession to EAEU by writing that the country had unrealized hopes, for which there are objective reasons - an expert on joining the EAEU found "To date, there are many obstacles and barriers in the internal market of the EAEC, - the Ministry of Economy".

Tazabek tried to keep balance by publishing pro-EAEU articles such as “Miracles do not happen, and Kyrgyzstan must undergo an adaptation period, - Deputy Prime Minister O.Pankratov on the EAEU” and “What did Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the EAEU give? - The Ministry of Economy named the main results”, “The crisis is not eternal, the recession always follows growth - the President of Kazakhstan N.Nazarbayev on the economic indicators of the EAEU”.

Another interesting finding was that Tazabek published several research results on EAEU and CIS member countries’ perceptions and attitudes towards these unions. One of such news articles was on research results, which was conducted in 2015 about the attitude of people in EAEU member countries towards EAEU, which concludes that in 2015, people in Kyrgyzstan were more positive about membership in the EAEU, which changed insignificantly from 86% to 83% in 2016-2017. Another news article dedicated to this topic was about a research, which concludes that Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan believe that in the next five years the countries of the CIS region will converge with each other. One more news article related to this topic states “In a difficult moment, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey will support us think people in Kyrgyzstan. Another news article regarding this topic wrote “In Kyrgyzstan, support for participation in the EAEU fell from 86% of the population in 2015 to 81% in 2016”.

One more news article related to this topic states “In 2016, public support for participation in the EAEU fell from 86% to 81% in Kyrgyzstan, - EDB”.

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were framed by Tazabek mostly negatively by focusing on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues in October 2017.

Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were covered by Tazabek in a neutral tone by focusing on a new level of relations between two countries.

Informational agency 24.kg

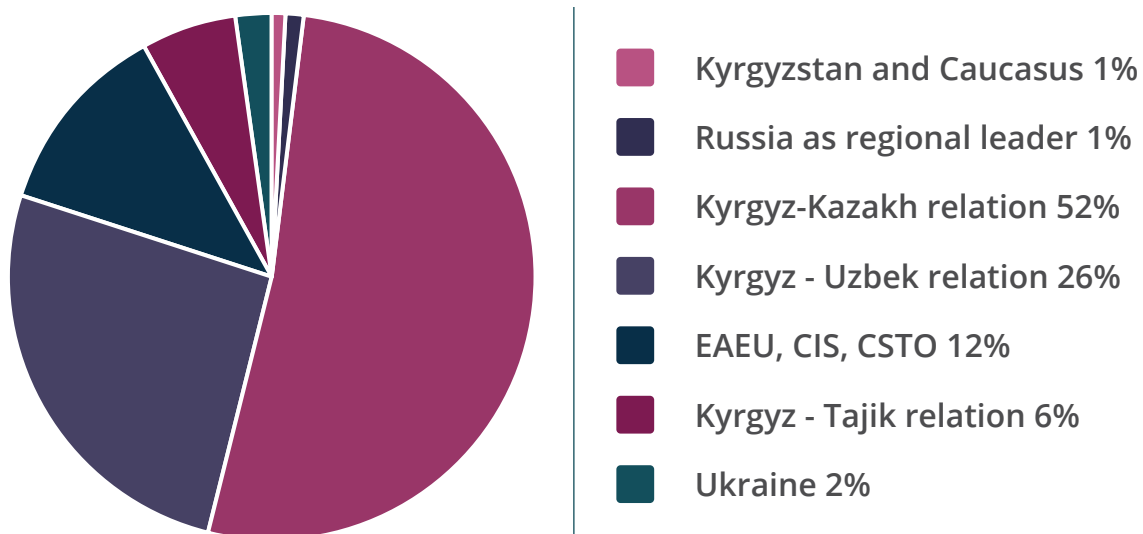


Chart 3. Topical analysis of 24.kg

24.kg's coverage of our topic varied according to thematic analysis of news articles published in 2017 (see Chart 4). More than half of the news articles (52%) were on Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, more than a quarter (26%) of all news articles were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations and 12% were about EAEU, CIS and CSTO.

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were covered by 24.kg in a negative tone by focusing on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues, which started in October 2017. 24.kg provided a chronological order of news reports about the situation on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border under the title "Situation on border" dedicated to series of news report on the escalation of the situation. Another section devoted to this issue was "Agent-024" which reported 7/24 on difficulties passengers and trucks facing on the border. 24.kg named the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border as a blockade, problem and confrontation between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were framed by 24.kg positively by focusing on a new level of bilateral relations between two countries. Official visits of Presidents of two countries, economic agreements, investment of Uzbekistan in construction of Kambar-Ata HES, financial loan by Uzbekistan to Kyrgyz banks and China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project were major topics. Demarcation and delimitation of Kyrgyz-Uzbek borders were also another major topic. Negotiations around Unkur-Too, Chala-Sart were also among news reports by 24.kg. Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were framed as a positive development because of a new opportunities for new markets, investments, export and import opportunities and financial assistance provided by Uzbekistan.

Most articles narrated positively about EAEU, CIS, CSTO by framing regional these unions and organizations as integration processes of their member countries. New regulations for exporting products, new economic opportunities and free trade among member countries were major topics. Another major topic was about the attitude and perceptions of people in member countries about EAEU. The increase in export volumes, GDP, salaries, economic indicators of member countries after the accession of the EAEU was main focus of most articles. Interviews with experts supporting the EAEU and CIS integration processes and closer cooperation among its member countries were provided. Number of news reports increased during EAEU and CIS, CSTO Summits, meetings, official visits of Presidents of member countries and official visit of Vladimir Putin to CIS countries.

Informational agency Kaktus Media

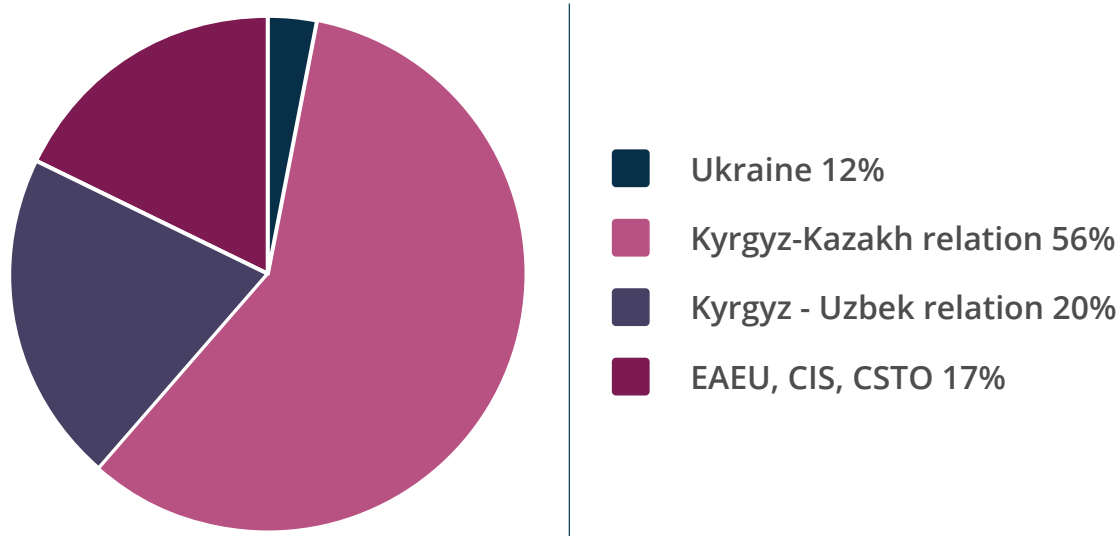


Chart 4. Topical analysis of Kaktus

The analysis of news articles published on Kaktus media revealed that the palette of topics was very rich (8 topics). More than half of them (56%) were about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, one fifth (20%) were on Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations and almost one fifth 17% were on CIS, EAEU and CSTO (See Chart 7).

