

Tackling Media Capture in Southeast Europe: Strengthening Corrosive Capital Safeguards

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Russia vs. Europe in the Balkans: A tug of war between democracy and state capture



Source: impakter.com

Russian influence through media capture: scope, means and impact

A fourfold comparative assessment of Russian media capture in Southeast Europe based on:

- the **instruments** that Russia deploys for establishing informational leverage;
- the **channels** and **narratives** of Russian disinformation utilized to sway views of the West and its key institutions, the EU and NATO;
- the **impact** of Kremlin messaging on societal perceptions as conditioned by audience susceptibility and receptivity;
- the **amplification** of Russian media influence through convergence with the disinformation activities of other authoritarian states, particularly China.

Russian influence through media capture: Regional similarities (1)

- **Key instrument:** pervasive informality, manifested in the cultivation of opaque local networks of patronage.
- **Auxiliary tools:**
 - ✓ Tapping into and instrumentalizing advertising revenue.
 - ✓ Leveraging pro-Russian cultural, ideological and linguistic affinities.
 - ✓ Reinforcing governance gaps in the media sphere.

Russian influence through media capture: Regional similarities (2)

- **Main pattern in the content and stylistic modes of Russian disinformation:**

The more closely politically and economically enmeshed a given domestic Balkan outlet is with (pro)Russian groups and interests, the more straightforwardly and undeviatingly this outlet relates Kremlin-sponsored narratives.

Russian influence through media capture: Regional similarities (2)

Directly owned by the Russian state

Outlets such as the national language editions of Sputnik and Russia Beyond display the closest form of proximity as they are directly owned by the Russian state.

Partisan

Partisan outlets published by a domestic political party with strong links to the Kremlin (such as through the reception of funding and political support) also closely promote Russian positions albeit through a distinctive national prism.

Independent

Independent outlets that are unrelated to pro-Russian groups and interests (or indeed any other vested interests) can serve as a benchmark for comparing how a neutral source portrays Russia as opposed to media differentially connected to the Kremlin.

Broader dailies

A greater degree of distance is represented by broader dailies (i.e., more widely circulated or read), which maintain ties to (pro)Russian groups and interests and/or disseminate Kremlin propaganda, while being connected to broader national interest groups and aiming to reach a wider audience (than just party members, for instance).



Russian influence through media capture: Cross-country differences



Russian influence through media capture: Cross-country differences



Tackling Russian media capture

- Consider and incorporate specific provisions on the **scope and origin of capital of foreign ownership**.
- Create **EU-wide binding obligations to disclose ownership information** to a common European registry.
- The **reception of EU communications funds** should be made conditional on the full disclosure of the allocation procedure.
- The EU should exercise greater vigilance of and monitor the **incursion of Russian and Chinese state-owned media** into the European media space.
- Ultimately, initiate a fundamental **rethinking and restructuring of existing media ownership models**.

Thank you!