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were covered by Kaktus media in a negative tone by focusing on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues in October 2017. Kaktus media named this as a conflict, problem, blockade and confrontation between two countries. It provided a series of reports from the border about the situation. Under the title "Call-center" Kaktus Media reported 7/24 from Kyrgyz-Kazakh border.

Kaktus media covered Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations in a critical tone by focusing on one-sided use of Orto-Tokoy reservoir by Uzbekistan. The other was on "Kyrgyzstan returned to Uzbekistan four boarding houses in Issyk-Kul". Critical news articles were also on Kyrgyz-Uzbek border issues stressing that they are still unresolved. Another news story was about the open letter of the public literary fund of the Uzbek youth «Begayim» in Jalal-Abad sent to the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, where the issue of resuming the Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were raised. Some articles on Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations had neutral tone by focusing on official visits of Presidents of two countries and new level of development of bilateral relations. Kaktus media provided chronological publication of events related to new level of development on Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, which cannot be found in any other media in Kyrgyzstan.

Kaktus.media has a series of articles about Kyrgyzstan and EAEU. The news agency covers both the positive and negative news related to the EAEU. Kaktus.media writes about the problems with certification of the goods from Kyrgyzstan. However, there are also some positive materials. For example, "there is a new logistical center in Balykchy,

where producers can store their goods for a long period” before exporting them. Moreover, some articles express the opinions of experts who provide their criticism and recommendations. Thus, Kaktus.media provides a wide coverage on the topic of the EAEU.

Kyrgyz-Ukrainian relations were covered negatively on Kaktus Media by focusing on President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko’s ban of entry to Ukraine to Kyrgyz parliamentaries Karamushkina and Amankulov because of their trip to the Crimea, Poroshenko’s dismissal of ambassador of Ukraine in Kyrgyzstan Nikolai Doroshenko, Ukrainian embassy’s protest for the Foreign Ministry because of the trip of the KR deputies to the Crimea.

Mir 24 TV Channel

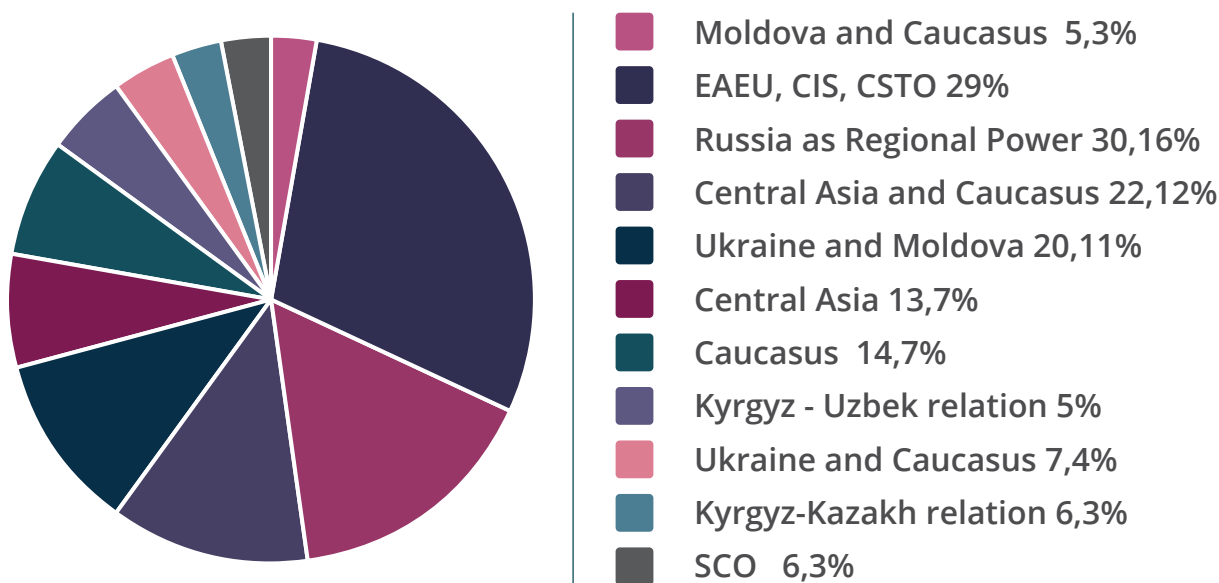


Chart 5. Topical analysis of Mir TV Channel

Analysis of Mir 24 TV Channel revealed new categories of topics such as Ukraine and Caucasus relations, Moldova and Caucasus relations, Moldova and Central Asia relations and Ukraine and Moldova relations (See Chart 3).

Topical analysis of Mir TV coverage revealed that almost one third of topics (29%) were about regional unions, regional cooperation organizations such as CIS, CSTO and EAEU. 16% of all news articles were about Russia as regional power in the region, the third major topic of Mir TV was about Central Asia and Caucasus relations (12%) and another topic was on Ukraine and Moldova relations (11%).

CIS, CSTO, EAEU was covered by Mir TV Channel in a positive tone supporting the regional cooperation and integration through these unions and organizations. News articles were focusing on economic benefits of these unions and organizations for their member countries creating common market to widen their export potentials and opening new markets for their products. The coverage of Summits, meetings, gatherings of Presidents of member countries, signing agreements and discussing barriers to free trade between these countries were major topics. Interviews of experts supporting EAEU, CIS, CSTO

unions were predominant than the interviews of alternative views providing neutral and balanced opinions of experts.

16% of all news articles were about Russia as a regional leader by framing that these integration processes were promoted by Russia and particularly by the President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. The number of news reports increased during Putin's visit to Central Asia, Putin's meeting with CIS leaders in Moscow. Some articles were also about Putin's interview about EAEU and its potential and future. Thus, Russia was depicted as a regional leader in CIS and EAEU member countries by initiating and promoting the idea of Eurasian Union.

Mir TV Channel covered Central Asia and Caucasus relations more than any other media outlet in the region. It may be due to the audience of channel which broadcasts to the whole CIS region and also to Eastern Europe. Economic, trade, commercial, bilateral relations between Central Asian countries and Caucasus countries were covered by Mir TV channel positively.

Azattyk.org

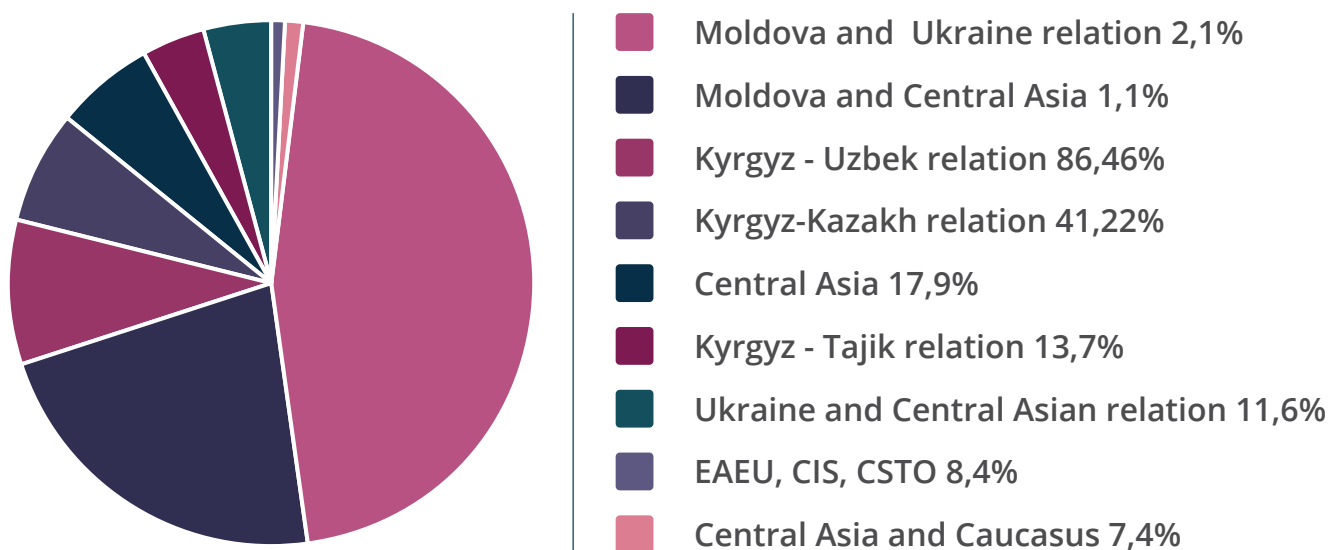


Chart 6. Topical analysis of Azattyk

Azattyk focuses mainly on the topics of 1) Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (86 news articles), 2) Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations (41 news articles), 3) Central Asian integration and cooperation (17 news articles) and 4) Kyrgyz-Tajik relations (13 news articles) and 5) Ukraine and Central Asian relations (11 news articles) (See Chart 2).

The coverage of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were positive by focusing on border demarcation and delimitation process, negotiations of both sides on Chala-Sart; Unkur-Too, Orto-Tokoi water reservoir and enclaves on the both sides, new level of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations which started with the visits of Presidents, PMs to Tashkent and Bishkek, signing bilateral agreements on cooperation, opening border check-points between two countries.

Azattyk's coverage of Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations was neutral by framing Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues in October, 2017; Kazakhstan 's financial help to Kyrgyzstan, issues related to transit of goods through Kazakhstan to EEU members countries.

Azattyk's coverage of Kyrgyz-Tajik Relations were also positive by framing about progress in negotiations on Kyrgyz-Tajik border, the similarities of Kyrgyz and Tajik, cooperation of border guards of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Leilek. Some articles also reported on conflict situation in Kok-Tash village on the border, Tajikistan is disputing oil field in Batken and environmental fee from transport entering Tajikistan from Kyrgyzstan.

News articles related to Ukraine and Central Asian relations were had a neutral tone by reporting about the diplomatic conflict between Ukraine and Kazakhstan, where the Crimea was shown as part of Russia on the map of the states participating in the international exhibition EXPO-2017 in Astana.

Azattyk covered Ukraine-Kyrgyzstan relations in a neutral tone by covering such issues as two deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh were banned from entering Ukraine, Ukrainian Ambassador is offended by the visit of Kyrgyz parliamentarians to Crimea, Kyrgyzstan voted against UN resolution on Crimea, an announcement inviting Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University students to Crimea to work.

News website Kloop.kg

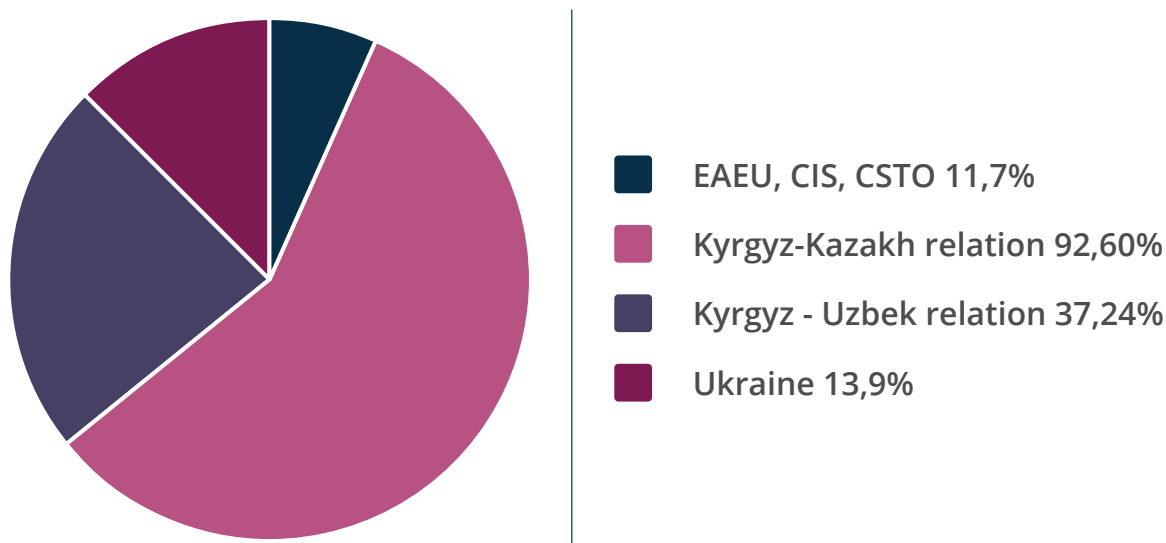


Chart 7. Topical analysis of Kloop.kg

The analysis of news articles published on Kloop.kg revealed that the variety of topics were limited in this media outlet. Only 3 main topics were revealed, the majority of news articles (65%) were about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, more than quarter of units (26%) were devoted to Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations and 9% of articles were on Ukraine (See Chart 5).

Kloop.kg was the only news website in Kyrgyzstan that collected the chronological publications about the situation between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan border issue in one

material. It contained all the statements and actions of the authorities of the two countries, because of which the situation at the checkpoints deteriorated.

Kloop framed Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations mostly in a critical tone by focusing on unresolved border issues and conflicts around these borders between the local people of two countries. Most news articles refer to the history of border disputes, for example one article was titled "The dispute is 17 years old: How Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan conducted the border negotiations?"

Kloop's coverage of Ukraine was neutral and mostly related to Kyrgyz-Ukrainian relations, specifically travel ban for two Kyrgyz MPs to Ukraine after their visit to Crimea. According to the interview, Karamushkina explained her trip by saying that she personally wanted to see what was actually happening in the Crimea. According to her, to go through Russia to Crimea was «more convenient». She believes that Doroshenko exceeded authority when he demanded that the Kyrgyz authorities take measures against her. Kloop also gave a view of Ukraine authorities to this issue: «Since the Crimea is Ukraine, Mrs. Karamushkina and her companions were to receive appropriate permission from the competent bodies of Ukraine and enter the territory of occupied Ukraine through the current border checkpoints.»

Informational agency Kabar.kg

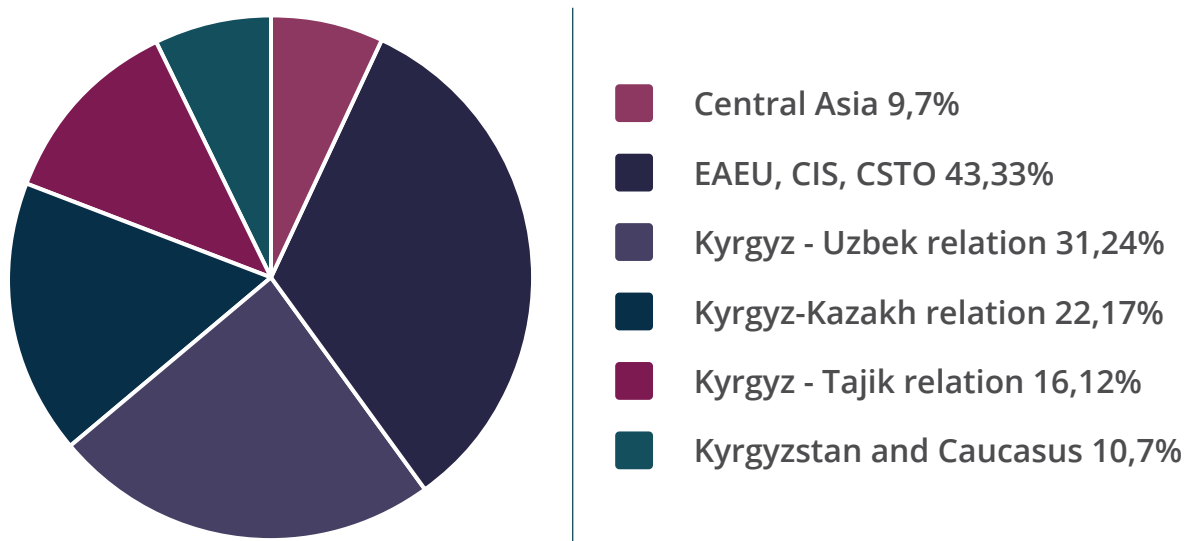


Chart 8. Topical analysis of Kabar.kg

Third of the coverage of Kabar.kg (33%) was devoted to EAEU, CIS, CSTO, another almost third of its coverage (31%) was about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations and about fifth (17%) was about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations (See Chart 12).

Kabar's coverage of EAEU, CIS, CSTO was positive by focusing on advantages of joining EAEU for Kyrgyzstan. Mostly economic benefits of EAEU accession, new opportunities for expanding export were reported. Kabar also gave preference to pro-Russian experts' opinions in covering EAEU integration and its benefits to its member countries.

Kabar’s framing of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations was also positive following pro-governmental agenda in Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations by reporting on official visits by government members of two countries and development of a new level of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations.

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were covered by Kabar in a neutral tone by focusing on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues in October, 2017 and negotiations between two countries.

Informational agency Knews

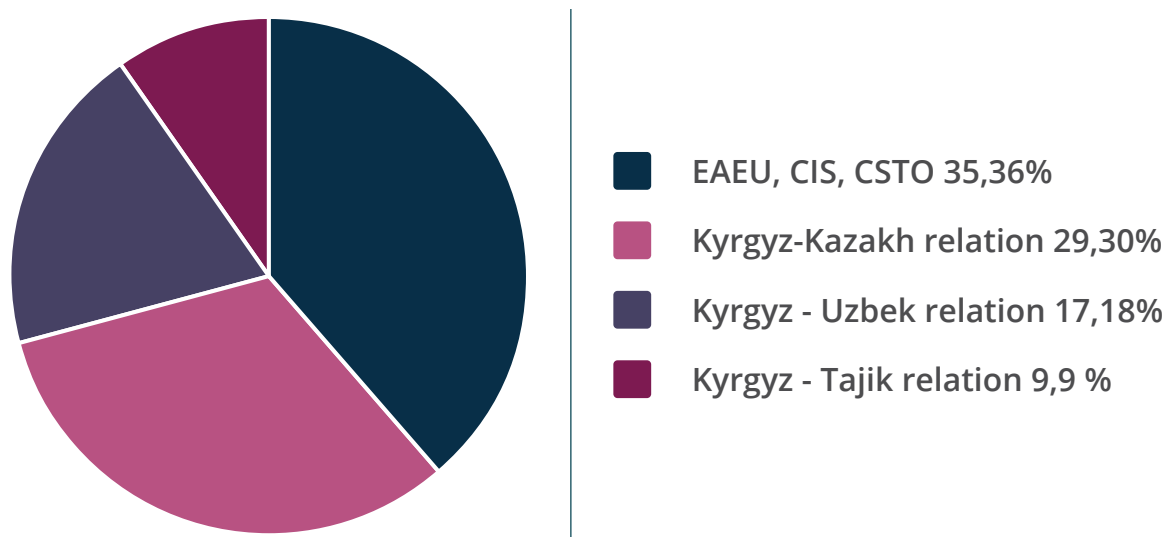


Chart 9. Topical analysis of Knews

The topical analysis of Knews reveals that more than third of news articles were about CIS, EAEU and CSTO (36%). Analysis of news articles on EAEU, CIS and CSTO reveal that the majority of news articles were positively covered these topics.

Almost third of news articles were on Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations (30%) and almost one fifth of all news articles (18%) were on Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (See Chart 6).

Knews covered EAEU, CIS, CSTO positively by focusing on achievements and prospects of CSTO, economic benefits of Kyrgyzstan’s accession to EAEU such as development of textile industry of Kyrgyzstan and the increasing volume of mutual trade between Kyrgyzstan and the EAEU countries. Other benefits that were highlighted in the articles included the reliefs for employment of Kyrgyz migrants in the countries of EAEU, a bigger market, and a new system for collecting custom duties.

Similar framing was focusing on removing barriers on borders between EAEU member countries. One such news article was titled: “Participating countries of the EAEU will no longer be «naughty» at the borders - Victor Volodatsky”. The article narrated that the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) together with the Eurasian Economic Commission are actively working to eliminate and prevent the emergence of new obstacles to the free movement of goods and services on the domestic markets of the Union.

Knews allowed very few critical news articles on the topic. The articles covered the

Armenian experience with EAEU. They stated that «after the accession to the EAEU agreement, there has been a regression in several socio-economic spheres”.

The second major topic covered by Knews was Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations. Knews covered Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations positively by focusing on economic, trade and business relations between two countries, Kazakhstan’s 100 million USD financial assistance to Kyrgyzstan to adapt to new conditions of EAEU, and increase in trade. Knews was neutral when reporting the situation, however still outlined the ban on dairy products, negotiations between two countries and possible ways of resolution. One of the news articles stresses on Russia’s role as a mediating third-party in Kyrgyz-Kazakh border issues: «If we talk about third-party assistance in resolving the contradictions that have arisen, the mediator in this case should not be Uzbekistan. It should be noted that the task of mediation between the leaders two countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), both in public and non-public forms, still should be resolved to a greater extent by Russia”.

Knews’s coverage of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were neutral by framing official visits of Presidents of two countries, number of agreements signed between them.

Public TV and Radio Corporation (OTRK)

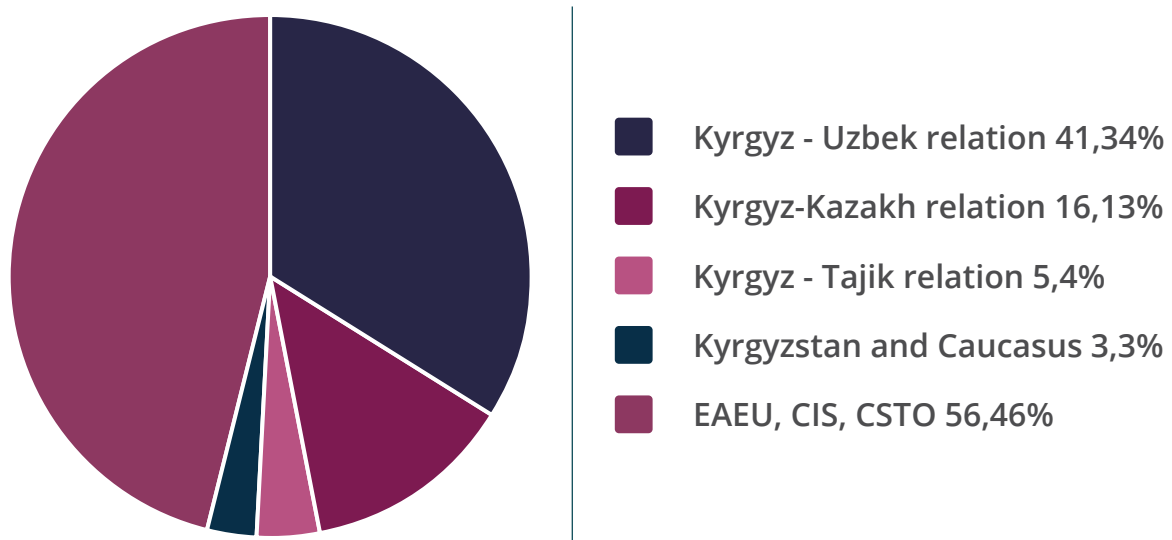


Chart 10. Topical analysis of OTRK TV Channel

The topical analysis of OTRK TV Channel revealed that this TV Channel devoted most of its coverage to the relations with our neighbors. Majority of topics (46%) were about EAEU, CIS, CSTO, one fifth (34%) were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, 16% were about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations (See Chart 9).

OTRK’s coverage of EAEU, CIS, CSTO was predominantly positive by focusing on benefits of joining EAEU for its member countries and Kyrgyzstan. News articles about EAEU were mostly about increase in exports from Kyrgyzstan to EAEU member countries, 18 technical regulations of EAEU, increase in textile manufacturing industry in Kyrgyzstan, in-

crease in prices of cotton, export of dairy and farm products to EAEU members countries, increase in salaries of EAEU member countries, decrease of problems of migrants from Kyrgyzstan to EAEU members countries, common oil and gas market of EAEU and ways of integration to EAEU.

Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were covered by OTRK positively by stressing new level of relations between two countries; official visits of Presidents of two countries, signing new cooperation agreements between two countries and negotiations of border issues.

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were framed by OTRK in a neutral tone by focusing on border negotiations between two countries.

AKIpress News agency

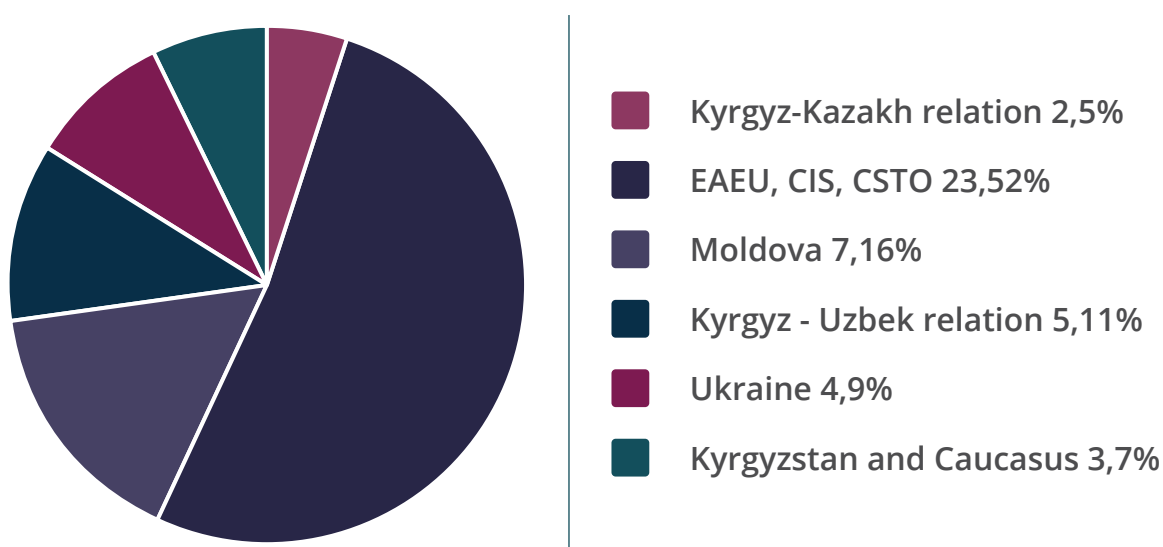


Chart 11. Topical analysis of AKIpress

Akipress.org gave preference to topics related to regional integration and cooperation organizations such as EAEU, CIS, CSTO, more that half of its topics (52%), 16% were about Moldova and 11% Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (See Chart 15).

The coverage of EAEU, CIS and CSTO was positive stressing on the contribution of these regional unions and organizations to regional cooperation and integration.

Akipress.org’s coverage of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (11%) were mostly positive by focusing on a new level of bilateral relations between two countries, official visit of Presidents and other officials to two countries and agreements and memorandums on cooperation signed by representatives of two countries.

Akipress covered Moldova in 16% of selected articles in a positive tone by reporting on the official visit of the President of Moldova Igor Dodon to Kyrgyzstan. Another topic related to Moldova was the termination of contract with Moldova for the supply of service and diplomatic passport forms in Kyrgyzstan. Also because of the Kyrgyz-Moldovan

inter-ministerial consultations meeting in Bishkek where the sides discussed the issues of strengthening cooperation in trade-economic, transport-communication, cultural-humanitarian and other spheres, expansion of the existing legal framework.

5th TV Channel

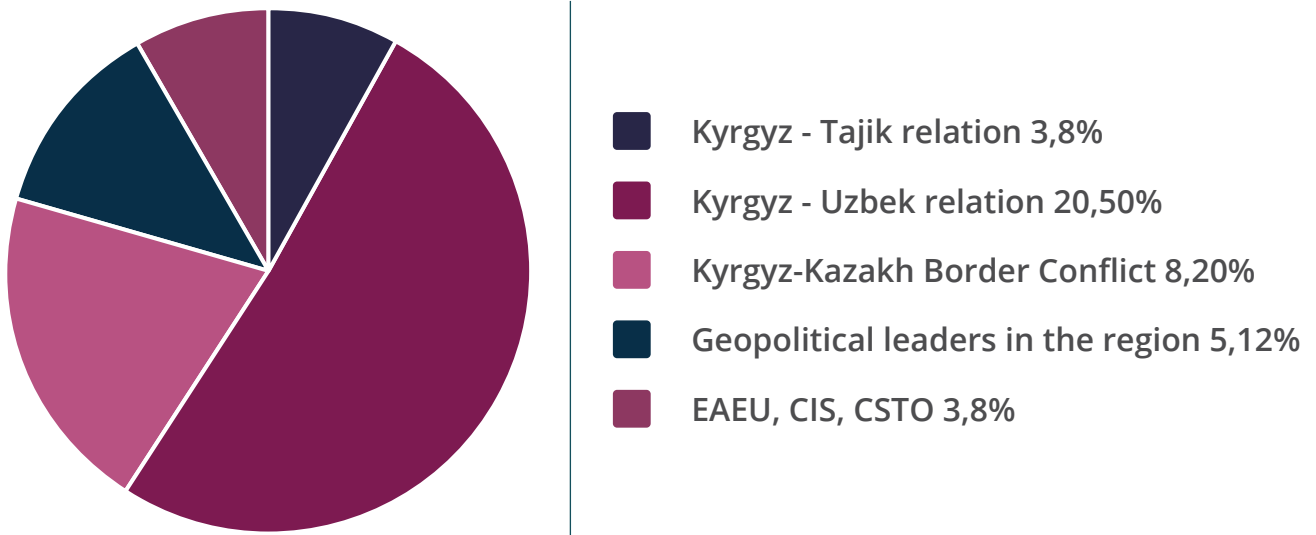


Chart 12. Topical analysis of 5th TV Channel

Half of the news on 5th TV Channel (50%) were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, one fifth (20%) were about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations and 12% were about Geopolitical leaders in the region such as Russia, China and Western countries (See Chart 10).

Channel's coverage of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations was positive by focusing on economic cooperation such as export of electricity to Uzbekistan, negotiations on joint use of the Orto-Tokoy reservoir with Uzbekistan, cross-border cooperation, the construction of the railway China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, signing Free Trade Area Agreement with Uzbekistan and launch of a business forum «Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan» in Tashkent.

Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were framed by 5th TV Channel were mostly negative by stressing Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade on October 10, 2017 and Kazakhstan's imposing restrictions on import of dairy, meat and confectionery products from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan's refusal to buy electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's delay of the tranche promised by the Protocol on Technical Assistance.

Yntymak.kg

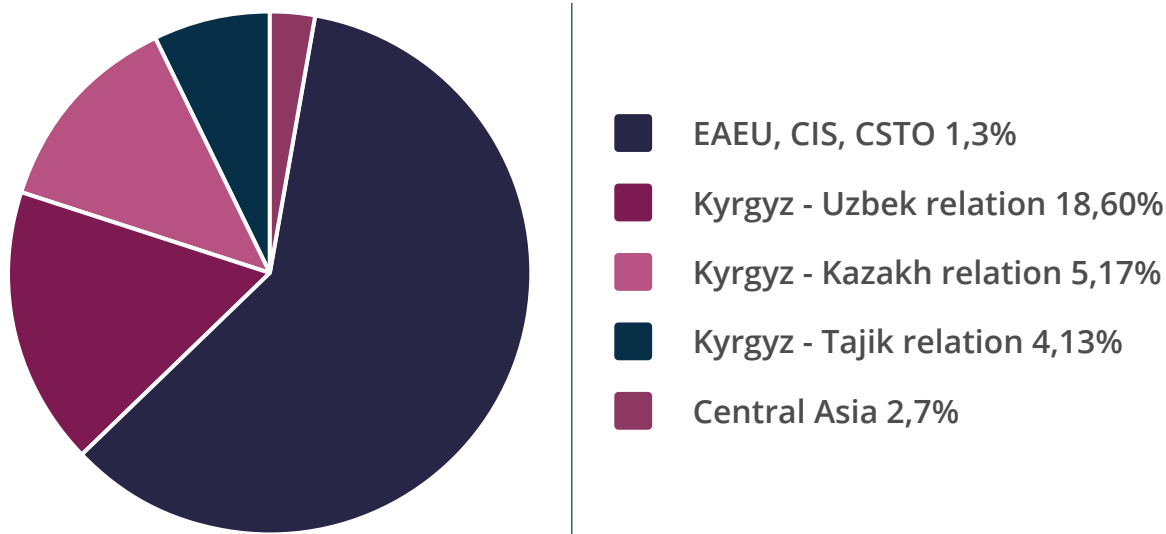


Chart 13. Topical analysis of Yntymak.kg

Yntymak.kg covered mostly the relations with our neighboring countries, majority of its topics (60%) were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, almost one fifth of its topics (17%) were about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations and 13% were about Kyrgyz-Tajik relations (See Chart 14).

It is reasonable why Yntymak.kg predominantly covered Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations. Yntymak.kg is situated in the south of the country (Osh town). The coverage of Yntymak.kg was predominantly on border conflicts, border negotiations between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The coverage of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations by Yntymak.kg was mostly positive by stressing on resolution of border issues, negotiations being held by two sides, cooperation and collaboration between two countries, official visits of Presidents of both countries, friendship between two nations and interethnic relations. The coverage of Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations was in a neutral tone by focusing on border issues.

Kyrgyz-Tajik relations were framed mostly in a critical tone by focusing on border conflicts between two countries.

NTS TV Channel

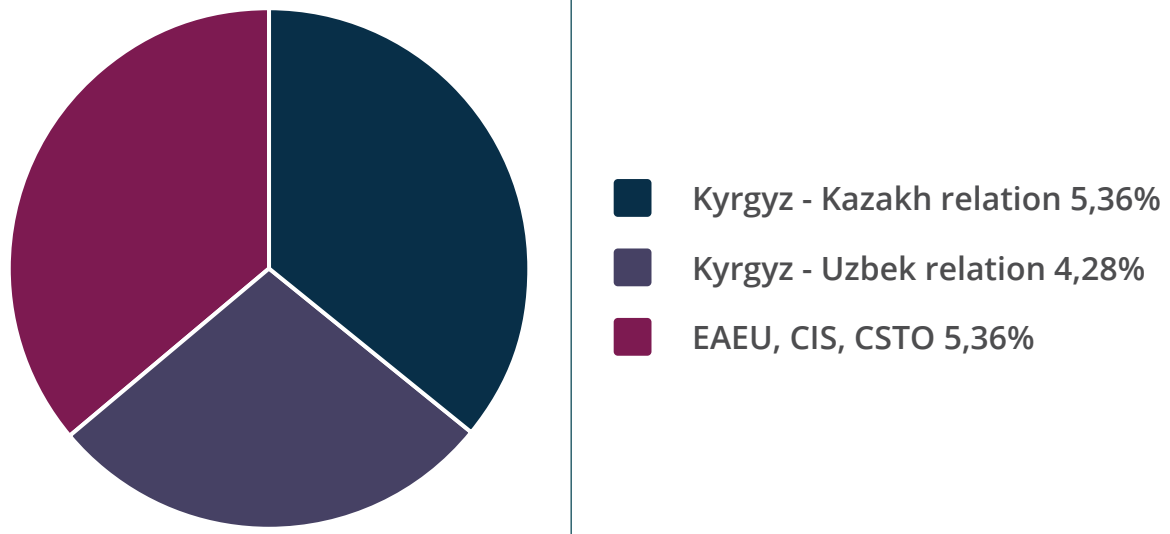


Chart 14. Topical analysis of NTS TV Channel

Equal coverage of EAEU CIS CSTO and Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations were given on NTS TV Channel, more than third of its coverage (36%) to both topics and more than quarter of its news (28%) were about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations (See Chart 11).

NTS's coverage of Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations was predominantly positive by focusing on economic, commercial and trade relations between two countries. The tone of news articles about Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade were mostly neutral by focusing on negotiations being held by two sides on resolution of this situation.

EAEU, CIS, CSTO were covered by NTS in a negative tone by focusing on difficulties and problems its member countries face during export of products. For example the article titled "EEU: Crisis or temporary difficulties?" writes that the member countries of the EAEU began more often to return exports of products to the country of the union where they were produced.

Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were covered by NTS positively stressing on official visits of Presidents of two countries, new economic relations between two countries.

Informational agency Kabarlar.org

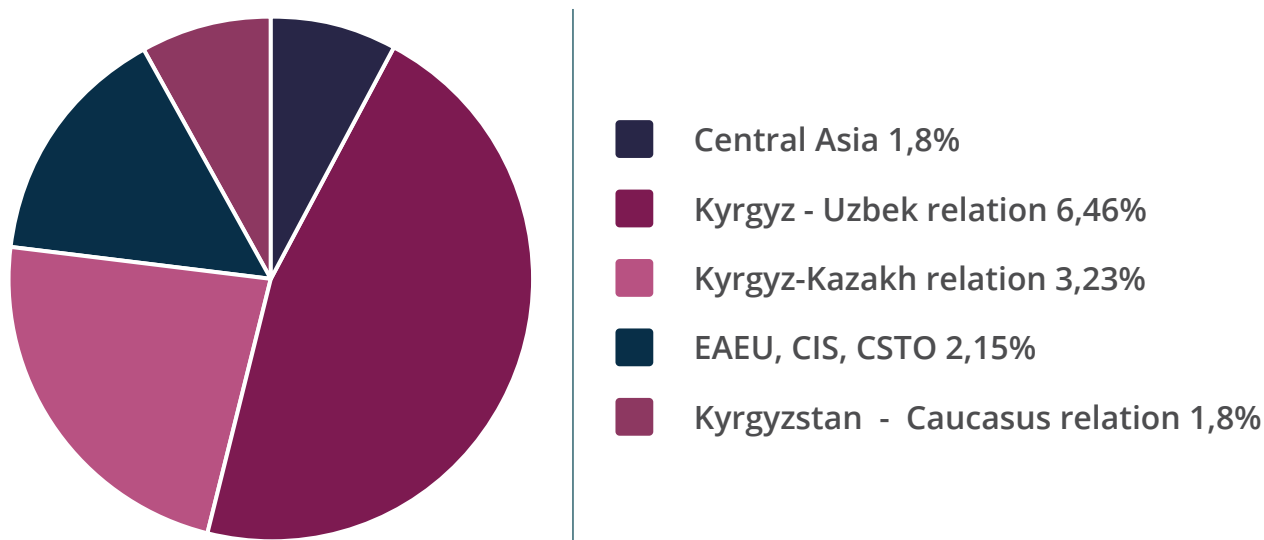


Chart 15. Topical analysis of Kabarlar.org

Kabarlar.org covered the topic in a richer palette of subtopics compared to Kabar.kg (5 subtopics) almost half of which (46%) was about Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, almost quarter (23%) was about Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations and 15% was about EAEU, CIS, CSTO (See Chart 13).

Kabarlar.org preferred to cover relations with neighboring countries. The relations with Uzbekistan was mostly positive by stressing on cooperation on the construction of Kambarata-1, the export of Kyrgyz potatoes to Uzbekistan, launch of a new route of cargo transportation Uzbekistan - Kyrgyzstan - China and official visits of Presidents of two countries.

The coverage of Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations by Kabarlar.org was mostly negative because of Kyrgyz-Kazakh border conflict, which occurred on October 10, 2017 and lasted for two months. The articles were criticizing Kazakh side for blocking the border, which brought huge economic and financial loss for hundreds of Kyrgyz entrepreneurs and state.

15% of news articles were dedicated to EAEU, CIS and CSTO as regional unions and organizations contributing to the regional cooperation and integration were mostly positive.

Comparative analysis of results

Private media: Tazabek & 24.kg

Topics	Tazabek	24.kg
EAEU, CIS, CSTO	49% (positive)	12% (positive)
Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations	28% (negative)	52% (negative)
Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations	15% (neutral)	26% (positive)

Mir TV Channel & Azattyk

Topics	MirTVChannel	Topics	Azattyk
EAEU, CIS, CSTO	29% (positive)	Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations	46% (positive)
Russia as regional leader	16% (positive)	Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations	22% (neutral)
Central Asia and Caucasus	12% (positive)	Central Asia	9% (neutral)
Ukraine and Moldova	11% (positive)	Kyrgyz-Tajik relations	7% (positive)
Central Asia	7% (positive)	EAEU, CIS, CSTO	4% (negative)
Caucasus	7% (positive)		

State-owned media: OTRK & Kabar

Topics	Kabar	OTRK
EAEU, CIS, CSTO	33% (positive)	46% (positive)
Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations	24% (positive)	34% (positive)
Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations	17% (neutral)	13% (neutral)
Kyrgyz-Tajik relations	12% (neutral)	4% (neutral)

Private Media: Kloop, Kaktus, Knews

Topics	Kloop	Kaktus	Knews
Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations	65% (negative)	56 % (negative)	30% (positive)
Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations	26% (negative)	20 % (neutral)	18% (neutral)
EAEU, CIS, CSTO	7% (neutral)	17 % (neutral)	36% (positive)
Ukraine	9% (neutral)	3 % (negative)	—

Tazabek. Being the biggest online edition in Kyrgyzstan that covers the news of business and economics - Tazabek.kg positively covered the EAEU and how it benefited Kyrgyzstan. Most of the articles were supportive of government and its policies towards the regional integration. When the border conflict between two countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan gained its peak, most of the articles by Tazabek.kg had a negative tone when highlighting the news, as the border conflict negatively impacted the Kyrgyzstani producers when they could not send their goods abroad. As the news portal has a focus in business and economics, it remained neutral when covering the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border issue.

Mir TV Channel and *Azattyk* are between two extremes of the framing divide. *MirTV Channel* (and to a lesser degree *24.kg*) frame the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova as an unavoidable, omnipresent phenomenon. Although all of the web portals admit the connection between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova through border issues and EAEU to Russia and CIS, *Mir TV Channel* and *24.kg* stress their mutual cooperation. Overall, *MirTV Channel's* coverage of the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova was pro-EAEU and pro-Russian (Russia as regional leader).

Azattyk, on the contrary, emphasizes the negative consequences in membership to EAEU, Russia's leadership role in regional integration, border issues in transit of goods between EAEU member countries, unresolved border negotiations between Central Asian countries, Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade. It chooses a positive tone to report the stories about and around the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. It concentrates primarily on the problems, and interviews of experts who are not happy with ongoing integration and cooperation processes and experiences. This creates an image of the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova as a lacking leadership and initiative of member countries to integration and integration being imposed by Russia as regional leader.

Private and state-sponsored media mainly differ in the choice of topics and tone of coverage. The major differences appear in the analysis of *24.kg*, *Knews.kg*, *Kabar.kg*, *OTRK TV Channel*, *NTS TV channel*, *Yntymak*, *5th Channel TV*, *Akipress.org* and *Tazabek.kg*. Whereas the state-sponsored media frames the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova positively by focusing on EEU, CIS CSTO integration unions and organizations, economic and trade relations and opportunities created by the accession of EEU. The private media provides more articles that contain more critical views, with the key topics of border conflicts, barriers in transit of goods between EEU member countries, negative consequences of EEU membership, Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade, Russia's regional leadership, border conflicts between Ukraine and Moldova, between Caucasus countries and between Central Asian countries, lack of initiative and leadership among EEU member countries.

Analysis of *Azattyk's* and *Kloop's* coverage of the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova shows that there were negative connotations in reporting integration by covering Kyrgyz-Tajik border issues, Kyrgyz-Uzbek border issues and Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade. *Azattyk* also criticized the Kyrgyz government for not solving border conflicts with its neighboring countries and not preparing to all conditions for transit of goods to EAEU and not using opportunities in membership to EAEU in Kyrgyzstan.

Conclusion

Analysis of the framing of the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova in online news agencies and mainstream TV channels of Kyrgyzstan reveals that their perspective towards the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova is rather complicated.

The official discourse in both state-sponsored and private media in general is in accordance with the country's policy towards preserving closer political and economic engagement as well as strong cultural ties with Russia, neighbouring countries in Central Asia, Caucasus, EUU members countries, Ukraine and Moldova seen as a traditional foreign policy allies and strategic partners. However, when the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border crisis escalated, EAEU customs policy initiatives, including calls for further political integration within the Eurasian Economic Union and tensions with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan over border issues, border blockade provoked more resistance and criticism (even if initially limited) across Kyrgyzstan's media, especially private media outlets. State-sponsored media outlets had a more nuanced view towards neighboring countries in Central Asia by focusing on Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations, Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, Kyrgyz-Tajik relations, EAEU, Russia as regional power (and Soviet experiences are oftentimes projected to modern Russia); while some tend to focus on Caucasus and Central Asia relations, Ukraine and Central Asia relations and Moldova and Central Asia relations.

The main discourses in state-sponsored media differed according to the editorial policies of these media outlets. State-sponsored media's coverage of the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova was not balanced by providing a platform mainly for pro-governmental, pro-EAEU, voices over the issue.

Findings include that the amount of coverage was rather small in official, state-sponsored media while in privately owned media, the amount and spectrum of coverage is wider. It seems also that private media are less controlled by the officials and therefore more varied in their views than state-sponsored media.

In a CIS media outlet MirTV Channel the relations between Caucasus countries, Moldova-Caucasus relations, Ukraine-Caucasus relations, Moldova-Ukraine relations and Caucasus-Central Asia relations were discussed. Kyrgyz state media reported only the relations between Central Asian countries and EAEU member countries, Russia's attitude towards Central Asia, Kyrgyz-Kazakh border blockade and Kyrgyz-Uzbek new relations were discussed, the official version that the membership in EAEU benefits Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and its member countries was also the focus of these media outlets. In private media, the coverage had a different pattern, being the most varied and critical in their views.

In a CIS regional MirTV Channel, projection to Eurasian union discussion was visible. This track is also visible in some private media outlets, particularly in 24.kg, Knews.kg, Aki-press.org and Tazabek.kg. Their stories were about possible influence of Russia on integration projects in CIS, CSTO and EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union).

In sum, the representation of the several discussed topics – regional unions, regional cooperation organizations such as the EAEU, CIS, CSTO; Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, Kyrgyz-Kazakh border conflict, Kyrgyz-Tajik relations and border issues, Central Asian integration, Central Asia and Caucasus, Central Asia and Ukraine, Central Asia and Moldova, Russia as regional power etc. – provides a rich example of how differently the 15 websites frame the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. Topics about Kyrgyzstan's relationships with neighboring Central Asian countries are prevalent in most state-owned media.

Recommendations for future research

As for the theoretical implications of this study, in assessing subtleties in media content this study defined broad and narrow conceptualizations as well as issue-specific frames that may serve as reference points when explicating the nature of the frames. Framing research as a contribution to theory and a tool for media analysis is work in progress. The paper is a first attempt to systematically assess issue-specific frames about the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova and identify contentious issues for future research to address. This especially refers to the consequences of framing on the individual and the societal levels. An individual level consequence may be altered attitudes about an issue based on exposure to certain frames. On the societal level, frames may contribute to shaping social level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions.

A limitation needs to be addressed in the selection of publications. During the course of the study, we noticed that some of the articles devoted to the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova did not contain any words cognate to “integration”. Although the search criteria were revised every time we found special naming, we cannot predict how many other contextual synonyms for “integration” could possibly exist. This complicated compilation of the finite data set and could have distorted the ratings of the most popular topics and articles. A possible distortion may appear as well in regard to the first coding process; the authors compared codes as a means of validating the process, however independent raters were not attracted. An important limitation needs to be addressed with regard to the results. The time frame of the analysis was short, taking into consideration that the partnership between Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova started after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It would also have been fruitful to compare more than 15 media outlets to see the range of perspectives on the issue. Finally, causal relations are hard to ascertain, because it is difficult to investigate with the help of thematic analysis whether the ownership shapes the ideology of the coverage.

Recommendations for media

Foreign affairs reporting in Kyrgyzstan remains naively one-dimensional; foreign news coverage unfortunately begins and ends with issues of immediate concern to Kyrgyzstan. Diplomatic reporting - distinct from general foreign news - involves the relationships among nations and their efforts to make their way in the world and manage the problems this presents. Ideally, news audiences in Kyrgyzstan and in other CIS countries deserve to be told about what is happening everywhere. By this measure, foreign correspondents of news media in Kyrgyzstan should be at work on every country in CIS and abroad covering every major story. Their diplomatic correspondent counterparts in Bishkek and at a few other strategic centers like Osh and Batken should be on top of every germinating policy decision, following the evolution of Kyrgyzstan diplomacy on every problem.

In Kyrgyzstan and in some CIS countries in cooperation with and at other times in competition with state institutions, an expanding number of globally networked non-state (or nongovernmental institutions), coalitions, and social movements have emerged. This means that local events can, through networks, shift to regional and global significance, without the involvement of intermediating levels of organization, such as national government. Despite their dire financial condition, a core element of traditional news organizations in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in CIS countries will continue to offer news from locations around the region.

News is defined as an endless series of events that often lack meaningful context. They are, in the research language, episodically framed (Iyengar, 1991 Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible: how TV frames political issues*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Google Scholar]). All information are of course but a Google search away. But the question is: Without direction from a trusted interpreter of events on the ground, someone very much like a traditional foreign correspondent, will anyone know to look? Will anyone care?

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